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# 2024 Intensive Conference

**BRINGING THE BALANCE**

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# Tackling Imposter Syndrome

PRESENTED BY LUCY CHAPPLE

Thrive Advisory

# SUMMARY

What is the Imposter Phenomenon?

Key Triggers

Tackling the Imposter Phenomenon



# WHAT IS THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON?

A pervasive pattern of thoughts, feelings and behaviours which result in:

- An intense experience of intellectual or professional fraudulence/ self-doubt
- An inability to internalise success
- A belief of having fooled those around you

(Clance, 1986)

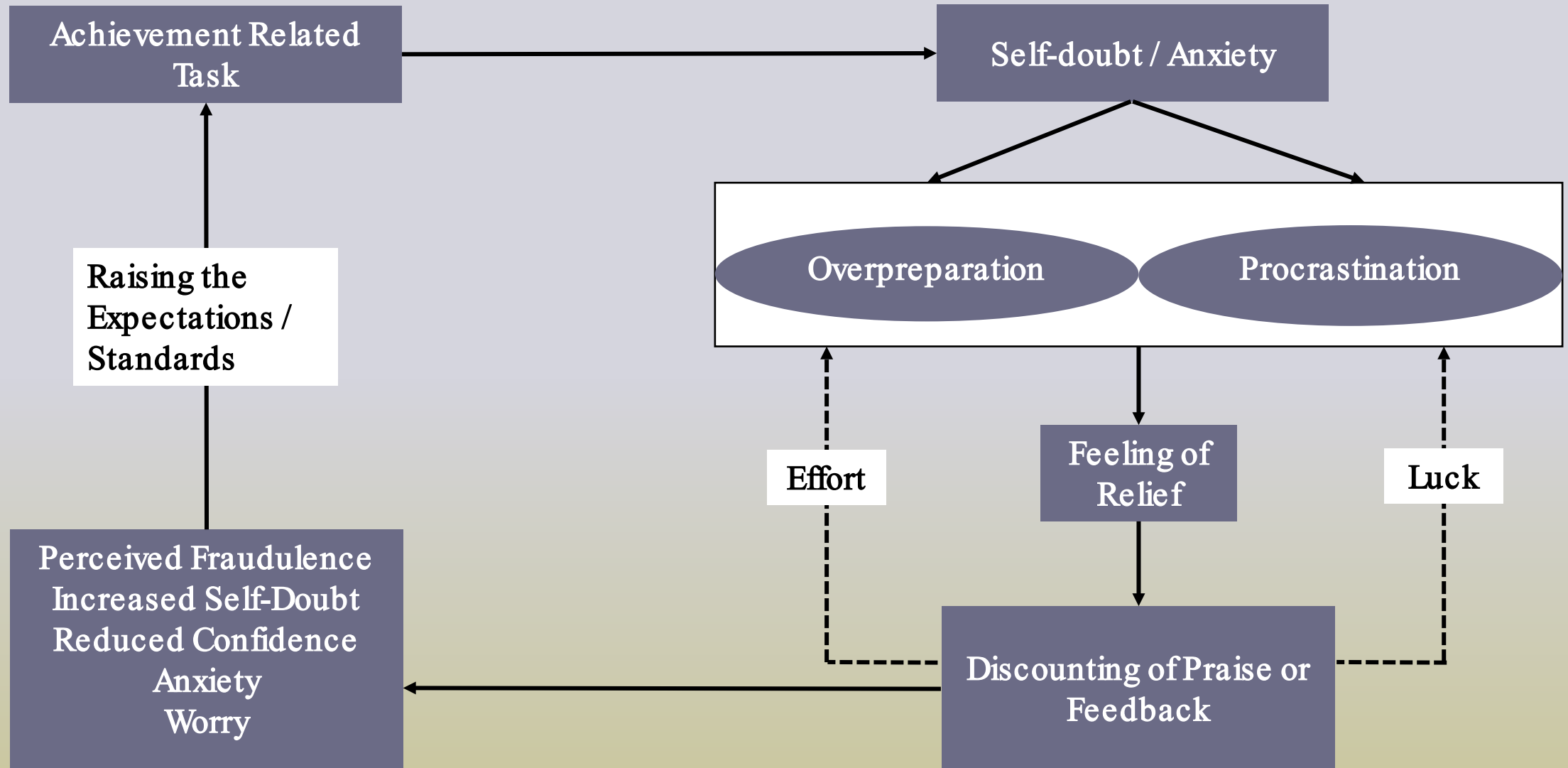


# MYTH BUSTING

The “Imposter Syndrome”  
isn't a Syndrome

Imposter Thoughts,  
Imposter Beliefs

# THE IMPOSTER CYCLE (CLANCE, 1985)



# CHARACTERISTICS

IPP33 (Ibrahim, 2020) and CIPS (Clance, 1986)

## **Doubt in own competence and denial of competence**

“I am not convinced of my capabilities” and “I can give the impression that I’m more competent than I really am”

## **Discounting of praise**

“At times, I feel my success has been due to some kind of luck”

## **Superhuman / Perfectionism**

“I feel bad and discouraged if I’m not “the best” or at least “very special” in situations that involve achievement”

## **Fear of failure**

“I’m afraid to fail, even though I’m usually successful”

## **Fear of and guilt about success**

“When people praise me for something I’ve accomplished, I’m afraid I won’t be able to live up to their expectations of me in the future”

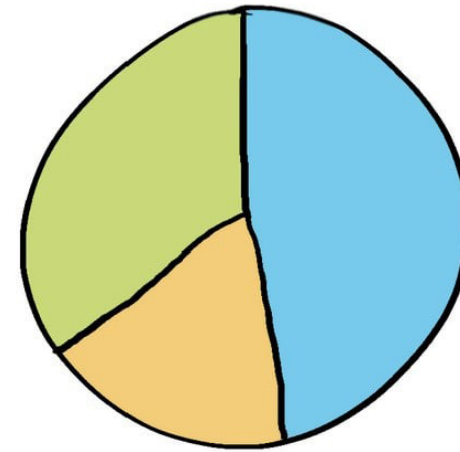
## **Maladaptive workplace behaviours**

“I usually finish important tasks at the last moment”



# THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON IS VERY COMMON

- Worldwide prevalence rates vary from 9% to 82% (Bravata, 2020)
- Cross-cultural - Asia, Europe, North America, Australia and Middle East
- It has been estimated that 70% of successful people have experienced imposter feelings at some time (Matthews & Gibbs, 1985)
- A recent KPMG Study found 75% of female executives have experienced imposter phenomenon during their careers.

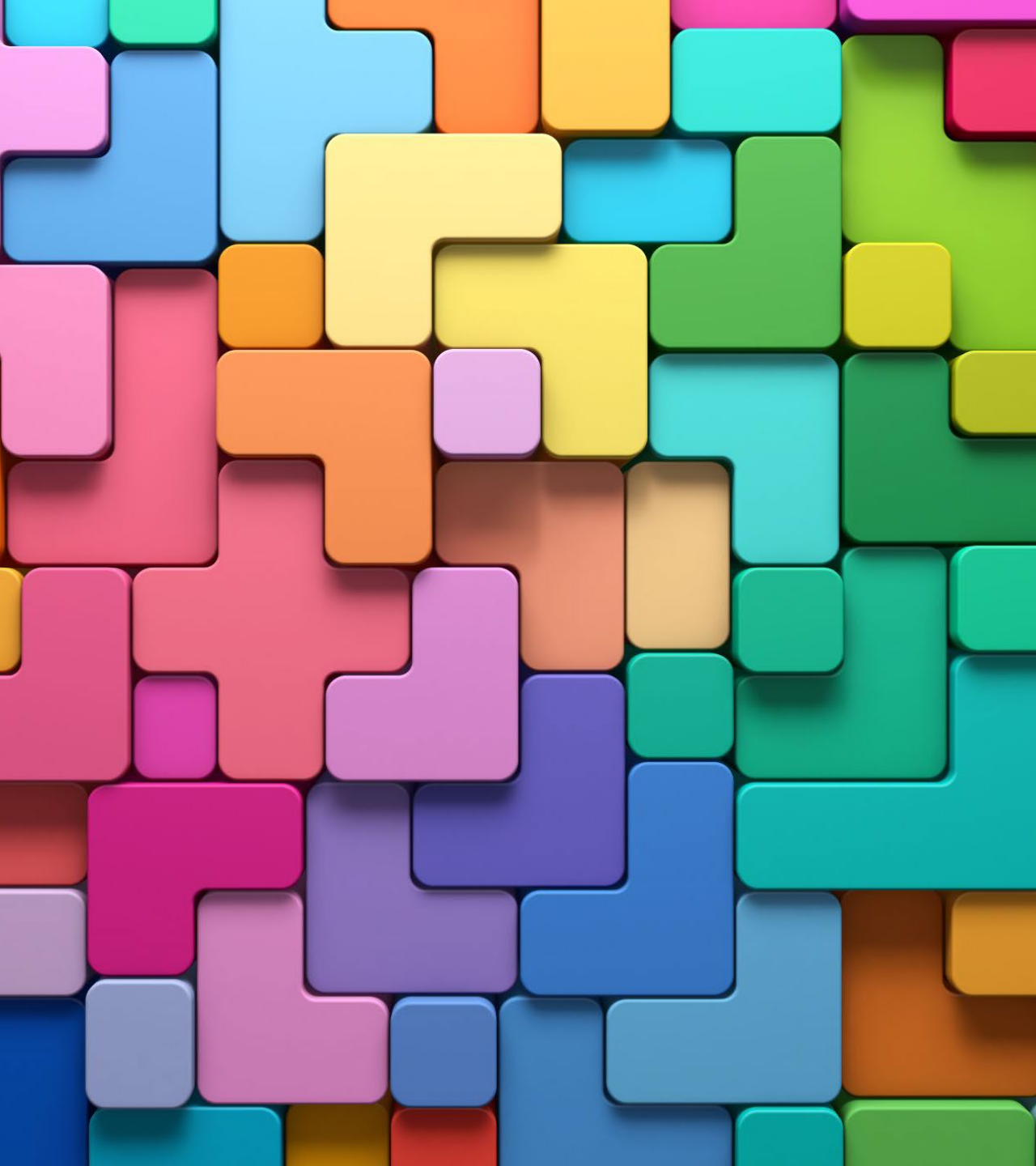


■ PEOPLE WHO GET IMPOSTER SYNDROME

■ OTHER PEOPLE WHO GET IMPOSTER SYNDROME

■ LITERALLY EVERYONE ELSE (THEY ALSO GET IMPOSTER SYNDROME)





# KEY TRIGGERS



# INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCE TRIGGERS

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- **Early family relationships**

Childhood social dynamics and attitudes – unsupportive and emotionally distant care givers – growing up thinking worth or value is only tied to achievement.

- **Personality**

Maladaptive Perfectionism and Low Self-efficacy (Vergauwe, 2015, Chapple, 2021).

- **Gender – it is not just a female thing**

Typically considered more prevalent in women but the research is not consistent. It may be that it is gender role orientation not biological sex (Patzak, 2017).

- **Race**

These differences tend to be due to contextual influences.

# WORK TRIGGERS

## **Times of change: first job, new job, or a promotion** (Ket de Vries, 2005)

- Isolated from support networks and feel a need to prove oneself

## **Competitive environments** (Canning, 2021)

- "Cultures of Genius" (Hutchins, 2015)
- Talent and ability are considered fixed - inherent brilliance defines success
- Cultures that value confidence and perfection

## **Critical workplace incidents (Academics)** (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017)

- Experiencing success (being recognised as an expert)
- Comparisons with/among colleagues
- Submitting work for peer review

## **Organisational cultures and practices** (Mullangi and Jagsi, 2019)

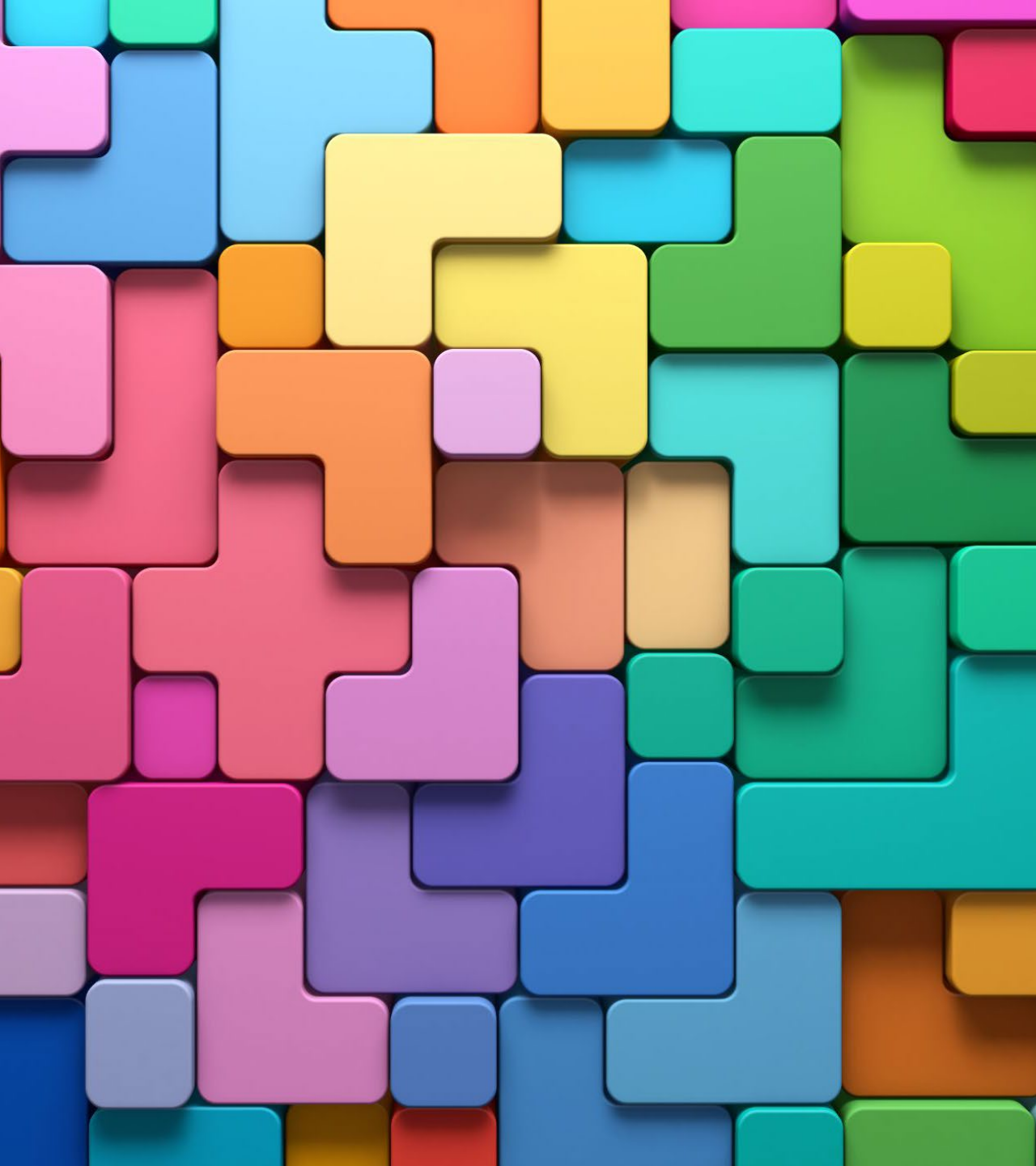
- Glorifying overwork
- Cultures that perpetuate assumptions that IP is an individual problem rather than a systemic issue

## **Lack of Diversity** (Tulshyan and Burery, 2021)

- Feeling like an imposter can be a rational response when an individual is in the minority in a workplace (experiencing microaggressions / feeling like don't belong)

# UNDERSTANDING GROWTH MINDSETS

- Fixed Mindset and Growth Mindset describe the underlying beliefs people have about learning and intelligence.
- **Growth Mindset:** the belief that intelligence, skills and abilities can be developed through effort and learning.
- **Fixed Mindset:** the belief that intelligence, skills and abilities are set.
- **Harsh Truth:** People's mindsets tend to be more fixed than they realise
  - **Fundamental Attribution Error:** the bias where people underemphasize external factors [situation/environment] for behaviour while overestimating internal factors [disposition/personality].
- There are challenges to developing Growth Mindsets in the Law.
  - “Mistakes are how we learn” vs “Mistakes lead to malpractice/negligence lawsuits”



TACKLING THE  
IMPOSTER  
PHENOMENON

# WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT TO RECOGNISE AND TACKLE THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON

Reduced Self-care and Wellbeing

Mental Health Symptoms

Lower Confidence and Self-Belief

Stress and Burnout

Lower job satisfaction

Barrier to career development

# INSPIRATION FROM ADAM GRANT AND OPRAH





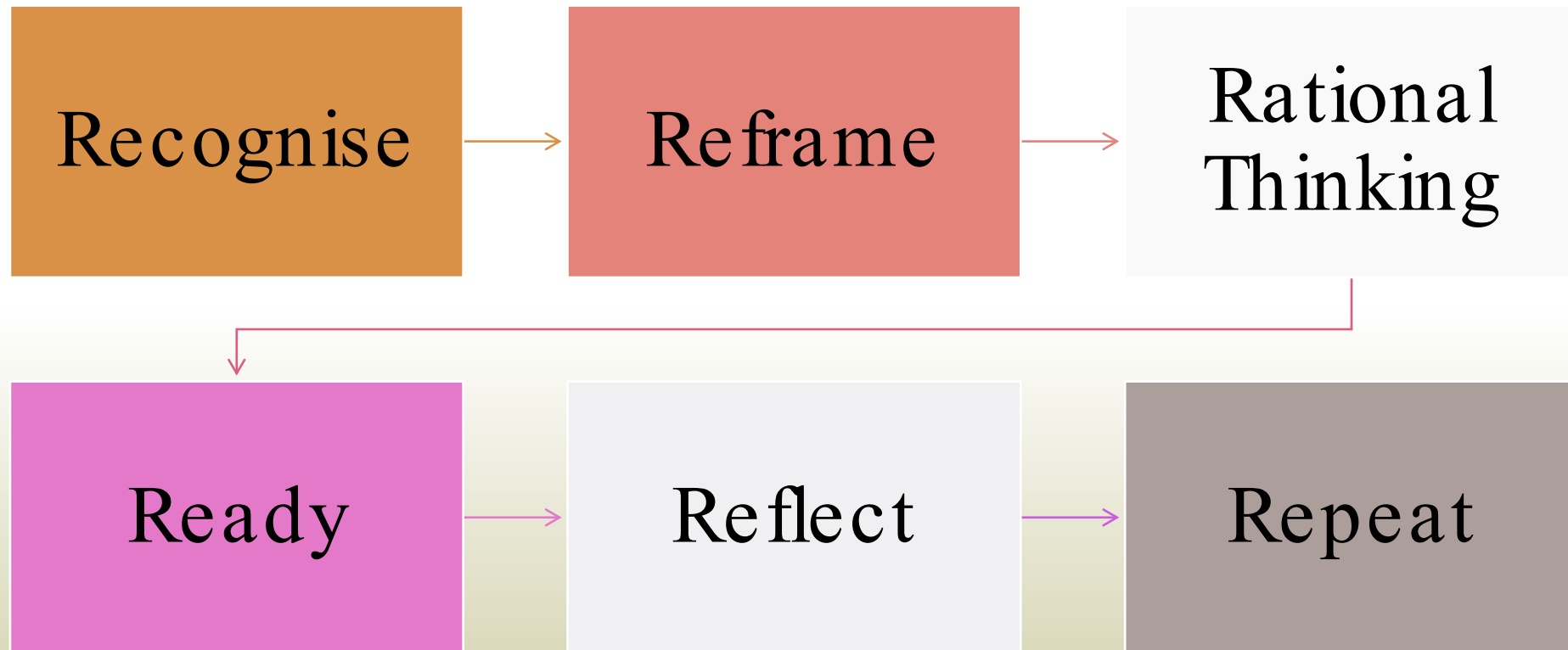


## WHY IS THE IMPOSTER CYCLE HARD TO BREAK?

- Most people experiencing Imposter Phenomenon suffer in silence
- The patterns of the Imposter experiences are subconscious – we tend to believe our inner critic
- Unhelpful beliefs like:
  - “Imposter Phenomenon keeps me humble”
  - “But the fear helps me perform!”
- Commentary has framed the Imposter Phenomenon as a “problem” with the individual, whereas work environments can exacerbate feelings of impostorism

# THE SIX “R”S FOR TACKLING IMPOSTER THOUGHTS

SALAZAR, 2020, JOS A, 2019



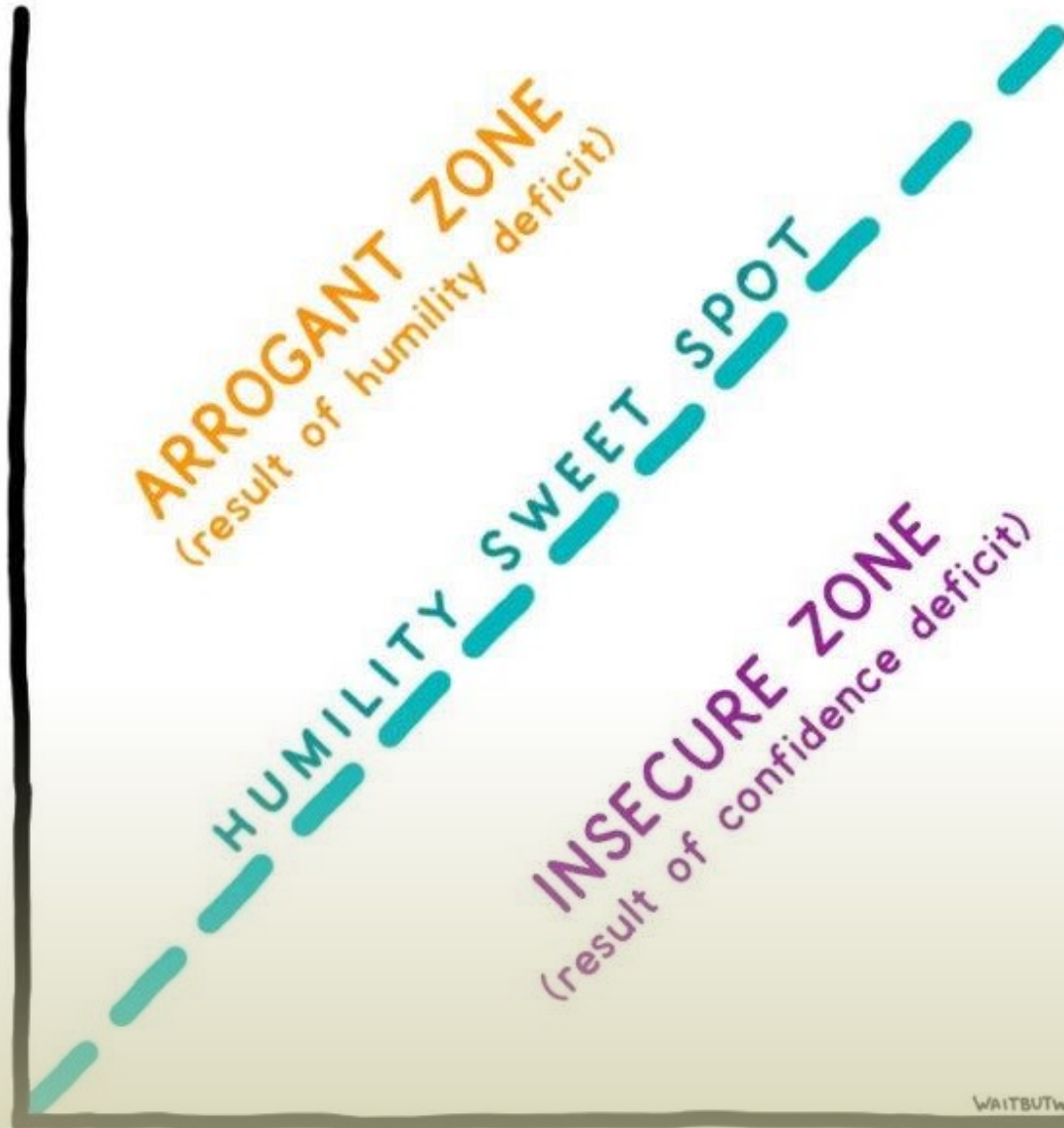
# RECOGNISE IMPOSTER THOUGHTS

- What triggers your Imposter experiences?
- What are your early warning signs?
- What are you thinking, seeing, saying to yourself?
- Is there a point at which you can press pause?
- What behaviours do you express when you experience the Imposter Phenomenon?
- How do you know when your Imposter experience is over? What kinds of things are you thinking and saying to yourself?
- Think about how your life could be without experiencing Imposter Phenomenon?

## **QUIZ: Are You Even Good Enough to Have Imposter Syndrome?**



CONVICTION



KNOWLEDGE

## RECOGNISE YOUR IMPOSTER BELIEFS

- Understand your current mindset – draw out any ‘fixed mindset’ biases in your thinking.
- What are your fears/limiting beliefs?
  - I can’t apply for the Partner because
  - I’m not good enough to lead a team because
  - I can’t develop that client relationship because
  - The fear/worry helps me perform
  - The fear/worry keeps me humble
- How do you currently approach new achievement related tasks? Do you see them as threats or challenges.
- Ask yourself why you are holding on to your limiting belief and if it is true?
- Ask yourself what your limiting belief is costing you? personal time, sleep, stress?

# REFRAME YOUR THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS

- Take your self-talk/worry and ask: Is it really true?
- If the answer is ‘yes’
  - What evidence am I basing that on?
  - Is that evidence biased?
- Take your limiting beliefs and ask: What do I want instead?
- Collect evidence to support new belief [see Rational Thinking]
- Turn your inner **voice of encouragement** on
  - See new achievement related tasks as opportunities / challenges rather than threats.
  - Replace “but” with “and”
  - Remove “try” and “just”

“  
Take Your Thought  
To Court  
”

# RATIONAL THINKING

- Help yourself internalise success
- Collect objective facts and achievements that speak to your qualifications → build confidence and quell self-doubt
  - Keep a “wins” file
  - Keep thank you notes and praise
  - Be specific about your contributions to team projects
- When you hear your inner critic, ask yourself: would you say that to a friend/colleague.

## Wins File

### Achievement Examples

- # of Clients helped this quarter
- # Matters settled/won/completed
- # Presentations delivered this year

### Acknowledgement Examples

- Thank-you messages
- Acknowledgements from peers
- Specific contribution to Team wins

### Opportunity Examples

- New type of matter
- New type of client

# READY

## Let go of negative thoughts and feelings

- **Accept** the thought and don't try to fight it or place judgment on it
- **Breathing** exercises to tame the stress response
- **Choose** a thought that makes you feel better

## Develop active coping techniques

- **Ask yourself:** what has worked for you to turn around an imposter experience?
  - Regular exercise, sleep and diet
  - Mindfulness exercises
  - Exercise in self-compassion
  - Speaking to friend, mentor, colleague
  - Giving your thoughts a name and telling it to go away

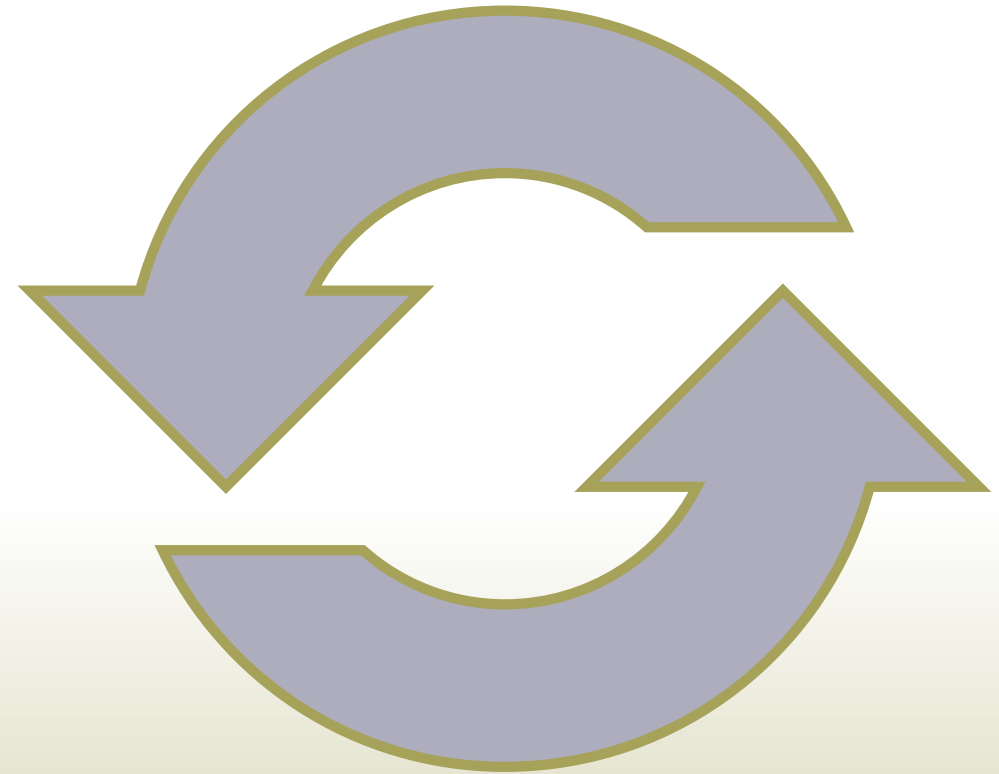


# REFLECT AND REPEAT

What worked well last time?

Would I like to change my approach next time?

Celebrate your wins (no matter how small)



# EXTERNAL SUPPORT

- **Mentoring** (Sandford, 2015, Hutchins, 2017)
  - Provide courage confidence and confirmation
  - Goal setting, seeking out opportunities
  - Correcting thoughts about ‘what success means’ and validating success
  - Help recognise unhelpful work dynamics and assist with how to manage those dynamics
- **Coaching** to create a growth mindset (Zachetta, 2020)
- **Social Networks** (Hutchins & Rainbolt, 2017; Sandford, 2015)





## TIPS FOR RECEIVING FEEDBACK

- Seek advice rather than feedback: Advice is forward looking → a path for growth.
- Focus on behaviours and/or skills that can be improved.
- Set SMART Goals/Experiments: establishing goals/experiments that challenge, promotes a sense of purpose and growth enables you to measure and track progress.
- Frame the goal as an experiment if you struggle with failure – if your experiment doesn't work, that's okay, try another one. This helps create a path for growth.
- Foster your growth mindset by celebrating learning and curiosity.
- For the perfectionists.... Give yourself an “A” for how well you took the “D”

# WHAT CAN WE DO AS LEADERS?

Educate employees about Imposter Thoughts / Beliefs

Be a force for change: promote cultures of growth rather than cultures of genius to reduce the fear of failure

Promote mentoring programs with specific training about recognizing and taming Imposter Phenomenon

Effective feedback systems

Promote psychological safety

Improve diversity in leadership positions

Change the dialogue - name it to tame it

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Silence isn't helpful

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Take some time to work out what Imposter Thoughts / Beliefs you experience

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Take your Thoughts to Court

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Where there is perfectionism there is also likely to be imposter experiences

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Focus on Growth

SUMMARY

# RESOURCES

- **Books**

- Think Again (Chapter 2), Adam Grant
- Human Potential (Chapter 3, 5, 6), Adam Grant
- Right Kind of Wrong: Why Learning to Fail Can Teach Us to Thrive, by Amy Edmondson
- Ditching the Imposter Syndrome by Clare Josa
- Mindset by Carol Dweck

- **Measure of Imposter Phenomenon**

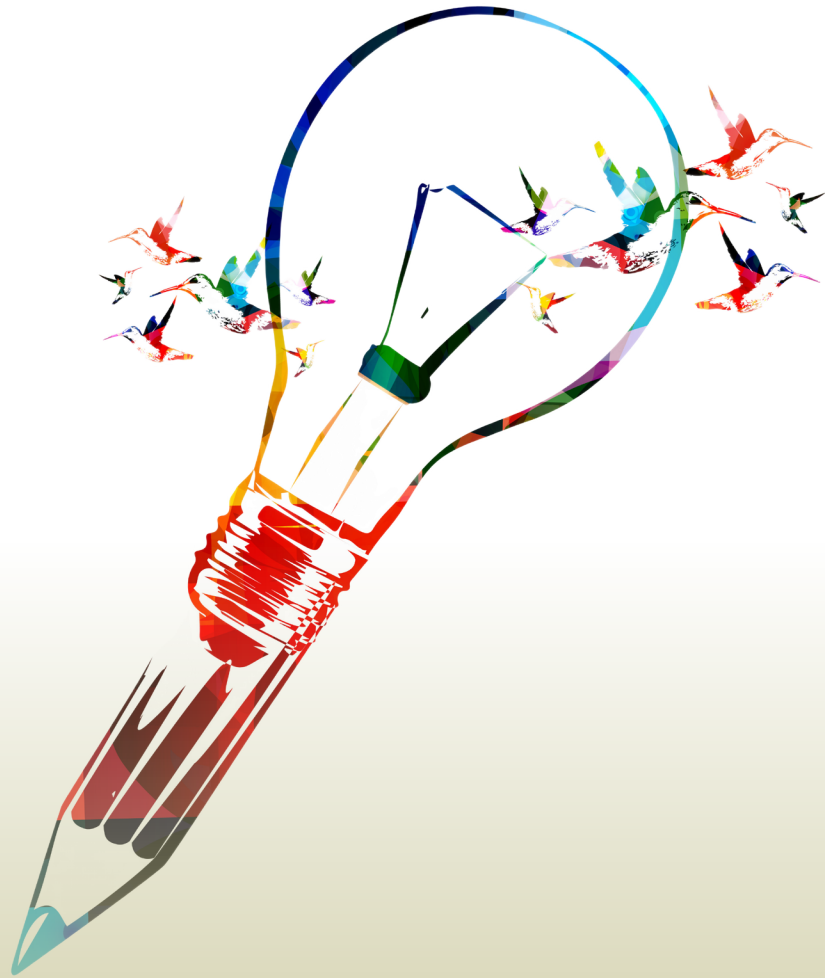
- Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale  
[https://paulineroseclance.com/impostor\\_phenomenon.html](https://paulineroseclance.com/impostor_phenomenon.html)

- **Podcasts**

- WorkLife with Adam Grant – Your Insecurities Aren't What You Think They Are
- ReThinking with Adam Grant – Reece Witherspoon on Turning Imposter Syndrome into Confidence







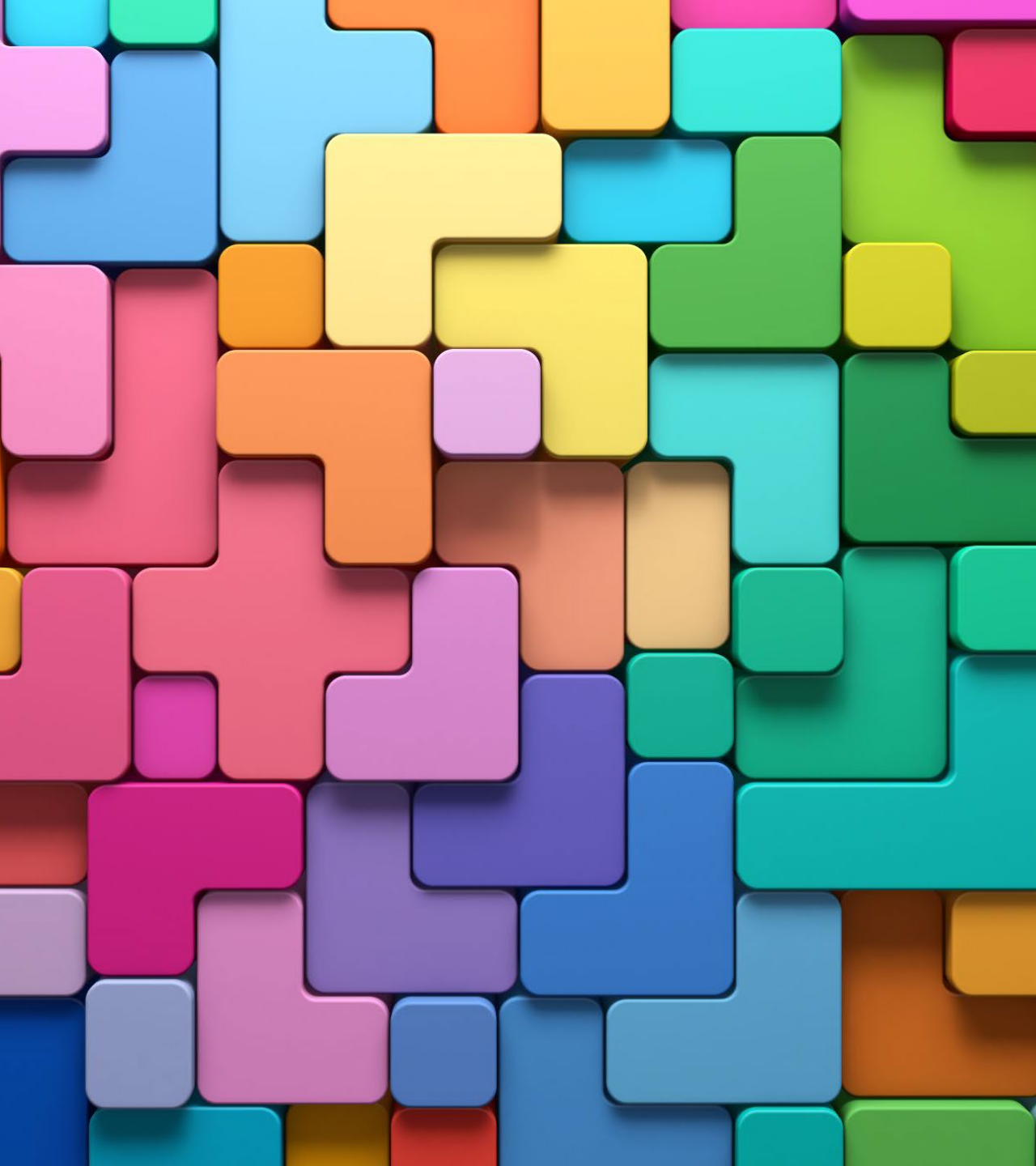
# REFLECTION IN THE LAW PROJECT (RiLP)

Evidence-based Resilience Training for  
Lawyers

A Research Program Testing the Effectiveness of a Systematic Self-Reflection Training Protocol to Build Resilience to Daily Stressors in Lawyers.

- Macquarie University – Performance and Expertise Research Centre
  - 2024: Testing the Self-Reflection Protocol in Students
  - 2025: Intervention Trial in Lawyers – mailing list available
  - 2026: Publication of Results
- **To be placed on the mailing list, please email:**  
[lucy.chapple@hdr.mq.edu.au](mailto:lucy.chapple@hdr.mq.edu.au)





QUESTIONS

“

When multiple people believe in you,  
it's probably time to believe them.

- Dr Adam Grant

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**actlaw**  
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ACT Law Society

Level 4, 1 Farrell Place, Canberra City ACT 2601

Phone 02 6274 0333 | [memberassist@actlawsociety.asn.au](mailto:memberassist@actlawsociety.asn.au)

**actlawsociety.asn.au**