The last time this appeared was in 1994
Human error is cited over and over as a cause of incidents and accidents. The result is a widespread perception of a ‘human error problem,’ and solutions are thought to lie in changing the people or their role in the system.

For example, we should reduce the human role with more automation, or regiment human behaviour by stricter monitoring, rules or procedures. But in practice, things have proved not to be this simple. The label ‘human error’ is prejudicial and unspecific, and any serious examination of the human contribution to safety and to system failure shows that the story of human error is markedly complex.

This book takes you behind the human error label. Divided into five parts, it begins by summarising the most significant research results. Part 2 explores how a changing understanding of accidents and an embracing of systems thinking has radically impacted ideas about human error. Part 3 explains the role of normal cognitive system factors (knowledge, mindset, and goals) in operating safely at the sharp end. Part 4 studies how the clumsy use of computer technology can increase the potential for erroneous actions and assessments in all kinds of fields of practice. And Part 5 tells how the hindsight bias always enters into attributions of error, and that human error is a mere label, the result of a social and psychological judgment process rather than a matter of objective fact that we can count, tabulate, punish or eliminate.

If you think you have a human error problem, recognize that the label itself is no explanation and no guide to countermeasures. The potential for constructive change, for progress on safety, lies behind the label. Find out why. Order your copy of Behind Human Error today.

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Part 3 Operating at the Sharp End
6. Bringing knowledge to bear in context
7. Mindset
8. Goal conflicts
This book is a long-awaited update of a hard-to-get work originally published in 1994. Written by some of the world’s leading practitioners, it elegantly summarises the main work in this field over the last 30 years, and clearly and patiently illustrates the practical advantages of going “behind human error”. Understanding human error as an effect of often deep, systemic vulnerabilities rather than as a cause of failure, is an important but necessary step forward from the oversimplified views that continue to hinder real progress in safety management.

Erik Hollnagel,
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‘This book, by some of the leading error researchers, is essential reading for everyone concerned with the nature of human error. For scholars, Woods et al provide a critical perspective on the meaning of error. For organizations, they provide a roadmap for reducing vulnerability to error. For workers, they explain the daily tradeoffs and pressures that must be juggled. For technology developers, the book offers important warnings and guidance. Masterfully written, carefully reasoned, and compellingly presented.’

Gary Klein, Chairman and Chief Scientist of Klein Associates, USA

‘If you welcome the chance to re-evaluate some of your most cherished beliefs, if you enjoy having to view long-established ideas from an unfamiliar perspective, then you will be provoked, stimulated and informed by this book. Many of the ideas expressed here have been aired before in relative isolation, but linking them together in this multi-authored book gives them added power and coherence.’

James Reason, Professor Emeritus, University of Manchester, UK

‘This updated and substantially expanded book draws together modern scientific understanding of mishaps too often simplistically viewed as caused by “human error”. It helps us understand the actions of human operators at the “sharp end” and puts those actions appropriately in the overall system context of task, social, organizational, and equipment factors. Remarkably well written and free of technical jargon, this volume is a comprehensive treatment of value to anyone concerned with the safe, effective operation of human systems.’

Robert K. Dismukes, Chief Scientist for Aerospace Human Factors, NASA Ames Research Center, USA

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