Emmy Noether Treffen 2025 – Failing Successfully
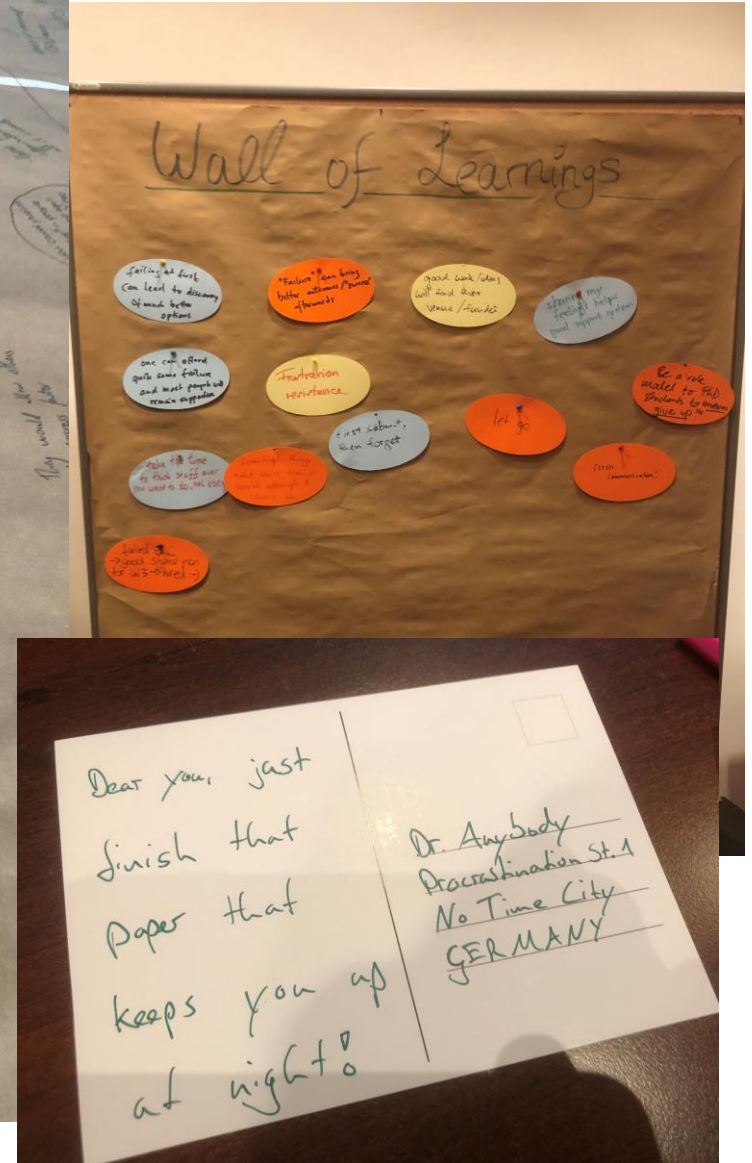
Wall of Failure

Silent posting of failures and learnings on a wall – exercise of letting go (taring failures apart)
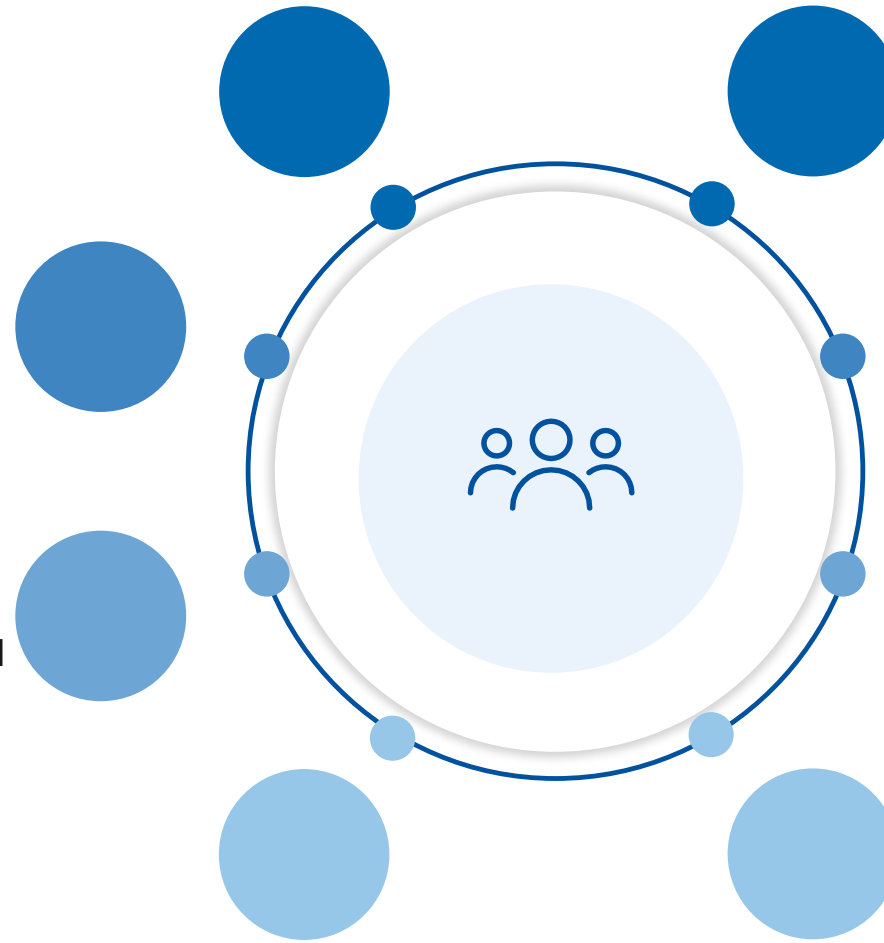
Privileges

Group discussion on „How different are the stakes for failing and who do we allow to fail?"

Narratives

Group discussion on „Narratives and perspectives when telling the story of our projects"

Communicating

Collecting and learning about tools such as the „CV of failures" or „Failure Talks/Fuck-Up-Nights"

Team culture

Group discussion on „How to establish failure-friendliness in my team? How to reward learning behaviour instead of just results?"

Honesty Postcards

Designing postcards to collaborators and being honest about the success/failures of past projects

Systemic View

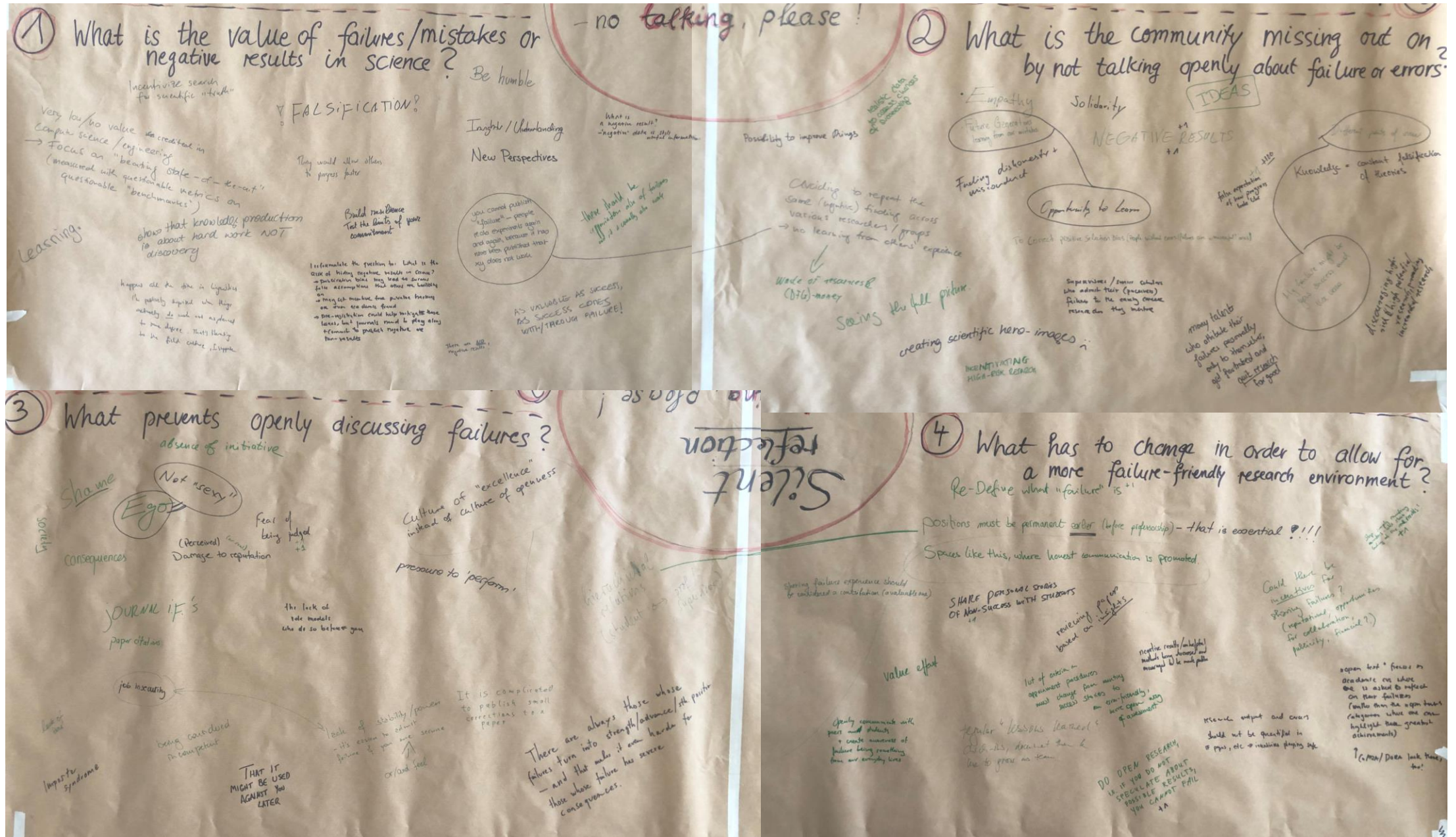Silent writing dialogue on "What has to change in the research community to become failure-friendly?"

Sharing stories

Individual conversations about own experiences of perceived failures

① What is the value of failures/mistakes or negative results in science?

— no talking, please!

② What is the community missing out on by not talking openly about failure or errors?

Be humble

Incentivize search for scientific "truth"

⚡ FALSIFICATION?

Insight / Understanding

New Perspectives

What is a negative result? — negative data is still useful information

Possibility to improve things

Very low/no value no credit in Computer science / engineering
→ Focus on "beating state-of-the-art" (measured with questionable metrics on questionable "benchmarks")

They would allow others to progress faster

Build resilience
Test the limits of your commitment

shows that knowledge production is about hard work NOT discovery

Learning:

You cannot publish "failure" — people redo experiments again and again, because it had been published that xy does not work.

How should be appreciation side of failures if it is really sth useful

I reformulate the question to: What is the cost of hiding negative results in science?
→ publication bias may lead to serious false assumptions that others are building on
→ they lack incentive true private theating on their evidence-based friend
→ Pre-registration could help mitigate these latest, but journals need to play along
+ commit to publish together we have positive results

AS VALUABLE AS SUCCESS, AS SUCCESS COMES WITH/THROUGH FAILURE!

· Empathy   Solidarity   IDEAS

Future Generations

NEGATIVE RESULTS

Finding dishonesty + misconduct

Opportunity to Learn

Knowledge + constant falsification of theories

Deciding to repeat the same (negative) finding across various researchers/groups
→ no learning from others' experience

Waste of resources (DFG)-money

Seeing the full picture

creating scientific hero-images

INCENTIVATING HIGH-RISK RESEARCH

Supervisors / senior scholars who admit their (previous) failures to the early career researchers they mentor

many talents who attribute their failures personally only to themselves get frustrated and quit research for good

③ What prevents openly discussing failures?

absence of initiative

Shame   Not "sexy"

Ego

Culture of "excellence" instead of culture of openness

Fear of being judged

(Perceived) (actual) Damage to reputation

pressure to 'perform'

JOURNAL I.F.'S

paper citations

the lack of role models who do so before you

job insecurity

being considered incompetent

Imposter syndrome

THAT IT MIGHT BE USED AGAINST YOU LATER

lack of visibility/power
- it's easier to admit failure if you are secure

It is complicated to publish small corrections to a paper

or/and feel

There are always those whose failures turn into strength/advance/5th positive — and that make it even harder for those whose failure has severe consequences.

Silent reflection

④ What has to change in order to allow for a more failure-friendly research environment?

Re-Define what "failure" is

Positions must be permanent earlier (before professorship) — that is essential ?!!!

Spaces like this, where honest communication is promoted

Sharing failure experience should be considered a contribution (a valuable one)

SHARE PERSONAL STORIES OF NON-SUCCESS WITH STUDENTS

reviewing for grant based on insights

value effort

negative results/unhelpful methods have discussed and encouraged to be made public

Openly communicate with peers and students
+ create awareness of failure being something we are everyday have

regular "lessons learned"

DO OPEN RESEARCH, IF YOU DO NOT SPECULATE ABOUT POSSIBLE RESULTS, YOU CANNOT FAIL

Could there be incentives for sharing failures? (reputational, for collaboration, publicity, financial?)

open text + focus in academic cv where one is asked to reflect on past failures (rather than an open track categories where one can highlight their greatest achievements)

research output and career should not be quantified in # pprs, etc & mindless playing safe

↑ C/MSR/DORA lock honey too!

… for group meetings

Communicate that it is normal to make mistakes and share own stories

Make successes as well as failures a regular part of weakly group meetings

"Fuck-Up-Friday" in the team – sharing really stupid mistakes and learnings – and laugh

… for leadership in general

Celebrating "small" success stories (together)

Be constructive – highlight the improvement and learnings

When reacting to mistakes/failures – don't judge or blame, be de-escalating

Get to know your team members, what their stakes are – foster trust

Where to find more info?

Journal of Trial and Error https://journal.trialanderror.org/

CV of Failures, https://www.nature.com/articles/nj7322-467a [1]

Paper "Ten simple rules for failing successfully in academia" [2]

Failspace Project https://failspaceproject.co.uk/

Podcast (Episode 97) Navigating Failure in Academia - Research Culture Uncovered

A failure repository vHGOcpBje9iSTPTrTs91-keep | Riseup Pad

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[1] Stefan, M. "A CV of failures." Nature **468.**7322 (2010). https://doi.org/10.1038/nj7322-467a

[2] Gaillard, S., et al. "Ten simple rules for failing successfully in academia." PLoS Computational Biology 18.12 (2022): e1010538 doi: 10.1371/journal.pcbi.1010538