The Black Box Approach –

Learning from Failure, knowing what works and why!

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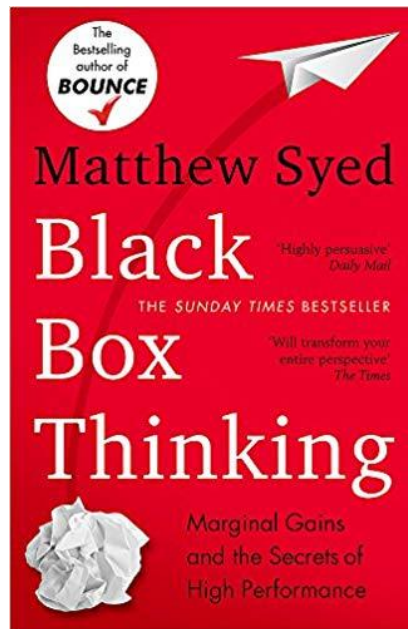### What Does the UEFA Nations League Signal for the Future of Football

Posted: Sun, 09 Dec 2018 12:58

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The Problem

If our aim is to get the Nation Physically Active we are Failing.

Like most sectors we are afraid to admit and report failure - Why?

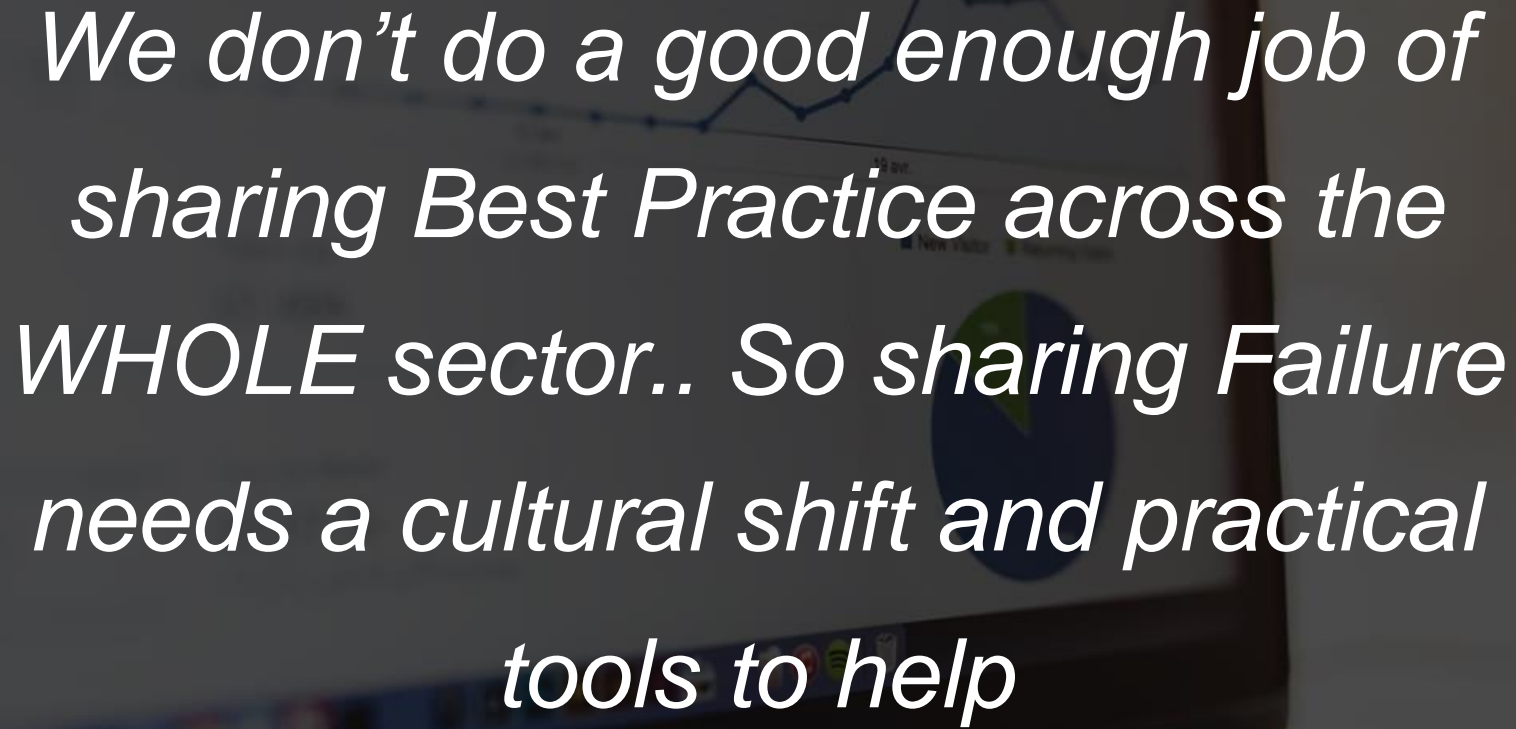Some of the answers were in Black Box Thinking - Matthew Syed.

20XX   20XX   20XX   20XX

Why #TheFWord

Andy Reed, Director of Sports Think Tank, said: *"Having read Black Box Thinking and worked with some start-ups in the sport tech sector I realised that 'failing fast' was not just a cliché but something I admired in young entrepreneurs. Seeing Street League in their 2017 Annual Report admitting where they had not achieved everything they set out to do, I was keen to see more of this honesty. But this will only happen if we can create a culture of trust between funders, projects, organisations and the media that understand that failure – The F Word - is a necessary part of us making improvements in how we work.*

"We want to model this practise ourselves and create an environment where we openly discuss what we get wrong. The events, training and resources we create are to help develop a new open culture – where we co-create the solutions for others to use and practise".
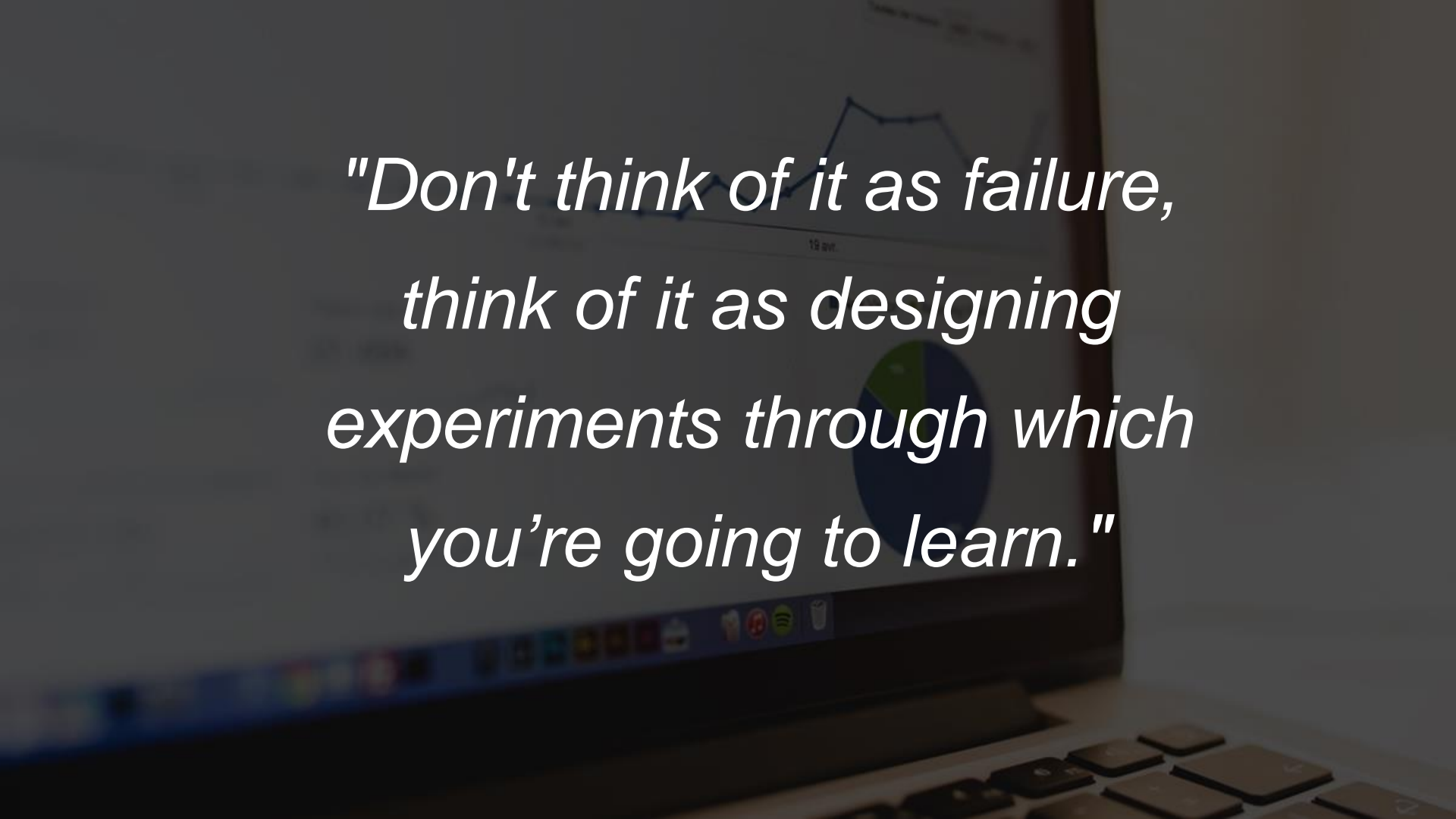
We don't do a good enough job of sharing Best Practice across the WHOLE sector.. So sharing Failure needs a cultural shift and practical tools to help

Addressing the Issue #TheFword

The **F** Word
Learning through **Failure**

"It is exactly for these reasons that I am a big supporter of events like The F Word, led by the Sports Think Tank and Upshot. Failure is unavoidable. It is those individuals and institutions that have the resilience and flexibility to face up to failure, learn the lessons and adapt which ultimately excel. And that is what this event is aiming to do. Unfortunately I cannot be there but I hope this is the start of a wider movement for the third sector."

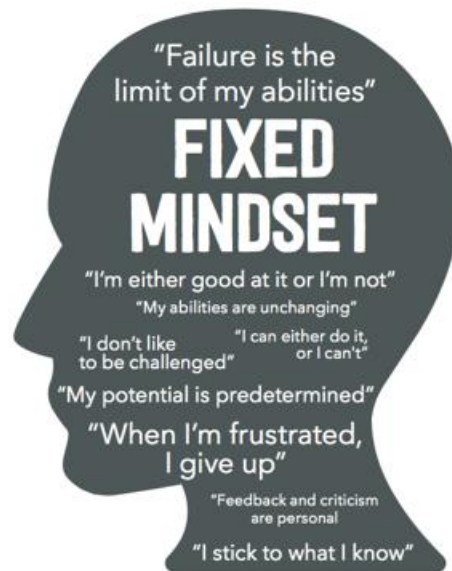**Matthew Syed**
Author and Columnist

"Don't think of it as failure, think of it as designing experiments through which you're going to learn."

Mindset approach

Key to embracing this your Mindset.

Which Are You?

"Failure isn't fatal, but failure to change might be" - John Wooden

Everything you want is on the other side of fear." - Jack Canfield

Success is most often achieved by those who don't know that failure is inevitable." - Coco Chanel

Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly." - Robert F. Kennedy

If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original." - Ken Robinson

"If you don't try at anything, you can't fail… it takes back bone to lead the life you want" - Richard Yates

. "Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. Failure is delay, not defeat. It is a temporary detour, not a dead end. Failure is something we can avoid only by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing." - Denis Waitley

Quotes – None of this is new!

Matthew Syed – Black Box Thinking

Barriers to embracing #TheFWord

- Cognitive dissonance - when mistakes are too threatening to admit so we reframe or ignore.

- Even confronted by evidence we reframe or even ignore!

- Emotionally we hate to fail.

- But we are not born with a fear of failure. Young children have no fear of failure.. We instill it in them with cultural norms.

- Self -esteem and status

BUT

Failure is simply the opportunity to begin again, this time more intelligently

The solution–

Embrace #TheFWord

Failure is an incredibly powerful tool for learning. ==Designing experiments, prototypes, and interactions and testing them is at the heart of human-centered design==. So is an understanding that not all of them are going to work. As we seek to solve big problems, we're bound to fail. ==But if we adopt the right mindset==, we'll inevitably learn something from that failure.

The solution–

Embrace #TheFWord

Human-centered design starts from a place of not knowing what the solution to a given design challenge might be. <mark>Only by listening, thinking, building, and refining our way to an answer do we get something that will work for the people we're trying to serve</mark>

The solution– Embrace #TheFWord

Failure presents an opportunity to review and adapt your plan. When reviewing, ask yourself:

- What happened?
- What did I learn from this?
- Why did I fail?
- What could I have done differently?
- Where do I need to improve to succeed next time?

The solution–

Embrace #TheFWord

The Streetleague Experience

- Inspired by [Streetleague Approach in their 2017 Annual Report](#)

- But why was this such a seismic shift in thinking and reporting - Just being honest?
- Combined cultural shift internally, trust with funders and Risk at Board

THIS YEAR WE WEREN'T ABLE TO HELP 183 YOUNG PEOPLE

Last year, Street League identified 109 young people that we weren't able to help – who left our programme early and who we lost contact with. We were unable to understand why they disengaged.

In 2016/17, we had 111 young people disengage from Street League's programme who we have lost contact with (direct comparison to FY15/16).

However, this year we have expanded our "disengaged" definition to include young people who we decided were not suited to Street League's programmes or whose circumstances changed (details in analysis below). By including these categories, **our updated total of disengaged young people is 183**. This improved analysis allows us to focus efforts to reduce early disengagement and ensure each young person's individual support plan is appropriate.

FY 15/16 + WHAT WE DID = FY 16/17

109 YOUNG PEOPLE WE WEREN'T ABLE TO HELP + EXPANDED DEFINITION OF "DISENGAGED" + ANALYSIS TO UNDERSTAND REASONS WHY = **183** YOUNG PEOPLE WE WEREN'T ABLE TO HELP + UNDERSTANDING WHY

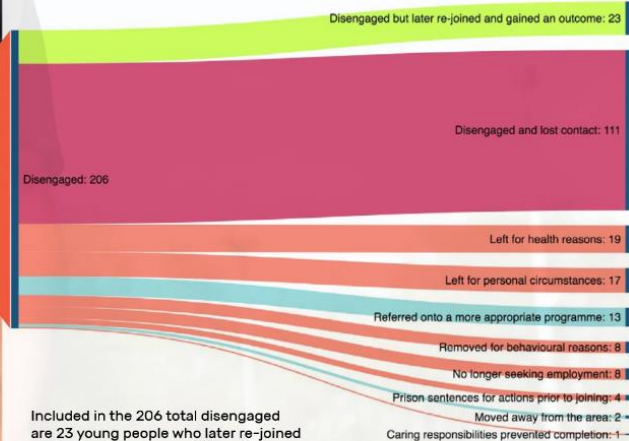**48** OUTCOMES WERE REJECTED DUE TO LACK OF EVIDENCE + NEW OUTCOMES POLICY AND STAFF TRAINING = **0** OUTCOME REJECTED DUE TO LACK OF EVIDENCE

DISENGAGEMENT ANALYSIS

Disengaged: 206

- Disengaged but later re-joined and gained an outcome: 23
- Disengaged and lost contact: 111
- Left for health reasons: 19
- Left for personal circumstances: 17
- Referred onto a more appropriate programme: 13
- Removed for behavioural reasons: 8
- No longer seeking employment: 8
- Prison sentences for actions prior to joining: 4
- Moved away from the area: 2
- Caring responsibilities prevented completion: 1

Included in the 206 total disengaged are 23 young people who later re-joined and gained an outcome. These 23 young people are hence excluded from those who we weren't able to help.

Our Three Golden Rules

We believe in complete transparency and a robust approach to impact measurement. We have created our three golden rules:

1. We will never over-claim what we do.

2. All percentages include sample sizes to avoid being misleading.

3. We have evidence to prove all of our outcomes.

READ ABOUT TRANSPARENCY >

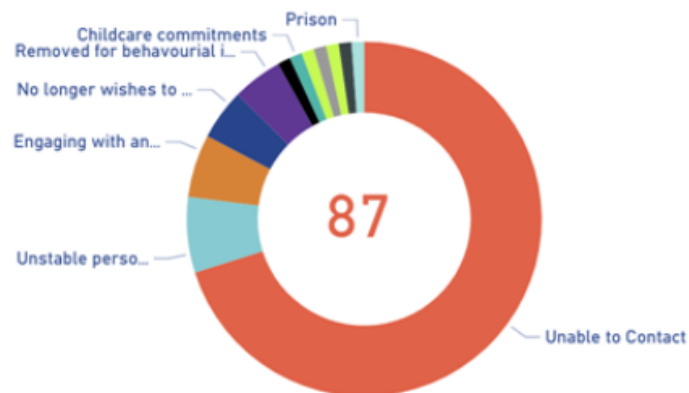Data updated on 7 December from our internal database (Hanlon)

Hint: Select buttons above to filter our data and more detailed analysis.
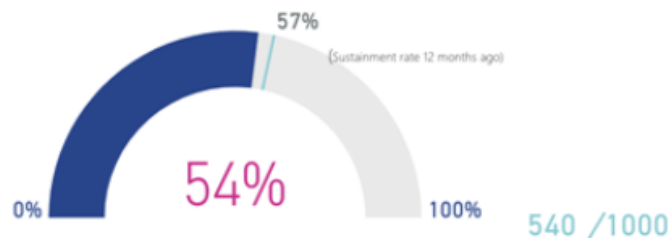
87 young people **disengaged** from our programmes over the past twelve months.

1709 young people **progressed** into jobs, education or further training over the past twelve months.

Why did they disengage?

Prison
Childcare commitments
Removed for behavourial i...
No longer wishes to ...
Engaging with an...
Unstable perso...
Unable to Contact

87

How many are still in work after six months?

57%
(Sustainment rate 12 months ago)

0%   **54%**   100%

540 /1000

What's our female participation rate?

| Female Participation (%) | 26% |
| Female Participation 12 months ago | 14% |

700 / 2729

Relevance
Context shifts so core offering is no longer needed

Complexity
We become too complex or fail to comprehend complexity

Efficiency
Competitors become more efficient in the same space

Morality
Society shifts moral focus

Pride in past blinds us to urgency or need
Pride

Modes of Failure
© Julian Stodd

Engagement
Remaining transactional in a world of relationships

Normalcy
Unusual things become normal. Normal things become unusual.

We adopt wrong tech, adopt too slow, or miss weaknesses
Technology

Abstraction
Our value in a long tail system becomes abstracted

Strongly codified strength leaves us fragile
Fragility

Someone else has blinding insight - you lack conditions
Insight

Rapid adoption of new approaches leave others more effective
Effectiveness

problem

Intelligent Failure Assessment

Is your organization maximizing learning, innovation, and resilience?
Highlight the sections below that most sound like you. How well do you do?

Organizational Component[1]	☆	★	★★	★★★
Environment Clients, Customers, Competitors	Needs & demands of competitors and clients do not influence our work	Clients and customers are frequently asked for feedback	This feedback is collected early and often used to make improvements	Needs & demands are constantly assessed and used to inform & inspire innovation
Resources Employees, Capital, Info, Reputation	Failures are hidden for fearing of losing access to resources	We discuss failure with the goal of minimizing losses	Failures are openly discussed regardless of the impact on resources	We share failures externally, which increases our access to resources
History Key Decisions, Past Failures	I have no knowledge of past failures in my organization	Our stories of past failure focus on the punishment	Our stories compare expectations to results and share what was learned	Our stories focus on what was learned, celebrate courage, and never blame
Strategy	Our strategies focus on what has worked in the past; the status quo	Innovation and learning are considered in our strategies	Innovation, learning, and adaptation are significant aspects of our strategies	Testing, maximizing learning from success & failure *is* our strategy
Tasks Workflow, Expected Actions — Innovation	We can not take risks or do something new in our work	Some testing & risk taking is okay, if we mitigate the risks	We consider the risk of staying the same when evaluating ideas	We're tasked to create new ideas; smart risks are rewarded
Learning	There are no expected tasks for responding to failure	Our response to failure is often inadequate or inappropriate	Our response allows us to share learning & make changes	We right-size our response to failure and share learning
HR Practices	Failure is punished when discovered	Responses to failures are varied and often not transparent	We acknowledge that not all failures are equal & always respond accordingly	Evaluations reward effort & learning - we talk about blame- vs. praiseworthy[2] failure

1 Nadler, David A., and Michael L. Tushman (1980) A Model for diagnosing organizational behaviour. Organizational Dynamics, 9(2) 35-51

2 Edmondson, Amy C. (2011) Strategies for Learning from Failure. https://hbr.org/2011/04/strategies-for-learning-from-failure

Milestones

We are at the start of this journey

The **F** Word
Learning through **Failure**

Conference Launched
in 2018

June 2019
Loughborough
Conference

October 2019
Workshops and
Training delivered

| Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | Jun | Jul | Aug | Sept | Oct | Nov | Dec |

QUEST Conference

July 2019
Examples shared via
www.thefailureword.com/

Conclusion

We are handing #TheFWord to the sector to embrace the cultural shift and take the practical steps to engage in reporting and sharing Failure

Together

Culture

Practical Steps

Thank You

Andy Reed OBE

Saje Impact & Sports Think Tank