

MISTAKES POLICY

WHAT WE SHOULD DO

How we react when things go wrong will profoundly affect the culture in our team!

Follow these four steps on what we should do when things go wrong...



1

CELEBRATE THE EFFORT & LEARNING

This is often the most critical step. The leader should publicly or privately acknowledge the courage and initiative shown by the individual or team. Focus on what was learned from the "failed" experiment. This reinforces the idea that the goal was not just to succeed, but to gain valuable insights. This is a core part of an agile and innovative culture.

2

CONDUCT A BLAMELESS REVIEW

The leader should facilitate a discussion to analyse what happened. What assumptions were wrong? What did the team not know? What could be done differently next time? The focus should be on the process and the system, not on the person. This turns a failure into a powerful learning opportunity.

3

PROVIDE SAFETY & SUPPORT

The leader must ensure the individual doesn't feel humiliated or afraid to try again. A simple, "It's okay, we're going to learn from this or I'm glad you took the risk," can make a huge difference. This builds a foundation of trust and makes employees more likely to innovate in the future.

4

MITIGATE THE FALLOUT

Depending on the scale of the failure, the leader must deal with the consequences. This might involve a conversation with stakeholders, making an announcement or a shift in their strategy. It's important to be transparent and accountable while still protecting the employee from unwarranted blame.



WHAT TO AVOID

PUNISHING THE INDIVIDUAL

Disciplinary action, demoting or publicly reprimanding the employee for trying and failing sends a clear message to the rest of the organisation: don't take risks. This will reduce innovation and lead to a culture of risk-aversion and inaction.

IGNORING THE FAILURE

Pretending it didn't happen is just as bad as punishing it. It sends the message that the work didn't matter and that the lessons learned are not valuable. This can be just as discouraging as direct punishment.

DISPROPORTIONATE REACTIONS

This is where Amazon's concept of reversibility is so useful. A leader who treats a small, reversible failure (Type 2) with the same gravity as a major, irreversible mistake (Type 1) will quickly create a culture of bureaucratic slowness and fear.