

THE ADULT LEARNING CYCLE

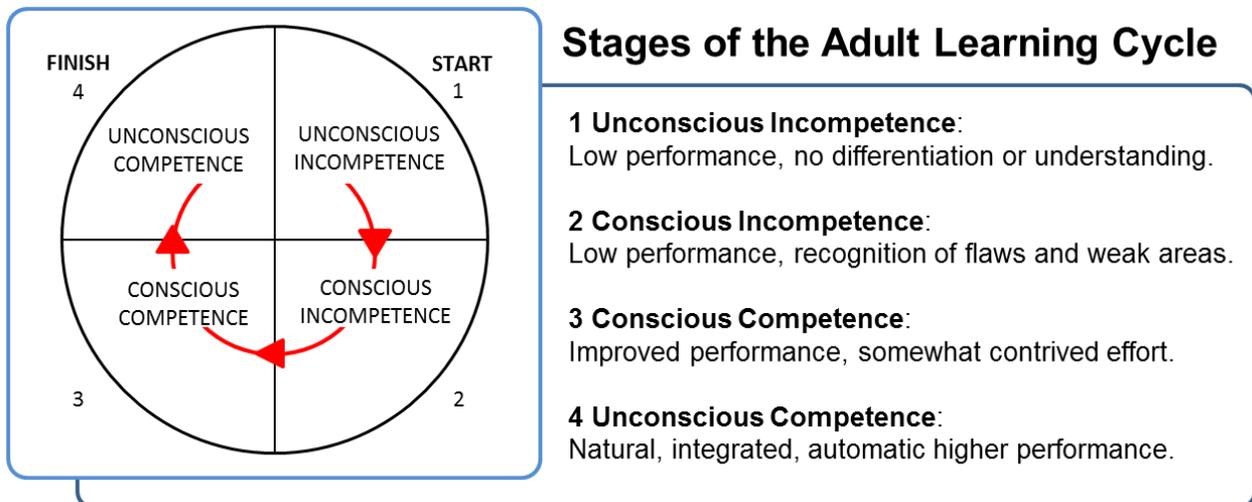
Successful organizations understand the process of how adults learn and use this information to develop their employees in areas such as leadership, process improvement, and organizational change. This tool explains the Adult Learning Cycle and how to benefit from understanding its four stages.

Before considering the cycle, it is important to understand these four concepts concerning the role that learning plays in the development of leaders and the success of organizations:

- Learning is a part of work and work involves learning.
- Learning is not only about getting answers from others. It is about translating our personal experiences into meaningful knowledge.
- Learning is a result from **intentional and planned** efforts to learn.
- The capability to learn comes from within yourself. While experts can teach you about the learning process, no one but you can learn your personal method of answering difficult problems.

By linking learning to individual and organizational success, you and others in your organization can use the use the concepts of the Adult Learning Cycle to facilitate an optimal learning atmosphere.

Now, consider the cycle:



Let's look at each phase of the cycle:

- 1. Unconscious Incompetence** – At this stage, you aren't aware of inappropriate or ineffective behaviors. For example, a trusted colleague tells you that you frequently talk down to others. This takes you completely by surprise; you had no idea you were doing this, nor were you aware of the impact that your behavior has had on others. By acknowledging this feedback and desiring a change, you begin the learning cycle.
- 2. Conscious Incompetence** – Your efforts at change are intentional, planned, and practiced as you begin to exercise a new set of skills. Using the previous example, perhaps you start listening attentively and rephrasing aloud what you hear others say. At first, you will likely stumble through these skills because your former behaviors are comfortable and familiar. However, just like playing a musical instrument, these actions form habits that become natural with practice.
- 3. Conscious Competence** – With continuous and deliberate effort, you begin to succeed at your new skills. You no longer stumble through applying these skills and your behaviors are noticeably better. You still have to focus on your actions but they are significantly more effective.
- 4. Unconscious Competence** – After continuous practice, you integrate this new behavior into your personality. The new skills that you've been practicing have now become a part of your routine. Not only are you proficient, but now you no longer have to think about the correct actions. If you once frequently talked down to others, you no longer do so; your improved behavior is natural.

As you consider your own development, use the above information to better understand not only how you learn but also how to support others in their learning. If a friend or colleague is at Stage 1 of an improvable behavior, you can facilitate his or her development by pointing out room for improvement. In this way, the cycle can lead both you and others to higher levels of individual growth.

LRI's expert consultants can help you develop effective leadership skills.
Please call us for a free consultation at 800-598-7662
or email info@leadingresources.com.