Reframing the stigma of failure with playfulness

Fostering a bold and open culture in museums

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Abstract: Within the field of software development, notions of agile development, failing fast, and learning from your mistakes are ingrained in the culture. However, this is seldom the case for legacy cultural institutions, such as museums. This is detrimental to their innovative potential. The importance of acknowledging failure as a part of innovation was one of the key insights coming out of an action research process involving ten museums from the EU and the USA. Here we will account for the ideas on the value of failure resulting from this process and how one museum partner tried to leverage the learning potential residing in past failures. However, the social stigma surrounding failure proved too strong. Adopting a playful approach to rapid prototyping of ideas, instead, as a way of reframing this stigma, seems more promising. We argue that museums should learn from other sectors that have a less risk-averse approach to innovation and adopt a bolder culture of active experimentation even if it will inevitably involve failure and therefore require a better failure resilience of the organization.

Keywords: Failure, fail resilience, learning, museum, organizational culture, action research, playfulness

At the dawn of the Information Age (Castells 2001) learning theorist Donald Schön emphasized the necessity of organizational learning to adapt to the processes of continuous change: “We must invent and develop institutions which are ‘learning systems’, that is, systems able of bringing about their own continuing transformation” (1971:28). Within new sectors indigenous to the Information Age this organizational nimbleness became ingrained in the work culture, perhaps most explicitly in “agile” software development (Beck et al. 2001). Now, the notion of agility has spread to other sectors and is proposed as a general approach to project management (Richet 2013). Agility is seldom a part of the culture of legacy organizations, however, such as museums which “are by nature conservative and resistant to change” (Ames 1997:5) and a hierarchical organizational structure can be detrimental to becoming a learning organization (Griffin et al. 2007; Kristinsdóttir
Christian Hvid Mortensen & Sarah Younas

& Hafsteinsson 2019). Still, as Black (2020:xviii) aptly states, “society will move on whether or not museums move with it.”

Another notion that has transcended from systems development to other sectors is the concept of failing fast as a means of avoiding the expenditure of resources on a lost cause (Dipiro & Chisholm-Burns 2013). The immediate value of fast failure is cost minimization, but it also implies learning from what went wrong, which can be applied in subsequent, improved effort. To learn from failure, however, we must not only fail fast but also intelligently. Intelligence manifests not only in how we respond to failure but also in an experimental approach to problem-solving grounded in knowledge: “‘Intelligent’ means that when you take a risk you want to learn as much as possible about what happened and why by gathering feedback. ‘Intelligent’ also means the risk is attempted in such a way that not many resources (time and money) are lost if it fails” (Matson 1992). Nonetheless, the emphasis on failure can seem counterintuitive to many, as failure is often associated with a social stigma (Singh et al. 2015) that results in a fear of judgment and punishment, especially for cultural-sector workers dependent on securing external funding in the future (Jancovich & Stevenson 2023). This fear can lead to avoidance behavior that is hampers innovation. Thus, emotional, and cognitive barriers prevent us from responding constructively to failures and learning from them.

The idea of organizations as learning systems has been further developed and popularized by the work of Peter Senge and others on learning organizations (Senge 2006). However, there are significant cultural differences between commercial industries and non-profit cultural institutions regarding risk-taking and proactivity, which can further impede adaption to change. For example, a recent study at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) identified six organizational values that are constitute of a learning organization. The two values in which the organizational culture of NMNH was considered weakest were “experimentation (exploring new ideas and approaches in one’s work)” and “aspirational thinking (taking risk in one’s work)” (Korn et al. 2021). This displays signs of a decidedly risk-averse culture where the fear of failure unnecessarily constrains creativity and innovation. The severity of the consequences of, and therefore also the tolerance for, failure will vary depending on context. Presumably, the risk of failure resulting in irredeemable consequences is lower for museum educators than for museum conservators. Still, high-risk consequences should not result in a culture of silence regarding the failures that have already occurred, thus disabling the potential for learning from them. On the contrary, it becomes even more pertinent to share failures at work to enable colleagues to learn from them, as evidenced by a case study of hospital birth doctors in Norway where errors can be fatal (Kvalnes 2017).

The idea of learning from failure and accepting that failure is an essential part of innovation was a recurring theme during the discussions in the action research process with museum professionals from ten museums from the EU and US forming part of the GIFT project funded by the EU’s Horizon 2020 research program (GIFT 2019a). This shows that this issue is perceived as pertinent to a variety of museum organizations across the sector. The purpose of this article is to use the findings from this action research project to inspire museums and other organizations to adopt a revised perception of failures as a source of learning and to strive for a bolder
work culture by building the fail resilience of the organization. Here, we will account for the deliberations within our group on the potential for learning from failure within the museum sector and ideas for addressing this issue. In addition, we will corroborate these ideas with similar insights from other museum contexts, the cultural sector in general and from other sectors. Furthermore, as an illustrative example of the potential stigma surrounding failure at work we will show how one of our museum participants tried and failed to address this stigma with a small-scale experiment. The shame associated with acknowledging failure can lead to avoidance behavior such as the continuation of projects that should have been stopped or to keeping silent about failure, or reframing failures as just less successful, thus preventing others from actually learning from previous mistakes (Edmondson 2011; Kvalnes 2017). We will discuss the reasons why the experiment failed and how a more subtle approach based on playfulness in engaging with the notion of failure in museum organizations seems more promising in counteracting such avoidance behavior and thus building organizational resilience in dealing more constructively with failure and striving towards becoming a learning organization. First, we will briefly account for the methodology of action research that formed the groundwork and provided the impetus for the experiment.

**Action research as reflective practice**

The ideas and experiments presented here stem from an action research process involving a group of seasoned museum professionals from ten museums in the EU and the US (GIFT 2019b). Participants fill different roles within their respective organizations, but they are all involved in content production in some form. Action research builds on a respect for local knowledge. It is participatory, involving people who want to improve their own situation (McTaggart 1991). Action research consist of systematic cycles of action and reflection. In action phases, participants experiment and gather evidence. In reflection phases, they make sense of data, evaluate the action and plan eventual further action (Reason & Bradbury 2008).

Within GIFT the process stretched over 18 months and was structured around five two-day workshops where all participants were gathered with time for taking action by conducting experiments at their home institutions in between. The initial diagnostic and scoping were a collaborative effort identifying common challenges faced by all participants. The experiments were carried out locally, but again the evaluation and identification of key learnings afterward was collaborative with the whole group, aimed at distilling insights that might benefit the museum community at large (Mortensen et al. 2022). Over time, the group of museum professionals came to function as a cross-institutional “community of practice” (Wenger 1998). Participants, in particular, valued the safe space for reflection enabled by participating in the GIFT project and attending the workshops with a group of peers away from the organizational constraints, hierarchical power relations, and challenges of their everyday work (Mortensen et al. 2022). Furthermore, Wenger argues that such a community of practice is well-suited to “explore radically new insights without becoming fools [...] A history of mutual engagement around a joint enterprise is an ideal context for this kind of leading-edge learning [...]” (Wenger 1998:214). Research shows that psychological safety, as a
shared belief in the safety of interpersonal risk taking, is a precondition for a learning culture in which experimentation and learning from failure are key (Edmondson 2019; 2011; 1999; Garvin et al. 2008; Garvin 2000). However, the psychological safety and open sharing culture felt by the participants in the off-site workshops, did not necessarily manifest itself in their local organizational contexts as our illustrative example from Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums will show. The workshops were facilitated by consultants from the cultural agency Culture24 and researchers from the IT University of Copenhagen participated by documenting the process and supporting participants in their experimental endeavors with mentoring. We documented the action research process by collecting data in the form of audio recordings from the workshops together with written materials (such as posters and post-its) produced here. We also recorded the mentoring calls that researchers held with each participant when they were conducting experiments. However, we did not systematically collect data from the local experiments, such as the Failure Café described later, so here we rely solely on the testimonies from our GIFT participants. Here we will present the discussions leading to the value of failure and acknowledging failure as part of innovation becoming a key insight as well as one of the experiments addressing this issue.

**The value of failure**

Until the fourth workshop of the process each participant had planned and conducted an experiment, evaluated the outcome and reiterated an improved version of the experiment. Now the time had come to identify key insights from all the experiments that might be of value to the greater museum community and operationalize these learnings into practical recommendations. During this process our group formulated 12 need statements for the museum sector [Museums need X], which then went through a voting process, where the statement 'Museums need to acknowledge failure as part of innovation' received the most votes from the group. This statement was later combined with another popular statement 'Museums need a bold and open culture' and reformulated as a design question: 'How might we create a bold and open culture in museums, including an acknowledgement that failure is part of innovation?’. This question then served as the starting point for an idea generating brainstorming session.

The ideas (marked in italics in the following) produced in response to this question centered around the importance of learning from failure. This could occur through formal and systematic evaluation of both successes and failures within your organization. If you want to take a long, hard look in the mirror, metaphorically speaking, you first need to construct a “mirror” by collecting reliable data about your activities (Garvin et al. 2008). Another opportunity for learning, stressed by participants, was the sharing of failures. For example, arranging a conference on failure where museum professionals could learn from the failures of other organizations. A precondition for such sharing, however, is establishing a safe confessional space where the sharing can happen. It is essential that the space is also perceived as a safe space for unsafe ideas by participants. One way of creating this reassurance is for leaders to share their failures and by showing vulnerability encourage subordinates to share their failures too. Another idea was a dedicated hashtag such as #Museumgore for the sharing of museum failures on social media. But more
than creating concrete opportunities for learning from failure, acknowledging the value of failure requires a transformation of work culture and a new mindset. Our group of museum professionals saw a need for museums to remove the fear of failure, become less risk-averse, even encourage foolishness and reward boldness. One way to reduce the fear of failure is to reduce financial risks in production processes, thereby making failure affordable - a central argument for the fail fast approach mentioned above. Allocating small pots of funding for small-scale development projects that test ideas is another way of limiting the financial risks of failure by providing a parachute to fail.

Lessons learned from past failures are not only about the past but are directed towards the future as implied by the notion of failing forward. The concept was proposed by John C. Maxwell (2000), but has now become a movement focused on developing Fail Resilience as “the ability to deal constructively with failing and to treat it as a learning experience” (Fail Forward Movement 2016). Fail resilience is thus simultaneously an individual trait and ingrained in the organizational culture. It could be beneficial to reverse our conventional thinking by defining criteria for failure rather than success when discussing the key performance indicators (KPIs) of products and projects.

However, agreeing on these criteria can prove difficult as both learning and failure have a subjective quality. Here we have returned to the central role of evaluation and feedback in learning processes. Obviously, not all failures have the same potential for learning. According to Edmondson (2011), the reasons for failure exist on a continuum from deviance and incompetence to exploratory testing. We therefore need to distinguish between different forms of failure to be able to “fail intelligently”. Mistakes can be categorized as preventable, complexity-related and intelligent with the most potential for learning residing in the last form. Intelligent failures occur at the frontier of development, where experimentation is necessary as this exact situation has not been encountered before: “At the frontier, the right kind of experimentation produces good failures quickly” (Edmondson 2011).

**The failed experiment of the Failure Café**

This experiment took place at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums in the UK a major regional museum and archival service across Tyneside consisting of nine museums and galleries with over 150 staff (Tyne & Wear Archives and Museums 2020). The motivation behind the experiment was an interest in “reducing risk aversion and chipping away at the idea of perfection and that projects cannot be revealed until they are ‘finished’” (Younas 2019a). This entailed removing the sense of shame surrounding the notion of failure and instead promoting failure as essential for learning and as part of innovation. According to our participant the organization was not used to the idea that ideas can be iterated. Rather, current practice saw many projects quickly shelved, especially if they were not immediate successes, resulting in an attitude of “let’s never do that again”. Combined with a lack of evaluation, there was no opportunity to learn from failure, which seems a waste of effort (Younas 2019b).

Inspired by the concept of The Church of Fail, introduced to the UK museum sector at the Let’s get Real conference in 2014 (Culture24 2014), it was decided to plan a Failure Café as a safe space for sharing past failures. The Church of Fail is a method developed by the
consultancy NixonMcInnes aimed at fostering innovation by celebrating mistakes. Taking inspiration from the religious practice of confession, the idea is to provide a ritual as a structured social setting in which participants can stand at a pulpit and confess their mistakes in front of an audience or “congregation”. Participants must describe how they dealt with the situation and what they will do differently next time. After the confession, the audience celebrates the mistake with applause to compensate for the vulnerability just shown by the confessor (Buchanan 2013). While the experience of confession can be cathartic for the confessor the important part is articulating the lesson learned from the mistake, which can provide value to the audience. In a similar vein, there exists a website dedicated to #FailuresAnonymous with a confession booth feature, where everybody can share their confession and make peace with failure. There seems to be little need for such an initiative, as there has only been submitted nine confessions and no submissions since 2017, when the site went live (Matlievski 2017). Apparently, people have little interest in sharing their failures with the great void of the Internet. Presumably, there is also less of a cathartic effect in submitting an anonymous online form than disclosing failure in front of a live audience. The event was intended for staff and people from the local cultural sector in a social setting. Initially the organizers envisioned a stand-up night with commissioned speakers and some open mic spots, but it was decided to scale it down to just a Failure Cafè for staff. But still the idea of admitting past failures made participants nervous and uncomfortable. In hindsight organizers were too enamored by the idea of learning from the failures of others, and therefore considered failure as a positive thing – as an opportunity for learning. However, they failed to convey this reframing of failure to their colleagues beforehand and the stigma surrounding failure proved to be too strong. This lack of trust and resulting culture of fear was also encountered by Jancovich & Stevenson (2023) in their study of cultural participation in the UK. Still, being able to talk about failures is a precondition for learning from them and to this end, they have developed a toolkit to help get the conversation started (FailSpace 2020).

Instead, organizers ran a rapid prototyping session using LittleBits (Sphero 2022), electronic magnetic building blocks, that quickly and easily can turn ideas into functioning prototypes. This approach is similar to the widespread LEGO Serious Play® concept (LEGO 2022), as well as rival toy manufacturer Playmobil’s Proplay Method (Playmobil 2022; ProPlay 2022), in its focus on tangible objects. Creations, such as prototypes, can become important vehicles for learning as external representations of your ideas that enable others to play with them and thereby get a better understanding of your ideas and provide valuable feedback (Resnick 2013). The organizer of the prototyping session is inspired by the Lifelong Kindergarten initiative at MIT. They believe that the mode of learning experienced in kindergarten is well-suited to the creative thinking necessary to prosper in the 21st century and a model for lifelong learning (Resnick 2013). Based on this belief, they have developed a simple method for rapid prototyping, The Creative Learning Spiral, which is to: imagine, create, play, share, reflect, repeat (Resnick 2007). These steps are not always distinct or sequential, but often intermingled. Play is a central element of this process and an essential aspect of play is a different perspective on failure: when a toddler accidentally topples the tower of wooden bricks they have built during play it is not perceived as a failure, but as a reason for redesigning
and rebuilding a more robust tower, as the purpose of play is not the tower in itself but the process of playing/building (play can also be destructive, however, as when another child deliberately topples the tower just to see what happens (Sicart 2014). In this way, play is autotelic, with an intrinsic purpose, which precludes any notion of failure or makes failure part of play. For example, when we build tall brick towers until they inevitably topple. Either way there is less risk and no shame of failure involved in play.

Abstracting from the particular branded approaches and commercial tools mentioned above, a general playful attitude seems promising in reframing the stigma of failure. Sicart defines playfulness as the attitude of play that can be projected onto other kinds of non-play activities (Sicart 2014:22). Playfulness appropriates a context that was not intended for play. Such activities preserve their original purpose and playfulness is therefore not autotelic. Rather, playfulness transforms these activities by adding ambiguity and providing a form of freedom in otherwise confined contexts. Playfulness, as an attitude, has both physical, psychological and emotional aspects. In the rapid prototyping session, the playful approach and physical tinkering with *LittleBits* changed participants’ perception of failure and thus absolved them from the associated feelings of guilt and shame.

Even though the rapid prototyping session was a success, since it engaged participants in accepting failure and using it as an opportunity for further tweaking and tinkering to make things work, the organizer reports that the group of participants was the same people who were usually willing to try out new things. Therefore, the success of the session is biased as the people attending were probably already accustomed to this way of working and accepting failure as part of an innovative process. The session failed to engage with the people who might actually need to experience failure in a safe environment in order to shift their perspective on failure and the negative feelings associated therewith. In this sense, the rapid prototyping session felt “very safe” (Younas 2019a) and did not make any substantial contribution to an altered work culture within the organization. Therefore, the organizer now feels that there is still an unrealized potential for transforming the organization in a more radical way by addressing how failure is being perceived and handled. The ambition is still “to create a culture where the ‘imperfect’ and ‘unfinished’ are tested with the public in a cycle where products and projects are constantly being improved as a result of feedback” (Younas 2019a). This implies a safe space of a much broader scope than just the museum. Including the public in a process of organizational learning in this way would be an excellent form of community participation. However, currently the stigma of failure often prevents such participation. Therefore, it is important to boost the fail resilience of museums as it is not just detrimental to innovation, but also community participation.

In the following, we will discuss some approaches to reframing the stigma of failure and thus contribute to a bolder work culture.

**Discussion**

In this section, we will discuss some preconditions for a bold culture of active experimentation argued for here. In particular, we will look at establishing a “safe space for unsafe ideas”, as suggested by one of our participants. Finally, we will consider games and playfulness as ways to build the fail resilience
of an organization and thus contribute to a bolder work culture.

Preconditions for active experimentation
During the 1990s Glenbow Museum, a major regional museum in Canada, underwent a transformational process to adapt to the conditions of change which have been thoroughly documented in a case study (Janes, 1997). They responded by adopting the “learning organization” (Janes 1997:95; Senge 2006) as a guiding principle to “outwit, the forces of change” (Janes 1997:43). It is striking how several of the insights from this study are reminiscent of the pressing issues for the museum sector identified by our group of museum professionals over 20 years later. Many museums are still struggling with how to learn and adapt to change. The insight most relevant here is that museum organizations need active experimentation in a spirit of open integrity to adapt to the forces of change: “Active experimentation applies to everything – strategies, programs, services, policies, work practices, etc. The results can be modest or bold […]” (Janes 1997:126–27). Further, Janes identifies three essential preconditions for active experimentation:

(1) Small, semi-autonomous work units with decentralized decision-making.
(2) Rapid action: Refrain from analyzing and designing everything before taking action; take risks, innovate, create and get feedback; learn from the action and take further action.
(3) Support for learning: foster a new attitude toward success and failure; failure is something to learn from; don’t punish. Punishment will set the organizational tone, and there will be no active experimentation.

In particular, precondition (3) echoes the call from our group for a change in attitude toward failure as an opportunity for learning, fostering a culture of experimentation characterized by boldness in the will to take risks and reliance on feedback to learn from this experimentation (as in precondition (2)). Further, in the recent NMNH study mentioned above, experimentation and risk-taking were also identified as constitutive of a learning organization but found lacking in the culture at the NMNH (Korn et al. 2021).

Seemingly, museums often have difficulties embracing failure as an opportunity for learning. This might be the result of the common “dynamic conservatism” of social systems with a propensity for the status quo (Schön 1971:32). However, there is another reason that might further afflict museums as knowledge organizations staffed with well-educated specialists and professionals. According to organizational theorist Chris Argyris (1991:100), such people are very good at what they do and rarely experience failure. Therefore, they have not developed the necessary fail resilience to deal constructively with failure and learn from their mistakes. Instead, they act defensively and screen out any criticism: “In short, their ability to learn shuts down precisely at the moment they need it the most”. At Glenbow it was revealed that a large number of museum staff “value order, control and the status quo, as well as the weighing of all options, before taking action” [italics in the original] (Janes 1997:100), a predisposition not very-well-suited to an experimental approach that will inevitably involve failures.

Establishing a safe space for unsafe ideas
To change the attitude towards failure and remove the feelings of shame associated therewith, we need to create an environment
where participants feel comfortable experimenting and making mistakes. As already mentioned, our group discussed the notion of a safe space for unsafe ideas. This was exactly the intention behind the idea of a Failure Café as a place for discussing and sharing failures, as they are obviously controversial, without fear of reprisal such as blame or condemnation. This implies a measure of psychological safety, which has been shown to be of paramount importance for the performance of successful teams (Edmondson 1999; 2011; 2019; Garvin et al. 2008). It is not enough just to declare a safe space, however, as the example and failure of the Failure Café showed. A safe space is conditioned on the existing work culture and the values embedded within the organization. Here leadership plays a pivotal role as either enablers or disablers of a learning culture: “Only leaders can create and reinforce a culture that counteracts the blame game and makes people feel both comfortable with and responsible for surfacing and learning from failures” (Edmondson 2011). Here our group suggested that leaders might show the way by sharing their failures. According to Black (2020:262), citing Bergeron and Tuttle (2013): “No organization can experiment, take risks, or learn from its mistakes without secure, stable and empowering leadership in place”. Further, Black declares that courage, implying “an appetite for risk” and “learning from failure”, should be part of the future vision for any museum (Black 2020:259).

Similarly, games (but definitely not gambling) are considered safe environments for making mistakes and experimenting with different strategies by suspending the costs of failure. Therefore, games are used in leadership training, for example, where the game-based “simulation provides a safe training environment where the participant can learn from mistakes without jeopardizing real projects, budgets or colleagues. This helps the players to be much better prepared when they have to deliver when it really counts in real life” (Agger 2020). Simulations are not just a feature of corporate management training. A similar game-based approach has recently been developed for innovation and conceptual design within museums, where players are assigned different roles and tasked with designing new museum experiences together (Madsen & Krishnasamy 2019).

Furthermore, adopting a more playful attitude in your work might not only help circumvent the stigma of failure and contribute to a bolder culture of active experimentation leading to more creativity and innovation as suggested here, but can also have other beneficial outcomes as suggested by Playful Work Design such as employee wellbeing, team connectivity and better overall performance (Bakker et al. 2020).

Building fail resilience for a bolder work culture
The notion of failure in games, according to Juul, is more complex than just providing safe environments for making mistakes. Juul (2013) calls it the “paradox of failure” that we generally seek to avoid failure and we will inevitably experience failure when playing games. Still, many of us seek out games and seem to enjoy them. While games almost certainly guarantee failure, they also offer us the promise of a fair chance for redeeming ourselves. And such promises are rarely made in the regular world. According to Juul (2013), we make an emotional gamble that we hope will pay off when we invest time and self-esteem in playing a game. This gamble often results in frustration, however, when we fail repeatedly in the game. Therefore, one could argue that engaging in these emotional gambles
will build our fail resilience in games and this resilience could plausibly be transferred to failure in other contexts. However, according to Masten (2001), resilience is preconditioned on the element of risk. If we do not venture outside our comfort zone, we do not build our resilience. Therefore, games might be considered too “safe” environments to have significant effect in this regard.

Taking risks often involves a certain amount of fear and fear is clearly a central aspect of the stigma of failure, such as the fear of embarrassment or even the fear of causing harm. It can therefore be argued that in order to strengthen our fail resilience by reducing this fear we should become more accustomed to failing through playful experimentation, as in the rapid prototyping approach and in game-based simulations, where failure is inevitable. This is analogous to exposure therapy as a treatment for other kinds of avoidance behavior, the goal of which is that our strategies of avoidance that we engage in is no longer constraining our life significantly (American Psychological Association Div. 12 2019). By exposure to failure, we are not directly removing the stigma of failure, but rather reframing and bypassing it in different ways, thereby building up our fail resilience and tolerance for failure This might enable us to use failure constructively as an opportunity for learning. Reframing failure as an opportunity for learning entails a certain cognitive distancing between oneself and failure, enabling us to shift our attention from the failure itself to how we perceive it. This relates to the difference between a fixed and a growth mindset. A person with a fixed mindset would perceive a failure as inherently bad, while a person with a growth mindset might perceive it as an opportunity for learning. Thus, perceiving failure as an opportunity for learning is part of a more general outlook on life where personal characteristics and abilities are not fixed but can be further developed (Dweck & Yeager 2019).

Evaluation and feedback are a precondition for learning
It is also important to consider the kind of learning derived from failure. Adopting a distinction from Schön (1983) a key difference between the rapid prototyping and Failure Café approaches in regard to learning is that a confession is a form of reflection-on-action where learning is derived in retrospect, while rapid prototyping is a form of reflection-in-action where learning is integral to the process. Rapid prototyping can also be described as a form of tinkering. Resnick characterizes tinkering as a bottom-up approach (as opposed to planning as a top-down approach): “They [tinkerers] start small, try out simple ideas, react to what happens, make adjustments, and refine their plans” (Resnick 2017:136). Tinkering has long been part of the visitor offerings of especially science museums (Gutwill et al. 2015). However, as an approach to organizational learning and building failure resilience it has yet to prove itself. From a learning perspective, it is important not to become stuck in endless explorations but turn them into a focused activity. Feedback, and how we react to it, is of paramount importance here. We have touched on the importance of evaluation several times; however, systematic evaluation requires resources and can also be a source of fear when we are confronted with data that might reveal the extent of our failure. Conversely, data will also corroborate our success. The goal of evaluation should be learning, rather than monitoring resulting in understanding rather than judgment. To this end, the Centre for Cultural Value has
developed a set of evaluation principles appropriate for the cultural sector. The principles were co-created with a working group with over 40 representatives from across the sector (Garcia & Mantell 2021).

**Conclusion**

Above, we have accounted for the action research process involving museum professionals representing ten museums from the EU and the US, leading to the formulation of the question: How might we create a bold and open culture in museums, including an acknowledgment that failure is part of innovation? The focus on failure stemmed from a shared sense within the group of the huge innovative potential for museums residing in learning to deal more constructively with failure, what can be termed fail resilience. The group also agreed that barriers to learning from failure exist within many museum organizations, where the stigma of failure is strong. This becomes obvious when we look at other sectors where fail resilience is ingrained in the work culture. Therefore, an acknowledgment that failure is part of innovation and an opportunity for learning requires a bold and open work culture where people feel safe enough to experiment and take risks. Apparently, this insight has been dormant in the museum sector for a long time, as it was also central to the Glenbow Museum case study over 20 years ago. There are signs of a change in attitude towards failure in the cultural sector, however, as the FailSpace project, and several other sources referenced here, show. Now there is even a *Museum of Failure* with traveling exhibitions showcasing failed products and services (West 2017). We hope that this account of experimentation and failure will provide inspiration and courage for others to experiment knowing that even if they fail, it will be a source of learning. Failing intelligently and learning in this way, however, is dependent on gathering quality feedback and thus requires being vigilant about evaluation. Further, we hope that the theoretical positioning in this article will provide a grounding for initiating the conversation on learning from failures in your organization.

We suggest that a playful attitude might circumvent the stigma of failure and contribute to a bolder work culture of active experimentation, such as tinkering and rapid prototyping. On that note, another museum partner, The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, has found immense value in the concept of playfulness despite the immediate incongruence between this concept and the sensitive, emotionally charged subject matter of the center's activities. A playful approach proved useful in establishing participation across all departments in a more inclusive development process planning the exhibitions for the new extension to the existing museum (Christensen & Steien 2019). A playful attitude might even benefit organizational culture further in terms social wellbeing and connectedness, as suggested by the Playful Work Design approach. Bakker et al. (2020) even propose employees should proactively try to change their approach to work by implementing playful elements. This proactivity aligns nicely with the agency of action research accounted for here, where people are engaged in changing their situation for the better. Still, one should be mindful of the role of leadership in sustaining a given work culture and as either enablers or disablers of organizational change, as pointed out by Black (2020) and Edmondson (2011).
References


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