



CSI: Failed Startups Division

Digital Project Guide for Facilitators

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CSI: FAILED STARTUPS DIVISION FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

OVERVIEW

Welcome to CSI: Failed Startups Division, where participants become entrepreneurial detectives investigating the sudden and mysterious demise of real startups. Their assignment: identify the cause of death, expose the red flags, and write the final report. They start with only a name and must piece together the rest. This is not a lecture...it's entrepreneurial forensics.

This facilitator guide equips you to run startup failure investigations in a variety of environments and not just the classroom. Whether you're leading a university seminar, a startup bootcamp, a pre-incubator program, or a career readiness workshop, this case-based format invites participants to think like entrepreneurial detectives. With only a startup name and a source article, learners analyze what went wrong and uncover valuable lessons.



Your mission: guide the inquiry, provoke thought, and help participants crack the case wherever your investigation takes place.

MISSION OBJECTIVES

Learners will:

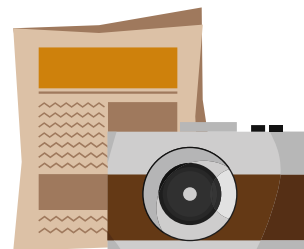
- Assume the role of post-failure startup investigators.
- Conduct independent research using online sources.
- Diagnose the "cause of death" in real startup shutdowns.
- Present findings as investigative case reports.
- Extract key startup lessons from real-life failures.



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TOOLS OF THE TRADE

- Cold Case List
- Participant Investigation Template (printable/digital)
- Research Rubric (assessment and feedback)
- Additional Startup Failures Sources:
<https://www.kaggle.com/datasets/dagloxxkankwan/da/startup-failures> <https://www.failory.com/blog>



INVESTIGATION DURATION

1–2 periods + independent research

Phase 1: Briefing – Assign startup names, explain objectives

Phase 2–4: Field Work – Students research independently

Phase 5: Case Reports – Presentations + Reflections



FIELD MANUAL FOR INSTRUCTORS

1. Issue the Brief

Announce the premise: "You are assigned a cold startup case. Your job is to determine what went wrong."

- Assign one startup name per participant/team.
- Provide the Investigation Template.

2. Guide the Field Work

- Check progress during lab time or assign as homework.
- Encourage use of diverse sources:
 - Articles (TechCrunch, Failory)
 - Founders' blogs and interviews
 - Funding platforms (Crunchbase, AngelList)
 - User reviews, customer feedback

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FIELD MANUAL FOR INSTRUCTORS

3. Debrief the Investigations

- Each team or participant submits/presents their Cold Case Report.
- Host a debriefing discussion:
 - What patterns emerged?
 - What clues were missed?
 - Could the failure have been prevented?



EVALUATION

Use the rubric to assess:

- Research depth
- Diagnostic reasoning
- Creativity of insights
- Clarity and professionalism of the report

OPEN DISCUSSION

Use the Open Discussion File to:

Encourage open-ended inquiry by prompting students to explore assumptions, question decisions, and connect the dots between business choices and their consequences.

- Utilize the provided articles as starting points to begin the conversation.
- Utilize the Open Discussion File as your roadmap to provide structure without limiting the conversation, helping you draw out thoughtful observations and entrepreneurial lessons through curiosity-driven dialogue.

Final Words from HQ

This project brings the reality of startup failure to life. By turning participants into investigators, you help them build the habits of founders: curiosity, analysis, and reflection. Treat each report not as a paper, but as a forensic file contributing to the living science of entrepreneurship.

Startup success may be inspiring, but startup failure is where the deepest learning lives.

