

# Some Key Aspects of Human Behavioural Psychology for Leadership



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**INFOVA**  
LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT

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### Foreword

This document is linked to others we have written on the subject of Leadership or Organizational Behaviour and Change, such as the Principles of High Performance and Inclusive Leadership.

These documents are primarily used to support face-to-face, online or blended learning courses or workshops, where these concepts are explored further and put into practice, so as to learn by doing.

Nevertheless, these Key Aspects of Human Behavioural Psychology for Leadership can be read on their own, as they apply to most aspects of human endeavour, not just for Leadership.

The purpose of this document is to summarise very briefly some of the basic concepts and models which can help people to understand a little more about themselves and become more aware and effective in their personal and professional interactions and communication with others.

*It is not by any means a comprehensive review of Human Behavioural Psychology and does not pretend to be anything more than a quick and easy guide to some relevant and practical aspects of human behavioural psychology for leadership and working in organisations, which will then be explored further in a training environment.*

## RELEVANT ASPECTS OF HUMAN BEHAVIOURAL PSYCHOLOGY

### SELF-AWARENESS



The first step in dealing with our own lives, is to understand more about ourselves.

Self-awareness is the ability to focus on yourself and how your actions, thoughts & perceptions, or emotions do or don't align with your internal values or standards.

If you're highly self-aware, you can objectively evaluate yourself, manage your emotions, align your behaviour with your values, and understand more accurately how others perceive you.

Importantly, self-awareness at its most basic level, gives us choice.

It gives us a choice to change our attitude to what we are experiencing. If I behave in a certain way: for example, if I always feel anger when something specific happens, then I am reacting in a subconscious and habitual way. Most of the time, I simply react to the specific "happening" or trigger, without realising it.

If I become aware of this "trigger", I can now choose to do something about it. Before, I simply reacted to it. It was not a conscious choice.

Once I have a conscious choice, I am responsible.

Literally, as is the Latin root of the word, I am able to respond (respons-ability). How I respond is only up to me (remember, not responding, is a response and, also a choice).

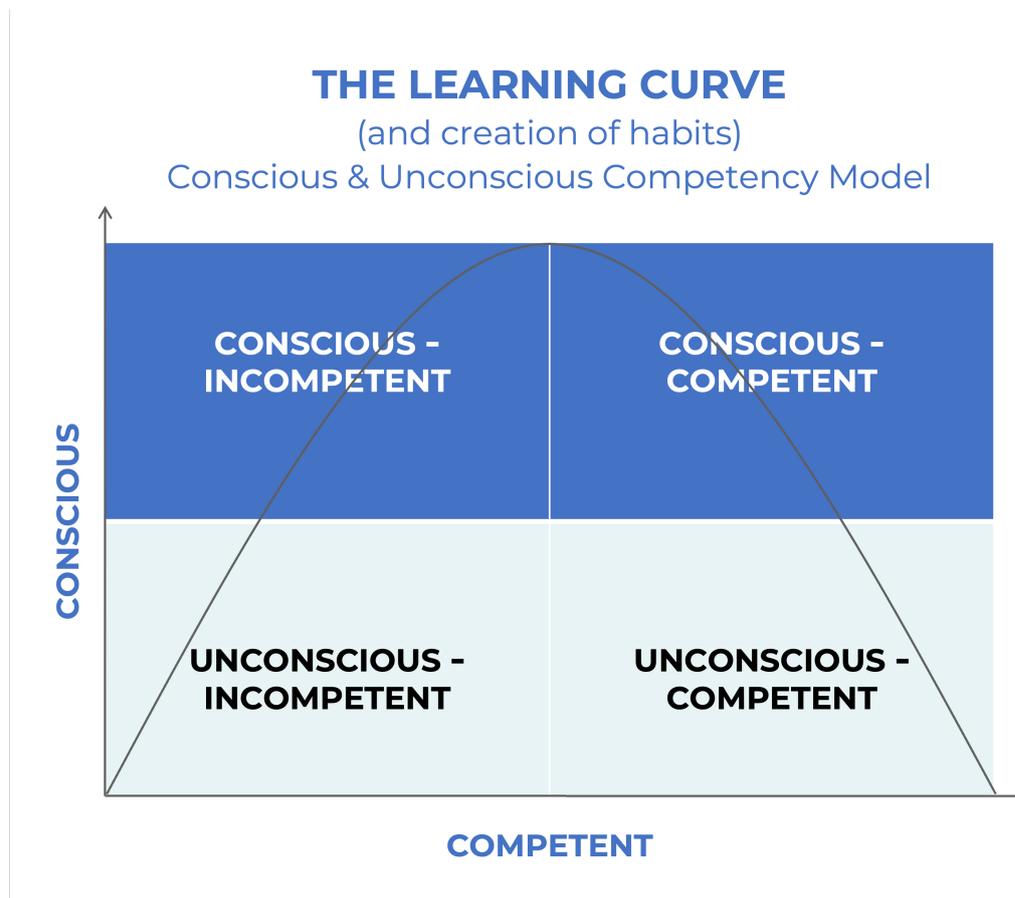
To a large extent, therefore, we can consider choice and responsibility as the basis of freedom. (The opposite of freedom is not being able to choose, nor being responsible for one's own life. The opposite of freedom is imprisonment, enslavement or any other form of restriction, whether it be by others, or by our own beliefs and habits).

*If you are interested in evaluating your level of self-awareness, you can do a free quick online "Self-Awareness" Test (only available in English) at the following INLP website link:*

<https://inlpcenter.org/self-awareness-test/>

## THE LEARNING CURVE

How we learn and create habits: the (un)conscious-(in)competence model



### CONSCIOUS (IN)COMPETENCIES:

- those things we know we know how to do, and
- those things we know we do not know how to do

### UNCONSCIOUS (IN)COMPETENCIES:

- those things we do not know we can, or
- cannot do.

The first step is to find out what they are (hence the importance of effective communication, and in particular, the giving, receiving and asking for feedback).

In the process of identifying one's personal & professional (in)competencies, the first step is to accept one's own limitations, as well as possibilities.

**The key is usually in adopting a positive attitude and a willingness to learn about oneself!**

The process of learning and the process of creating a habit, are essentially the same.

- This process has 4 stages:
1. **Unconscious / incompetent,**
  2. **Conscious / incompetent,**
  3. **Conscious / competent,**
  4. **Unconscious / competent.**

As an example of how this works, think back to the process you went through in order to learn to ride a bicycle or a drive a car.

1. **Unconscious incompetence** was when you are neither aware of what a bicycle is for, let alone how to use one. Probably when you were a kid, one day you saw other kids riding bikes. You now know what they are for, but not how to use them. **You are aware. You now have a choice.**
2. **The transition from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence is** bridged by desire. In other words, when you saw the other kids riding their bikes and having fun, you may have thought that you would like to do that too. You wanted to learn how to ride.  
You are now **consciously incompetent**. In other words, you know what the bike is for, you want to ride it, but you do not know how.
3. **The transition from conscious incompetence to conscious competence is** where you first begin to learn. In other words, it is the beginning of the action phase. **The key** to pass from one phase to the other is that your desire to learn (in this case to ride the bicycle) is greater than the fear of learning. In other words, if you fall off and hurt yourself (which you inevitably will), the desire to keep trying must be greater than the fear of pain, otherwise, you will give up and never learn. (This is also known as getting out of your comfort zone).  
Being **consciously competent** means you now know how to ride the bicycle or drive the car sufficiently well to survive. However, it is not yet a skill which comes naturally, or which does not incur a high level of stress. You still need to **think consciously** about what you're doing. (A good analogy for this is when you took your car driving test. Unless you had been brought up driving on a farm since you were a child, the likelihood is that, when you took your test, you were competent enough to drive, but you were very nervous, anxious or

stressed. You had to *think* about all the different aspects of driving and had to make conscious decisions there and then).

4. **The transition from conscious competence to unconscious competence** is difficult to pin-point, but is achieved with practice, practice, practice. As you repeat the same actions, movements or disciplines, the neuro-connections in the brain strengthen, to the point where you no longer have to “think” in order to perform...

**You are now unconsciously competent.** Learning has taken place, and you have effectively created a “habit”. (You are now back in your comfort zone, only this time your comfort zone is larger than it was before).

It is important to note here that just because you have learned or created a habit (an unconscious competence), it does not mean that the learning or the habit is a good or useful one. Practise does NOT make “perfect”, only **good** practise makes “perfect”.

In other words, some of the things we have learned or habits we have developed over time, help us achieve what we want. Others, however, do quite the opposite, and get in the way of achieving what we want.

***The key comes back to self-awareness.***

*In order to develop and improve, we need to know which of our learnings and habits help us and which ones do not (any longer). Since these habits are “unconscious”, we need to become aware of them before we can change them. In order to change them we will need to “unlearn” them and substitute them with new more effective ones.*

*The process of unlearning and a creating a new learning or habit in its place is often not an easy process, as one’s automatic response is to repeat the unconscious competence. It is the same as an addiction, and therefore requires a conscious effort to change one’s behaviour.*

*As a rule of thumb, it requires approximately 30-40 days of a new daily practice to “break” the old habit (or addiction).*

*In order to convert the new practice into a habit (or unconscious competence) it may require substantially more time of regular practice.*

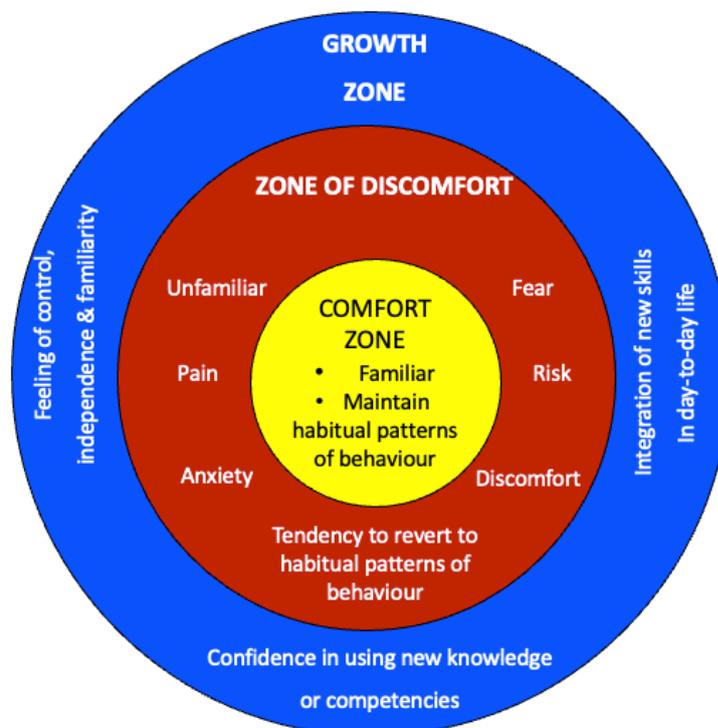
## LEARNING & COMFORT ZONES

The zones of comfort, discomfort and learning/growth are key concepts in any process of learning, development or transformation. These are some of the keys:

1. You can't learn what you have already learned.
2. New learning is outside your comfort zone.
3. To learn and reach your objectives, you must go beyond your limit of comfort.
4. There will be certain costs attached to breaking / surpassing your comfort zone, to learn and grow. The principal costs include:
  - Fears: fear of failure, fear of non-recognition / reward, fear of inadequacy.
  - Anxiety, nervousness, and lack of tranquillity
  - Possible physical discomfort (Somatisation: involuntary transformation of psychological problems into organic symptoms).

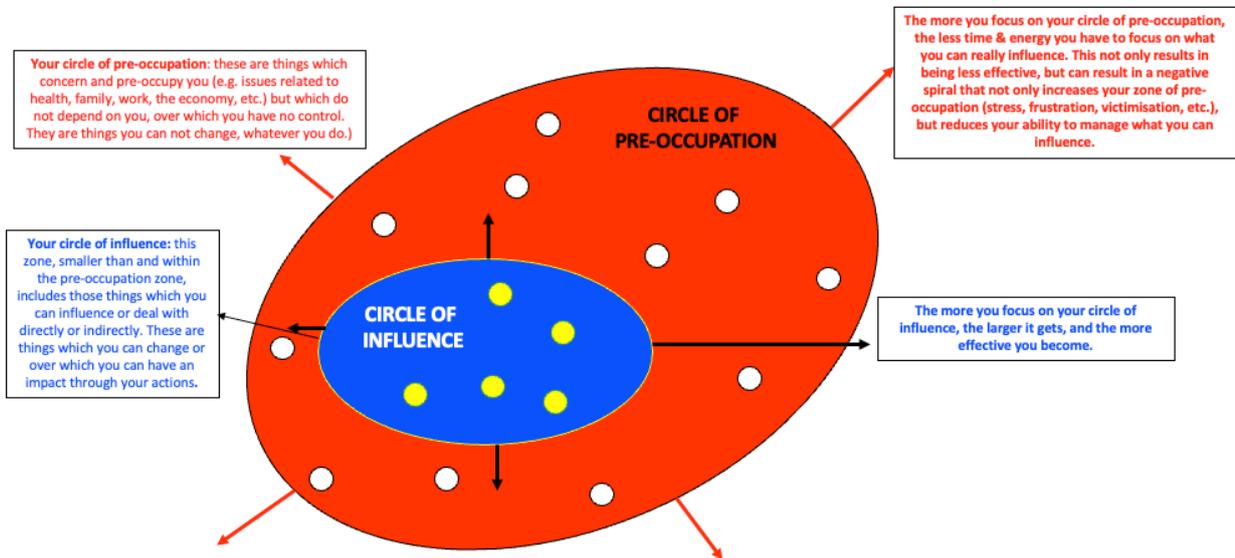
During the process of moving out of your comfort zone, it is key that you respond effectively to typical trick questions like...

- Who told me to do this...?
- Why do I need this?
- What's the point of making all this effort if I was fine where I was before?



*"The only way of knowing the limits of the possible, is by going beyond them, towards the impossible." (Bruce Barton)*

## CIRCLES OF INFLUENCE & PRE-OCCUPATION



If you focus your energy (e.g. through complaint or anxiety) on things that you have no control over, you will spend less time focussing on those things you can influence or control.

The more you do this, the less confident you become in your ability to resolve problems which you do have control or influence over. It becomes a negative spiral.

It is your “responsibility” to focus on those things which you can influence: this is where you can be effective and make a difference.

When you succeed in focusing on your circle of influence, your circle of influence will grow, which will mean that you will increase your ability to influence things which had hitherto been in your zone of pre-occupation. This becomes a virtuous spiral.

Proactive versus reactive behaviours can be explained by the degree to which a person focuses more in one circle than the other (Proactive – circle of Influence, Reactive - circle of Pre-occupation).

## THE POWER OF BELIEFS



### **Dictionary definition of “Belief”:**

- Something believed; an opinion or conviction: a belief that the earth is flat.
- Confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof.

### **Our definition:**

- A belief is a subjective psychological state in which a person considers as “true” a specific intellectual concept or premise. Usually, this belief is held in the absence of critical analysis or rationale arguments. In other words, a belief is the opposite of knowledge.
- The sources of a belief (with or without an empirical base) can be external (when they originate from explanations given by others in order to understand certain phenomena), or internal (when they originate from personal thoughts or convictions).
- Beliefs are neither good nor bad: they perform useful & necessary functions (individually and collectively) in the process of decision-making and establishing relationships. Problems arise when we forget that beliefs are by nature hypothetical, and when we use our beliefs as distorting filters of our perception, and when they become so rooted in our psyche that we become prisoners of our beliefs.
- In summary, beliefs are definitions which build realities.

### **Dictionary definition of “Paradigm”:**

A set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline.

### **Our definition:**

- A paradigm is a belief which serves as a framework or reference by which we perceive, understand, interpret and interact with the world around us. It includes the sum of scientific knowledge which governs a particular era, as

well as patterns or ways people have of thinking and feeling in a particular culture, geography or historical period.

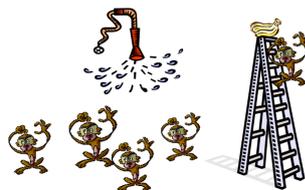
- A paradigm therefore determines a certain predisposition towards certain types of reactions, behaviours and “truths”, based on past experiences.
- It also conditions our opinions, the development of our beliefs and, in the end, our self-knowledge.
- **Beliefs & paradigms result in Feelings which result in Actions which result in consequences.**
- No change in behaviour can be sustained without a change in beliefs

As an example of the power of beliefs, here is one of many experiments done to observe behaviours.

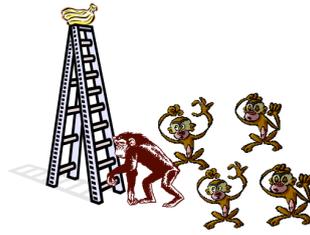
1. A group of scientists enclosed 5 apes in a cage. In the centre of the cage, they placed a stepladder, on top of which they left a bunch of bananas.



2. Each time an ape climbed the ladder to get the bananas, the scientists would hose down the remaining apes on the ground with cold water.



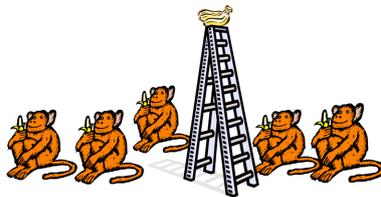
3. After a while, whenever an ape tried to climb the ladder, the others would hit him.
4. After a while longer, none of the apes would attempt to climb the ladder, despite the temptation of the bananas.
5. At this point, the scientists substituted one of the apes. The first thing this new ape did was to climb the ladder but was very swiftly brought down by the others who administered him a severe beating. After several beatings, the newcomer desisted from climbing the ladder, although he never knew the reason why.



6. A second ape was substituted, and the same thing occurred. The first substitute was amongst the most enthusiastic in beating the newcomer. A third ape was substituted, and again the others beat up the newcomer. The fourth, and finally the fifth of the veterans were also substituted.



7. There was now a group of 5 apes, who despite never having had cold water thrown at them, continued to beat up any ape who tried to reach the bananas.
8. If it had been possible to ask any of them why they beat any ape who tried to climb the ladder, the answer would surely have been: "No idea! It's just the way we do things around here!"  
Are you familiar with this sort of reasoning?



*"Two things are infinite:  
the universe and human stupidity;  
and I'm not sure about the universe.  
Albert Einstein*

## **BELIEVE – FEEL – ACT MODEL**

For practical purposes we can briefly explore the basis of human behaviour, by using a simple model call the **“Believe-Feel-Act” model**.

**This model is a reformulation of the Albert Ellis ABC model:**

**A** – *Activating Event (Internal or External).*

**B** – *Belief System (rational or irrational).*

**C** – *Consequence (consequence or reaction to A: whether emotional, cognitive or conductive).*

*It is not the circumstances (A) which determine our conduct or feeling (C), but rather our interpretation of them, after the filter through which each one of us perceives our life (B).*

In other words,

1. Our beliefs and thoughts influence the way in which we perceive, evaluate or interpret any given situation. We tend to apply a value of absolute truth to these beliefs, which then provoke a series of positive or negative emotions, which in turn determine our actions.
2. This psychological process is also clearly observable in organizations.
3. Professionals and employees, who despite knowing that there are more effective ways of working, continue to behave in the same ineffective ways, often through inertia, simply because that is the way things have been done in the past.
4. These beliefs, based on judgements, make up what we call thought models.
5. Judgements are a particular type of affirmation, normally arrived at through consensus, which were established in the past, are re-made in the present, and which allow or prevent possibilities for the future.
6. Thought models are deeply rooted suppositions, generalizations and images which influence the way in which we perceive reality and intervene or act in the world around us. More often than not, we are not even conscious of them, nor of their effect on our behaviour. (Peter Senge)
7. People do not always behave in line with their objectives or in congruence with what they actually want. However, people *always* behave consistently and in line with their belief systems.

*“It is easier to disintegrate an atom than a preconceived idea.”*

**Albert Einstein**

There are basically 3 types of approaches to the creation, consolidation and change of beliefs and behaviours:

### **1st Level: Behaviours**

Largely through conditioning and punishment-reward methods. (Based on school of “conductive” psychology).

### **2nd Level: Review and identification of beliefs:**

Which ones help our development, and which do not. To be more flexible with our beliefs, we need to check whether the image we project of ourselves is congruent with what we really want to be.

### **3rd Level: Assimilation / internalization of new flexible belief systems, and the modification of those behaviours which are ineffective.**

*"We can't always influence what others may say or do to us – but we CAN influence how we react TO it!"*

*"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."*

(Viktor Frankl – In Search of Meaning)

**In conclusion, understanding the power of beliefs is fundamental, not only to managing one's life and relationships in general, but to managing and resolving conflicts.**

The “Believe – Feel – Act” model basically helps us to remember that

1. Our beliefs impact how we feel and think, and our feelings and thoughts impact our actions.
2. We cannot change our feelings or thoughts in the moment: they are what they are. They are largely the result of our beliefs and perceptions.
3. We can, however, change our beliefs and our actions.
4. Changing our actions can be done through changing our beliefs, but also by changing our behaviours. In other words, through the repeated practise and discipline of repeated behaviours or actions (which become habits!).
5. Changing our beliefs is not only possible, but desirable, if and when those beliefs get in the way of what we want (e.g., happiness, success, peace, money, etc.). However, the process is not always easy or straightforward. First, we need to become aware of them and identify them, which often requires time, effort, and / or a process and help. Secondly, to change them, we need to change them for new beliefs which align with our deepest values and desires. This too is a process which takes time and effort but can be accelerated with the help of someone equipped to do so (e.g., a coach, therapist, psychologist, teacher, etc.).