

Postmortem Template

INTERNAL — Helix Engineering / CS Operations

PURPOSE

Postmortems capture what happened, why, and how we prevent recurrence. They are required for all P0/P1 incidents and any deploy rollback.

TIMING

Schedule within 5 business days of incident resolution. Hold the meeting within 10 business days. Post the document within 15 days.

ATTENDEES

Incident commander, on-call engineer(s), engineering manager, anyone with relevant context. Customer-facing teams (CS, support) optional but encouraged for customer-impacting incidents.

SECTIONS

(1) Summary. One paragraph: what happened, customer impact, root cause. (2) Timeline. Bullet points with timestamps from detection to resolution. (3) Root cause. Why did this happen? Use the Five Whys. (4) Contributing factors. What made this worse than it could have been? (5) What went well. Don't skip this — celebrating good responses reinforces them. (6) Action items. Specific, owned, with deadlines.

BLAMELESS CULTURE

Postmortems focus on systems, not individuals. 'The deploy lacked a database migration check' is good. 'Engineer X forgot to add a migration' is bad. Even when individual choices are relevant, frame them as system gaps that allowed those choices.

ACTION ITEMS

Every action item must have an owner and a due date. Track in the engineering action item board. Action items not completed by their due date are escalated to the engineering manager.

DISTRIBUTION

Internal postmortems are visible to all employees. For customer-impacting incidents, an external-facing summary (sanitized) is shared with affected customers.