



Keynote

Building Confidence to Foster Inclusive
and Collaborative Tech Communities

Sheena Yap Chan

Confidence isn't
about being the
loudest in the
room—it's about
trusting your
voice.



THE NEW ERA OF TECH LEADERSHIP

- Tech is evolving fast; leadership must evolve too.
- It's no longer just about coding or systems—it's about people.
- Confidence is a critical driver of innovation and adaptability.



WHY CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP MATTER

- ◆ **C++ powers the world**

From operating systems and real-time systems to aerospace, finance, and gaming—C++ is foundational to the modern digital world. But even the most sophisticated code can't run without the people behind it.

- ◆ **Code doesn't innovate—people do**

Yes, technical excellence is essential. But innovation comes from people who are willing to take risks, share ideas, and collaborate across differences. That kind of contribution only happens when people feel seen, safe, and supported.



WHY CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP MATTER

- ◆ **Confidence is the quiet engine of inclusive innovation**

When developers—especially those from underrepresented backgrounds—lack the confidence to speak up or contribute, entire communities lose out on brilliant ideas and solutions.

🌟 “*Talent is everywhere. Confidence is not. And that's the real gap we need to close.*” – Sheena Yap Chan



WHY CONFIDENCE & LEADERSHIP MATTER

Why it matters for C++ communities:

- Underrepresented voices often hold unseen solutions to longstanding challenges.
- Inclusive teams that actively build confidence outperform homogeneous ones in creativity and problem-solving.
- Bridging the confidence gap means opening the door to stronger collaboration, higher retention, and greater innovation—at both individual and community levels.



THE CONFIDENCE GAP IN TECH

💡 **It's not always about ability—it's about visibility and belief.**

In tech, we often assume that if someone isn't contributing, they lack the skill. But more often than not, they're battling an invisible barrier—a lack of confidence.

🔍 **Many developers from underrepresented groups hesitate to:**

- Share ideas publicly – for fear of judgment, being dismissed, or “not sounding smart enough”



THE CONFIDENCE GAP IN TECH

- Speak up in meetings or reviews – especially when they're the only woman, person of color, or junior team member in the room
- Contribute to open source – afraid their pull request will be picked apart or ignored
- Step into leadership roles – assuming they're not ready, or waiting for permission that never comes

These are not technical limitations.

This is not about potential.

👉 **This is a confidence issue.**



THE CONFIDENCE GAP IN TECH

🧠 What's at stake:

- Missed ideas – Brilliant solutions never shared out loud
- Underutilized talent – Highly skilled individuals sidelined by silence
- Stalled innovation – When only a few voices dominate, creativity suffers
- Low retention – Without confidence and belonging, people leave tech altogether



You can have the right people in the room—but if they don't feel confident enough to speak, you're still missing out.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CONFIDENCE IS CULTIVATED

When confidence rises, everything changes.

Confidence isn't just a personal trait—it's a collective advantage. When individuals feel empowered to use their voice, the entire tech ecosystem becomes more inclusive, resilient, and innovative.

Individuals speak up and lead

When someone feels confident, they're more likely to:

- Contribute bold ideas—even if they're not perfect yet
- Ask clarifying questions that others might be afraid to
- Take initiative and step into stretch roles or leadership
- Advocate for themselves and others

Confidence unlocks potential that's already there.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CONFIDENCE IS CULTIVATED

Collaboration strengthens

Confident individuals:

- Engage more in team discussions
- Offer constructive feedback without fear
- Trust their teammates and feel trusted in return

This creates a culture of mutual respect, not competition.



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CONFIDENCE IS CULTIVATED

Retention improves

People stay where they feel:

- Valued
- Visible
- Supported

When confidence and belonging are present, so is loyalty—especially for those from marginalized or underrepresented backgrounds.



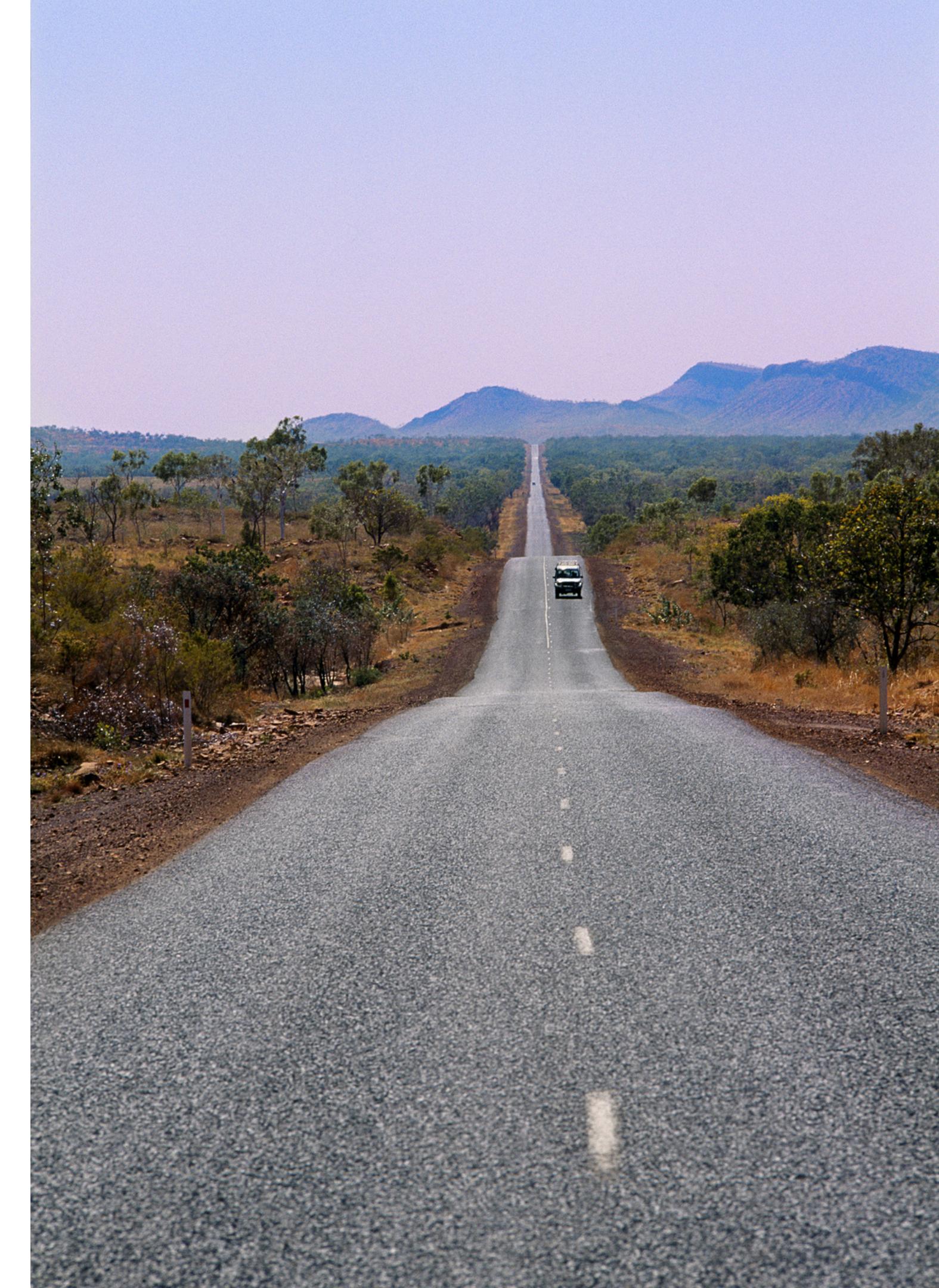
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CONFIDENCE IS CULTIVATED

The Confidence Chain Reaction:

Confidence → Inclusion → Collaboration → Innovation

This isn't a feel-good concept. It's a proven strategy for team success and organizational growth.

 *"Confidence is contagious. When one person rises, the whole team lifts."* – Sheena Yap Chan



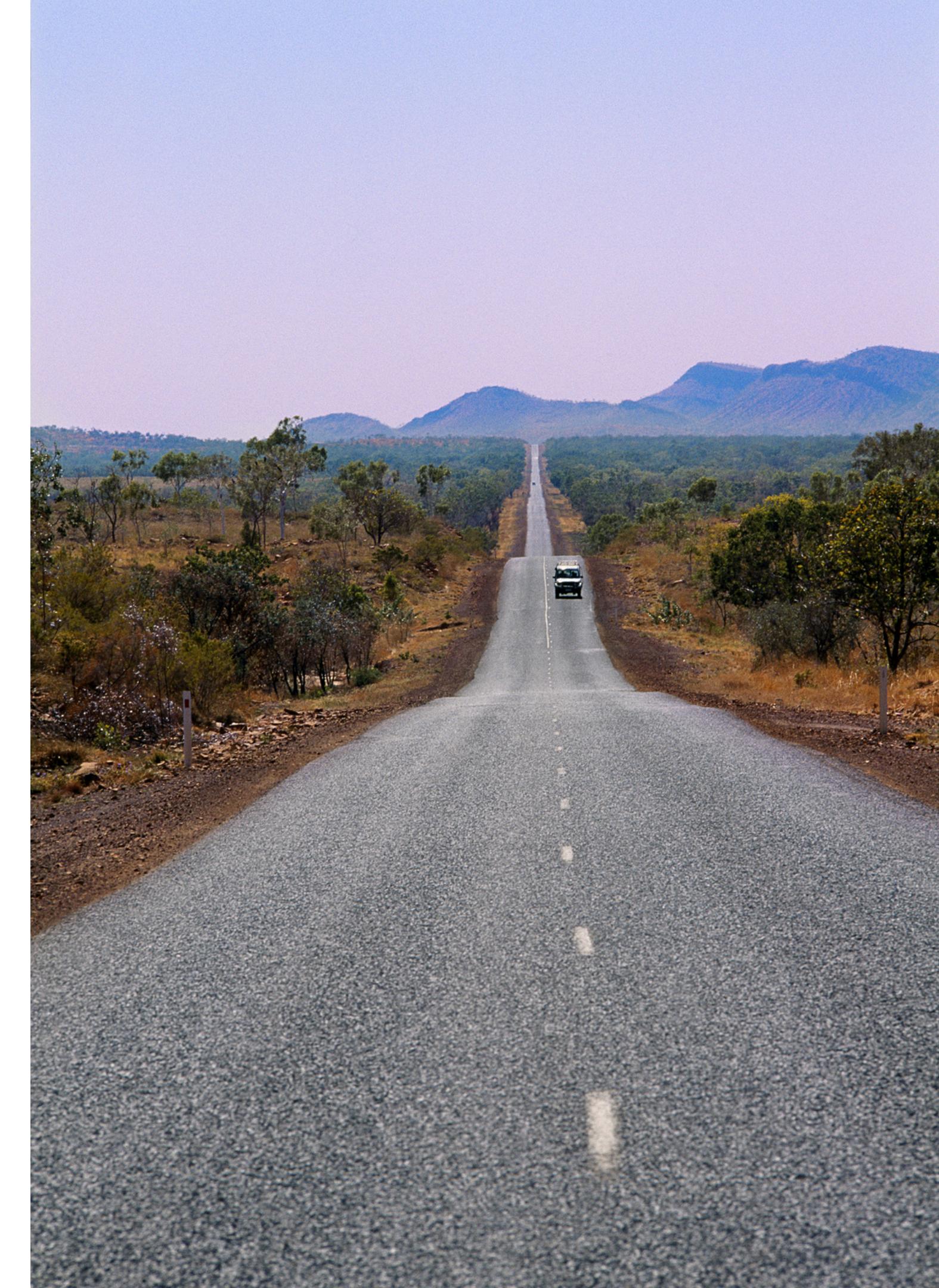
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN CONFIDENCE IS CULTIVATED

Innovation accelerates

When diverse voices contribute freely, innovation flourishes:

- New ideas emerge from different lived experiences
- Teams iterate faster with more input and fewer silos
- Failure is seen as a learning step, not a confidence killer

Confidence fuels creativity without fear.

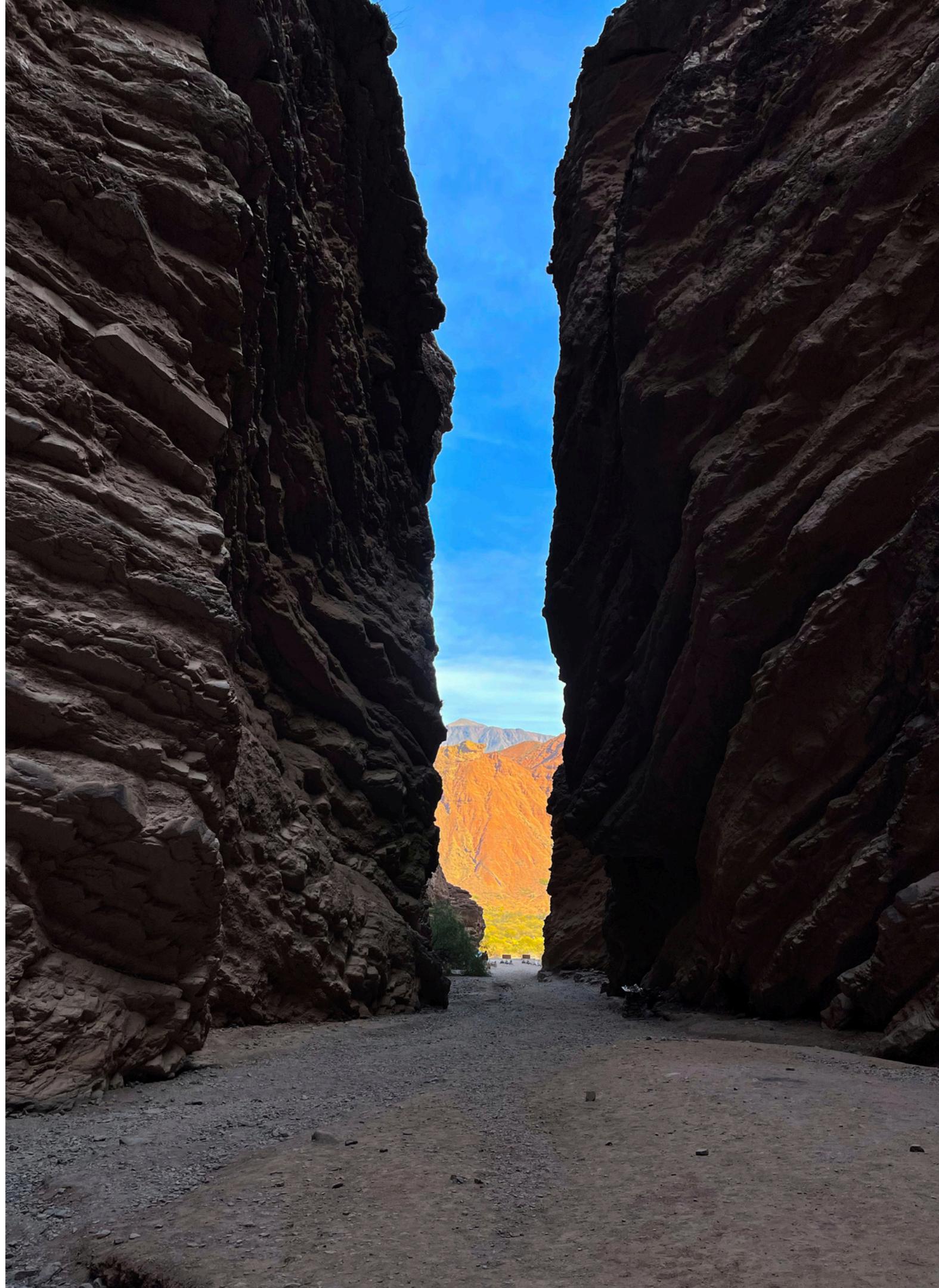


ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFIDENCE GAP

🚫 **Confidence isn't lacking because people are unqualified.**

It's lacking because the environment often signals:
“You don’t belong here.”

To bridge the confidence gap in tech communities—especially in C++ development—we must first understand why it exists.



ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFIDENCE GAP

🔍 1. Imposter Syndrome

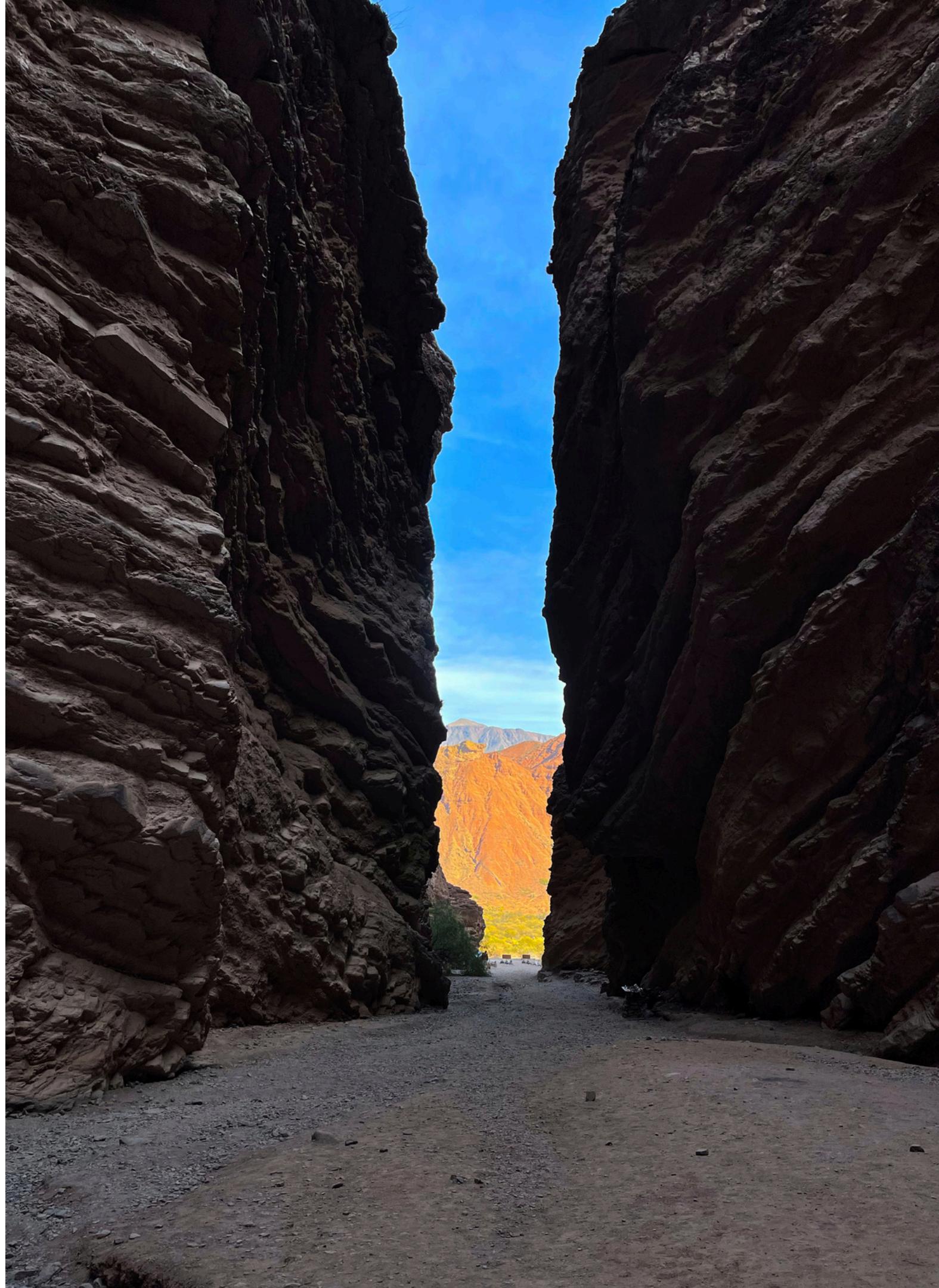
Even highly capable developers often doubt their worth.

They may think:

- “I don’t know enough.”
- “I just got lucky.”
- “Eventually, someone will realize I don’t belong.”

This inner narrative leads to hesitation, burnout, and invisibility—even when skills and results say otherwise.

… “*I’ve seen brilliant minds stay silent in rooms they were more than qualified to lead.*” – Sheena Yap Chan



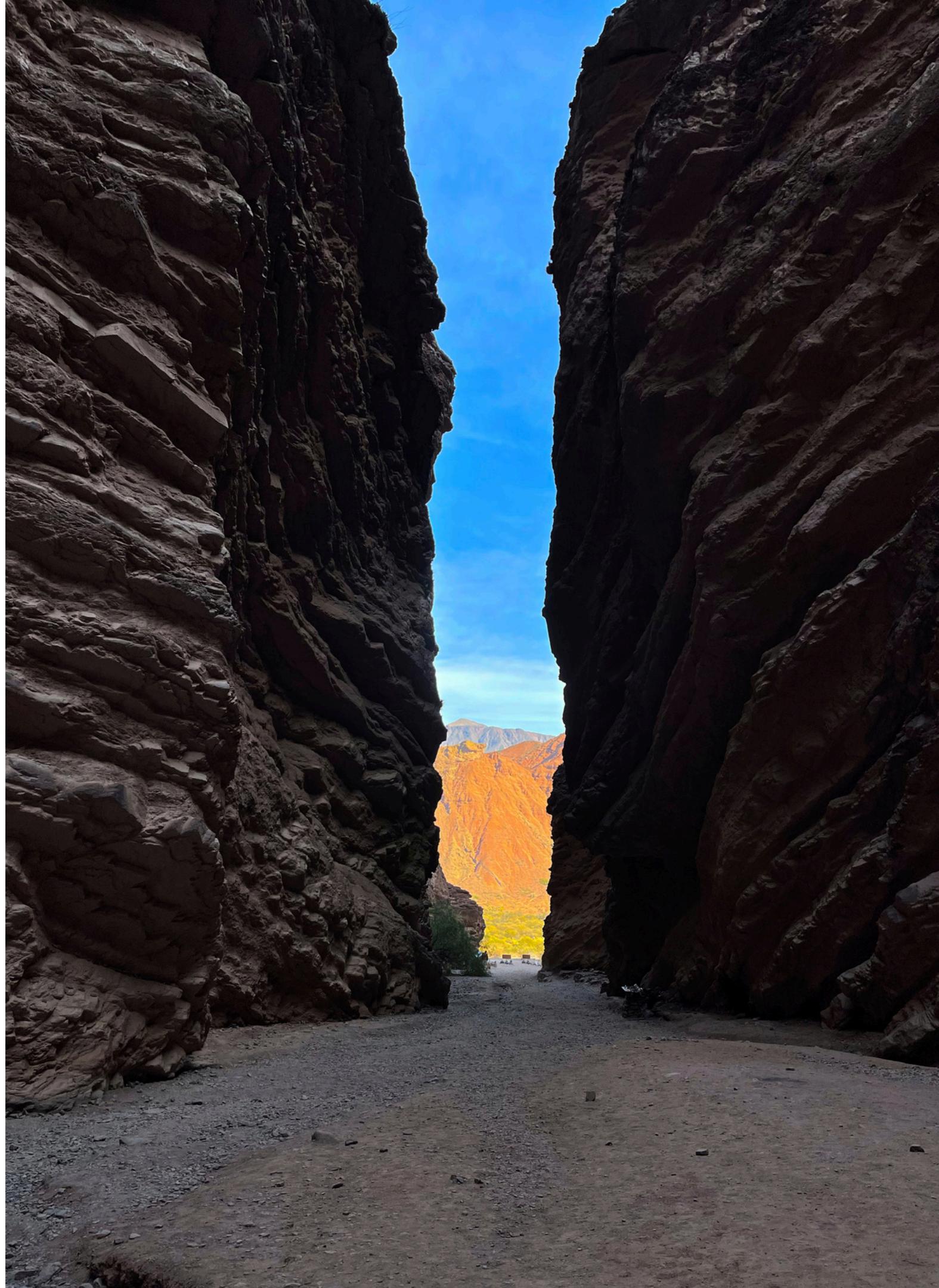
ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFIDENCE GAP

🔍 2. Lack of Representation

You can't be what you don't see.

When leadership teams, speaker panels, or code maintainers don't reflect diverse identities, it sends a subtle message: "There's no place for you here."

This absence makes it harder for others to believe they belong—or to envision themselves stepping up.



ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFIDENCE GAP

🔍 3. Fear of Making Mistakes Publicly

In tech, there's often pressure to be perfect.

Mistakes can feel like public failures, especially for those from marginalized backgrounds who already feel scrutinized.

The result?

- Less participation
- Fewer questions asked
- Ideas kept to themselves

Confidence withers in environments where perfection is prioritized over progress.



ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFIDENCE GAP

🔍 4. Cultural or Gender-Based Biases

Many cultures teach humility over visibility.

Many women are socialized to defer, not lead.

Biases—both conscious and unconscious—often reinforce these patterns, labeling confident individuals as “aggressive,” “unqualified,” or “too emotional.”

These experiences slowly chip away at self-belief, even in the most capable professionals.



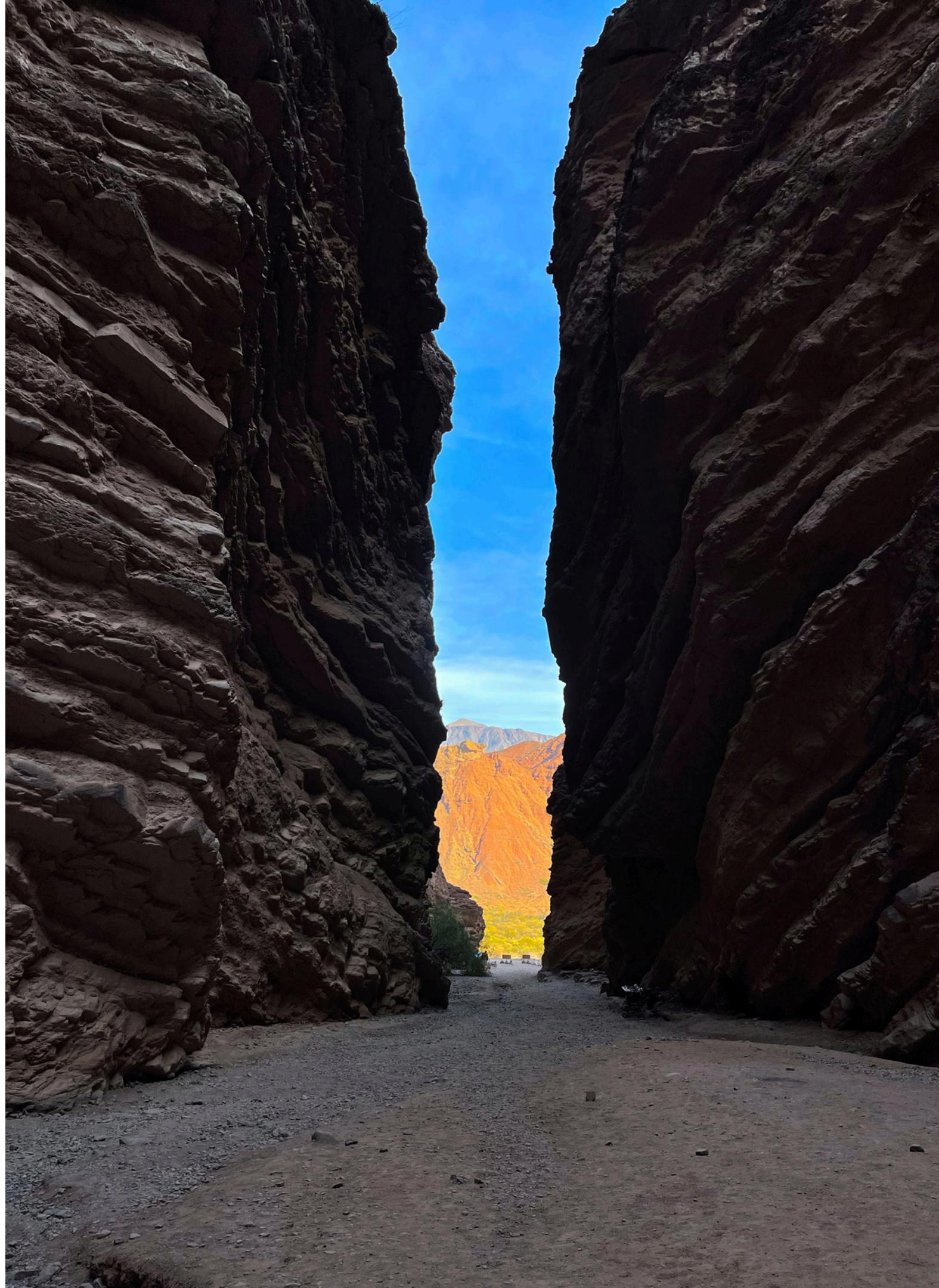
ROOT CAUSES OF THE CONFIDENCE GAP

🔍 5. Limited Mentorship or Visibility

Without guidance or encouragement, it's easy to stall.

- No one to validate your ideas
- No one to open doors
- No one to model what “leadership” looks like for you

Mentorship is more than support—it’s a mirror that reflects possibility and potential.



The confidence gap doesn't come from a lack of ability. It comes from a lack of affirmation, access, and opportunity.



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Every confidence journey starts somewhere—mine began in kindergarten.

 **I failed kindergarten... for coloring outside the lines.**

That moment may seem small, but it planted a deep message:

"You don't fit in. You're doing it wrong."

I didn't just learn to color differently—I learned to shrink myself to meet other people's expectations.



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

➊ I grew up believing I wasn't enough.

- Not smart enough
- Not confident enough
- Not worthy enough to lead or be seen

Like many girls—especially those from Asian backgrounds—I internalized the idea that staying small, quiet, and obedient was the safest way to survive.

But safety isn't the same as success. And silence doesn't serve our fullest potential.



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

🔥 I turned adversity into a mission.

After years of doubting myself, I realized:

If I was struggling with confidence, I wasn't the only one.

I made it my mission to:

- Speak up so others feel safe doing the same
- Share my story to normalize imperfection
- Amplify voices that don't always get heard



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Now, I empower thousands globally

Through:

- My podcast The Tao of Self-Confidence (1.3M+ downloads)
- Books like Bridging the Confidence Gap
- Keynotes and workshops that spark action

I've helped women, leaders, and tech teams transform how they see themselves—because confidence is a skill that can be taught and grown.

And now, that mission has grown into a movement.

What started as a personal journey has become a global call to action—

To help others not only build confidence, but to step into visibility, leadership, and true belonging.



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

 **Helping Women—and Teams—Be Seen, Heard, and Respected.**

After years of navigating confidence challenges in my own life, I realized something deeper:

🔑 Confidence and visibility are not just personal—they are systemic.

And when we lack visibility, we start to question our value.

That's why I created the **Confidence Through Visibility** movement—to shift how we build confidence not only in ourselves, but within our workplaces, industries, and communities.



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

◆ What is the Movement?

Confidence Through Visibility is a global initiative that empowers individuals—especially women and underrepresented voices—to:

- Step into leadership
- Own their stories and ideas
- Be recognized, respected, and seen

It's a movement rooted in the belief that representation matters, and that visibility is not a reward for success—it's a requirement to unlock it.



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

◆ The **VISIBLE** Framework

A 7-part framework to help individuals and organizations foster confidence, leadership, and visibility from within.

V – Voice

I – Identity

S – Storytelling

I – Inclusion

B – Belonging

L – Leadership

E – Empowerment



FROM COLORING OUTSIDE THE LINES TO LEADING FROM THE FRONT

✨ This movement is not just about individual empowerment—

...it's about transforming systems, shifting workplace culture, and building communities where everyone is confident enough to lead, collaborate, and create change.

🎤 “When we make visibility a priority, confidence becomes a natural outcome.”



STRATEGY #1 – NORMALIZE CONFIDENCE BUILDING

💡 **Confidence isn't just a personal trait—it's a team competency.**

If we want inclusive, collaborative tech communities, we have to stop treating confidence like it's optional or individual. It must be built into the culture—intentionally, consistently, and collectively.

💡 **Make confidence a team competency**

- Just like you teach coding best practices or collaboration tools, you can teach confidence.
- Talk about it in retros, stand-ups, and 1:1s.
- Integrate it into onboarding and mentorship programs.

🗣 “We don’t rise to the level of our goals. We rise to the level of the support systems around us.”



STRATEGY #1 – NORMALIZE CONFIDENCE BUILDING

💬 Encourage growth mindsets

- Shift from a “prove yourself” culture to a “learn and grow” environment.
- Reframe mistakes as feedback, not failure.
- Highlight progress over perfection, especially for junior or marginalized developers.

💡 *Confidence grows when people feel safe to take risks without fear of judgment.*

🎯 Praise effort, not just outcomes

- Celebrate people for trying something new, not just shipping flawless code.
- Acknowledge those who step up, even if it’s messy.
- Give shoutouts for collaboration, curiosity, and courage.

This creates a culture where trying is valued as much as achieving.



STRATEGY #1 – NORMALIZE CONFIDENCE BUILDING

🛡 Create brave—not just safe—spaces

- A safe space says, “You won’t be judged.”
- A brave space says, “You’re encouraged to speak, question, challenge, and grow.”

Brave spaces allow room for real conversations, diverse perspectives, and confident contributions.

🔧 Practical Tools to Normalize Confidence

- **Peer recognition systems** (Slack kudos, team shoutouts, feedback Fridays)
- **Demo days or “show your work” sessions** to highlight contributions of all team members
- **Opt-in leadership moments** – Let people lead stand-ups, retros, or mini-initiatives based on interest and readiness, not rank

⟳ Over time, these micro-moments build a macro-culture of inclusion, visibility, and confidence.



STRATEGY #2 – AMPLIFY DIVERSE VOICES

🎤 “Give a mic to those who rarely get one.”

Inclusion doesn't stop at inviting someone into the room. It's about ensuring their voice is heard, valued, and amplified—especially when that voice reflects an experience or identity not often centered in tech spaces.

🔄 Rotate speakers in meetings

- Don't let the loudest or most senior voices dominate every stand-up or review.
- Make space for junior developers, introverts, or team members from underrepresented backgrounds to lead updates or share insights.
- Consider a rotating facilitation schedule—confidence builds through practice, not pressure.

📌 *When people are trusted to speak, they begin to trust their own voice.*



STRATEGY #2 – AMPLIFY DIVERSE VOICES

👉 Offer mentorship or ERG (Employee Resource Group) pathways

- Provide structured opportunities for peer and cross-level mentorship.
- Elevate ERG members by giving them visibility at town halls, conferences, or team briefings.
- Don't just form ERGs—fund and listen to them.

📣 Mentorship and ERGs aren't extracurricular—they're culture accelerators.

🏆 Celebrate wins publicly

- Acknowledge behind-the-scenes contributors, not just the "hero coder."
- Use Slack shoutouts, newsletters, or all-hands to spotlight different team members' strengths.
- Highlight how people contributed—not just what they built.

🎯 Confidence grows when people are seen in their excellence.



STRATEGY #2 – AMPLIFY DIVERSE VOICES

🌟 Acknowledge unique contributions

- Diversity brings different problem-solving styles, cultural perspectives, and communication approaches.
- Instead of expecting uniformity, celebrate what makes each person distinct.
- Recognize that being “different” isn’t a challenge—it’s a competitive advantage.

🗣️ “Diverse voices don’t just add color—they add clarity, creativity, and innovation.” – Sheena Yap Chan

💬 Pro Tip:

Use inclusive facilitation techniques like:

- Written feedback options for those who prefer time to reflect.
- Anonymous suggestion boxes
- “I’d love to hear from someone we haven’t heard yet” prompts



When you amplify voices, you don't just uplift individuals—you unlock the full potential of your team.



STRATEGY #3 – BUILD INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION RITUALS

 **Inclusion is built through rituals, not just policies.**

If we want to create confident, collaborative C++ teams, we must design everyday work habits—not just workshops—that ensure everyone can contribute meaningfully.

 **Use asynchronous (async) tools to reduce pressure**

- Not everyone thinks best on the spot—or feels safe speaking in real time.
- Tools like GitHub comments, Slack threads, Notion docs, or Loom videos allow people to reflect, process, and respond with intention.
- Async collaboration levels the playing field across time zones, neurodiversity, and cultural communication styles.

 *Confidence grows when people have space to think before they speak.*



STRATEGY #3 – BUILD INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION RITUALS

Encourage “idea parking lots” for quiet thinkers

- Not all great ideas show up in meetings. Create ongoing spaces—digital whiteboards, suggestion forms, team Trello boards—where ideas can be added at any time.
 - Review and act on submissions publicly, so contributors know their voice matters.
-  Visibility isn't always verbal. Let people lead in their own way.

Invite feedback in multiple formats

- Some people feel confident speaking up; others prefer to write or message privately.
- Offer a variety of channels: anonymous surveys, 1:1 check-ins, structured feedback sessions.
- Clarify that feedback is welcomed—and model how to receive it gracefully.

 Confidence is built in environments where feedback is a gift, not a threat.



STRATEGY #3 – BUILD INCLUSIVE COLLABORATION RITUALS

🔍 Hold inclusive code reviews

- Ensure reviews are constructive, respectful, and focused on code, not the person.
- Encourage senior engineers to mentor, not gatekeep.
- Use inclusive language, avoid jargon-heavy criticism, and spotlight strengths along with suggestions.

💡 Tip: Pair juniors with kind, communicative reviewers to build skill and confidence.

⌚ Equity in contribution = Equity in innovation

If only a few voices are heard, only a fraction of your team's genius is activated. When everyone has the tools and safety to collaborate fully, innovation doesn't just grow—it compounds.



Inclusion isn't
passive—it's an
active decision to
design teams
where every voice
has weight.



YOUR ROLE IN BRIDGING THE GAP

🔑 **Confidence-building is everyone's responsibility—regardless of title or level**

You don't have to be a manager, DEI lead, or HR executive to help close the confidence gap.

Every single one of us plays a role in shaping a culture where people feel empowered to speak, share, lead, and grow.

✓ **Encourage, mentor, and advocate**

- Be the person who notices when someone is holding back—and gently encourages them forward.
- Offer to mentor junior team members or those newer to the industry.
- Speak up for others in rooms they're not in—recommend them for projects, panels, or promotions.

👉 Advocacy is visibility. And visibility builds confidence.



YOUR ROLE IN BRIDGING THE GAP

Acknowledge confidence as a growth skill—not a personality trait

- Confidence isn't something you either have or don't. It can be nurtured like any other professional skill.
 - Normalize talking about it during 1:1s, retros, and career development plans.
 - Provide tools and training that help individuals build both competence and self-trust.
-  Confidence isn't loud—it's learned. And it's your job to help others learn it, too.



YOUR ROLE IN BRIDGING THE GAP

Design for inclusion, not just participation

- Don't just invite people to the table—make sure they're set up to thrive once they're there.
- Consider different learning styles, communication preferences, and cultural norms.
- Ask: "What barriers might prevent someone from participating fully—and how can we remove them?"

 True inclusion is proactive, not performative.



YOUR ROLE IN BRIDGING THE GAP

Lead by example—show vulnerability and courage

- Share your own moments of doubt or failure.
- Admit when you don't know something.
- Ask questions that invite other perspectives.
- Let others see you stretch and grow—that's how they'll believe they can, too.

 “When leaders show up with courage and humility, it gives everyone else permission to be human—and confident.” – Sheena Yap Chan



YOUR ROLE IN BRIDGING THE GAP

 **Small actions lead to systemic change.**

- One person creating space.
- One team prioritizing voice.
- One leader modeling visibility.

Together, we shift the culture—and close the gap.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

🎯 Let's bring it all together.

We've explored the impact of confidence on inclusion, collaboration, and innovation—especially in C++ and broader tech communities. Now, here are the core truths to walk away with:

✓ 1. The confidence gap is real—and solvable.

- Many brilliant developers are holding back—not because they lack the skill, but because they lack self-belief.
- This gap shows up in quiet meetings, uneven code reviews, missed leadership opportunities, and team disengagement.
- But here's the good news: Confidence isn't fixed. It can be taught, practiced, and nurtured—just like any other technical skill.

… “We can't afford to leave confidence to chance. It's time we build it on purpose.”



KEY TAKEAWAYS

✓ 2. Inclusive cultures require intentional confidence-building.

- Representation alone isn't enough.
- Inclusion without empowerment is just participation without voice.
- Companies that succeed don't just talk about inclusion—they design for it. They create systems, rituals, and feedback loops that lift people up and help them believe: I belong here. I can contribute. I can lead.

🎤 Every developer deserves the confidence to code—and the courage to speak.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

✓ 3. Confident individuals = collaborative, high-performing C++ teams

- Confidence fuels better communication, stronger collaboration, and more diverse contributions.
- It leads to higher retention, greater innovation, and a healthier team culture.
- In fast-paced development environments like C++, confident teams don't just build faster—they build better.

🧠 Confidence isn't a soft skill—it's a core driver of technical excellence and team success.



When we bridge
the confidence
gap, we don't just
uplift individuals—
we unlock the full
potential of our
communities.



FINAL TAKEAWAYS

🙌 Confidence fuels connection, creativity, and code.

💻 Let's create a C++ community where every voice matters.

CONNECT WITH SHEENA YAP CHAN
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