FAILING FORWARD

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What isn’t working?
Why isn’t it working?
What can we do better?
Build community around talking about failure

Learn and adapt to failures

Accept failure; nurture innovation

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You’re not alone. Lots of people are doing this. You can too.
The development community is failing...to learn from failure. Instead of recognizing these experiences as learning opportunities, we hide them away out of fear and embarrassment.

No more. This site is an open space for development professionals who recognize that the only "bad" failure is one that's repeated, for those who are willing to share their missteps to ensure they don't happen again. It is a community and a resource, created to establish new levels of transparency, collaboration and innovation within the development sector. Read more.
Learning the Lesson Is Not Enough

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With 2 Comments
Permalink

by Marilyn McHarg, Executive Director, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

Project: Iraq Mission
Location: Iraq
Sector: Disaster Relief, Health and Safety
Professional Designation: NGO

Failure

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an organization that thrives on critical debate. Across the five MSF operational teams, we easily point out each other’s errors and shortcomings. When this dynamic is kept...
NGO hopes to benefit from failure

A Canadian NGO has posted its shortcomings online in a bold attempt to learn from them and encourage others to do the same.
Learn and adapt to failures

What isn’t working?
Why isn’t it working?
What can we do better?
Organizational Norms and Characteristics

1. Ego decoupled from activity
2. Failures characterized to decentralize blame and understand root causes
3. Overarching lessons extracted from trends
4. Individuals internalize responsibility for taking action
5. Management involved and supportive
6. Failure sharing, learning, and adapting rewarded
7. People encouraged to take risks, think innovatively
Accept failure; nurture innovation
Innovation is Proportional to Risk of Failure

- Innovation Required
  - i.e. Complexity of the Problem
- Risk
  - i.e. Likelihood of Failure

Low

High
Accept failure; nurture innovation

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