

Learning from Failure: A Safe Space Session

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Chatham House Rule

- To encourage sharing – we're operating under the Chatham House Rule – you can share what you hear but not attribute it to a specific individual / organisation
- There's A5 handouts that describe this a bit more – please sign as a gesture of agreement. There's also a space for your email – I'll send you the write up that results from the session!

Principles underpinning today

- **Vulnerability** – what we're talking about can be a bit confronting – our own real experiences of making mistakes and failing – but this is a positive thing and this is a supportive and encouraging environment!
- **Appetite** – one of my takeaways from last year was there was (and still is) an appetite for doing and trying new things to encourage learning – so I'm hoping to see you really engage with this
- **Participation** – this session hinges on you working with and alongside me to deliver – it may not work perfectly, but that is the very essence of what I'm trying to explore today

Reflections on the 2017 AES conference: Promise. Appetite. Vulnerability.

Published on September 7, 2017



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learning more about
evaluation more broadly**

**Perth (2016) – started to learn more about
different tools in design research – thinking
about how evaluation could use these**

**Canberra (2017) – thinking about co-design /
human centered design / design thinking (etc)
and how evaluation intersects and how they
can benefit each other**

**Launceston (2018) – the role of
failure in design, and why it seems a
bit taboo in evaluation**

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MQP's talk - Evaluators

**without borders, not
operating in silos**

**Not sharing between
organisations (consultants or
gov) – fear of being seen as
incompetent?**



Our objective

- To share and discuss our own experiences of mistakes, failure and **learning** in a safe space
- From this, develop a set of action-oriented principles that can be shared more broadly to:
 - a) continue the conversation of learning from failure and sharing lessons
 - b) support emerging evaluators (and others) in developing their own practice.

How today will run

- My own examples (and other ones I've found) to get you thinking and encourage sharing
- Two interactive components:
 - **A Penny for your Thoughts** – small groups / partners describing, documenting and sharing their own experiences to develop a draft principle
 - **Bring it Home** – refine by posting up for review and 'voting' by the room

Leading from the front

- Before we dive in...
- I did a lot of reading on some of the ways that people learn from failure – not too much was surprising – reflection, feedback, etc
- Cultures of sharing learning from failure come from the acceptance that it is OK to fail. Easier said than done. In many examples, it starts with sharing our own experiences in an environment that is supportive and encouraging



alanbenzie

@alanbenzie

During a night-shift I updated the grid on the Telegraph website crossword without updating the clues. The day-shift guys had to deal with all the angry emails. There were many.

9:44 PM - May 3, 2018

♡ 905 💬 53 people are talking about this



Devondan

@DanielPhilips1

I mistook an order for bags of crisps (48 per box) for boxes and sent a small shop 6 pallets of crisps

10:26 PM - May 3, 2018

♡ 270 👤 See Devondan's other Tweets



Entropy

@Entropy72

I once sent a company wide virus warning by forwarding the email so they could see what it looked like should they receive one, and forgot to remove the infected attachment.

9:31 PM - May 3, 2018

♡ 2,609 💬 242 people are talking about this

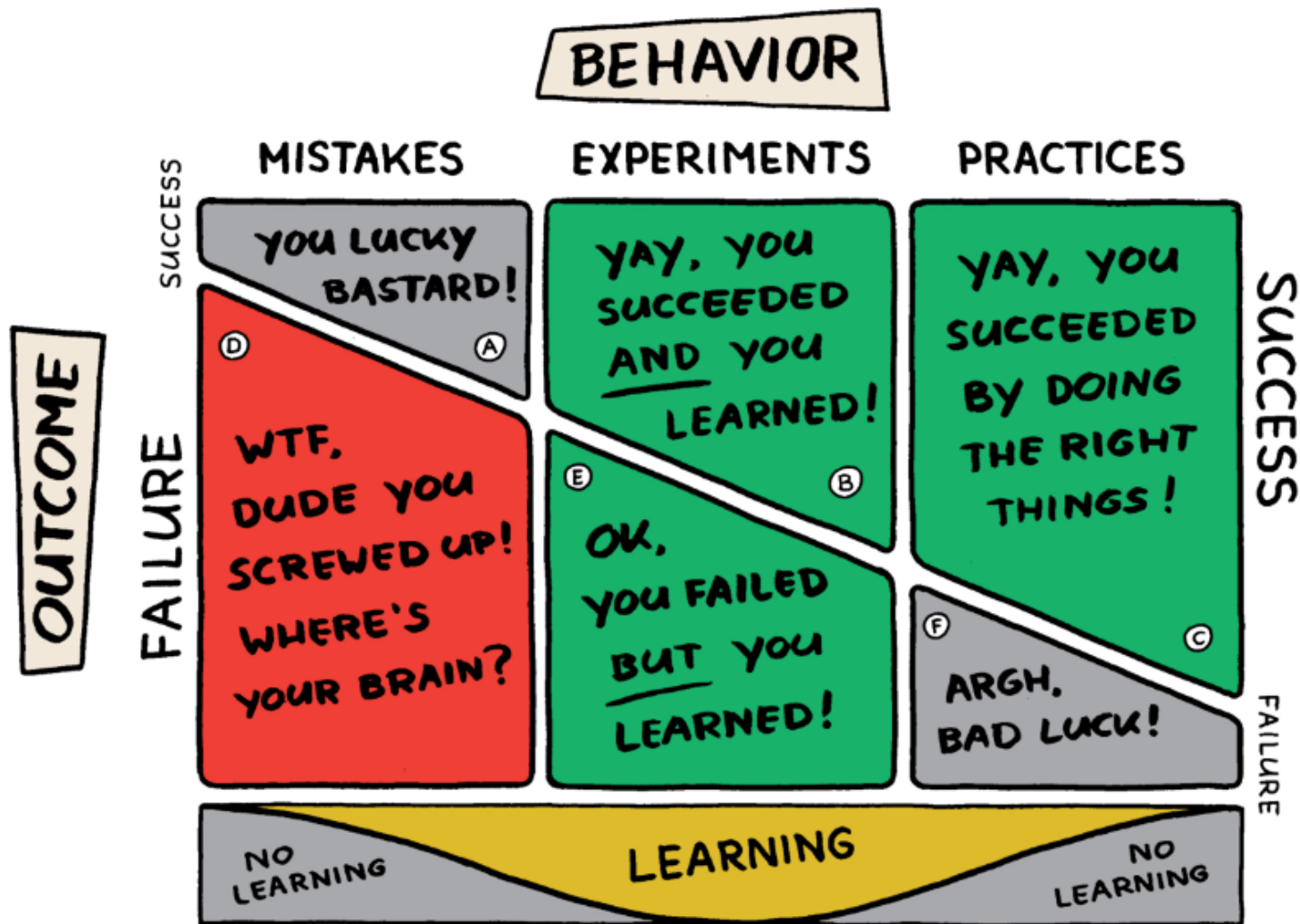


Two of my own examples...

- The time it took me six days to do two days of data entry... my first (ever) evaluation project...
- The time I sent the **wrong** draft of a report to a client and only realised after they queried (following their two days of review) “some sections seem a little... unfinished?”

Types of Mistakes





Behavior and Outcome (the Celebration Grid)

Source: <https://medium.com/@jurgenappelo/mistakes-versus-failures-67736fd3ec1a>

In summary

- Mistakes are not all created equal, and they are not always desirable.
- Most importantly, learning from mistakes is not automatic. In order to learn from them the most we need to reflect on our errors and extract lessons from them.
- If we understand mistakes and failure more clearly, we can communicate the learning and experiences to others...

Component 1 – A Penny for your Thoughts



Process

- On your table is a handout, take three or so minutes **as individuals** and reflect on your own past experience (doesn't even need to be evaluation if you're very new to it) and try to identify at least one mistake or failure that fits under one of those categories
- The focus is on where **things did not succeed or work very well, or you made a mistake but were lucky it still succeeded**
- Once you have at least one example, use the prompt questions to try and articulate what you learned as a result. You can produce multiple examples if you wish.

Process (contd.)

- With your page in hand, form small groups (probably three or four max). You'll need a piece of butchers paper!
- Share your example and learning – what themes / commonalities / differences stand out among these? Could be context, experience, or something else entirely...

Process (contd.)

As a suggested starting point:

- Start with a word, phrase or action that encapsulates your takeaway thoughts, feelings or ideas from the discussion
- Supplement this with other words, phrases or actions that provide some direction to an outside reader
- The goal here is to develop a **principle or statement that you group feels will underpin how evaluation / evaluators can / should or should not share failure and the learning that has occurred.**
- I also think of this across borders, cultures, organisations and individuals...

Example (from education)

Start Small, Build Big

- A learning experience should be envisaged as a story with a natural progression. Related concepts need to be introduced in a way that makes sense and serves the defined learning objectives. Learning designers should think about the overall learning experience as a carefully crafted series of learning sequences (i.e. a succession of informational and activity screens that focus on a specific learning point).

Review and discussion time

- Stick your pages up on the wall
- Please feel free to browse what others have produced – you will find some sticky dots (red, orange and green) you can use these to indicate that:
 - You agree / it resonates strongly / you like it (**Green**)
 - It's ok / does not resonate as much / you can live with it (**Orange**)
 - You disagree / it does not resonate / it needs some work (**Red**)

Reflections and wrap-up

- Does anyone want to share what they came up with, why or what they felt when reviewing others?

Thank you for participating!

Contact me:

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