

**FAIL SAFE,
FAIL FORWARD**

Board Leadership Lethbridge

AGENDA

1. INTRODUCTIONS
2. BACKGROUND
3. HISTORY OF FAILURE
4. GOOD FAILURE & BAD FAILURE
5. REACTING TO FAILURE
6. FAILURE IN PARTNERSHIPS
7. ACCEPTING and EMBRACING FAILURE
8. NOW WHAT?
9. QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

**Failure is not the
OPPOSITE of
success. It's PART of
success.
-Arianna Huffington**

ONE “RULE”

Please, no judging in this session
~ this is a safe place so we can
learn from each other's
experiences

INTRODUCTIONS

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A bit about Lori:

- EDUCATION
- CAREER JOURNEY
- VOLUNTEERISM
- CURRENT ROLE
- FAILURE IN MY LIFE

INTRODUCTIONS

Meet your neighbors:

- share failure experiences
- and
- why you choose this session

**A failure is not always a mistake - it may simply be the best one can do under the circumstances.
The real mistake is to stop trying.
-B.F. Skinner**

BACKGROUND

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Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations ~ October 2018

- Two days
- 50+ people from government and school divisions to not-for-profits
- The new direction/way of thinking
- Social Innovation Labs

**I can accept failure, everyone fails at something. But I can't accept not trying.
-Michael Jordan**

WHY AM I HERE?

And why I hope you are here

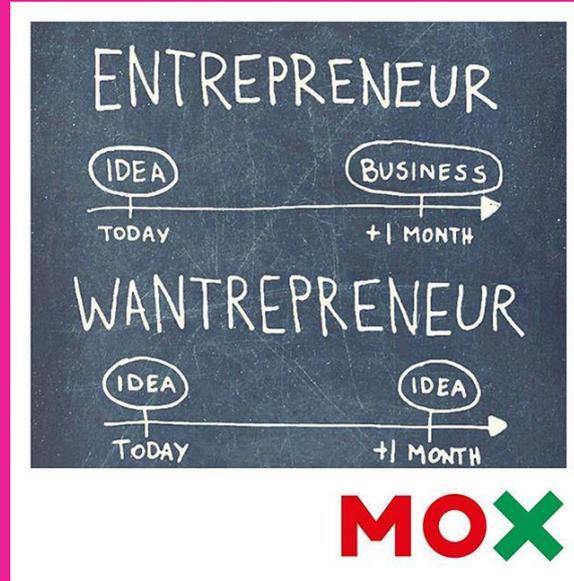
We need to be able to talk about failure in a non-blaming way so that we can learn from it

In order to be innovative, we
will face failure...
and we all need to talk about
that and be ok with that

and innovation is crucial for not-for-profits, just like it is for businesses, though businesses are light years ahead of us

BUT

**we must not forget about
the user experience in the
process of innovation**



Many not-for-profits fit into the Wantrepreneur category, we shy away from risk-taking unlike Entrepreneurs

HISTORY OF FAILURE

HISTORY OF FAILURE

MUSEUM OF FAILURE

The only man who
never makes a
mistake is the man
who never does
anything.
-Theodore Roosevelt

Trip Down Memory Lane









WOW Chips!



COMMON THEMES

- Don't know audience
- Little to no research, customer engagement, testing
- Being alone/not partnering or working together
- Being greedy
- Those who think an idea isn't good don't say anything
- Trying to be something they aren't

REVISIT YOUR STORIES

Find a new partner

Going back to the introductions and the stories you shared the first time, and share again but this time share any insights you may have about the situation(s) you experienced failure with and discuss why

Did any of you experience any of the common themes mentioned earlier?

**GOOD FAILURE &
BAD FAILURE**

WHEN FAILURE IS NOT OK

- Planning is not done
- Stagnating rather than implementing
- Being reactive
- Lack of consultation
- Success always depends on others to approve and implement
- When it happens because people didn't have the environment or courage to say or do something

STRATEGIC PLANNING RELATED FAILURE

- Confusing accountability with hope
- Creating a mirror instead of a target
- Failing to take into account the external context
- Not identifying indicators of change
- Assuming you have it all figured out

** adapted from the Stanford Social Innovation Review*

PRODUCTIVE FAILURES

- Risk of failure is understood
- Major underlying assumptions are documented
- Its riskier to do nothing than to act and fail
- The cost is contained
- Success is defined, the opportunity is significant

Types of Failure

Amy C Edmondson
(Harvard Business Review, April 2011)

Blameworthy Failure

Praiseworthy Failure

Deviance

Violating prescribed processes.

Inattention

Careless deviation from process.

Inability

Lack of skills, training, competence.

Process Inadequacy

Prescribed process is faulty.

Task Challenge

Task is too hard to execute reliably.

Process Complexity

Process breaks down due to complexity.

Uncertainty

Reasonable choices lead to failure due to unforeseeable events.

Hypothesis Testing

Experiment designed to test an idea leads to unwanted results.

Exploratory Testing

Experiment designed to uncover new knowledge leads to unwanted results.

REACTING TO FAILURE

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

I am wrong/bad

Shame



Cover Up

In the case of not-for-profits it especially seems to be that we don't want to talk about it as it may affect funding, but it is hard on workers and organizations that know that things aren't going well

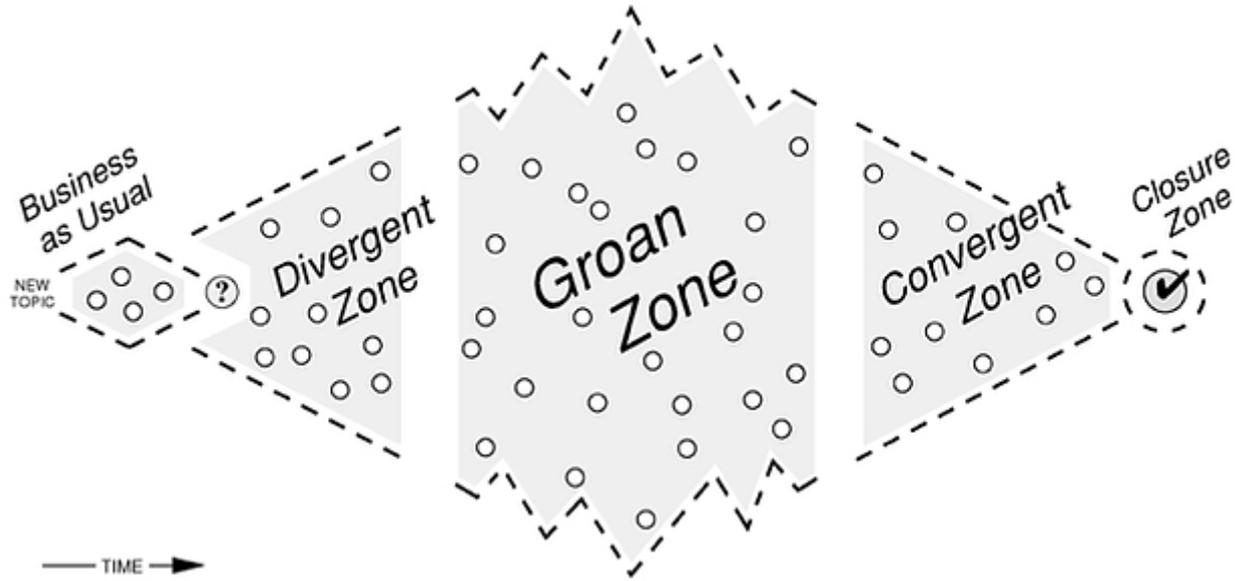
IT SUCKS WHEN YOU ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF IT!



FAILURE IN PARTNERSHIPS

THINGS TO CONSIDER IN PARTNERSHIPS

- How does everyone at the table get to have power? Look at the power dynamics
- Share assumptions always – they often are what get us into trouble
- We tend to prioritize funding – money is power
- We are leery to conclude a partnership and things get dragged out



<http://www.cocreativeconsulting.com/single-post/2017/05/01/Collaboration-Pattern-3-Diverging-Converging-Diamond>

ACCEPTING & EMBRACING FAILURE

INTELLIGENT FAILURE - Ashley Good

We fail when we don't change and innovate to adapt to the changing needs of the community

3 ideas for Intelligent Failure:

1. Responding to failure is easy but not instinctive
2. There is always enough time to invest in learning
3. Good productive failure is always possible

POWER & PRIVILEGE

We need to acknowledge that power and privilege exists

This plays into the “It’s ok to fail” and having the ability to safely fail

For some, based on systemic presumptions, racism, etc the first chance is the last chance

ACCEPTING, NO EMBRACING FAILURE

Innovation needs failure – [Social Innovation Labs](#) or [Social Venture Partners](#)

- Test quickly, cheaply
- Know most tests/answers won't pass
- Failure is NORMAL
- Both/And
- Entrepreneurial thinking

Success is
stumbling from
failure to failure
with no loss of
enthusiasm
- Winston
Churchill

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Think about how you ask questions, what language are you using

Don't ask "What did you do wrong?"

Separate the person from the "thing" that happened

Engage others so its shared and there is feedback from multiple sources about the "thing"

The leader must be able to be vulnerable and be the first to talk about failure

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

1st stage - Listen

2nd stage - Understand that they are likely dealing with feelings and not facts, but that they will move beyond - you may have to guide them into the facts

3rd stage - What did we learn?

Then move on!

NOW WHAT?

HIRING/INTERVIEWING

- Ask about failure

Do they rationalize or jump around? ~ red flag

- Ask what they learned and how they can recognize it/learned from it

Do they own the situation? ~ what you are looking for

Some people have an inability to process failure and learn from it, in which case they may be moving on and trying to find a new job

NEXT STEPS

Failures are pivot points – they matter a lot

Self-doubt vs self-examination

- Identify a “failure support team”
- Open up – the more times you talk about a “failure” the better you will feel

Talk about all failure – own it, be transparent and honest

- Covering it up will only compound the issue

NEXT STEPS

Check your language - “success” and “failure” aren’t good words to use

Remember that no one deliberately screws up

Allow staff to spend a % of their time doing what they want as long as it is within the goals of the organization, and allow failure to be acceptable

Not for profits are notorious for being rigid (won’t let go of old processes), and we jump to new things to explore but don’t let go of old things (create more committees, etc) OR we stay in the same place because it is working for us even though the world is changing

NEXT STEPS - FAIL SMART, FAIL FORWARD

Think outside the organization - what does it feel like for your clients/users

Implementing in the workplace

- Failure journal/Growth Log
- Team discussions

Normalize it....Embrace it

Talk to funders

I have not failed,
I've just found
10,000 ways that
don't work
-Thomas A.
Edison

FINAL THOUGHTS – Paul Shoemaker

Yes you can learn from failure but:

1. It sucks when you are in the middle of it
2. You can prepare and be ready for it
3. You shouldn't be ok with it happening because of lack of courage or an environment that doesn't allow for people to speak up
4. Consider if it is the culture or the person
5. Remember that sometimes it is incompetence
6. Leadership always matters
7. How it is dealt with makes a huge difference
8. If you don't fail, you may not be close enough to the real challenge

BUT don't let failure let you off the hook!

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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RESOURCES

- Fail Forward & Ashley Good – failforward.org

Ashley Good made the powerful point that there's a vast difference between how we think about the term failure and how we think about the people and organizations brave enough to share their failures for the purpose of learning and growing.

– Brené Brown, Author of Rising Strong

- Paul Shoemaker – paulshoemaker.org
- KPMG book – “That’ll Never Work”
- Brene Brown – <https://brenebrown.com/>
- “The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning” – Henry Mintzberg
- “Thinking Fast and Slow” – Daniel Kahneman

- Three Horizons Thinking - <http://training.itcilo.org/delta/Foresight/3-Horizons.pdf>
- Canadian Social Innovation Lab stories - <http://www.sigeneration.ca/canadian-lab-stories/>
- Social Venture Partners - <http://www.socialventurepartners.org/>