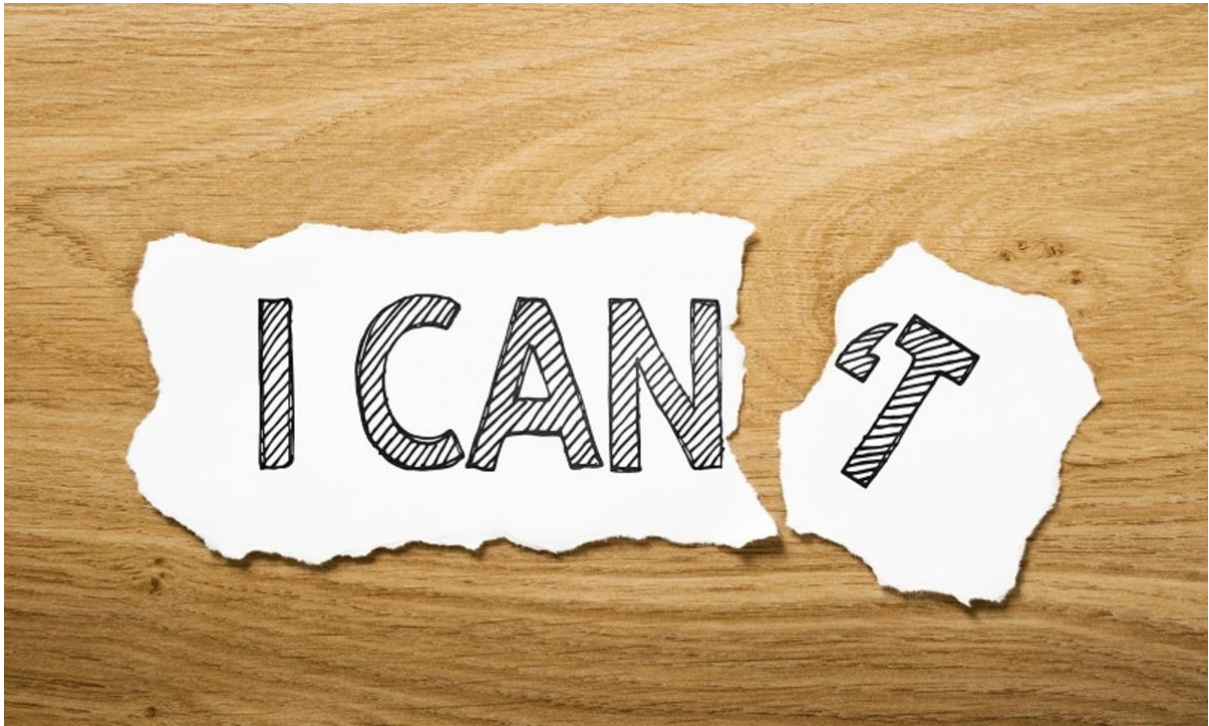


The Confidence Project



**A search for the biggest thing holding us back
from reaching our leadership potential**

Project Group:

**Miao Li Kellie Dowling Kelly McCormack
Ansin Antony Fleur Horsley
Camilla Rocks**

Executive Summary

The Confidence Project was undertaken as part of the Leadership Development for Women program in 2019. The idea arose from the first face-to-face session, where the issue of confidence resonated with this group of women.

This report summarises the project with reflections from some of the group. The group recognised that a lack of confidence in oneself can hold us back from taking on leadership positions or trying new things. We were motivated to create a resource that would help women such as ourselves to develop more confidence and learn techniques to cope with phenomena such as Impostor Syndrome.

Members of the group found resources such as books, websites, podcasts and published articles, utilised those resources and reviewed them. Some information was explored more deeply to enable a better understanding about how it might affect confidence.

An interim Interact 2 site was developed to host the material that we found. The group recommends that this site be developed further into a professional resource for CSU staff and students.

The Project

The original concept for this project was to create a repository of information that CSU staff could use to work on the self-confidence, using information from our LDW mentors, self-exploration and other available material. We anticipated being able to develop an ELMO module or similar and we titled the project “Lean In To Self”.

As we progressed in our knowledge, we felt uncomfortable with the original title and renamed the project “The Confidence Project”. We also began to focus on our personal growth, with the confidence that this would lead to something – just what, we were not sure.

The team soon found that researching information to help with confidence was not as straightforward as it sounded. The internet is teeming with websites, articles, videos and apps to help improve confidence. The podcast libraries were likewise groaning with opinions. The idea of road testing resources became the focus of our project.

This road testing, along with our weekly meetings became the fun bit of the project and contributed greatly to our learning. We tried each other’s recommendations and found that what resonates for one, does not necessarily do so for another.

In searching for a suitable way of sharing our research, we settled on Interact 2, being easily accessible in the University. We produced a draft Interact 2 site, loaded with our back story, road testing and some ‘deep dives’ into some material.

The group felt that CSU could develop the Interact 2 site as is, with enhancement such as a moderated forum, to provide staff and students with a safe place to go for guidance in developing their own confidence. It

would also provide managers with resources to recommend for their staff. We believe that the road testing is important in narrowing the field from the overwhelming collection of resources available and hope that the site would remain open to allow all users to upload their own reviews.



The Interact 2 Site

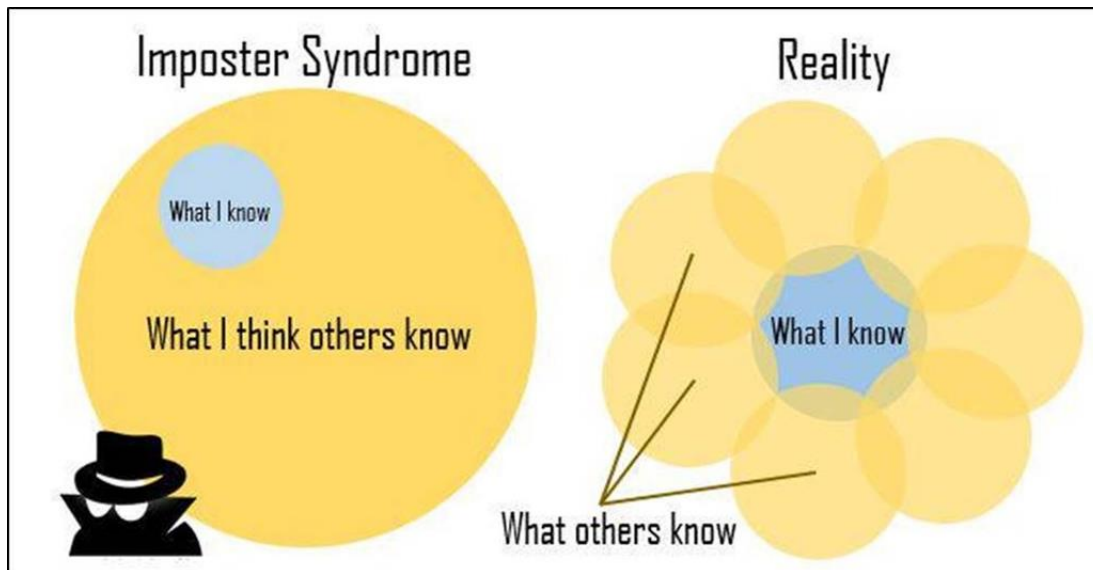
The group had a vision to collect information in one location that would be accessible to anyone in the CSU community. We felt that this would enable people who are struggling with confidence to find resources quickly and easily.

Interact became the vehicle of choice because it was already available as a CSU resource, was accessible to anyone at CSU and would be a suitable home for our work, which could be added to by others.

As we added resources, we became excited about the potential this project had for the university. We dreamt of having a chat room and the ability to add and edit reviews so that it became an evolving and current resource.

During the LDW program, we were fortunate enough to be able to attend online presentations, from several inspiring women. It is in hearing the stories of others that we can reflect on our own stories and grow. In particular, it can be empowering to learn about how others have struggled with confidence and managed to thrive despite this. The Interact site would support online discussions and recorded sessions that users could access when it suited them.

Importantly, the Interact site would be helpful for CSU staff and students with low confidence because they could use it from home, from work at a time to suit. One of the characteristics of people with low confidence or Impostor Syndrome, is a reluctance to ask for help. The Interact site is a non-threatening resource they can dip into and even contribute to.



Some Reflections

Miao Li:

My participation in the LDW program has been a reflective journey for me. Along with the theme of self-confidence, I explored deeper and broader of my personal behaviour and why I behave the way I do. For example, I noticed myself having issues raising counter-opinions in a team. I am comfortable to raise my opinions but when they are contradictory with someone else's, I feel that I am challenging the other person. I believe there are the following reasons:

1. The Chinese traditions cherish/value/respect harmony (“以和为贵”, “中庸之道”). We were taught to be humble and modest and not to be aggressive at school. We seek a compromised position for all parties. Deep down inside me, I don't feel comfortable challenging people.
2. I can't distinguish people's opinion from people. If I challenge one's opinions, I feel as if I am challenging the person.
3. I don't insist on my opinions might be because I am afraid of being judged/different from the group consensus. I noticed I have problems being at the centre of the spotlight/attention.
4. At the first LDW session in Bathurst, I remember I wrote “loud voice = leadership?” on the sticky note. Now I realise my problem is that sometimes I can be too quiet. If too quiet in a meeting and not saying anything, I deserve my team by not providing a different set of opinions. I may as well not be present at the meeting.
5. Self-worth.... Is my opinion worthy? This refers to the confidence theme.

The LDW program provided the opportunity for me to go beyond just to observe a phenomenon, but to explore deep reasons. I now know I have this issues, then I can be more mindful in my mental and professional activities. For example, I can try not to take “raising counter-opinions” personally, and I notice that people do not necessarily take it personally either; I can try to think beyond individuals, which was also suggested as one of the four steps to build confidence in “Performing with confidence”, a book written by Richard Redenbach. I can try to be comfortable feeling confronted or challenge others, thinking that it is for their growth as well.

Having said all this, I believe the most important thing is to accept, truly accept without judgement or expectations, the way I behave, knowing that “The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change” – by Carl Rogers.

Camilla Rocks

I came to the LDW program as I was quite new to CSU and to the University sector, after 14 years in the same organisation, and needed to make some contacts and find my place at CSU. Whilst I was not unhappy in my previous role, I was restless and felt I needed something new in my life. The process of developing my resume was immensely confidence boosting! By listing my transferrable skills, I realised how much I had achieved over my working career.

That confidence dissipated very quickly upon arriving at CSU. In a new industry, commencing a new career, isolated in a small building and in a role that was completely new to me, I floundered being ‘the new girl’.

Of all the issues we discussed at the first LDW session, the issue of confidence resonated most strongly with me. That led to a wonderful collaboration with other CSU women. As part of the project, I researched Impostor Syndrome and recognised this as an important influence in my life which had stopped me from trying new things.

The LDW program gave me permission to spend time on mindful reflection and investigate ways of helping myself, things that as a working mother of four, I had never given myself time for. The greatest gift I have received from this program, is the connection I have made with over 20 CSU women, all of whom shared personal insights, struggles and friendship.

The growth I see in myself is amazing and confidence boosting in itself. I have learnt that it is OK to be an introverted, empathetic, over thinking woman and that I don’t have to know everything to take on something new. I have learnt from many people and realised that most of us have times of self-doubt and I have found techniques to harness that feeling of doubt to push on.

I have reached a new sense of calm that is noticeable to those around me, as many have commented. I plan to continue my reflection time and make it a priority.

“Our doubts are traitors and make us lose the good we oft might win by fearing to attempt” William Shakespeare.



Kelly McCormack

Confidence is something that has hurt my career progression in the past. I would hide from opportunities because I didn't have the belief and confidence in myself. I have wished many times that I could go back and talk to myself when I was in University or when I started my first job, when it came to career progression and leadership, I have been my own worst enemy.

My confidence over the years has improved. As I road-tested our resources I realised I was already thinking and doing some of the things that were recommended. I had many 'ah-ha' moments as I linked advice from the resources back to my past, recognising what I had been and what I do today that is different, and all the time I was thinking "I wish I could have known all of this earlier". This project has taught me many things about myself, wrapped words and logic around some of my actions that I have been intrinsically doing. This project has changed my thinking from being subjective to objective when it comes to my interactions. I truly believe that a resource such as the one we envisioned would be invaluable to many people, staff and managers.

"The way to develop self-confidence is to do the thing you fear, and get a record of successful experiences behind you." – William Jennings Bryan

Fleur Horsley

Like the other women in my group, confidence in the workplace hinders my career progression. Since my early 20's I have only ever worked in small, family run businesses so starting at Charles Sturt University in 2017 was a big culture shock. I never imagined myself working for such a large organisation, and while I am skilled and experienced in my area of expertise (and passionate), sometimes doubt enters my mind because I don't have a university degree.

My confidence has improved greatly during the LDW program. I have also recognised that leadership takes many different forms. The LDW program has taught me that leadership isn't always about managing and leading a team. It's about finding your voice, putting your hand up at the table and being able to voice your options, thoughts and concerns confidently. It's about being recognised as a leader within your area of expertise. The Confidence Project allowed me to examine and reflect on my own confidence issues. I had to be vulnerable, honest and trust in the process. At times I was quite uncomfortable.

I am proud to say that my confidence has improved. I have faced challenging situations that previously I would 'brush under the carpet', I have voiced my thoughts and ideas, and I have been able to present a business case for a new opportunity.



Ansın Antony

Confidence is not something you are born with. It is a feeling you have when you believe that you are capable of handling a situation successfully. I had so many confidence issues in the past. There was something pulling me back when I was trying to put forward my ideas in meetings or when applying for a job or trying anything new.

The decision to come out of my shell and to join the LDW program was itself a big challenge for me. As part of the LDW program I decided to do "The LDW Confidence Project" to build up my confidence level and to understand and find some strategies to build confidence in other women in the University.

There were so many resources out there but I was not sure if those will work for me. I believe the Interact 2 webpage with the road tested resource collection, one of the major outcomes from our project, would be a major breakthrough to the University. I can say with confidence that the LDW program has definitely improved my confidence.

"You can't teach talent. You can't put in what God left out – but you can teach confidence." – Gloria Naylor

Our Recommendations

Over six months, the group researched and explored many ways to improve self-confidence. This involved a significant investment of time given the sheer volume of resources available. The Interact 2 site that we developed is by no means comprehensive but is a curated collection of what we found to be helpful. All members of the group experienced a distinctive improvement in our confidence levels as a result of participating in the LDW program and, in particular, from finding a resource that worked for us. We believe that the site could become a valuable resource for CSU staff and students.

Our recommendations to the senior leadership team are:

- Recognition of the crippling impact a lack of self-confidence can have on the day-to-day lives of staff and students as well as on career progression
- Recognition that a lack of confidence will impede how a person seeks to address the issue and that a passive resource such as our Interact site would be useful for self-direction or referral from a supervisor
- Professional adoption of the Interact site by the HR division and development into a dynamic resource available to all staff and students or development of a similar resource
- A moderated forum as part of the site where the confident and not so confident can interact in a supportive and constructive way.

We have demonstrated that, by finding one or two resources that resonate and applying what they teach, we have the power to build our self-confidence. We believe that we work in the kind of environment where we should share our knowledge and we are confident the staff and students of CSU would support and utilise a resource like our Interact site.

Conclusion

The confidence project resonated with everyone in our group because we had all had issues with confidence in our working lives. Our group wanted to understand how our confidence levels impact us, develop some strategies to increase our own self-confidence and learn some new skills to support other women in our lives. Our ultimate goal was to curate all the information that is available into a resource that could be shared beyond the LDW group. We have presented you with an Interact site that has done just that and we hope that it will be a useful tool for CSU employees.

We found this to be a very fulfilling project where we all had opportunities to get to know each other, develop the group dynamics, open up to each other and support each other through our confidence odysseys. We are all on individual leadership journeys and, having spent time reflecting on our confidence levels, gathering resources and learning from our group facilitators, mentors and the guest speakers we were fortunate to have address us, we are all in a stronger position to acknowledge our leadership styles and consider opportunities we might have previously let pass by. We would like to thank the University for supporting a program that has enabled us to participate in such a worthwhile self-development journey.