

“The **Failure** Paradox”

Results of an Extensive B2B Survey for EASE

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Thessaloniki, October 6, 2026

Research Profile

214

senior executives /
entrepreneurs

50 / 50

EASE members &
non-members

**June 26–
July 14**

Fieldwork 2025

6 IDIs

Qualitative research
Duration: 1 hour

Design, implementation, data processing, and analysis: Focus Bari



The Big Picture at a Glance

87%

They state:
"I'm not afraid of failure"

Personal
self-identification

The paradox is evident from the start.

The gap between
individual attitudes and corporate culture

79%

They see/feel/observe:
"Failure is unforgivable / a stigma"

Work
experience

The **"failure paradox"** is already here:
the calm attitude exists, but the environment does not reinforce or support this attitude.

A: Failure & personal attitude

At first glance: The word/concept remains loaded—the interpretation changes.

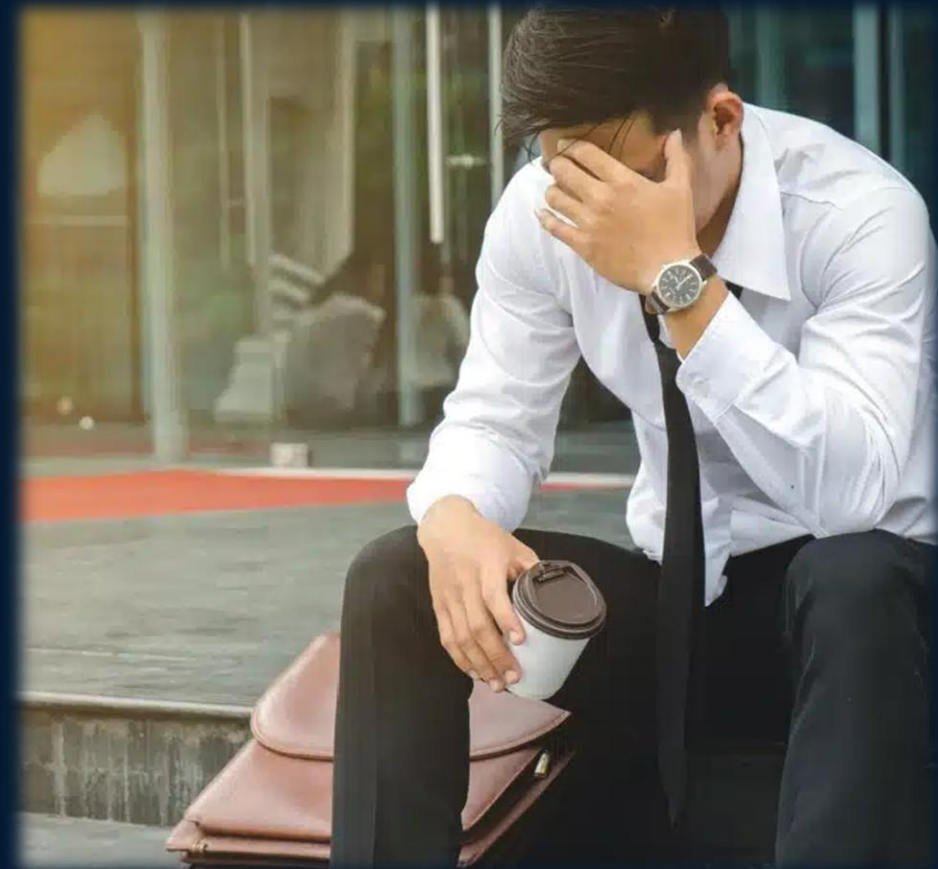
It evokes fear

Need for “separation”

Historical stigma

Relative improvement over time

It softens/fades with age



Experience, age, status, and environment all shape the experience!

What does failure mean?

"Failing to achieve a goal of yours"

"Not learning anything from it"

"Back in Greece, it used to be a stigma—a disaster"

"When I was younger, I was more extreme"

"Not growing"

"I live with immense anxiety and the fear of it"

"It depends: a major failure is one thing; 'everyday' mistakes are another"

"Greek companies are more tolerant—multinational companies wear you down"

"Failure is giving up"

Failure directly affects the leader

Responsibility, learning, and image coexist in tension, reinforcing the “oxymoron.”

77%

his own
responsibility

57%

learning, not stigma

77%

concealed to protect
one’s image

41%

In high-level positions,
failure undermines trust

94%

Taking responsibility enhances credibility
and the leader’s image!

This is where the challenge lies: leaders must demonstrate accountability without getting caught up in protecting their image or undermining trust!

#1 Key Learning

The paradox is more experiential than theoretical.

*“It’s a learning opportunity; today it’s forgiven, but...
it hurts, and I’d rather it not happen to me!”*

Failure *is gaining* ground in the *language* of learning—
but not yet in everyday experience:

A lack of corporate culture or personal values?

B: The culture of failure within the organization

There is open discussion—but not (yet) with a consistent, institutionalized practice



- The culture differs between executives and entrepreneurs
- People at the top aren't convinced about everyone
- There is a willingness to discuss and learn, but...

*"I discuss it openly
with my team"*

*"I'm not afraid of it anymore,
but of course I don't know if
there are some here who
are afraid..."*

The approach is not always clear

Approaches range from open discussion to skepticism, and... it depends on the leader

"In the workplace, we discuss failure..."

49%

openly, forgiven when
substantiated

51%

sometimes / rarely

32%

in the last month

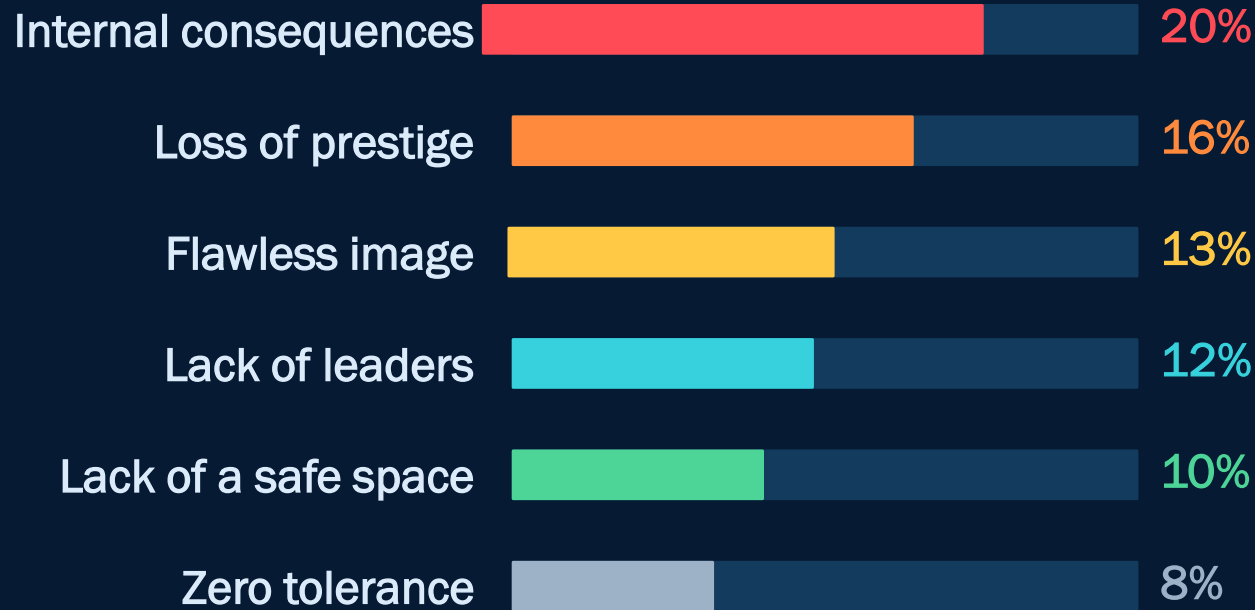
31%

depends on the leader

The “atmosphere” isn’t yet institutionally entrenched — it varies depending on the situation, the team, and the leader.

Management obstacles: multi-layered fears

“What do you consider to be the biggest barrier to managing failure in your organization?”



Only 21%

say there are no obstacles

It's not just one fear. It's different fears that add up.

There is a positive aspect, but it is not enough on its own to change the culture.

That is why learning has not been fully institutionalized

“Which of the following practices has your company implemented to learn from failures?”

31%

internal reviews /
lessons learned

26%

mentoring / coaching

25%

safe spaces /
learning meetings

36%

no formal process—it depends on
individual initiative

#2 Key Learning

The intention is there. The right culture and process are missing.

“Without a specific, established process, we discuss—though not always—how we will learn from this.”

*“The next step isn’t just talking’;
it’s knowing when, how, and for what purpose we’re talking!”*

How can leaders challenge the status quo and drive meaningful changes in culture and processes?”

C: Leadership in Managing & Overcoming Failure

A huge difference between “I try & I want” and “I dare & I take the step”



“Leadership must foster a safe environment”

“Culture starts at home and at school”

“Leaders must encourage initiative, space for action, and show tolerance for mistakes”

“Leaders must lead by example”

Fear leads to high operational costs

"Which of the following impacts has this fear of failure caused (or is causing) in your company?"

2 in **3**

the fear of failure
is very real!



Fear shapes culture and translates into operational friction and losses.

The Ideal Recovery After Failure

The key drivers of rapid recovery — The Top 3 in the ranking

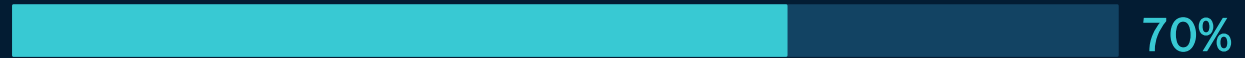
“In your opinion, how can a quick ‘recovery’ be achieved after a failure?”

No. 1

70%

Calm analysis without assigning blame

Calm analysis without assigning blame



70%

Honest communication with the team/stakeholders



59%

Leadership support for team members



52%

Creating a safe space for dialogue



43%

Recovery isn't about “forgetting.” It's about understanding without a blame game

#3 Key Learning

Change starts at the “roots” and flows through leadership.

“Parents, teachers, institutions, and leaders must cultivate this new perspective in children!”

**From fear to courage. From mistakes to lessons.
From the blame game to healthy failure.**

How will we achieve this? By fostering self-leadership and setting an example through accountability!

Why do we live in two “worlds”:

- Growth mindset
- Lessons learned
- Failure as a steppingstone
- Resilience
- Second chance

Theory:
*“What do I say,
I want?”*

Reality:
“What do I feel/do?”

- Fear/anxiety
- Lack of courage
- Well-trodden path
- Silencing
- Wasted potential

“

***Success has many
fathers, but failure is
an orphan!***

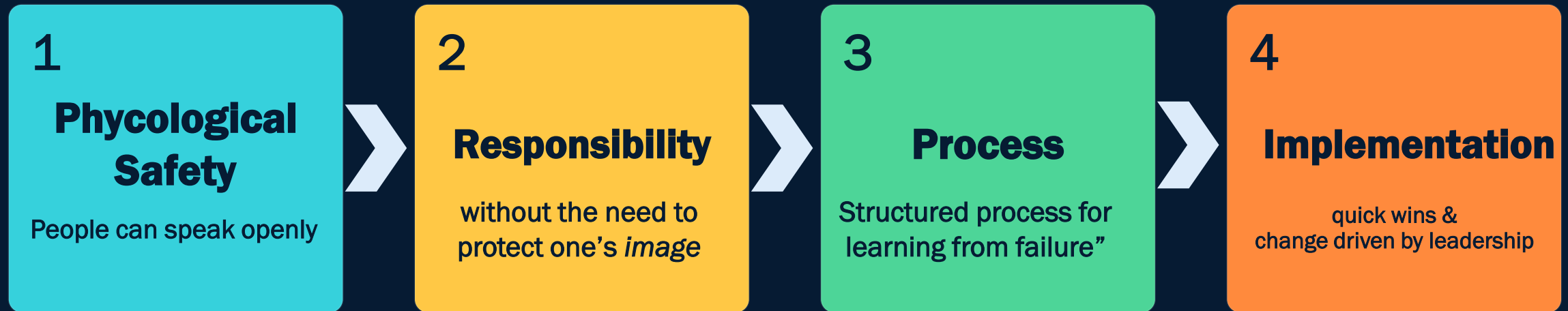
JFK

On responsibility, visibility, and ownership



Transformation or ... “Metamorphosis”

From the blame game to healthy failure.



Failure becomes productive only when it has context, “ownership,” and consistency

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Thank you!