STILL I RISE

FAILURE REPORT

Our biggest mistakes of 2024, divided by department, and what we learned from them

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PREMISE

This is the first year we publish a failure report, and we are committed to writing one every year. Despite the negative implication the word “failure” carries, we believe that if you put yourself out there and try to do things you have never done before, failure will naturally be part of the process.

That’s what Still I Rise is all about. Through successes and failures, we learn every day, we evolve, and we improve.

This is also what we teach our students in our Schools: don’t be afraid to make mistakes and potentially fail, learn from them and try again next time. Practice makes perfect.

In line with our ethos, each director in their department, including our CEO, has created a list of our biggest failures last year, divided by department, and what we learned from them.

NICOLÒ GOVONI - CEO

Failure: Inconsistent Leadership Approach

As the ultimate leader of the organisation, it is my obligation to model behaviour and inspire my colleagues through my decision making and leadership. Unfortunately, I'm still in the process of learning the craft of being a leader, and the mistakes I make - whether due to misguided choices or lack of action - not only impact my team members, but they also misdirect them.

During the entirety of 2024, my approach to leadership, especially as far as monitoring and delegating is concerned, was uneven, to say the least. One could argue that this was due to external circumstances, which forced me to divert my attention elsewhere, but that's just an excuse to justify the fact that I'm yet to settle on one, unified leadership approach, and that there is a lack of consolidated management habits.

For example, in January 2024, I was involved in two different field missions, the first in Yemen and the second in Colombia. That resulted in the partial halt of my ability to effectively coordinate with the rest of the C-Suite (Leadership Team), which, in turn, caused major delays in objective setting and their pursuit. Partly but not only caused by this was a substantial delay in finalising the **2024 Business Plan**, which was shared with the rest of **SIR's Global Team** only in April. This caused major hold-ups in the actualisation of key activities across Still I Rise.

Lessons learned:

Objective setting and the drafting of the yearly Business Plan shall happen **well ahead** of the new year.

When deployed on a field mission, I will make sure to delegate my objectives and that my colleagues are fully equipped to pursue theirs.

-To streamline communication and monitoring, **SIR will adopt the project management tool Asana in 2025.**

In **April and May of 2024**, due to **Giovanni Volpe**'s departure to set up operations in India and the absence of an official **Head of School in Kenya**, I found myself covering the role on a full time basis. That proved unsustainable, especially when historic rainfall hit the country, causing substantial disruption and turmoil, which was exacerbated due to an extortion attempt by the local authorities in Mathare. Unfortunately, that overlapped with the planning and the launch of **the India campaign**, our most important fundraiser in 2024, which required intervention and correction on the fly. This means that I went from a leadership approach characterised by lax supervision and reduced communication to **micromanagement** in the span of two months, resulting in frustrations and inefficiency, despite the fact that we mandated to achieve all the objectives, both in the field and within the India fundraising campaign.

Lessons learned:

We hired a **professional Head of School** to help us manage the Kenya program.

We agreed on **starting the planning phase of any campaign at least 4 months early.** That should allow me to dedicate my time to initiatives other than coordination, while also avoiding the trap of halting processes that may require my direct involvement or approval.

Finally, **in July and August of 2024**, I had to halt my coordination and supervision efforts almost completely due to the impending **Rizzoli book deadline**. That caused further delays, impacting specifically the **recruitment of new teachers in the field** and the design of the Fall/Winter fundraising initiatives. Once again, I felt the need to intervene and partially rectify a number of activities that I deemed inadequate in order for the organisation to achieve its end of year's objectives, causing friction and entropy.

Lessons learned:

For better or worse, I'm going to consciously adopt **a well defined and openly communicated leadership approach** and stick to it, bearing the responsibility of the mistakes I'll make, without constantly course-correct mid-year.

I will clearly establish department-based objectives from the get go and monitor their achievement via weekly checks on Asana.

GIULIA CICOLI- CHIEF FUNDRAISING, COMMUNICATIONS AND ADVOCACY OFFICER

Failure: not meeting fundraising goal

This year we had a fundraising goal of **4 million euros**, but we closed the year at around **3.5 million**, coming up **500,000 euros** short. We still managed to cover our expenses and gain a small margin, but not as much as we thought we would have to invest in future projects for 2025 and the years ahead.

Contributing factors:

- We began the year with **key roles missing** in the department and lack of internal expertise, so we left certain areas on hold until the right people were hired.
- **Poor planning and a lack of strategy** for the first months of the year.
- **Unforeseen collapse of Wordline,** where we lost some regular donors as well as one-off donations, and we were only able to restore credit card donations at the end of the year.
- Significant funds pledged for 2024 postponed to 2025 by the donor.

Lessons learned:

Planning is crucial, as well as having a strategy. **This year we planned ahead.**

Although some crucial roles are still missing, instead of waiting for the right person to join the team we have researched, **asked trusted experts** and split tasks among our teams to cover the area.

We have taken the time to **automate tasks** that were previously done manually and set up systems to improve our donor experience.

On top of working towards reaching the yearly target, we are also planning ahead for the years to come. We are working together as a team to **re-think completely how we do things** and, on top of improving fundraising channels we are already doing well in, we are working on expanding and building different sources of income.

MIKE FISHER- CHIEF SCHOOLS OFFICER

Failure: lack of unified assessment for International Schools

AIn December we came to make decisions about the extent to which our International School students are flourishing or not, and who should move up through the year groups or repeat or even exit the programme. In both Kenya and to a lesser but still significant extent in Colombia we were not equipped to make a clear and informed decision on several student cases. Bearing in mind that exiting or not is life-changing for these students, that matters.

Contributing factors:

- **Our baseline data was not strong enough**. Especially in Kenya where the programme is several years old, we had not yet established reliable data collection from our core units, whose execution had grown creaky after we'd stretched our attention on and off site from their execution. So while the end of year data was of much more reliable quality, we had little to compare it to in order to measure progress.

- **There was inaction on getting students SEN diagnosed.** This turned out to be local and affordable and the information was there from the start of the year, but it was a case of everyone thinking someone else might do it, and not getting on with making it happen, ie being results oriented. As something which fell on the intersection between Education and Child Safeguarding this is also something which needed to be learned from.

- **SEN support** was one of several things which had not been carefully planned in the programmatic budget forecast, so there was confusion over what could and couldn't be spent.

- **Differentiation techniques both in class and within Extra Sessions were inadequate.** This meant that when it came to asking ourselves the question at the end of the year, what was done about the shortfalls spotted months back, too often the response was lacking.

Lessons learned:

- We will be conducting from the beginning of the academic year formative and summative assessment in line with the expectations of IB and which garner helpful and accurate baseline data.

- By planning activities and their connected costs earlier, we have this year planned and budgeted individualised interventions for those students who have learning needs which require more substantial differentiation.

- Students are getting diagnosed for SENs and we are currently gathering specialist local and global partners who can then support the individuals and their teachers via training.

- Earlier in the year students are being identified as struggling and needing Education Plans which can be enacted sooner.
- New differentiating techniques including an AI tool which uses personalised learning and a buddy system where the supporting student receives grade points for their year depending on the success of those they are buddied with.
- Responsibility is being assigned more clearly to demarcate ownership, particularly between CPS and Education, with expectations of proactive action which students directly benefit from to be prioritised.

GIOVANNI VOLPE - GENERAL COUNSEL

Failure: Partner Vetting and Negotiations for India

In 2024, the most significant failure in my department revolved around a **programmatic oversight during real estate negotiations in India**, leading to wasted time and delayed progress.

On a programmatic level, every real estate transaction must adhere to full knowledge-based decision-making, where all parties disclose relevant information to establish clear command lines. However, **this principle was not followed adequately in one instance.**

We identified a plot owned by a large organization, offering significant potential for our objectives. The deal required careful due diligence due to its sensitivity. While broad commercial terms were negotiated, a detailed discovery process was necessary to ensure the feasibility and legality of the transaction.

Due to the property's attractiveness and perceived prestige, we decided to proceed with negotiations and invested substantial time in preparing a Term Sheet. Unfortunately, **the representative from the prospective tenant's side lacked the clearance to act on behalf of their organization, falsely misrepresenting their authority.**

A proper legal discovery process to verify the representative's credentials should have been conducted at the outset. This misstep led to significant time loss. While no financial loss was incurred, a basic verification step would have revealed that the representative did not have the authority to negotiate.

In hindsight, the allure of the property caused deviations from standard operating procedures, resulting in inefficiencies. **This incident highlighted the need for stricter adherence to protocols during partner vetting.**

Lessons Learned:

Mandatory Verification: Always verify the credentials and authority of representatives before entering any negotiations.

Adherence to SOPs: Standard operating procedures must not be circumvented, regardless of the perceived attractiveness of the deal.

LAURA ARENA ARDUINI - CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

Failure: credit card provider disruption

A migration from one fundraising management system to another **disrupted the connection with Wordline**, our credit card transaction intermediary. This resulted in the **loss of recurring donations** and significant financial losses estimated at **€80,000**, alongside operational inefficiencies.

Contributing factors:

- **Poor coordination** between internal teams and Wordline's technical support during the migration process.
- **Lack of clarity on data migration requirements**, leading to missed steps and incomplete integration.
- **Insufficient technical expertise** on the Still I Rise side to manage complex system migrations effectively.
- **Wordline continued to charge fees** despite the termination of the contract, creating additional frustrations and financial losses.

Lessons Learned:

Provider selection processes must involve detailed **due diligence** to ensure compatibility with organizational needs.

Migrating financial and fundraising systems requires **strict adherence to timelines and a collaborative approach** between all stakeholders.

Adequate internal technical expertise is essential to manage migrations and integrations effectively.

Conduct a **comprehensive review of contracts and termination clauses** with legal support to prevent unauthorized charges.

Legal note

The Legal Department, in consultation with Finance, conducted an internal review of all correspondence and existing documentation related to the matter. Based on this assessment, it was decided to proceed against WL through the association's internal legal department. Accordingly, a legal notice was sent via certified email on 24.04.2024, outlining the service failures and the resulting inconvenience to the organization.

The notice demanded the immediate restoration of Still I Rise's donation management system and the fulfillment of all contractual obligations.

Despite repeated emails and calls to various WL employees, Still I Rise has been unable to obtain clear responses regarding the ongoing issues. Meanwhile, the organization has continued to be charged for services that were never provided.

Following WL's limited response on 15.05.2024, Still I Rise's Legal Department consulted an external law firm. On 17.12.2024, the organization appointed Da Re Alessandro of the Court of Treviso to pursue an amicable settlement. If unsuccessful, legal action will be taken before the Banking and Financial Arbitrator and/or the competent courts.

CONCLUSION

Through the publication of this Failure Report, we commit to continuous improvement. Failure is part of our path to growth, but only if we learn its lessons and turn them into opportunities.

In 2025, we will implement the changes necessary to consolidate our strategies, optimize project management, and strengthen our operations.

With humility and determination, we continue to grow.

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LET'S CHANGE THE WORLD TOGETHER, ONE CHILD AT A TIME.

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