



*Performance Enhancement*

# Understanding an Individual's Learning Journeys

## Article - 10 min read



By the end of this article you will have some ideas to help understand the learning journey an individual takes when they are trying to develop a new set of knowledge, skills or behaviours.





## How will this help me?

It can improve your general awareness of how an individual is developing and guide you when making decisions about what best approach to adopt when someone is learning something new.

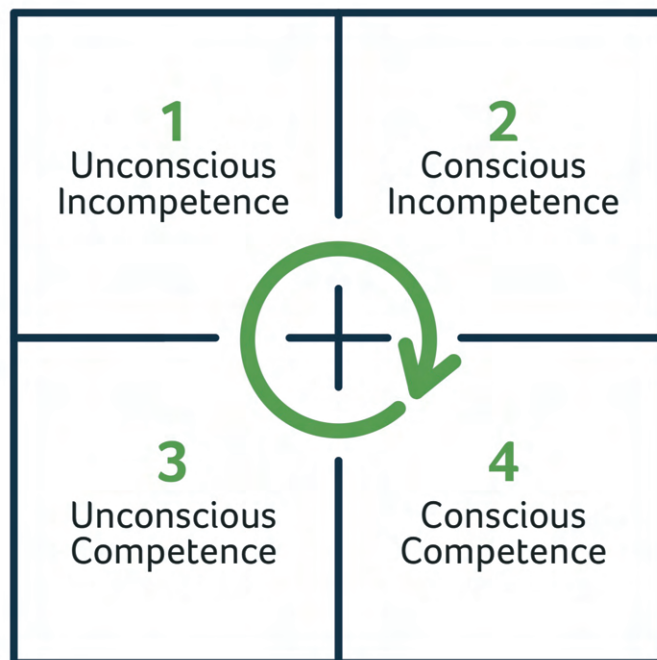
As a Manager & leader who contributes to the professional development of those we collaborate with it can be useful to understand the process of learning and how an individual traditionally embeds new knowledge, skills & behaviours.

One useful means of understanding this process is using the “Four Stages of Learning” framework...



## The Four Stages of Learning

It is sometimes referred to as “the Conscious Competence Model”, and looks like this:



Let’s look at the journey it illustrates...





## Stage One – Unconscious Incompetence

This is the point at which the learner does not possess the necessary knowledge or skill, nor are they aware of its existence or relevance to success in their role.



**Manager Tip:** You can influence this area as a Manager/Leader by encouraging increased self-awareness in your teams/colleagues and delivering feedback to the individual.

## Stage Two – Consciously Incompetent

The learner has now identified the knowledge or skill they require to be successful, and acknowledge its relevance to their role, however, are not yet competent employing the knowledge/skill when they need it.



**Manager Tip:** Consider how you support people around you when they are developing and practicing a new approach to a task. Discuss the plan to seize opportunities to grow & practice in the identified area and be supportive throughout.

## Stage Three – Conscious Competence

The individual has now developed the knowledge/skill to the point where they can employ it with some concentration & focus: they will have to actively think about it as they are doing it, it has not become “second nature”.



**Manager Tip:** Help the learner seek opportunities to utilise the knowledge/skill frequently. Promote honest discussion about the time it takes to complete a task and support the additional time required to master it through a more time-consuming period of practice.





## Stage Four – Unconscious Competence

The individual has now practiced & developed the knowledge/skill that they are able to employ it without the prior focus & concentration; it has become “second nature” or “muscle memory”.



**Manager Tip:** Acknowledge & praise the accomplishment of developing the knowledge/skill to this stage. Focus the praise on the hard work & commitment that the individual has demonstrated, and not just the end result.

## A Word of Warning...

In contemporary examination of the framework it has been argued that reaching Stage Four – Unconscious Competence can be detrimental to the ongoing success of a learner. When we reach Unconscious Competence, we are at risk of becoming complacent, neglect to re-assess our talents against current expectations, and become resistant to new & innovative ways of working as it threatens the comfort of being Unconsciously Competent.



As a Manager/Leader it is important to encourage a fifth stage, not often displayed on the framework, which is sometimes referred to as “Reflective Competence”. Ask questions that promote regular review of approaches & working practices to see whether there is an opportunity to re-visit the Conscious Competence stage again.

