

Maslow's Conscious-Competence Model There are four states of consciousness and competence that you may pass through as you learn, as in the model below.

		<i>Competence</i>	
		Incompetent	Competent
<i>Consciousness</i>	Conscious	Conscious Incompetence (awareness)	Conscious Competence (progress)
	Unconscious	Unconscious incompetence (ignorance)	Unconscious Competence (success)

Unconscious incompetence

As an unconscious incompetent, you do not know what you do not know. You lack knowledge and skills in the area in question and are unaware of this lack.

In this state, where you can exist for a very long time, you are not as competent as one or more of:

- You think you are
- You actually could be
- Other, more competent people

In this state, you may be in one of two positions. Ignorance is bliss, as they say, and you may well be happily naive, not realizing that you are not competent.

You also may be in a faking state, where you believe you are competent, and either do not realize that you are in this state or are covering up your incompetence (in which state you may be in the next stage).

Conscious incompetence

As a conscious incompetent, you realize that you are not as expert as perhaps you thought you were or thought you could be.

The transition to this state from being unconsciously incompetent can be a shocking and sudden realization, for example when you meet others who are clearly more competent than you, or when a friend holds up a metaphorical mirror to your real ability.

You can also exist in this state for a long time, depending on factors such as your determination to learn and the real extent to which you accept your incompetence.

Conscious competence

Becoming consciously competent often takes a while, as you steadily learn about the new area, either through experience or more formal learning. This process can go in fits and starts as you learn, forget, plateau and start anew.

The more complex the new area and the less talent you have for it, the longer this will take. The good news is that many people have achieved remarkable feats of learning through sheer persistence.

Unconscious competence

Eventually you reach a point where you no longer have to think about what you are doing, and are competent without the significant effort that characterizes the state of conscious competence.

Discussion

Learning tacit skills such as carpentry takes time to become naturally competent. A master carpenter can thus saw at a right angle and plane flat without knowing particularly how they do it. All they know is that it feels right when they do.

Howell (1982) describes the four stages succinctly thus: "Unconscious incompetence - this is the stage where you are not even aware that you do not have a particular competence. Conscious incompetence - this is when you know that you want to learn how to do something but you are incompetent at doing it. Conscious competence - this is when you can achieve this particular task but you are very conscious about everything you do. Unconscious competence - this is when you finally master it and you do not even think about what you have such as when you have learned to ride a bike very successfully"

-- (Howell, 1982, p.29-33)