

Ask the Expert Failure

Not all failures are created equal

Amy Edmondson identifies three different types of failure

1. Preventable failures - *human error in predictable situations*
2. Complex failures - *usually unavoidable and multi-causal*
3. Intelligent failure - *a result of the right kind of experimentation.*

Intelligent failures are the 'right kind of wrong.' They are the result of a risk that was worth taking.

Note down one failure you've had in the past six months, and one reflection on what you learnt.



Strategies for learning from failure



Create conditions to fail well

Creating a psychologically safe environment is important for any work that requires creativity, problem-solving, or ingenuity.

"Psychological safety isn't about being nice. It's about: giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes and learning from each other."

- Amy Edmondson



Celebrate failures

In a psychologically safe environment intelligent failures are celebrated, not just tolerated.

Celebrating the initiative, hard work and learning behind intelligent failures leads to future growth and innovation.

Including these moments as part of your team's ways of working makes a big difference to team work and wellbeing.



Develop 3 skills to fail well

Self-awareness - being curious and becoming more aware of the impact you are having.
Sounds like: *"What am I missing?"*

Situational awareness - sizing up your degree of uncertainty.
Sounds like: *"How much do I know and where are my gaps?"*

Systems awareness - realising the impact of your actions on others.
Sounds like: *"Who else might be impacted by this decision?"*



"Unlearn the wrong-headed belief that we are supposed to know everything. We are fallible human beings. We need to accept and embrace this."

Amy Edmondson, [Author and Novartis Professor of Leadership and Management at the Harvard Business School](#)

How can you choose 'learning' over 'knowing' in your work?



Recommended resources



Strategies for Learning from Failure
HBR article by Amy Edmondson about how leaders can create an organisational culture where people feel safe admitting or reporting on failure.



Psychological Safety
Amy Edmondson discusses the concept she has pioneered through her research on #151 of Squiggly Careers.