

Monitor Institute
by **Deloitte**.

Adjacencies & Hypotheticals

*Building a culture that
embraces failure*

More productively
learning at scale

Every year, **Engineers without Borders Canada** (EWB) publishes a Failure Report in conjunction with its Annual Report. The Failure Report includes cases written by leadership and staff members who describe national office failures, venture failures, and chapter failures, along with their lessons learned. By publically celebrating failures, EWB increases incentives to share information, take risks, and be creative.

What would it look like for social sector organizations to collectively share failures in an open way and create systems for learning from them?

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*Recognizing that failure is
an inextricable part of a
portfolio*

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Venture capital investors

recognize that many of their investments will fail. In fact, the industry rule of thumb is "40-40-20" – 40% of VC-backed companies fail outright, 40% break even, and 20% are "home runs."

What would it look like if funders saw their grantmaking as a portfolio and specifically dedicated some of its resources to high-risk, high-reward investments?

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*Enabling independent
verification of the
information of others*

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Provenance, a UK-based company, is using new blockchain technology to stamp out illegal fishing. Blockchain is a digital ledger originally used for the currency Bitcoin. It enables local fishermen to send SMS messages to register their catch on the blockchain, and the identification of the fish is then transferred to a supplier at each stage along the supply chain. Information about the complete journey of the fish can be accessed and verified by end buyers using their smartphones.

What would it look like if philanthropy leveraged technology to make its data and results more transparent so others could learn from or confirm findings?

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*Embracing radical
transparency as a way
of life*

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Buffer, a social media management company, embraces the principle of “default to transparency.” Buffer publicly shares all financial information, including individual salaries, real-time revenue, and where each cent of a purchase goes. All of their code is open source, and each email sent can be seen by any member of the team.

What would it look like if social sector organizations shared their results and learning by default, making exceptions when necessary, rather than the reverse?

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*Using third parties to
mediate data sharing*

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The Yale School of Medicine Open Data Access Project

(YODA) serves as an independent scientific reviewer for requests from researchers seeking access to Johnson & Johnson's clinical trials data. The project promotes cooperative learning while maintaining scientific standards and protecting the data.

What if a third party intermediary served as a responsible gatekeeper to increase accessibility to and safeguards for key social impact datasets?

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*Using content analysis to
find information gaps and
patterns*

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Quid provides text-based data analysis of millions of documents, including news articles, blog posts, company profiles, and patents. It offers insight by visually organizing the content of these documents so that users can identify patterns, commonalities, connections, and gaps. Quid also allows users to identify the most frequently discussed individuals, organizations, topics, and terms.

What if philanthropy could use technology to conduct analyses that would identify unseen patterns across grant reports, research, and other important datasets?

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*Mapping data gaps to
determine where to focus
efforts*

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Earth Microbiome is a crowd-sourced open science effort to analyze microbial life on the planet that includes the mapping of “dark matter” as part of its efforts. Up to 99% of microbial organisms are deemed unknown dark matter, which biologists can’t culture in a lab due to limited knowledge or insufficient growth conditions.

What if funders could broadly map out existing knowledge to help identify where there are critical gaps in information that need to be addressed?

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Establishing brokers of knowledge to facilitate information sharing

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The National Basketball Association (NBA) acts as a broker of knowledge between its 30 franchises on topics such as, marketing, strategy, and data analytics. On monthly calls, franchise representatives from these functions share lessons learned and best practices, and discuss the results of new analytics software being pioneered and implemented across individual franchises.

What could it look like if funders and nonprofits within an issue area established more frequent, but light-touch, cadences to share information?

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*Using big data to generate
usable insights*

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Earth Genome, an integrated platform of tech and digital resources, is designed to make “big” environmental data usable by overcoming its overwhelming quantity and complexity. Earth Genome aggregates datasets from myriad public and private sources and provides decision tools that visualize, translate and interpret the datasets for end users. Earth Genome enables decision-makers to use big data insights to analyze the consequences of potential activities on natural systems.

What if an intermediary focused on aggregating social impact datasets in order to provide decision makers with higher quality information from which to make informed decisions?

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*Using the Internet of
Things to aggregate data
"exhaust"*

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The city of Barcelona has deployed responsive technologies to remotely sense and gather data from public transit, parking, lighting, and waste management systems. Through its open source platform, data is managed and shared with city workers and citizens. Barcelona City identified areas for intervention and improvements have already saved money and substantially decreased resource use. For example, Barcelona estimates that IoT systems have helped save \$58 million on water.

What would it look like if funders made an effort to tap existing connected devices or invest in the Internet of Things as a way to produce useful data for broadly measuring social impact?

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*Launching a "moonshot"
data effort to improve
understanding*

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The National Institutes of Health (NIH) awarded grants totaling \$40 million to map the human brain's connections in high resolution through **The Human Connectome** project. This coordinated effort uses state-of-the-art tools and technologies to better understand the structure of the brain for improved diagnosis and treatment of brain disorders. All data are available to the research community.

What would it look like if philanthropy launched a "moonshot" collective data effort in a specific field?

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*Creating data commons to
enable large-scale
collective learning*

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The Genomic Data Commons

is a unified data repository that enables data sharing across cancer genomic studies in support of precision medicine. With 4.1 petabytes of data, it includes some of the most comprehensive cancer genomics datasets in the world. Given the complexity of lifestyle, genetic and environmental factors, large sample sizes will help researchers study which combinations of drugs are effective against which combinations of mutations.

What would it look like if philanthropy promoted common repositories for multiple issue areas?

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*Aggregating individual
data on collective
platforms*

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PatientsLikeMe's Open Research Exchange is an open platform for developing, validating, and sharing health outcome measures that better reflect patients' experiences with a disease. Researchers, can get feedback from real patients to test and improve health outcome measures to make them more relevant to a patient's health and quality of life.

What would it look like if funders aggregated data so that it could be made more accessible and useful for informing the day-to-day work of grantees?

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*Enabling systems
interoperability*

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While widespread **ATM** installation occurred in the 1980s, the ability to use the ATM card of one financial institution at an ATM machine of another financial institution was not originally possible. In the early 90s national electronic funds transfer (EFT) networks were completed, which enabled the ATM cards of a financial institution in a network to be used at ATM machines that belonged to another network member.

What would it look like if funders invested in the technological infrastructure and standards that made data sharing and comparisons easier?

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*Promoting common
standards for usability*

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We have common **time zones** as a result of the transcontinental railroad. Railway clerk William F. Allen was so exasperated by the chaos caused by the 8,000 local times zones in the U.S. that he fought tirelessly to standardize time into four zones. The time zones follow common train hubs, which is why they're not straight lines.

What would it look like for philanthropy to broadly agree on common outcome standards to enable consistency across organizations?

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*Creating space to test the
methods themselves*

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The **Lime Street experiment** dismantled assumptions about the cause of arson. The experiment carefully re-staged a fire that had recently occurred, outfitting a nearly identical house nearby with similar furniture. The crime analyst was able to demonstrate that “signs of accelerant use” were possible, even when an accelerant had not been used. The ATF Fire Research Laboratory, an experimental facility dedicated to understanding fire behavior, was created to conduct forensic fire science and engineering tests, including large-scale fire replications.

What would it look like if philanthropy had an intermediary that could serve as a central clearinghouse to test the relevance of new methods and data analytics approaches to the social sector context?

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*Collectively assessing
different theories of
change*

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Different approaches to solving the same problem are generally evaluated separately.

What could it look like to coordinate the evaluation of multiple approaches addressing the same problem?

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*Overcoming the focus on
individual assessments*

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Nonprofits are typically evaluated individually.

What could it look like if funders grouped nonprofits working toward the same goal and evaluated common elements that were effective across multiple interventions?

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*Promoting data
infrastructure development*

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Foundations and nonprofits often don't have sufficient or high-quality data to answer their questions about impact.

What could it look like if data infrastructure was sufficiently built out for a given issue area out to dramatically improve data quality and enable learning at scale?

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Focusing less on "what works" and more on implementation and context

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“What works” clearinghouses have been criticized by some for being overly narrow in program and methodology focus.

What if we worked on developing evidence bases to better understand implementation effectiveness, likely effectiveness under different contexts and with new populations, and interactive strategies rather than single programs?

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*Convening social scientists
and data scientists to
bridge differences*

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The role of data scientists in the social sector is likely to grow substantially over time, yet data and social scientists have very different training, knowledge and assumptions.

What could it look like to bring together data scientists and social scientists in a systematic effort to define a common, integrated approach (or complementary approaches) to evidence creation in the social sector?

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*Specifying the roles of
funders and nonprofits in
developing evidence*

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Nonprofits don't generally have the resources, skills or incentives to rigorously evaluate impact.

What could it look like if foundations were responsible for testing the quality of broad ideas (e.g. does microfinance work) and nonprofits were only responsible for assessing the quality of their implementation (e.g. monitoring)?

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Instructions

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INSTRUCTIONS

You can flip through this deck yourself to spark ideas or use it for group brainstorming. For group brainstorming:

- **Identify a monitoring, evaluation, and learning challenge** for which you'd like to brainstorm solutions.
- **Deal out the full deck of cards around your table.** It doesn't matter if people have slightly different numbers of cards in their hand.
- **Look at your hand of cards.** For each card, think about the adjacency described and consider: What are the key attributes of the adjacency? How is it similar to your challenge?
- **Choose the cards with the adjacencies that are most interesting to you.** Why is it interesting? How could you adapt the solution to your challenge?
- **"Play" the cards at the center of the table.** Explain the adjacencies you chose to the group, and tell why you chose them and what connection they have to your challenge. Go around the whole table, with each person playing their cards. Don't take more than 30 seconds explaining each card to your group.
- **Discuss the cards on the table. Identify solutions related to each adjacency.** Record key insights and potential solutions on a flip chart.
- **Share back with the full group** if you've broken up into different groups.

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