



# Intelligent Failure Assessment

Through self-evaluation, organizations of all sizes can visualize how well they are equipped to work with failure, and explore what getting better might look like.

For more great resources or to get in touch, visit [failforward.org](http://failforward.org)



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# Intelligent Failure Assessment

Is your organization maximizing learning, innovation, and resilience?

Highlight the sections below that most sound like you. How well do you do?



## Organizational Component<sup>1</sup>



| Organizational Component <sup>1</sup>                    |                   | 1  | 2  | 3  | 4   |
|--|-------------------|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Environment</b><br>Clients, Customers, Competitors    |                   | Needs & demands of competitors and clients do not influence our work | Clients and customers are frequently asked for feedback      | This feedback is collected early and often used to make improvements           | Needs & demands are constantly assessed and used to inform & inspire innovation                   |
| <b>Resources</b><br>Employees, Capital, Info, Reputation |                   | Failures are hidden for fearing of losing access to resources        | We discuss failure with the goal of minimizing losses        | Failures are openly discussed regardless of the impact on resources            | We share failures externally, which increases our access to resources                             |
| <b>History</b><br>Key Decisions, Past Failures           |                   | I have no knowledge of past failures in my organization              | Our stories of past failure focus on the punishment          | Our stories compare expectations to results and share what was learned         | Our stories focus on what was learned, celebrate courage, and never blame                         |
| <b>Strategy</b>  |                   | Our strategies focus on what has worked in the past; the status quo  | Innovation and learning are considered in our strategies     | Innovation, learning, and adaptation are significant aspects of our strategies | Testing, maximizing learning from success & failure <i>is</i> our strategy                        |
| <b>Tasks</b><br>Workflow, Expected Actions               | <b>Innovation</b> | We can not take risks or do something new in our work                | Some testing & risk taking is okay, if we mitigate the risks | We consider the risk of staying the same when evaluating ideas                 | We're tasked to create new ideas; smart risks are rewarded  |
|  | <b>Learning</b>   | There are no expected tasks for responding to failure                | Our response to failure is often inadequate or inappropriate | Our response allows us to share learning & make changes                        | We right-size our response to failure and share learning  |
| <b>HR Practices</b>                                      |                   | Failure is punished when discovered                                  | Responses to failures are varied and often not transparent   | We acknowledge that not all failures are equal & always respond accordingly    | Evaluations reward effort & learning - we talk about blame- vs. praiseworthy <sup>2</sup> failure |

<sup>1</sup> Nadler, David A., and Michael L. Tushman (1980) A Model for diagnosing organizational behaviour. *Organizational Dynamics*, 9(2) 35-51

<sup>2</sup> Edmondson, Amy C. (2011) Strategies for Learning from Failure. <https://hbr.org/2011/04/strategies-for-learning-from-failure>



# Individual

Perceptions & Expectations

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Knowledge & Skills

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Needs & Preferences

I lack confidence and/or security to openly deal with failures

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I do not respond well to negative feedback & struggle to admit shortcomings

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I simply cannot fail.

I can share failures as long as I have a solution

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I keep mistakes contained and focus on avoiding a repeat

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Innovation is a low priority so I don't step up or take risks

I know not all failures are equal and respond accordingly

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I work to assess where I might be failing and adapt accordingly

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I'm excited by new ways of doing things and I share my ideas

I can confidently own my failures - my team will help me learn

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I seek feedback early and often and know how to learn from it

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I strive for ambitious goals vs. the safety of achievable results

# Job Design

Experimentation, reflection, and learning are not part of my job

I often lack time, resources, or freedom to test new ideas or learn

Leaders support me to find the time and resources to experiment and learn

Experimentation, reflection & sharing learning are constant and core to my job

# Organizational Design

Work is often siloed so we struggle to collaborate and innovate

Despite barriers, we can often collaborate with effort

Our work, office space, and teams are designed for collaboration

Our leadership and organization is designed to support collaboration

# Culture, Values, Norms

Productive conversations about failure feel impossible

We're able to identify and assign failures in order to keep working

We actively seek out our failures and act on new ideas and insights

We treat success as a step towards more creative failures

# Relationships

There is a strong tendency to point fingers

It is rare to feel shunned for a failure and we challenge with respect

We have strong trust and collaboration - everyone's ideas are listened to

Failure is rewarded with encouragement to try again

# Behavior of Leaders

Never talk of their own failures; react negatively to those of others

Speak in broad terms of failure, yet never reward those who speak up

Build psychological safety: Acknowledge fallibility, frame work as learning, and ask curious questions <sup>3</sup>

Make psychological safety a priority: admit when they're wrong; reward and tell stories of failure & learning