Why Etsy Developed Morgue and How It Is Used Today

Etsy developed Morgue as a centralized tool to manage incident tracking and promote accountability across engineering teams. Prior to Morgue, postmortems were conducted in an ad hoc manner, often using shared documents like Google Docs. This fragmented approach made it difficult to share knowledge or learn effectively from past failures. Morgue addressed this gap by enforcing a standardized template for postmortems that includes root cause analysis [RCA], impact assessments, and a clear list of action items designed to prevent recurrence. This structure also helped shift the culture away from assigning blame and toward identifying systemic issues.

The process is used heavily within my organization. Which made learning of the same process, from another company’s perspective, incredibly stimulating material. Morgue integrates tightly with Etsy’s existing DevOps tools. When an alert is triggered, Morgue automatically creates a case file that contains system logs, metrics, and chat transcripts, streamlining incident documentation. During ongoing issues, engineers can collaboratively add notes, building a real-time paper trail that helps with post-incident analysis.

After an incident is resolved, stakeholders contribute to the formal postmortem. These reports are stored and indexed within Morgue, enabling future teams to search for similar problems and learn from historical patterns. Action items resulting from postmortems are tracked to completion, ensuring follow-through and accountability.

Although Etsy’s Morgue is not publicly available, it has inspired similar tools like PagerDuty’s Postmortems and JIRA Service Management. Key benefits of Morgue include improved transparency, faster recovery times (reduced MTTR), and continuous improvement in system reliability. Ultimately, Morgue reinforces a culture of learning and resilience within Etsy’s engineering practices.

Sources

1. Allspaw, J. (2012, July 5). *Blameless postmortems and a just culture*. Etsy. <https://www.etsy.com/codeascraft/blameless-postmortems>
2. Etsy. (2016). *Debriefing facilitation guide*. <https://www.etsy.com/codeascraft/debriefing-facilitation-guide/>