

Step 3: Integrate Mistake-Proofing Into Existing Workflows



KEY LEARNINGS: STEP 3: INTEGRATE MISTAKE-PROOFING INTO EXISTING WORKFLOWS

Why Mistake-Proofing Fails

Mistake-proofing systems can fail despite being well-designed due to three key reasons:

1. Resistance to Change

- People avoid using new tools or systems if they don't see the value.
- Example: A law office ignored a document scanning step, leading to a critical error when the wrong contract was sent.

2. Complexity

- If using the system feels time-consuming or difficult, people bypass it.
- Example: Concert hall staff skipped equipment labeling during a big event due to time constraints, resulting in gear mix-ups.

3. Invisibility

- Over time, when systems work too well, users forget their importance and become complacent.
- Example: Water office staff stopped checking alerts from a billing system that prevented double charges—until it failed and hundreds were overbilled.

How to Make Mistake-Proofing Stick

To ensure long-term success and adoption of mistake-proofing systems, apply the following strategies:

1. Update Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

- Integrate mistake-proofing steps into official job instructions.
- Example: A video editing firm added a resolution check to its SOPs, eliminating file size errors.

2. Embed Mistake-Proofing into Workflows

- Design systems so the correct action is automatic or enforced.
- Example: A spa blocked double bookings by changing the system logic—no reminders needed.

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3. Make Systems Easy to Use

- The easier the tool, the more likely people are to use it.
- Example: A credit union fixed slow ID scanners, leading to widespread adoption and fewer verification errors.

4. Use Checklists and Digital Prompts

- Reinforce mistake-proofing with visual aids or system prompts.
- Example: A cruise line introduced a digital checklist with time-stamped steps to ensure safety checks were never skipped.

5. Train with Standard Work Instructions (SWIs)

- Teach mistake-proofing as part of the job from day one.
- Example: A call center integrated pop-up assistant tools into new hire training, so agents used it naturally.

Final Insight

- Mistake-proofing isn't extra work—it should feel like the way things are done.
- When built into processes, reinforced with training, and supported by tools that are easy to use, mistake-proofing becomes second nature—and that's when it truly works.

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