FINAL PROJECT MANAGEMENT REPORT

Author: Startups.be

ABSTRACT
LIFE project progress report with details on management, achievement, challenges, risk mitigations and financial implementation.

LIFE – Learning Incrementally from Failed Entrepreneurship
H2020 – GA645000
## PROJECT INFORMATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project number</th>
<th>645000</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project acronym</td>
<td>LIFE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project title</td>
<td>Learning Incrementally from Failed Entrepreneurship</td>
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<tr>
<td>H2020 programme</td>
<td>H2020 ICT-13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project start date</td>
<td>2015.01.01.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project duration</td>
<td>2 years (24 months)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deliverable title</td>
<td>D1.3 – Final project management report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lead partner</td>
<td>Startups.be</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dissemination level</td>
<td>PU - public</td>
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## List of authors

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## Revision history

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>First version</td>
<td>15/12/2015</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm final version</td>
<td>01/02/2016</td>
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<td>Second version</td>
<td>12/12/2016</td>
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LIFE – Learning Incrementally from Failed Entrepreneurship. The project received funding from the European Commission’s H2020 Framework Programme, under Startup Europe’s umbrella

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Background

The LIFE project was about collaborative learning from failure in entrepreneurship and collaborative actions to bring entrepreneurship forward. It aimed to overcome distributed markets and decentralised policy by providing access to pan-European case stories, talent & relevant expertise, sufficient financing and adequate facilities & networks.

Due to the high number of project partners involved in LIFE, sound project management with clearly defined roles and a strong focus on WP leaders’ responsibility in executing the tasks have been necessary from the beginning of the project. Whilst this may have been considered a disadvantage in terms of managing the delivery of the project, it also provides broad access to many of the most prosperous startup ecosystems in Europe, along with prominent media outlets such as Tech.eu and F6S.

The construction of Ecosystems and stimulating a change in mentality were the long-term goals to achieve: The LIFE project aimed to raise awareness on the importance of failure acceptance for the success of Startups. It also aimed to accelerate the learning process from the failure of all of the actors in the startup ecosystem by highlighting the available support and by analysing the entrepreneurial climate in the respective countries. Cross-country synergies were sought and encouraged, and also channeled into best practices and recommendations.
Work progress in the first year

WP1:
The project kick-off was organised in Brussels in January 2015, where partners agreed on the project management structure and action plan for the first year. Roles were assigned along with establishing the primary communication channels (Slack). Since there is no particular budget line planned for travel and accommodation, partners need to coordinate amongst each other to identify common events of interest, and work towards face-to-face meetings whenever possible. The meetings in Berlin and Lisbon facilitated the implementation of the project goals, in February – WP2 kick-off – and in June where partners followed up on progress with the interviews and local events.

Since all partners were invited to attend the yearly Failing Forward Conference, and to reduce the fly-in costs and time for partners (as the project does not cover such expenses), the consortium meeting was organised one day before the conference. During the 4th PMC meeting the results of the interviews were presented, and partners agreed on the next steps on how to build upon the insights and feed them into the recommendations in WP3. The importance of sharing information, providing financial input (time sheets) and prompt communication was also stressed and agreed.

WP2:
The Collaborative Learning work package encompassed interviewing 10-20 startups from each ecosystem to gain a better understanding of the influential factors in failure. Altogether 200 interviews were carried out by the partners, some of them with delays, therefore 160+ were analysed and addressed in the White Paper. Along the way, the data gained from the interviews proved too heterogeneous for a quantitative and scientifically valid analysis, thus partners deviated from the original plan towards a more qualitative analysis – which yielded valuable insights and was channeled into the recommendations in WP3. To complement the findings, partners mutually agreed to move forward with in-depth interviews including both senior partners and 3 ecosystem builders (VCs, business angels and community builders) from all partner countries. The WP5 leader drafted the interview script and carried out the interviews in the last months of 2015. The results from the partner interviews are incorporated in the WP5 Evaluation report, and also played an important role in the WP3 Second Action Plan. With the Collaborative Learning report submitted as a deliverable, this work package is officially finished.

WP3:
The Collaborative Action’s main goal was to detect patterns in failure findings, and make recommendations for the partners and service providers on how to address the causes of failure more effectively in their daily practice. Following the First Action Plan, which outlined yearly activities, partners actively engaged in seeking opportunities to organise or insert “failing forward” panels into local events. Part of the WP3 tasks were to collect those event reports and compile them into the Second Action Plan (see as deliverable). After the WP2 interview analysis was made available in October – with approximately a 3-month delay due to the difficulties faced –, WP3 started working on the recommendations and compiling the event report. Since partners agreed on a second, re-defined iteration of interviews (in-depth partner and ecosystem interviews), the findings were also fed into the report. To follow up on the local events that had been organised, a spreadsheet was developed where partners continuously indicated when they organised standalone events or addressed failure topics in other events. As a result, more than...
20 events touched upon the failure topic with 19,000+ people reached. Partners continued working on events and seeking opportunities to insert panel discussions into prominent startup gatherings in their ecosystem.

WP4:

Brussels, 14 October, 2015

Objectives:

- Share and celebrate the success stories that were built on incremental learning
- Open up the existing startup support programmes to web entrepreneurs from all over Europe

Overview:

Gathering over 200 participants, 2015’s edition of Failing Forward succeeded in putting the learning from failure topic in the spotlight again. As described by a participant, the conference was unique in Europe and created a great atmosphere to share stories about failure and connect with like-minded individuals. Failing Forward was not a typical tech conference, rather a celebration of inspiring others how to move on after learning the hard way.

In 2015, the annual conference enjoyed the support of Startup Europe’s LIFE project, a witty acronym standing for Learning Incrementally from Failed Entrepreneurship. The web entrepreneurship project - funded through Horizon2020 - involves partners from all over Europe and aims to identify, share and discuss best practices & success stories. This yearly pan-European conference in Brussels was complemented with local spin-off events in the partner regions, to generate and grow awareness that failure was an inherent part of the process of entrepreneurship and innovation.

The conference was built around a format which allowed all participants to find a cure for their burning issues. Ranging from one-on-one clinic sessions to power meetings in topics including startup funding, tax incentives or growth hacking, Failing Forward thrived to provide practical value in line with inspiring keynotes speeches.

2015’s LIFE panel featured four remarkable individuals from various walks of life. See below their bios:

**Kira Van den Ende**

Co-founder of Antiheroes, the organisation behind FuckUp Nights Brussels;

Working with how failure relates to tolerance, diversity, democracy and transparency on a daily basis; Writer, communicator, freelance all-round; Philanthropic lover of the edge of life.

**Bart Van Loon**
Bart Van Loon is a computer science engineer turned entrepreneur. In 2006 he got involved in his first business refurbishing 1960 Italian Vespa Scooters in Pakistan. Eventually Villa Vespa shipped containers to the US, Germany, Spain and Belgium. In 2007, he founded Zeropoint, an organisation dedicated to building and supported teams staffing the best talent from Pakistan and Sri Lanka for European businesses. Next to his business affairs, he is passionate about music and improv theatre.

**Damien Nicell**

Damien has over 30 years marketing, sales and business start-up experience in a variety of industry and government sectors across Europe and the US. Based in Brussels Damien will share his experiences of taking a proven franchise model from the US and implementing this in Ireland and the UK.

As co-founder of Duds'n Suds UK Ltd, Damien, along with his brothers set up a laundry franchise in Derry, Northern Ireland. While the franchise operations themselves were successful, the Franchisor business model failed. Damien will talk about the background, launch, growth and how he confronted the challenge of failing with this business model.

**Robin Wauters - moderator**

Robin Wauters is the founding editor of Tech.eu. With a background in online marketing for technology companies, he has been an entrepreneur, startup advisor but primarily a tech journalist for many years, most recently as the European Editor of global technology news site The Next Web and previously senior reporter at TechCrunch, a Silicon Valley-based tech blog and event organiser.

Media coverage:

- [From Hero to Zero - Tech.eu](#)
- [Failing Forward conferentie: de hoogtepunten - Technologium](#)
- [#FailingFwd: 5 lessons from start-up experiences - LinkedIn Pulse](#)
- [Episode 6 - The Dark Side of Entrepreneurship - Hypermedia](#)
- [Failure: An important step on the (bumpy) road to success - Think Progress UK](#)

Social media reach: detailed in WP4 D4.1 deliverable, Failing Forward report.

Social media visual overview:

https://storify.com/startupsbe/0b8ad0bb2dbbcd71b29f2ec61f1767e3

**WP5:**

Evaluation work package was fully on track with its deliverables and tasks, on the top of that they engaged in coordinating a second round of in-depth interviews in order to gain a broader overview about the ecosystems. In the scope of that, executives of LIFE partner organisations were interviewed about their respective ecosystem. To complement the findings, partners mutually agreed to move forward with in-depth interviews including both senior partners and 3 ecosystem builders (VCs, business angels and community builders) from all partner countries. The WP5 leader drafted the interview script and carried out the interviews in the last months of 2015. Interviews were, in the most part carried out, and the insights have been channelled into the recommendations. The full scope of results (including 42 interviews) fed into the final report at the end of the project. Also, Outsight did a great job in assessing the available failure literature and policy background, which was thoroughly detailed in line with the preliminary partner
insights in the WP5 evaluation report (deliverable, WP5 D5.2). The document served as a base for the partners to get a general understanding and overview of relevant actors of entrepreneurship policy making related to startups and failure. Apart from the substantial work carried out, WP5 kept on performing outstanding and timely quality review of the documents produced during the project. Also, the WP7 ethics requirements were researched and defined by Outsight in collaboration with Startups.be.

WP6:

Dissemination and exploitation was a horizontal work package stretching through the whole implementation of the project with ongoing, media-related activities. Tech.eu with F6S ensures that the project is well-known in the European startup ecosystem and media circles. As for the official part, the Project White Paper was delivered (delay was due to the postponed analysis of WP2 interviews), along with the Preliminary Exploitation Plan.

Furthermore, WP6 kept track of articles/publication/reach of activities on social media. Web presence was supported by F6S, www.failbetter.eu.

WP6 also took care of the publicity of the project results and publish articles regularly. Examples:

- http://tech.eu/inside/4584/fail-better/
- http://tech.eu/features/5895/arthur-tolsma-failing-forward/

Key metrics in 2015 and projection for 2016

The following table summarises where the project is heading and the measurable results to help track progress.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key metrics</th>
<th>Promise in application</th>
<th>September 2015</th>
<th>April 2016</th>
<th>End of Project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of interviews with startups (WP2)</td>
<td>Conducting interviews with startups at local level</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>this part has finished, second part: interviews with senior staff will take place</td>
<td>Mapping key success/failure factors in the local ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events organised by partners related to failure (WP3)</td>
<td>Including the Failing Forward concept in local spin-off events</td>
<td>First Action Plan (compilation of activities – 15 events/attendees/reach)</td>
<td>Keeping track of the LIFE-related events or where partners present about failure</td>
<td>Report on successful collaborative activities. outreach through events</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failing Forward conference (WP4)</td>
<td>Organising two editions of the conference</td>
<td>First conference will take place 14 October, 2015</td>
<td>Preparations for the 2016 edition</td>
<td>Two editions of the conference organised</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation (WP5)</td>
<td>14 partner interviews</td>
<td>+ 42 interviews with influential players (agreed during PMC)</td>
<td>Insights from senior partners compiled in first report</td>
<td>Overview on failure in European startup ecosystems</td>
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Challenges and risk mitigation

The size of the consortium posed a great challenge for project management to find a way to execute the required tasks efficiently without overburdening the partners. The iteration of the interviews was on track although, as the interviews were conducted, the data collected proved not as homogeneous and ready-to-analyse as was expected. In order to avoid the potential risks of losing valuable data and time, WP2 and Startups.be joined forces and put extra effort and time into analysing the collected data on a qualitative and quantitative basis. As a result, a general analysis was produced based on data and statements from the interviews. Although it should not be used as a firm scientific document, it allows the partners to look deeper into the prevalent issues in their ecosystems. Also, it greatly helped the work of the WP3 team in defining the recommendations. As a consequence of the prolonged WP2 process, the submission date of deliverables in other work packages deviated slightly from the initial plan together with an increased volume of hours declared on the WP leader side. Significant project management time needed to be invested in mitigating the risk of deviating from the WP2 objectives. However, sometimes learning by doing is the best approach and life tends to verify that. As a direct result of the difficulties faced in WP2, the consortium unanimously backed the idea of involving senior ecosystem players in the interview phase so as to complement the findings from another, different angle. Thanks to the joint effort of WP2-WP3 and WP5 leaders, 15 interviews with leading figures of the partner organisations were conducted in a very short time frame, in November and December. Insights gained from the interviews fed into the recommendations, and after finalising the round with 3 additional ecosystem builders from each partner countries, the results were concluded in the final evaluation and recommendation report. In spite of the difficulties, with increased efforts from all parties, the project got back on track and pivoted into a new, but equally advantageous direction.

Best moments from the first year:

- Successful Failing Forward conference, 2015
- ‘Failing Forward’ topic now widely accepted and scheduled at numerous events, including Startup Olé, ICT 2015, local events throughout the partner countries
- Emerging collaboration between event organisers (e.g. Fail-Learn-Succeed and FuckUp Nights) + between Startup Europe projects (My-WAY)
- Mainstream press is picking up on the topic, incl. The Bulletin, Trends/Tendencies

Lessons learned:

- Creating a mind-shift is possible as long as a sufficient amount of (key) people and organisations set out to do it
A large consortium is hard to manage - a lot hinges on the WP leaders - and the overhead of reporting / discussion project progress is considerable, given the ambitious targets and small budgets.

Action-driven collaboration (e.g. events & panels) works better than paper research.

With a relatively low budget distributed among a large number of partners proves hard to produce representative data from surveys conducted. Neither the scope, nor the resources are adequate for producing large-scale scientific analysis.

Emphasis should be put on the collaborative and network-building aspect instead.

### Technical review

In October, a non-official technical review of the project was scheduled in Brussels one day after a Startup Europe workshop with well-known experts who advised the project coordinators how to increase the added value and impact of the projects. Right after the workshop, the project results were presented for the EC officials and reviewers which received a good overall evaluation. Recommendations will be incorporated in the 2016 activity planning.

Following up on the recommendations of the technical review, F6S started to implement the speaker’s database idea with a registration page already in place on the website. It was supposed to serve as a tool for the public who show interest engaging with “failing forward” entrepreneurs, either by inviting them as speakers or coaches for events. Initially the Failing Forward speakers would be included, and according to the planning, the registration link would be distributed amongst all FF speakers of local events. Ideally, the database would step out of the LIFE circle and reach a broader audience in the mid-term. As a result, the floor would be opened for more and more panels, testimonials and discussions about the stigma on failure and how to fight it throughout Europe.

In terms of metrics: in WP1 to ensure the timely follow-up of project budget spending, each partner was requested to submit time sheets or projection of spending at least quarterly along with attending Skype calls and project consortium meeting. Partners in 2015 needed to submit interviews with startups in relation to WP2, which was complemented with a second round of in-depth interviews with ecosystem builders in their respective country. This KPI was met by all partners, and the results were already incorporated in WP2 analysis and appeared in the final report in WP5. Organising local-spin off events already started in 2015, and by 2016 all partners needed to come up with at least two events organised or a panel inserted into an existing event. A big chunk of work for 2016 was to implement the recommendations of WP3 as best as the organisation’s structure allows. To follow up on that, partners was requested to submit a contribution to WP3 on the progress. Regarding WP6, following the review recommendations a Speaker’s Database was planned to be made available at the project website. By the end of the project, all partners needed to make sure that they reach out and provide at least 3 speakers to the database. Since the project by then produced more publicly available document (WP2 analysis), WP6 would help to rework it into an easy-to-distribute format (articles).

### Collaborations and synergies

The Startup Europe team facilitated a great collaborative environment amongst the web entrepreneurship projects. The LIFE project had already started to exchange ideas with the FACE and Twist projects, and partnered up with the My WAY project to insert the failing forward topic into their student conferences. The first result of the collaboration was a LIFE session
during NACUE’s Student Enterprise Conference in London, February, 2016. Given the “sexy” nature of the failure topic, the LIFE project received collaboration proposals on a regular basis. A prime example was a satellite event addressing “failing forward” under the flag of The Next Web in Amsterdam, 25-28 May.

Startup Europe proved to be a crucial factor in facilitating collaboration throughout the year 2016. In March, a common meeting with the projects and advisors were held in Lisbon which helped to strengthen the relationship between coordinators. LIFE signed a collaboration agreement with MY WAY which resulted in failing forward session in 3 student conferences. It started in London (February), then continued in Lisbon (October) and in Treviso, Italy (December). Panels were appreciated by the participants as failure still bears a stigma in Europe. Starting educating young, wannabe entrepreneurs by showing them that a failed business idea is not game over could go a long way empowering more and more entrepreneurs in Europe.

Not only MY WAY, but a MOOC-enabled project, Digistart initiated a collaboration through which the videos of Failing Forward conferences became part of Digistart’s curriculum and displayed on their website.

FuckUp Nights – a concept deriving from Mexico - were also a vital source of speakers and collaborators throughout the project. LIFE project formed the cornerstone of the Failing Forward conference, and built on the experience a #failingfwd session moderated by the Brussels FuckUp Nights organiser was inserted into Startups.be’s Tech Startup Day event as well.

**2016 overview**

In terms of project management, sound financial management and thorough follow-up on tasks and deliverables characterised 2016. Project management committee meetings were held online (22 March) and in person, 25 May, Amsterdam and 17 November, Brussels. WP2 officially finished after the submission of the Collaborative Learning report. The recommendations in WP3 were made, and presented to the partners. Given the wide range of structures within the consortium partners, instead of a standardised evaluation of the results, partners were asked to adapt the findings to the metrics of the own organisations and ecosystems. WP3 leaders continued coordinating and encouraging the failing forward activities in line with following up on the recommendations and staying at the disposal of the project should questions arise. The 2016 edition of Failing Forward set for November. WP5 continued performing quality management and support the work of WP3 with the in-depth interviews. Another important milestone for 2016 was to disseminate the results for which WP6 leaders are in charge, both through WP3 findings and local events or inserting the FF theme into existing events.
SECOND YEAR PROJECT MANAGEMENT REPORT

Work carried out in 2016

2016 was characterized with administrative tasks (interim reports, midterm progress review) and defining formats and best practices how to implement the projects’ findings. Service providers organized several local events, collected #failingfwd speakers and continued identifying collaboration possibilities with local event organisers (including a side event attached to The Next Web). The cornerstone of the project, Failing Forward conference took place in November, 2016 featuring a LIFE panel with partners in the panel as well.

Iterations and trial & errors paved the way of LIFE execution. As much as a speaker database sounded a great idea in the beginning, as the implementation started it turned out to be a difficult exercise. Some entrepreneurs were comfortable with stepping into the spotlight with their stories, but as the consortium learned, most failed entrepreneurs were terrified by the thought of having another, public stigma of “failure” next to their names. It could harm their business potential in the future as some cited. Regarding these concerns, the database was made to be available only on a request basis and entrepreneurs listed were consent to be included. Yet it made it necessary to come up with other resources to list startups which failed. The next iteration was a list of publicly available resources indexing startup post mortems. Building on that, a compilation of articles related to the topic of failure formed part of the final reports which were made available on the LIFE website as well.

2016 was mostly about executing the recommendations and spreading the word about the project. Reporting – as many partners were first-time participants of EU projects – consumed the first 2 months of the year with some ups and downs. After having fought through the administrative and IT issues, all deliverables and reports were accepted with an interim financial payment received with no significant complications. Biggest challenge for project management was to measure the partners’ individual progress. With a relatively low budget and resources, with limitations on budget items other than personnel cost, a large consortium was an excessive task to keep aligned as it was pointed out in the first technical review. To come up with measurement metrics, each partner was asked to fill in event sheets and give recommendations to WP3.

Key numbers 2016

If you do not measure it, you cannot improve it – goes the saying. It is true to any European projects as well. As much as it was tricky to impose hard metrics on a coordination and support action which did not involve startups per se, there were ways to quantify progress. Important to note that all these data should be analyzed with consideration and discretion. For instance, since there was no budget dedicated to travel to the meetings, the “live” attendance was highly recommended but could (should) not have been forced on any partners. Bulk of the LIFE work was carried out online.

Attendance of project meetings:

1. PMC Brussels – January 15 – 12 partners attended on site or online (80%)
2. PMC Berlin – February – 11 partners attended on site or online (73%)
3. PMC Lisbon – June – 9 partners attended on site or online (60%)
4. PMC Brussels – October – 15 partners attended on site or online (100%)
5. PMC online – March – 13 participants (Skype) (86,6%)
6. PMC Amsterdam – May - 12 partners attended on site or online (80%)
7. PMC Brussels – November - 10 partners attended on site or online (66,6%)

Number of deliverables: 19
Number of interviews: 204 altogether
Number of ecosystem interviews: 42 interviews
LIFE partners in Failing Forward panels: 8 altogether
Local Failing Forward events:

**Challenges and risk mitigation 2016**

The biggest risk of the project had been from the beginning the large number of partners with a relatively small budget. It could have derailed implementation and made it hard to identify achievable goals within the means of the project.

A challenge for 2016 was to pull off the project periodic reporting with timely delivery of financial statements and deliverables. It took a considerable amount of time in January and February, but reporting was submitted in accordance with the grant agreement. The project coordinator took the necessary measures with individual consulting and the involvement of a financial manager to make sure partners received the help they needed.

Following the recommendations of the midterm review, partners started to collect a speakers’ database of entrepreneurs. It was a tricky task from the beginning to obtain the consent of the entrepreneur. The coordinator followed up the process closely, and learned that in practice such database could not work out as a public set of speakers. To mitigate the risk of creating potential reputation damage for the speakers, the coordinator decided not to proceed further with a public database. Instead, event organisers can request access to the database which will be evaluated on a case by case basis.

Organising events without additional budget is a challenge. It was imperative for the project success to engage partners in spreading the word about #failingfwd. A good solution to this question was to insert sessions into existing events or seek partnerships with other local events where failure topic could be present. A prime example was a satellite event of The Next Web in Amsterdam, 2016, where a Failing Forward side event with LIFE partners and entrepreneurs was organized and proved a successful iteration.

**Best moments in 2016**

- Consortium meeting Amsterdam and TNW side event.
- Failing Forward conference in Brussels.
- Broad recognition of the topic - > Startups.be was awarded with a local grant to continue the work towards a more inclusive, less risk-averse society
- Indirectly, but Slush also featured a high-level panel discussion with Europe’s finest CEOs sharing their failure stories. It was moderated by LIFE’s dissemination lead, Tech.eu’s Robin Wauters.
- Closing dinner and sharing why partners enjoyed the LIFE journey 😊
Lessons learned 2016

As much the topic started to gain traction in mainstream media, the underlying factors of failure were still prevalent in Europe. Society leans towards risk-aversion instead of the failing forward attitude. Policies – naturally – could not follow the speed of public perception though. Thanks to combined efforts of ecosystem builders across Europe, entrepreneurship and startup culture had been on the rise in the last years. However, bankruptcy policies, regulatory framework for hiring and even for cross-border sales were still to be geared up to speed. It results in slower adaptation and less visible (read: measurable) results when #failingfwd concerned. Lesson was that it takes significant time, patience and perseverance to change a long-standing paradigm. Signs are positive.

Crucial was to learn that creating a database of “failed” entrepreneurs could be counterproductive for failed entrepreneurs. Providing extra visibility was a noble goal which could be received well, yet it could also lead to further stigmatization which hurts reputation. Thus, the consortium decided to keep the speaker database confidential, which now can be made available upon request, on a case by case basis. To balance the lack of the database, partners continued collecting lists of publicly available startup post mortem lists.

Drawing lessons from administrative point of view, one little mistake in reporting could delay the entire consortium considerably. Built-in checks (double-checking SME ownership for instance) are essential to deliver the desired results without unnecessary delays. Stumbling between IT-related issues, payments could take longer than expected resulting in cash-flow urgencies. It was also valuable to learn that there had always been space for amendments (even of financial nature) and re-iterations, provided the consortium was on the same page and project officers agree to the measures. Timing is key though.

As a last point to consider for any future project initiator: when planning the project, better allocation of task managers across the consortium ensures smoother communication between the partners without constant intervention by the project coordinator. The smaller clusters are formed within a large consortium, the easier to make sure everyone finds its strengths and can contribute with their best abilities to project success. With uneven distribution of tasks, some partners can find themselves overwhelmed, subsequently understaffed, while managing those ones without direct responsibility requires extra attention and involvement from the project manager to get partners aligned.

Midterm review 2016

In April, the consortium coordinator underwent a review online. Project progress was discussed with the reviewers who complimented the partners for getting back on track with financial management and in general project management.
LIFE project review
Learning Incrementally from Failed Entrepreneurship - GA: 645000
8 April, 2016, 2pm - 5pm

Agenda:
14:00-14:30: WP1 – Project management (challenges, risks, finances)
14:30-14:45: WP2 – Collaborative Learning - interviews
14:45-15:00: WP3 – Collaborative Action (recommendations + local events)
15:00-15:15: WP4 – Failing Forward (2015 aftermath + 2016 planning)
15:15-15:30: WP5 - Failure literature/in-depth interviews/QM
15:30-15:45: WP6 – Dissemination
15:45-16:00: Wrap up – roadmap for 2016
16:00- : Questions & feedback

Participants from the project (tentative):
Karen Boers (Startups.be)
Diana Pati (Startups.be)
Carmen Bermejo (Tetuan Valley) - tentative
Jaime Novoa (Chamberi Valley) - tentative
Edite Cruz (Beta-i) - tentative
Jon Switters (Outsight) - tentative
Robin Wauters (tech.eu) - tentative
Leen Segers (tech.eu) - tentative

After the review:
The project submitted all deliverables, with relevant achievements in terms of early findings, events, and collaboration with other H2020 projects. Reviewers concluded that the project had great deal of innovation in the whole concept - first to encourage people to come to the stage/public and talk about their journeys, but also the approach the project used. It is not easy to talk about failure and thus build an entire project around it. On the upside, the project was complimented on its innovative approach to experiment formats how to tackle a sensitive social phenomenon. Event format recommendations, local #failingfwd events or panels and big events made the implementation diverse.

Recommendations:
The project coordinator was advised to steer the wheel towards even more results-driven activities. As a result, recommendation report based on 1-on-1 sessions concluded the best practices used by partners, local events with #failingfwd stories provided added value and
visibility in each ecosystem, furthermore the consortium expanded its reach thanks to MY WAY project’s student conferences. The LIFE partners found it equally important to engage young, entrepreneurial-minded individuals to embrace the fail forward attitude. Students were enthusiastic about the Learning from Failure Workshop introduced in the last conference organized at H-Farm, Italy.

Recommendation future work:

A better PR&Marketing strategy for the project was strongly encouraged which would be the direct consequence of the final reports. F6S prepared a page to showcase all the results gained from the LIFE project – public reports, videos and blogs. Partners also showed eagerness to continue keeping the topic high on their agendas and report on #failingfwd stories.

The consortium also produced two extra deliverables, both can be easily shared and used as visual aids. One compiles format recommendations by partners how to challenge traditional panel discussions about failure – as it still proves difficult to handle in public, the second is a flyer with LIFE’s Prevent-Discuss-Respond tagline underlined with best practices from partners across Europe. These extra documents along with the formal final reports were to be the backbone of the project website and sustainability after the LIFE project ended.

Collaboration and synergies

MY WAY collaboration worked in favour of LIFE’s reputation. The opportunity of inserting #failingfwd sessions into widely attended and well-advertised student conferences proved to be a fertile ground for dissemination. A panel discussion in London in February, a failure coach’s presentation in Lisbon and a learning from failure workshop in Treviso highlighted the work. Digistart published the Failing Forward videos as part of their MOOCs. High-profile events like The Next Web agreed to put #failingfwd in their side events in May, providing extra visibility to the project. FuckUp Nights became a natural source of inspiration (and speakers) to the partners, a good example is the Munich FuckUp Nights in collaboration with UnternehmerTUM.

Startup Europe proved to be a crucial factor in facilitating collaboration throughout the year 2016. In March, a common meeting with the projects and advisors were held in Lisbon which helped to strengthen the relationship between coordinators. LIFE signed a collaboration
agreement with MY WAY which resulted in failing forward session in 3 student conferences. It started in London (February), then continued in Lisbon (October) and in Treviso, Italy (December). Panels were appreciated by the participants as failure still bears a stigma in Europe. Starting educating young, wannabe entrepreneurs by showing them that a failed business idea is not game over could go a long way empowering more and more entrepreneurs in Europe.

Not only MY WAY, but a MOOC-enabled project, Digistart initiated a collaboration through which the videos of Failing Forward conferences became part of Digistart’s curriculum and displayed on their website.

FuckUp Nights – a concept deriving from Mexico – were also a vital source of speakers and collaborators throughout the project. LIFE project formed the cornerstone of the Failing Forward conference, and built on the experience a #failingfwd session moderated by the Brussels FuckUp Nights organiser was inserted into Startups.be’s Tech Startup Day event as well.

Financial management

The hard crack of every project, how to manage a pre-defined budget in the most efficient way to achieve the project goals. Some of the LIFE partners participated in EU-funded projects the first time. It is not a problem, rather a positive sign that new partnerships were built. However, it also required extra working hours in the reporting period from the coordinator and from the partners. Learning the ins and outs of the participant portal how to fill in financial statements can be daunting at first, not to mention the strict underlying regulatory framework and calculation methods.

In terms of diversity in cost the project was relatively easy – only personal cost and indirect cost. Partners managed well their expenses and use of resources. There were slight deviations in terms of hours spent on work packages, a usual side effect of a long project with iterations. Even though on one side a simplified budget could help implementation, it could also cause head ache when it turns out that a specific category would be useful – e.g. for marketing or for travel.

One of the main lessons learned from the project was that a pan-European collaboration should not lack face time. Therefore, planning travel budget – however small – would have been essential. Partners had to complement their budgets with extra travel costs to be able to attend events and meetings since there was no travel cost planned originally. It resulted in a constant discussion how to make it "lean", meaning to identify events of common interest and attendance to minimize the flying in time and expenses. To balance the deviations in the work plan – namely the fact that more in-person meetings were required-, the coordinator decided to redistribute partially its personal cost to the partners to allow them to participate in the last consortium meeting.

Impact and sustainability

Numerous events, articles, conferences were organized and published throughout Europe bringing #failingfwd to the spotlight. Startups shared their experience what caused them to fail, which was one of the first research of its kind in Europe. It proved valuable as a concept, and chances are that more and more organisations could realize the importance of measuring why
startups fail and in which stages. These insights could feed into policy recommendations after further refinement pertaining to geography and culture.

Partners in unity declared that the project was invaluable in creating new collaboration opportunities between themselves. Many of the projects’ deliverables, respectively the public ones, would be available to share with a broader audience. It would practically prolong the project’s bandwidth with some additional months. Exposure on F6S guarantees the project website would stay alive and partners also committed to keep on publishing #failingfwd stories. Recommendations could be also here to stay serving as a base for future improvements in partners’ processes. As for the coordinator, Startups.be pledged to continue keeping the topic in the spotlight with the help of a long-term grant from the Flemish government.

There has always been something positive in every bad thing. The fact that budget proved to be too little in the end, also made it possible to continue the efforts with relatively little to none financial incentives. As planned originally, it could become part of the daily work of partner organisations and beyond.

Brainstorming started in the consortium about the continuation of the project. A second iteration is probable with a different consortium structure. The European Startup Network, which sprouted in part from the LIFE collaboration, continues its work to bring European startup ecosystems closer to work together. It also provided a platform for potential future research, and outreach for sharing best practices or survey results with relevant actors. ESN, so as LIFE partners, would remain committed to bring up the importance of a systemic change which could empower more entrepreneurs to rise like phoenix along the entrepreneurial journey.

Photos

Project meeting in Amsterdam, 25/05/2016

LIFE panel 16/11/2016
LIFE – Learning Incrementally from Failed Entrepreneurship. The project received funding from the European Commission’s H2020 Framework Programme, under Startup Europe’s umbrella.