FailFaire: A place where it's ok to talk about what didn't work: Submission form

Failure shows leadership, innovation, and risk-taking in pushing the boundaries of what is possible in scaling ideas from pilots to global programs. There is no shame in failure - we all have failed.

Want to show your leadership? Want to push the boundaries, and show you have adapted to a changing environment and thanks to the "failure" you managed to deliver an even better project? **Why not share your story of a project and/or activity which did not quite work out as planned.**

Application form

To present at IFAD's FailFaire, please submit your answers to the brief questions below as well as read the remainder of this document for additional information.

For tips on how to tell a great failure story, see Tips for Presenters below.

The presentation format will be a 7-minute ignite-style talk that will address the following questions:
- What was the project?
- What were you trying to do?
- What was the fail/where did it go wrong?
- Why did it fail?
- What would you do differently next time (or never do again!)?
- What lessons can be learned?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS (*required):

1. Your name*
2. Failed project name
3. What was your role in the failed project? *
   Please note: Presenters must have had a lead role with the project. No 3rd-party critiques and absolutely no blaming! You need to take responsibility or it should be the other party presenting the story.
4. Failed project description*
   Please give us a brief description of the project and the main failure.
5. What makes this a good story? *
   Let us know what others will get out of hearing your story. What makes it particularly funny, informative, or insightful?

6. Your email address*
7. Your Twitter handle

Tips for presenters

Don't blame

Stay away from blaming other people or the situation. Presenters should only speak of the aspects of the failure to which they contributed and for which they are willing to take responsibility. Use this approach to explore how you could have acted differently to create a different outcome and in that way learn and adapt how you will act in future situations.

Look for root causes

Characterize the failure instead of assigning blame. This means overcoming the fundamental attribution error and going beyond first order explanations for why the failure happened. For example, saying "I made the wrong decision which caused the failure" is a first order attribution while taking the time to ask why that decision was made gets to the root cause and likely sounds something more like "I made this assumption based on my interactions, experience and knowledge and failed to notice this crucial piece for this reason which, in turn, caused me to act in this way which resulted in the failure." It is by recognizing oversights and faulty assumptions, and exploring how they were formed, that we learn how to avoid repeating similar mistakes down the road.

Focus on the learning

At least half of your story should be dedicated to extracting the learning, suggesting things to do differently and explaining why adapting to the learning is so important. If you wish to structure your story, here are some suggested elements:

- Context
  Critical factors influencing the story such as location, project objectives, timeline
- Specific actions and activities you undertook
  Be sure to mention any assumptions or hypotheses that led you to act in a certain way
- The result
  Why did the failure happen? What happened? What does this mean for the assumptions and hypothesis raised earlier? Why was it a failure? What are the big picture/long-term impacts?
- The learning
  What was learned and has changed because of the failure?
- So what?
  What are the implications for the future? How has the learning been institutionalized? Do you have recommendations for other projects in similar situations? Why is your story important to share? What is your main message?

Seek depth

Presenters should seek depth in their stories. Do you notice patterns of repeated actions, trends and behaviours you consistently struggle to change? The most meaningful stories are those that caused you to question your own values and/or the project's theory of change. The first sight of a failure is often emotional. When you feel ashamed, upset, fearful, annoyed, sad, and/or stressed it may be an indicator that there is a failure worth looking into and understanding.

Include perspectives from other stakeholders

Bring in stakeholders (partners you worked with, project customers/beneficiaries, team members, etc.) to help you understand and communicate a failure story that is inclusive of their perspective. Safe space for sharing is vital so it's a good idea to start out talking about appreciation for each person involved and their value beyond the outcome of their work. After all, we often need a group of people discussing failure to really understand and recognize the failure and its root causes.

It is very rare that a meaningful failure was caused by just one person or one thing. Uncovering the root(s) of the issue allows everyone to see the points with the most leverage for avoiding that failure in the future. A simple technique for getting at root causes is to continue to ask "Why?" to its logical end. One can also examine the different categories of "Why?"s such as your own personal actions, the underlying culture, legacies, leadership, management, environment, processes, other people, assumptions, expectations, etc.