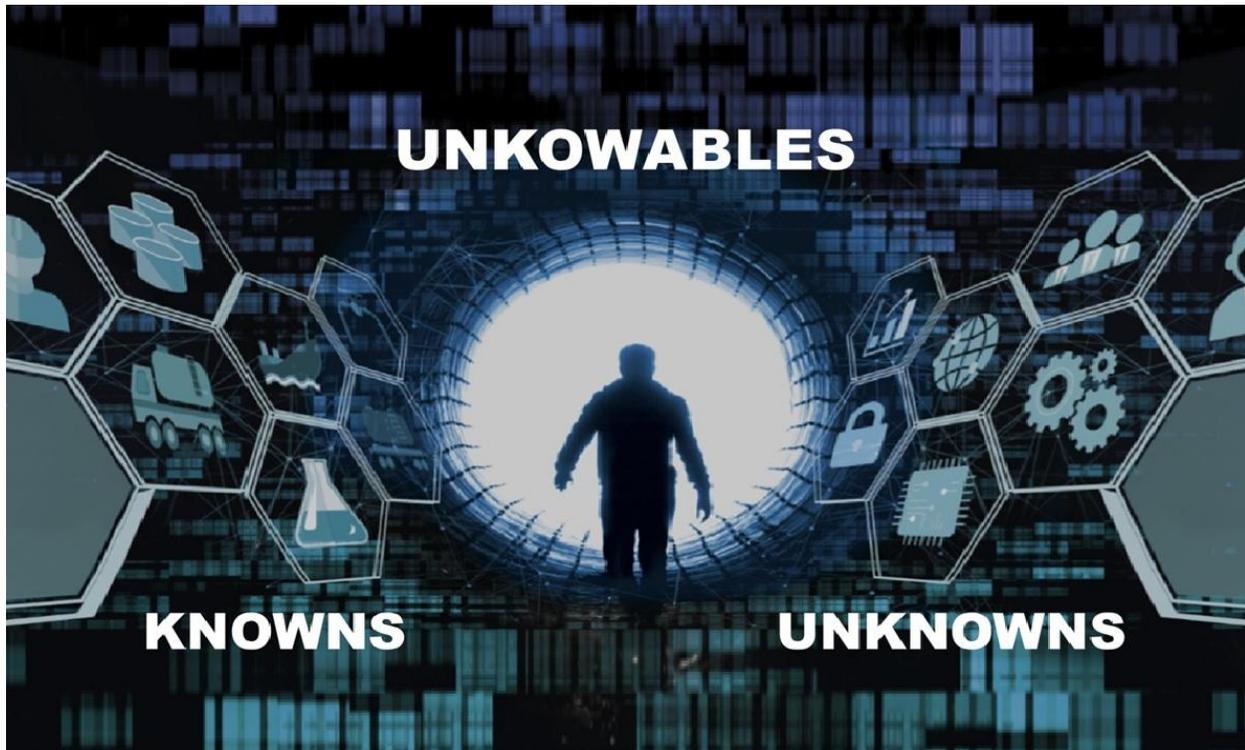


AWARENESS

How Leaders Learn, Decide, and Manage Risk *By: Nevin "Mustang" Taylor*



CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE

By: Nevin "Mustang" Taylor

TAB2-CHAPT 2a: <https://nebula.wsimg.com/06bbb40684d845efad96bddccf140070?AccessKeyId=A80584D51013D9CB2F46&disposition=0&alloworigin=1>

Leaders must be aware of the conscious competence model as a practical framework for improving judgment, learning, and decision-making in complex environments. The most significant leadership risk is not a lack of knowledge or not knowing what you don't know; it is awareness of that which is unknowable. Awareness is the gateway to competence and sound judgment.

The **conscious competence model** helps us understand *how people learn, make decisions, and manage risk*. It shows that the most significant danger is not what we don't know, but not realizing what we don't know, and most importantly, learning what we are unaware of. Once we recognize that gap, we become open to learning and better judgment. This awareness validates our **frame of reference** while it expands our **situational awareness (SA)** to empower us to improve decision quality.

<u>CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE MODEL</u>	COMPETENCE	INCOMPETENCE
CONSCIOUS	3 CONSCIOUS COMPETENCE	2 CONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE
UNCONSCIOUS	4 UNCONSCIOUS COMPETENCE	1 UNCONSCIOUS INCOMPETENCE

The Four Leadership States within the competent competence model are outlined below:

- 1. Unconscious Incompetence:** *Leaders are unaware of gaps in understanding. Decisions are made confidently but blindly. Risk is highest at this stage.*
- 2. Conscious Incompetence:** *Leaders recognize what they don't know. This awareness drives learning and reduces reckless action. This is the best stage for growth.*
- 3. Conscious Competence:** *Leaders can apply skills deliberately. They can detect errors and adapt. This is the ideal stage for mentoring and strategic development.*
- 4. Unconscious Competence:** *Skills become intuitive. Leaders operate effectively in uncertainty with speed and accuracy. True mastery includes humility and self-awareness.*

Reflection prevents blind spots, and open-mindedness reduces bias. Learning is continuous, not linear, but an exploration of options and opportunities.

Conclusion: Effective leaders manage awareness before they manage outcomes.

SELF AWARENESS:

Why Smart Leaders Still Make Bad Decisions, and How to Fix them. Most leadership failures don't stem from a lack of intelligence, experience, or data. They happen because decisions are made without full awareness of what is missing. The conscious competence model explains why. At the earliest stage, leaders don't know what they don't know. This is dangerous because confidence masks ignorance.

As awareness grows, leaders move into conscious incompetence, recognizing gaps and becoming motivated learners. This stage, uncomfortable as it is, produces the strongest growth. With practice, leaders reach the conscious competence level. They can perform reliably, but must still think carefully. This is where teaching, mentoring, and reflection sharpen judgment. Over time, expertise becomes intuitive. At unconscious competence, leaders act quickly and effectively, even in complexity.

But here's the paradox: the most dangerous leaders are not beginners; they are experts who stop reflecting. True leadership mastery requires ongoing self-awareness, humility, and openness to challenge. In volatile and ambiguous environments, it is not speed that wins—it is disciplined thinking. The best leaders don't just make decisions, they first manage their awareness.

IGNORANCE IS BLESSED:

The Most Dangerous Words a Leader Can Say: "I've Got This." Most failures don't come from bad intent. They come from decisions made with incomplete awareness. Leadership is not about how much you know. It's about how well you recognize what you don't know. To accomplish this, we must be aware that we all move through four stages:

- 1. First, we're unaware of our gaps**
- 2. Then, we recognize them**
- 3. Next, we apply skills deliberately**
- 4. Finally, mastery becomes instinctive**

Conclusion: The leaders who fail most dramatically are often the most confident—because confidence hides blind spots.

Ultimately, great leaders question assumptions, invite challenge, and slow down to consider all available options to make significant decisions. In a world of complexity, awareness is power, and humility is strategic strength. The best leaders don't ask, "What do I know?" They ask, "What might I be missing?"

