Barriers and Needs for Sharing and Owning Our Failures

**Recognition**
Defensiveness and cognitive dissonance are common instinctive and neurobiological responses to failure, which make it hard to recognize a failure as a failure while we are in it.¹

*If we recognize our responsibility for the failure then...*

**Decision**
Certain internal and external factors are required to overcome our instinctive fears and decide to share our failure story publicly.

*External*
- **Time** to reflect and share

*Internal*
- **Personal incentives** to share
  - Trust in the people with whom we share
  - Ability to manage the consequences of sharing

*If we decide to share our failure then...*

**Execution**
We require certain skills to take ownership for and communicate our failures well. Such skills include communicating our story in a way that maximizes learning and avoids blame, using the theory and archetypes for thinking through our failures and framing them into a meaningful narrative, and the ability to analyze and learn through our failures - while they’re happening and adjustments can still be made - not just from them.

All of the above is influenced by the type of failure in question. That is to say, sharing and owning a failure caused by incompetence with high consequences to oneself and others is a very different experience from sharing and owning one caused by experimentation with low consequences.

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¹ Tavris, Carol & Elliot Aronson (2008). Mistakes Were Made (But Not by Me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions, and Hurtful Acts