

Learning from an entrepreneur through a reflective journey

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Abstract

A group of students worked together with us in a project about failure and recovery. In this workshop, the participants will experience a reflective journey following in the footsteps of our students. We have two objectives: on the one hand, to show the benefits of the involvement of students in the collection of qualitative data for a large-scale research initiative. And on the other hand, to identify the challenges when replicating this methodology in different educational contexts.

The successful side of entrepreneurship is commonly highlighted in the Dutch society and mirrored in the Dutch educational system, leaving the topic of failure and recovery overlooked. In our workshop we address this topic using a combination of research and educational modules. Talking about failure and recovery is not an easy task for entrepreneurs, so we invited them to share their stories anonymously with our students. Entrepreneurs who shared their problems and mistakes made their lessons available for educational purposes.

As a preparation for this workshop, we ask participants to gather in advance a (anonymous) mini-story of failure from a colleague, a friend or someone else (one page description is enough – see workshop summary for guidelines). Participants will use that material throughout the workshop and share parts of it with other participants.

The workshop begins with a short explanation of our research project “Fenix” and the role of students in it. We name it Fenix Project as a symbol of the bird who was reborn from its own ashes. We use entrepreneurial stories to identify the lessons derived from the events of entrepreneurial failure and recovery. Through this project we aim to build stronger and resilient entrepreneurial ventures, which develop alternative plans for difficult times.

After this, the participants will be engaged in three stages of a reflective journey. We begin with the process of creating awareness of the topic of failure and recovery. In this first stage, we ask participants to share pieces of their mini-story with others and answer questions in a personal handbook that we provide. In the second stage, participants compare their experiences to find a suitable respondent with those of our students; we share tips and problems that our students went through. The third stage is where the reflection takes place, we propose a post-it notes brainstorming activity to gather the ideas from all participants. The workshop continues with a presentation of the most important learning processes we have seen so far in our project. To conclude, we open the discussion to identify the challenges for a potential replication of our methodology in other educational contexts.

We expect that the workshop will trigger interest for the topic of failure and recovery and also for the methodology to collect such stories. After the workshop, we will condense the input of the participants and send them via email.

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Workshop Summary

A group of students worked together with us in a project about failure and recovery; we named it Fenix Project as a symbol of the bird who was re born from its own ashes. The participants of this workshop will experience a reflective journey following in the footsteps of our students. We have two objectives: on the one hand, to show the benefits of the involvement of students in the collection of qualitative data for a large-scale research initiative. And on the other hand, to identify the challenges when replicating this methodology in different educational contexts.

As a preparation for the workshop, we ask participants to gather in advance a (anonymous) mini-story of failure from a colleague, a friend or someone else. Participants will use that material throughout the workshop and share parts of it with other participants. The workshop begins with a short explanation of the research project and the role of students in it. We distribute a workbook for each participant and with it, we follow a three-stages structure in our journey:

- **Creating awareness of the topic:** In this first stage, we ask participants to share parts of their mini-story with other participants through the questions in their workbook handout. The search and selection of a suitable respondent involves the completion of preparatory tasks where the awareness of its importance play a major role. Influential aspects are often related to the type of failure or to the process of convincing someone to share their (personal) problems. In our experience, many teachers and coaches are not prepared, and sometimes not willing, to discuss the event of failure in their entrepreneurial programs.
- **Searching an entrepreneur:** The second stage involves the participants' description of their efforts to find a suitable respondent for their mini story. We will compare them to the situations that were experienced by our students. We close with some remarks on the sense of urgency to complete the task of finding a suitable respondent.
- **Reflecting about the entrepreneur's experiences:** The third stage is where the reflection take places, we propose a post-it notes brainstorming activity to gather ideas from all participants. Two guiding question are used for this common reflection: one about the main lesson learned during the workshop and another about the possible reaction from their own students. We present a selection of students' quotes as a contrast to the experience of the participants.

To finish the reflective journey, we ask participants to discuss the strengths and limitations of our methodology. We also invite participants to include the study of failure and recovery in their curriculum. After the workshop, we will summarize the reflections and send them back via email.

Details of any underpinning theories, models or pedagogies informing the approach

In recent years scientific studies started to devote more serious attention to the notion of failure in entrepreneurship. Scholars have for instance studied topics such as conceptualizations of failure (Khelil 2016, Jenkins, McKelvie 2016) the causes and consequences of failure (Ucbasaran, Shepherd et al. 2013, Ucbasaran, Westhead et al. 2010) failure attribution and sensemaking (Mandl, Berger et al. 2016, Mantere, Aula et al. 2013), and learning from failure (Yamakawa, Peng et al. 2015, Fang He, Sirén et al. 2017). Sheperd (2004) emphasizes that important factors to consider in events of failure are connected with the emotions and the stories of entrepreneurs. In that line, more attention is needed to connect those feeling and memories with entrepreneurial education.

Vicarious learning is the path we chose to enable students to learn from the experience of entrepreneurs who have already processed their events of failure and are able to provide some lessons. Individual learning from another person is the seed planted in entrepreneurial education with our Fenix Project. Our students were given lectures about entrepreneurial failure followed by workshops about collecting stories. At the end, they were asked to write reflections about the lessons they have learned and to apply those tips in their business proposals.

Details of existing evidence, e.g. feedback/evaluation received so far

One of the educational strategies within our Fenix project is to engage students in a reflective journey. We use entrepreneurial stories to identify the lessons derived from the events of entrepreneurial failure and recovery. Through this project we aim to build stronger and resilient entrepreneurial ventures, which develop alternative plans for difficult times. For this workshop in particular, we inspire the participants to engage in a reflective journey to experience themselves the concept of vicarious learning.

The inspiration for this workshop comes from the activities that we have already carried out with the students taking part in the Fenix Project, we have conducted a dozen sessions for approximately 300 students. Moreover, an earlier version of this workshop was already given (in Dutch) in a conference about “Challenges for Entrepreneurship” for teachers and researchers of universities of applied sciences of the Netherlands. The participants were engaged in the Q&A section and approached us after the event for potential collaboration. As a result, a new faculty is joining our project starting in November 2019.

Activities and Outcomes:

- **Session breakdown – timings and activities**

The sessions have a short introduction of our Fenix Project, three stages to work together with the participants and a closing discussion. The first stage is about creating awareness of the topic of failure and recovery. With the help of a mini questionnaire, participants will share their own experiences. In the second stage, participants compare their efforts to find a suitable respondent with those of our students; we share tips and problems that our students went through. In the third stage, the reflection takes place. We propose a post-it notes brainstorming activity to gather the ideas from all participants. To conclude, we discuss the challenges for a potential replication of our methodology in other educational contexts.

- **Ways in which your session will be interactive – how will you involve delegates who sign up for your session?**

This workshop involves a variety of activities for the participants. In advance, they should hold a conversation with someone they know about an event of failure and share that information in the workshop. During the workshop, participants are given a personal handbook as a guide, and they can expect conversations in small groups, individual reflections, common discussions and brainstorming activities. As explained in the summary of the workshop, there will be three stages in which participants will be invited to share their thoughts, ask questions and give input.

- **What should participants do in advance (write a structured example of their own practice to discuss in groups, bring their own course outline, complete a survey, download an app or piece of software)?**

Think of someone who experienced a very bad time in his or her life. Approach this person (face-to-face, phone call or email) to find out more information about those hard times (do not write down names or sensitive information). Pay attention to identify aspects such as:

- In which context did things go wrong?
- How did they solve their problem?
- Which other people were involved in finding solutions?
- Were there inspirational people to get an advice from?

The person could be someone close to you, in your personal life or work environment. Please bring a description of that situation in approximately 300 words:

- What happened?
- How did this person found a way out of his or her problems?
- Who helped this person?

- **Expected participant outcomes and takeaways, e.g. ways in which content could be applied to their context, new resources to use, new approaches, new ways to evaluate practice, new questions to explore**

Each participant will take a glimpse of vicarious learning in entrepreneurial education, with its potential as well as its limitations. We expect that the workshop will trigger interest in the topic of failure and recovery and also for the methodology to collect such stories. During the concluding discussion, the participants will be able to identify the opportunities for teachers but also the possible problems when replicating what we have done within their context. As extra material after the workshop, we will condense the input of the participants and send them via email.

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