

Professional Confidence in the Age of AI

Organisation Development Practitioners' Roundtable Discussion

Summary & Take-Away Questions

New Work Consulting for Organisation Development Australia | 1 May 2026

About This Session

This online roundtable was convened for [Organisation Development Australia](#) to explore the findings of the [Australian Leadership Study, Professional Confidence in the Age of AI](#) (New Work Consulting, January 2026). The session brought together OD practitioners from internal organisational roles and external consulting practices to examine what AI's acceleration means for professional confidence, value and trust, from the vantage point of those who work directly on organisational culture and people capability.

Two core discussions were facilitated, with participants reflecting on where employee confidence is held and where it is most at risk, and what enduring human value looks like when clients and stakeholders have access to more information than ever before. The summaries below capture the key themes that emerged from two breakout discussions and subsequent whole-room debriefs.

Discussion 1: Where are employees most confident, and where is confidence most fragile?

Identity and contribution are at the centre of the confidence question

Participants named identity uncertainty as a core challenge: Who am I in this role? What is my contribution? Am I redundant? These are not abstract questions. They are live and present for many employees across organisations right now, and they are not easily answered by leaders who are themselves navigating similar uncertainty about direction, job security, and organisational relevance. Confidence is fragile when people cannot locate themselves clearly within the organisation's direction, and when that direction is itself unclear.

Feeling valued is foundational

Teams that do not feel genuinely valued, or that feel their concerns are being dismissed rather than heard, lose their footing in the organisation. The connection between feeling valued and having the confidence to act was direct: when people feel gaslit about their place or contribution, they withdraw from the kind of discretionary effort and visible engagement that builds trust and culture. For OD professionals, this points to the importance of designing listening processes that surface real experience, not just surface-level sentiment.

AI is both a capability and an avoidance mechanism

Participants observed that AI is being used in ways that accelerate output but, in many organisations, bypass the human work that needs to happen for people to work well together. AI orients people toward where the organisation is going without first establishing clarity about where it is right now. The practical consequence is that AI adoption, without deliberate design, can create a veneer of progress while leaving unresolved the underlying questions of contribution, coordination, and culture.

A related observation: the burden of AI output is shifting. People who remain thoughtful, considered, and selective in what they produce — what participants described as quietly confident — are not being drawn into producing high volumes of AI-generated content. The real challenge is falling to

those tasked with reviewing and quality-assuring that volume. Discernment, not production, is the emerging premium skill.

Where confidence currently holds, and where it is weakest

Participants identified that employees tend to be most confident in the specific, tangible work they know how to do, including knowledge of products and services, problem-solving for clients and customers, and delivery of projects where they are the key coordination point. These are areas of grounded, recognisable contribution.

Confidence is most fragile at the edges of these areas, particularly as AI enables clients to self-serve information and comparison more readily. When the knowledge an employee carries was previously the primary point of value, and that knowledge becomes commoditised, the employee must locate their value elsewhere.

Relationship intelligence is the rising currency

If AI is managing the information layer, the ability to relate, to connect, and to exercise contextual judgement becomes the primary differentiator. Authority to act on behalf of an organisation is also relational: when values are ambiguous or competing, the ability to navigate that ambiguity through strong relationships and clear identity becomes critical. Participants noted that the confidence to do this is not evenly distributed across organisations and will require deliberate investment. People cannot come to know themselves in isolation; confidence in contribution develops through relatedness with others, and organisations need to design for this.

Uncertainty will persist, and OD professionals can lead the response

Multiple participants noted that the full impact of AI integration will not be clear for some years. This is not a reason for inaction; it is a reason to invest now in the human infrastructure that will hold organisations together through ongoing change.

Discussion 2: If clients or stakeholders had perfect information tomorrow, what would clients and stakeholders still come to you for?

The most durable value is not informational

The clearest theme from this discussion was that what clients and stakeholders will continue to seek from humans, and from trusted advisors specifically, is not information they cannot access elsewhere. It is the capacity to make sense of their own situation in ways that information alone cannot. One participant articulated this directly: helping clients to see the things about their own organisation that perfect information actually hides, including the invisible work, the unspoken anxiety, the gap between what the strategy says and what people actually experience. This is sensemaking that comes from proximity, relationship and interpretive skill, not from data access.

Complex relationships and stakeholder navigation

Participants identified complex stakeholder relationships, including managing conduit roles with third-party service providers and navigating the politically sensitive or ambiguous issues that formal systems cannot contain, as enduringly human work. The human resources function, for example, continues to be needed precisely for the messy issues that defy clean process resolution. This kind of work requires presence, judgement and the capacity to hold ambiguity, none of which AI currently provides.

Framing is the work

A significant observation from participants was the importance of how OD professionals name and frame what they do. Understanding and being able to articulate a clear value proposition is a

professional challenge that should be in focus: if practitioners cannot articulate what they offer in terms that resonate with those who hold budgets and strategic authority, they are not in a position to lead the necessary work.

Unleashing creativity and human potential

Participants noted that helping people to access and direct their creativity remains uniquely human work. As AI takes on more cognitive and analytical tasks, the ability to help people think differently, connect ideas and generate meaning becomes more, not less, valuable.

Take-Away Questions for OD Practitioners

- How can you highlight that strategic thinking is not about 'what tool to implement'?
- How can you engage leaders in the 'professional confidence' discussion and its impact on protecting/strengthening culture?
- How can you reveal gaps in 'trust' – where the organisation's 'insides' and 'outsides' don't align?
- ...What's your next move?

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