Welcome to FailSpace

an AHRC funded research project that explores how the cultural sector can better recognise, acknowledge and learn from failure

https://failspaceproject.co.uk

@FailSpaceProj
#FailSpace

This session

- Consider why learning from failure is worthwhile
- Introduce tools to explore different facets of failure
- Explore how they could be used in your work
- All participants agree to the principles of learning from failure rather than punishing our failings
- Anything shared today will be treated confidentially and not shared outside the workshop room

Our research questions

- why, despite culture of evaluation, so little is learnt or changes
- what the benefits might be in more openly acknowledging our failures in addition to celebrating our successes

Our findings

- cultural landscape not conducive to honesty or critical reflection
- lack of trust and open dialogue between participants, artists, cultural organisations and funders,
- fear leading to blame avoidance and discouraging risk
- encourages repetition of past mistakes

Learning from failure

Our conclusions

- Success & failure = two ends of a spectrum
- Dependent on whose perspective we are looking from
- Need to reframe our thinking at every stage from planning through delivery to evaluation
- To ask - **Success and failure for whom? To what degree? To what effect?**

Our aim

- To encourage greater critical reflection from a range of different perspectives
- To encourage the sharing of different narratives
- To embed learning from failure as important component of success

The tools

- Starting the conversation
  - Exploring different narratives (Welcome to the Cultural Desert book)
- Exploring the 5 Facets
  - Talking about failure (audio recordings)
  - Describing success and failure at the outset (the wheel)
- Critical reflection
  - Sharing stories from different perspectives (postcards)
- Deepening understanding
  - Further reading and discussion (book club)

Each tool takes around one hour to use

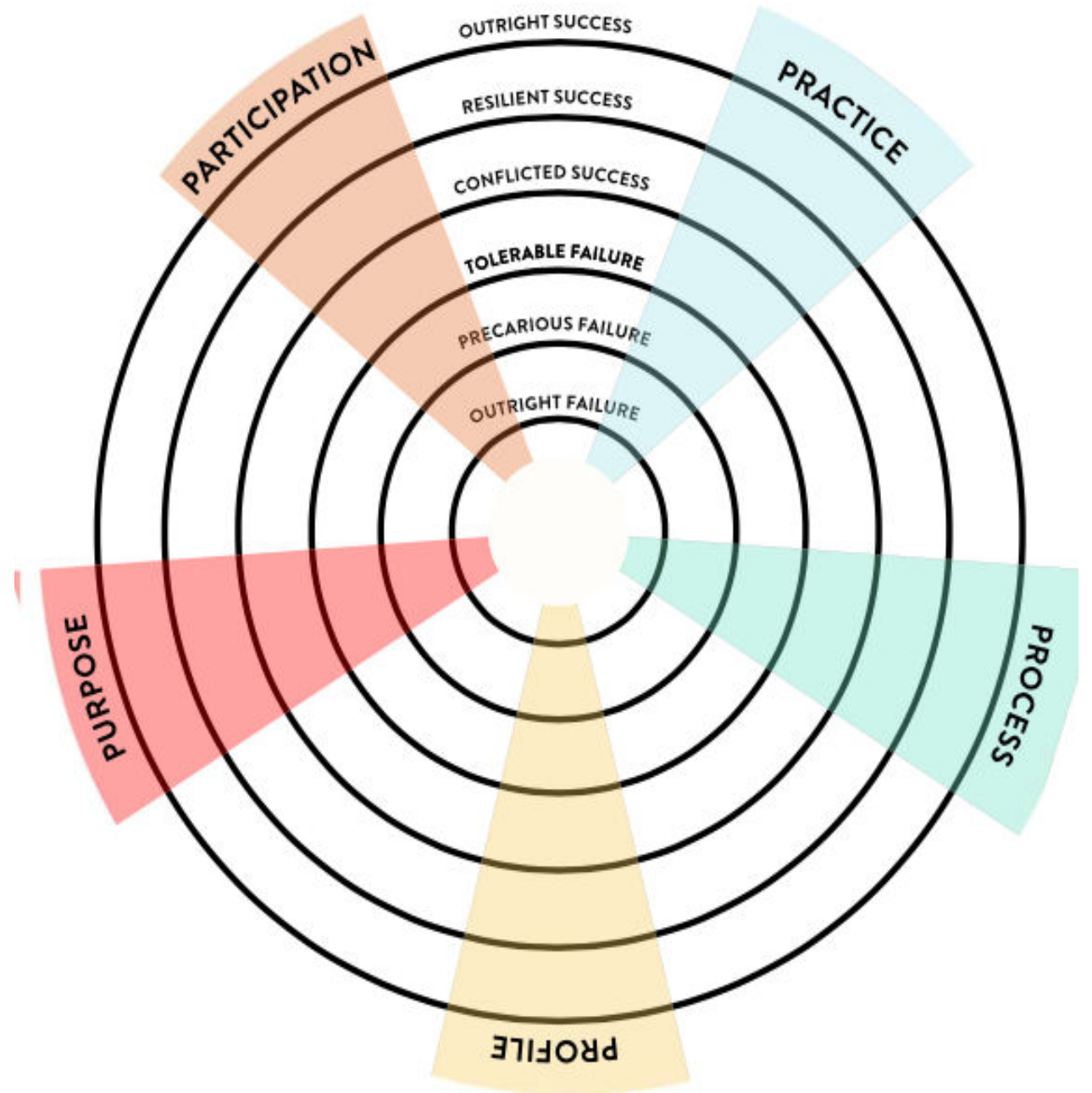Combine them as a 1-day workshop or use them as stand alone tools

5 Facets of Success/Failure

- **Purpose**
- **Process**
- **Participation**
- **Practice**
- **Profile**

6 Degrees of Success/Failure

- **Outright failure**
- **Precarious Failure**
- **Tolerable failure**
- **Conflicted success**
- **Resilient success**
- **Outright success**

A multi-dimensional analysis

For example, when evaluating a project you might find it to be:

- A tolerable failure in regard to its purpose
- A resilient success in regard to its process
- A precarious failure in regard to participation
- A resilient success in regard to practice
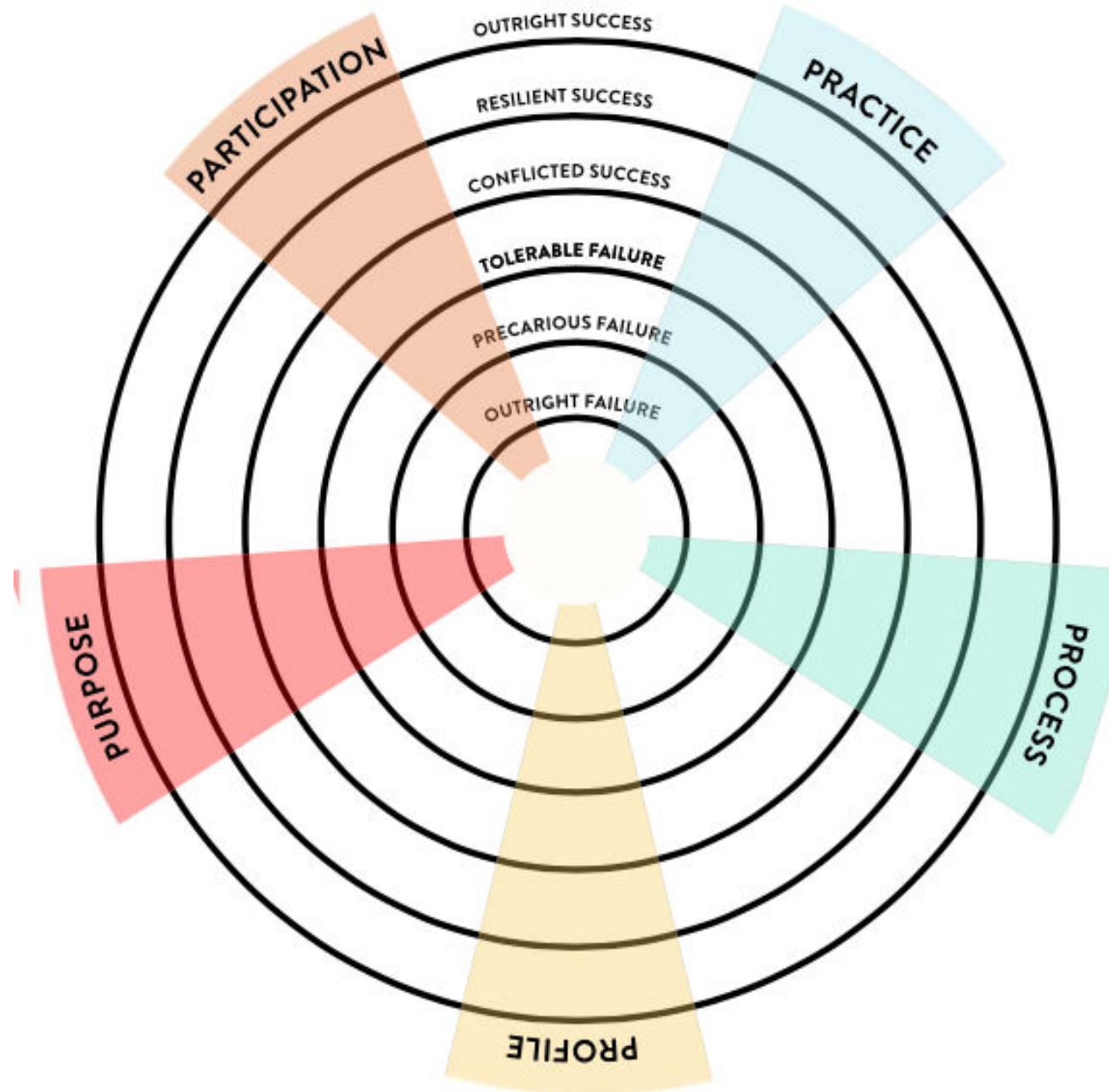- An outright success in regard to profile

Activity
The Wheel: Describing success and failure at the outset

- Use the wheel at the outset of a project to create a bespoke matrix of success and failure
- Include different stakeholders to find out what success and failure would look like for them in regard the project
- Not all stakeholders will have a stake in every facet
- Return to your matrix when evaluating your project – in each facet reflect on which description best reflects what happened

	Outright Failure	Precarious Failure	Tolerable Failure	Conflicted Success	Resilient Success	Outright Success
Purpose						
Process						
Participation						
Practice						
Profile						

	Outright Failure	Precarious Failure	Tolerable Failure	Conflicted Success	Resilient Success	Outright Success
Profile	The programme generates primarily negative coverage at a local and/or regional and/or national level	There is little to no awareness of the programme at local and/or regional and/or national level	The programme generates positive coverage at a local level but does not result in a national discussion about the importance of this type of work	The programme generates positive coverage for the funder but does not raise the profile of the organisations or artists	The programme generates positive coverage at all levels, raises the profile of all the organisations and artists involved and leads to new opportunities for them	Increased awareness and profile lead to a national commitment to mainstream the funding to support this type of work
Purpose	Opportunities for people to participate locally did not increase and few of the participants had not taken part in culture locally in the past year	Opportunities for people to participate locally increased but few of the participants had not taken part in culture locally in the past year	Opportunities for people to participate locally did not increase but most participants had not taken part in culture locally in the past year	Opportunities for people to participate locally increased, most participants had not taken part in culture locally in the past year, but there was little local interest in sustaining the programme long term	Opportunities for people to participate locally increased, most participants had not taken part in culture locally in the past year, and there was strong local interest in sustaining the programme long term	Opportunities for people to participate locally increased, most participants had not taken part in culture locally in the past year and were also now participating with other local activities/organisations
Process	Local organisations, artists, and audiences are only collaborating in ways they have done before	Local organisations, artists, and audiences are collaborating effectively in new ways, but they do not connect to national organisations	Local organisations, artists, and audiences are collaborating effectively in new ways and connecting to national organisations but only for work related to this programme	Local organisations, artists, and audiences are collaborating in new ways and connecting to national organisations, but some involved have found it hard to adapt and won't adopt these approaches in future	Local organisations, artists, and audiences are collaborating in new ways, connecting to national organisations, and have committed to adopt these approaches to work together in future	Local organisations, artists, and audiences are collaborating in new ways, connecting to national organisations, have committed to adopt these approaches to work together in future, and are supporting others to do the same
Practice	Artists involved in the programme do not feel the art created was of quality	Artists involved in the programme feel the art created was of mixed quality	Artists involved in the programme feel the art created was of quality but did not involve new or innovative practice	Artists involved in the programme feel the art created was innovative and of quality, but a significant number of their peers disagree	Artists involved in the programme feel the art created was innovative, of quality, and most of their peers agree	Artists involved in the programme feel the art created was innovative, of quality and their peers are building upon the work in new ways
Participation	Those who are currently least likely to take part in cultural activities we fund were not consulted about the design of their local programme	Those who are currently least likely to take part in cultural activities we fund were consulted but their opinions didn't influence the design of their local programme	Those who are currently least likely to take part in the cultural activities we fund were invited to help design their local programme, but the majority opted not to	The opinions of those who are currently least likely to take part in cultural activities we fund informed the design of their local programme, but they weren't involved in decision making	The opinions and decisions of those who are currently least likely to take part in cultural activities we fund significantly shaped the design of their local programme	The opinions and decisions of those who are currently least likely to take part in cultural activities we fund significantly shaped the design of the programme both locally and nationally

- Think of a project you have worked on/are working on
- Pick two of the five facets
- Thinking about that project and draft some descriptions for each degree of success/failure in those facets

The postcards: Sharing stories from different perspectives

Start by looking at the postcards of failure people have shared online and discuss

- *Which do you recognise and which are surprising?*
- *What prevents us sharing stories of failure about our projects?*

Next ask people to complete their own postcards

- *Share with each other and by uploading to our website*
- *Discuss how is failure felt differently by different people*
- *How does sharing help us think differently?*

You could even get your group to design their own postcards!

Acknowledge a previously unacknowledged failure about the project. Tell them what you have learned.

I'M SORRY I WAS SO FOCUSED ON MY OWN OUTCOMES THAT I DIDN'T PROPERLY ACKNOWLEDGE MY GRATITUDE TO Y.U FOR MAKING THE WORK HAPPEN. I'M SORRY THAT I DIDN'T DO MORE TO ENSURE THAT YOUR CO-AUTHORSHIP WAS REPRESENTED FULLY. I'M SORRY FOR THE TIMES I USED DOG-WHISTLE TERMS LIKE 'COMMUNITY' + 'HARD TO REACH' TO VIRTUE SIGNAL + GAIN PERSONAL ACCOLADES.

Write a postcard to someone that a previous cultural participation project failed to recognise or involve.
Tell them why they were not involved and be honest about whether you will be able to involve them in the future.

In spite of the recognised linguistic diversity, our lack of capacity means engagement was limited to English. Given the profile of our team, it is unlikely this will change without outside support. The gap is recognised but not effectively addressed. I'm sorry we didn't do better.

Who recognizes these scenarios from delivering projects?

Write a postcard to a funding body that supported a past cultural participation project.
Tell them about a failure that you intentionally left out of the evaluation. Tell them why you couldn't admit it at the time.

WE & YOU WERE OVER OPTIMISTIC ABOUT WHAT WE COULD DELIVER IN THE BUDGET & TIMELINE SO INSTEAD OF FULLY ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS ON PARTICIPANTS BEING FAST TRACKED THROUGH AN UNREALISTIC PROCESS WE FOCUSED ON SOME OF THE POSITIVE OUTPUTS (NOT OUTCOMES)

TO FUNDERS OF TIME SPECIFIC PROJECTS / EVENTS

Lucy Wright, 2019 (www.artisticresearcher.co.uk)

For arts organisations & artists

PLEASE SHARE A PHOTO OF YOUR POSTCARD AT WWW.FAILSPACEPROJECT.CO.UK/UPLOAD

And finally… how about when dealing with funders?

Our tools are designed to be flexible - so make them your own!

- Where do you use the tools to have discussions about failure?
- With who do you use the tools to have discussions about failure?
- How did you share your discussions about failure beyond your group?
- How do you adapt the tools to have discussions about failure?
- What other tools did you create to help you have discussions about failure?
- What other tools could help you to start conversations about failure with key stakeholders?
- Email us at joanna.jowett@outlook.com
- or l.jancovich@leeds.ac.uk