



Managing Failure

Content:

1. Perspectives on failure
2. Success vs failure: a mindset
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4. How to move forward

Perspectives on failure

Examples of academic failure

“As scientists, we construct a narrative of success that renders our setbacks invisible both to ourselves and to others. Often, other scientists’ careers seem to be a constant, streamlined series of triumphs. Therefore, whenever we experience an individual failure, we feel alone and dejected”. [Stefan, M. A CV of failures. Nature 468, 467 \(2010\)](#)

JOHANNES HAUSHOFER CV OF FAILURES	
Most of what I try fails, but these failures are often invisible, while the successes are visible. I have noticed that this sometimes gives others the impression that most things work out for me. As a result, they are more likely to attribute their own failures to themselves, rather than the fact that the world is stochastic, applications are crapsheets, and selection committees and referees have bad days. This CV of Failures is an attempt to balance the record and provide some perspective.	
This idea is not mine , but due to a wonderful article in <i>Nature</i> by Melanie I. Stefan , who is a Lecturer in the School of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. You can find her original article here, her website here, her publications here, and follow her on Twitter under @MelanieStefan.	
I am also not the first academic to post their CV of failures . Earlier examples are here, here, here, and here.	
This CV is unlikely to be complete – it was written from memory and probably omits a lot of stuff. So if it's shorter than yours, it's likely because you have better memory, or because you're better at trying things than me.	
Degree programs I did not get into	
2008	PhD Program in Economics, Stockholm School of Economics
2003	Graduate Course in Medicine, Cambridge University
	PhD Program in Psychology, Harvard University
	PhD Program in Neuroscience and Psychology, Stanford University
1999	BA in International Relations, London School of Economics
Academic positions and fellowships I did not get	
2014	Harvard Kennedy School Assistant Professorship
	UC Berkeley Agricultural and Resource Economics Assistant Professorship

Awards and scholarships I did not get	
2011	Swiss Network for International Studies PhD Award
2010	Society of Fellows, Harvard University
	Society in Science Scholarship
	University of Zurich Research Scholarship
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2009	Human Frontiers Fellowship
2007	Mind-Brain-Behavior Award (Harvard University)
2006	Mind-Brain-Behavior Award (Harvard University)
2003	Fulbright Scholarship
	Harned Scholarship (German National Merit Foundation)
Paper rejections from academic journals	
2016	QJE, Experimental Economics
2015	AER x 2
2013	PNAS, Experimental Economics, Science, Neuron
2009	AER
2008	Science, Neuron, Nature Neuroscience, Journal of Neuroscience, Journal of Vision
Research funding I did not get	
2016	MQ Mental Health Research Grant

[Johannes Haushofer. CV of failures](#)

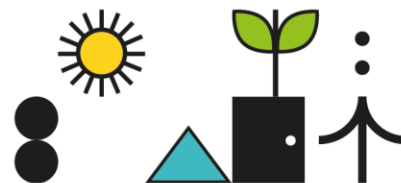
Negative perspectives:

- Failure is bad
- Fear of failure --> connected to perfectionism, procrastination, low self-esteem

Positive perspectives:

- [Learning from failure](#)
- [‘Trial and error’ method + self-reflection](#)

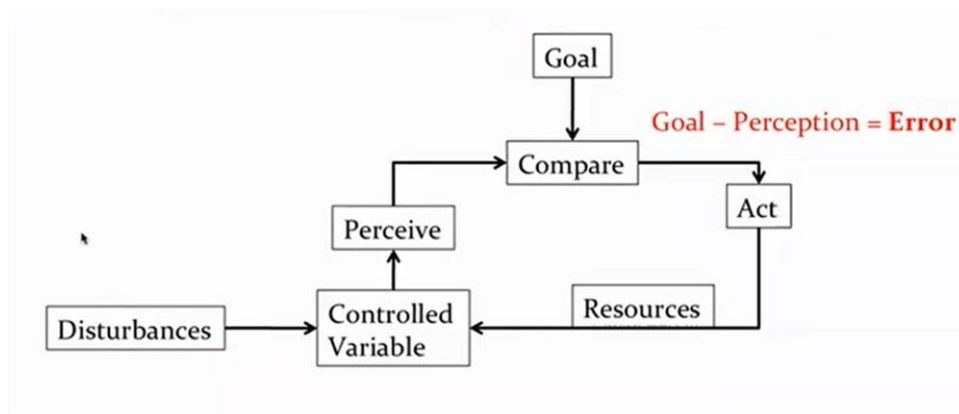




Success vs failure: a mindset

William T. Powers, *Behaviour: The Control of Perception*. 1973:
“Excellence in performance is a continuous correction of error”

[Warren Mansell, *The Psychology of Failure*](#) minutes 6.30- 9.06
“Perceptual Control Theory”



Perceptual Control Theory helps us understand that:

- Success (reaching the goal) is not always possible or within our control [disturbances]
- Success is not opposed to failure [a loop not a dichotomy]
- Our own perception of success and failure are influenced by many factors
- The pursuit of a goal is a continuous, perseverant journey

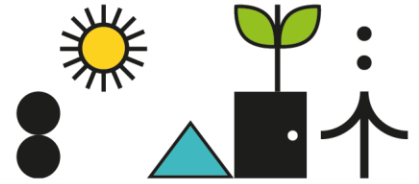
Perseverance and resilience

1. Perseverance: persistence in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success
2. Resilience: the capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties

When resilience is bad:

- [Dark side of resilience](#): focus on impossible goals (false hope syndrome) and make the individual unnecessarily tolerant of unpleasant or counterproductive circumstances
- [Sunk cost fallacy](#)





Tips to build resilience:

- Change the narrative: avoid analysis paralysis, practice expressive writing and find the silver lining (3 positive things)
- Face your fears: slowly and repeatedly expose yourself to what scares you.
- Practice self-compassion: practice a self-compassion break (be mindful, you're not alone, be kind with yourself) and write a self-compassion letter

[Newman Kira M., Five Science-Backed Strategies to Build Resilience, Greater Good Magazine, 9 November 2016](#)

How to move forward

- Success-failure is not a dichotomy
- Practice perseverance and expand resilience
- Be [flexible in your tenacious goal pursuit](#)
- Learn to re-assess your goals
- Define [your own success](#)
- Separate [success and failure from self-worth](#)

Actions

[Amazing If, Squiggly Careers Podcast, #284 How to move forward from failure](#)

Amazing If offer some great ideas to either pre-empt failure or to find the right response.

