KEY LEARNINGS: LEVEL 4: DETECTION – IDENTIFYING AND STOPPING ERRORS IN TIME

Overview
- While Facilitation prevents most errors through intuitive design, some mistakes slip through in real-time.
- At this stage, prevention is no longer possible—the mistake has already occurred or begun.
- Detection is the last opportunity to catch the error before it causes damage.

What Is Detection?
- A reactive mistake-proofing approach that identifies errors at the moment they occur.
- It doesn't stop errors from happening—but it flags them early enough for intervention.
- Goal: Catch the mistake before it spreads or harms the customer.

Examples of Detection in Action
- Metro turnstiles: Reject used tickets instantly—preventing duplicate entry.
- Hotel fire alarms: Detect smoke early and trigger response systems before escalation.
- Self-checkouts: Detect mismatched weights to flag mis-scanned or missing items.

How Detection Works: Three Core Tactics
1. Real-Time Alerts
- Purpose: Immediate feedback that stops the process until the issue is resolved.
- Example:
  - Self-checkout terminals pause if the scanned item doesn't match the weight.
- Result: Mistakes are blocked the moment they occur.

2. Double-Checking Critical Steps
- Purpose: Adds a second verification layer for high-stakes tasks.
- Example:
  - Mental health helpline responders verify caller identity and risk level twice in a call.
- Result: Reduces risk of serious oversights or miscommunication.

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3. Pattern Analysis to Predict Errors
- Purpose: Spot repeat behaviors that may indicate deeper issues.
- Example:
  - Plagiarism detection tools flag patterns across multiple student submissions.
- Result: Prevents systemic abuse or ongoing mistakes from going unnoticed.

Key Insight
- Detection is about minimizing damage, not preventing the initial error.
- It allows businesses to intervene before a mistake becomes a disaster.
- Especially critical in fast-paced or high-risk service settings where small errors can scale quickly.

Conclusion
- Detection ensures that no error goes unnoticed.
- When implemented well, it transforms a potentially damaging mistake into a recoverable moment.
- The final step? Prepare for the rare moments when detection fails too—and Mitigation becomes necessary.