# Confidence: A Slippery Fish

Practical Execution. Strategic Thinking. Psychological Insight.

 Confidence is a slippery fish.

One moment it's firmly in your metaphorical hands; the next, it’s gone, like Keyser Söze (if that reference doesn’t land, ask your parents).

Psychology hasn’t entirely agreed on what confidence is. Depending on where you look, it shows up as a trait, a state, or a skill. All three have some merit.

That said, the literature offers several recurring themes:

- Confidence relates closely to one’s perceived abilities and capabilities.

- Early developmental experiences appear to shape baseline confidence.

- It can be fleeting, rising and falling with circumstances.

- It can also shift more permanently, for better or worse.

- It can be painstakingly built and undone in a moment.

- It shows up differently across domains; one might be confident in boardrooms but crumble in dating.

- Confidence responds to action, accomplishment, failure, and feedback.

- Framed as a skill, it appears trainable, with effort.

We think we can recognise it in others, and we make quick judgments based on it.

In moderation, it’s attractive; in excess, it's often repellent.

A standard working definition, albeit a bit generic, is:

“The belief in one’s capacity to perform actions to achieve a specific goal or goals.”

But this raises more questions than it answers:

- What exactly is confidence?

- Why does it matter?

- How do we get more of it?

- Why do we lose it?

- Can we rebuild it?

- How much is enough?

- Can there be too much?

Whether it’s ultimately a trait, state, or skill, confidence is bound up with a deeper concept: the Self. Indeed, “confidence” and “self-efficacy” are often used interchangeably, though they’re not quite the same.

Psychologically, confidence seems to be beneficial. Those with more of it tend to take more action, recover faster from setbacks, and attract others more easily. Confidence appears correlated with resilience, perceived competence, and even likability.

Socially, however, it’s another matter. Confidence has become a kind of cultural shorthand, a proxy for capability, power, charisma, and success. Those who appear confident are admired; those who don’t are often overlooked or pitied. But we’ve all known the polished professional who’s faking it, and the soft-spoken introvert with a spine of steel.

In my opinion, confidence is a performance, often for others, sometimes for ourselves. As a diagnostic, it’s deeply unreliable. To judge someone by their apparent confidence - whether it’s a fleeting state or an enduring trait - is lazy at best, and misleading at worst.

If we want to take confidence seriously, we need to stop treating it as a moral virtue or a measure of worth and start understanding it as an emergent expression of self-perception, emotional regulation, and social expectation.