Lead the Change

Action Learning Manual

Name: ....

Organisation: ....

Lead the Change

Action Learning in the Lead the Change Programme

The aims of the **Lead the Change** programme are to:

Develop innovative approaches to supporting community and social entrepreneurs, and to learn and share what works.

What we are seeking to achieve

Action Learning will provide an opportunity to explore in depth the opportunities and challenges raised from working in this way and will capture key lessons as the programme progresses; providing feedback and learning in real time.

This manual aims to provide information about the approach taken with **Action Learning** within the Lead the Change programme. It includes some background information about **Action Learning**, information as to how each of the sets was formed, details of the theoretical models used to underpin the process and step by step details of how an action learning set will run.

Lead The Change Peer Learning Network approaches

- Focusing on partners, learning, progress and journeys
- Light to touch facilitation: partners needs and agendas at the forefront of the network, its content and how it works
- Networking opportunities intrinsic to every event
- Collaborative/co-creation/contributory model
- Needs/offers based skill exchanges
- Ideas and solutions generated by the group

Based on UnLtd core values

- Trust
- People Focused
- Passion – then ideas
- Social Need
- Community Focused
- Risk Taking
- Action Oriented

Esmée Fairbairn FOUNDATION

UnLtd

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My Lead the Change learning objectives

The learning objectives I, _____ have identified for the Lead the Change programme are as follows:

1.

2.

3.

4.

What is Action Learning?

Professor Reg Revans (1907–2003) began his career as a physicist and an Olympic athlete and pioneered action learning as a means "to know the difference between cleverness and wisdom". As a young research scientist he was impressed by eminent scientists who were willing to share their doubts with each other. The theory of action learning emerged in 1945 when Revans' worked for the then biggest employer in the world, the National Coal Board.

His theory of action learning pivots on the crucial importance of asking fresh or "insightful" questions about complex problems. Revans' Formula used within action learning is:

L = P + Q (learning = programmed knowledge + questioning insight)

Revans' Law for an organisation to survive is:

Its rate of learning must be at least equal to the rate of change in its external environment

If you would like to do some further reading around Action Learning, the **International Foundation of Action** Learning is an excellent source of information and resources: http://ifal.org.uk
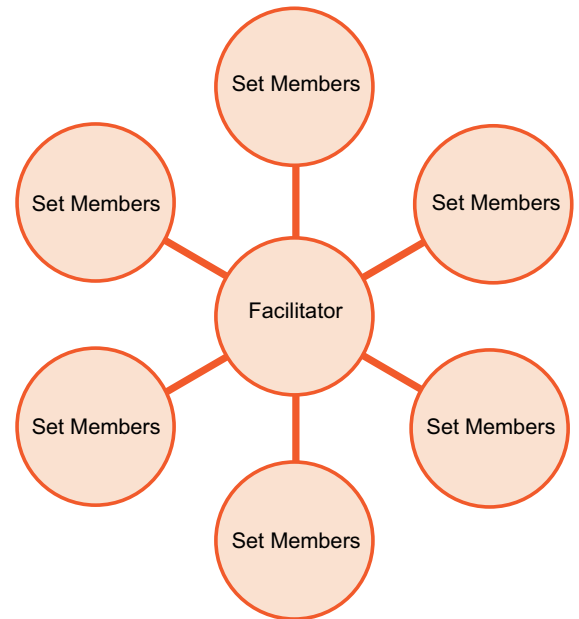
Action Learning Sets within Lead the Change

Action Learning is a form of professional development where groups of 4-8 peers come to together to learn in depth from each other around the actions they are taking. The sets, once formed, remain with those set members for the duration of the programme.

Set members support each other using **open questions** around issues and topics which are current and relevant to individual set members. It can be a fantastic way of airing and finding ways to tackle difficulties/challenges through peer support. The process has the potential to change our thinking and therefore influence decision making and the subsequent actions we take.

Whereas the Peer Learning Network seeks to focus on the organisations within the Lead the Change programme, the Action Learning Sets seek to provide an opportunity for **individuals** involved in the programme to focus on their own professional development.

Most action learning sets are made up of peers working at similar levels of responsibility. Sets can be made up of individuals within the same or different organisations. Within the Lead the Change action learning sets some of the set formation has been influenced by geography. In addition, if two members of staff from one organisation are participating then they have been allocated to separate sets to allow them to explore their learning freely.

Action Learning Set sessions

Three sets have been formed:

Set 1: Leadership Group
Set 2: Leeds, North East/Coast
Set 3: Manchester and surrounding areas

We are contracted with our funders Esmee Fairburn to hold five sets for each group over the course of the two year programme. At the end of the contract the set can decide if they want to continue to meet and can re-contract with each other should they wish to but this is not a requirement of the programme.

Action Learning Sets usually meet for day long sessions. For the purposes of the Lead the Change programme, we are meeting for shortened days from 10am–3pm. Action Learning works best when set members commit to attending all the sessions as this builds rapport and trust and therefore ultimately the learning which may be achieved.

Each day will be scheduled in advance using doodle and where possible, we will use partner venues to encourage further connections between individuals and their organisations. We will be using different methods to a standard action learning model; sessions will be shorter, more dynamic, using all our learning styles and with more opportunities for creativity and learning. As with other peer network meetings we are encouraging the group to eat together as a means of continuing to build relationships and trust.

The detailed content discussed within the sets will remain confidential. However, as this is a learning programme we would like to capture the learning to inform the evaluation of Lead the Change. In order to do this, the facilitator will be completing a feedback form after each set outlining the themes discussed and these will be made anonymous. It will be sent to the evaluation team to enable them to capture the learning, outcomes, challenges and potential actions/solutions from each set.

The sets will be facilitated by Bev Morton, the Peer Learning Facilitator.

CURIOSITY
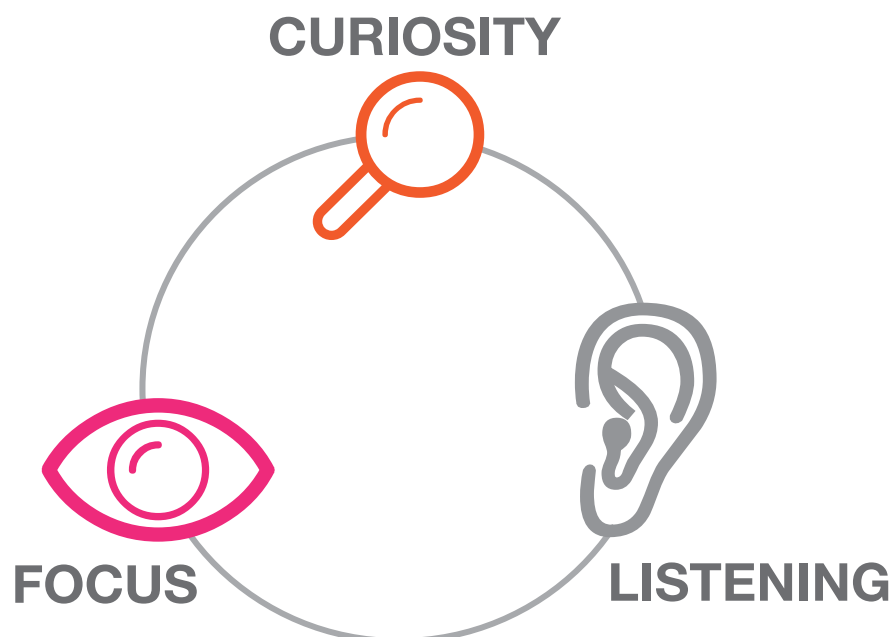
FOCUS

LISTENING

We will be asking set members to listen with curiosity to focus on whoever is speaking at any given time. This is what we will be referring to as **active listening** – this means we are focussed on what is being said. Set members do not give advice, talk about their own experience in the matter or pass judgement; they stay absolutely focussed on the presenter.

The sessions will follow a similar path each time:

- **Check in round** – Each member 'checks in' with how they are doing, what is happening and from subsequent sessions, reporting on any actions taken since the last set. (Approx. 30mins.)

- **Bidding round** – The facilitator helps set members decide on who is going to 'present' and plan the scheduling and timing of the sessions for the day. (Approx. 20 mins.)

- **Presenter** – The presenter describes the situation, problem or challenge (this will be limited to 5–10mins.). 'Presenting' is where a set member talks about an issue and the other members give them their full attention. Everyone in the set is given the option to present about a topic of their choosing. Presenters can present this through drawing, mapping the issue out on the floor, talking, illustrating it on flipchart – in whatever way works for them.

- **Open Questions** – Set members then ask open questions which are designed to help the presenter come to new insights or understanding of the topic they are presenting on and as a result, to be open to new solutions, attitudes and behaviours. (Approx. 15mins.)

- **Reflection** – The presenter reflects on their freshest thinking, identifies what they have learned, any new insights, reviews options and decides on action (if relevant). (Approx. 5 mins.)

- **Group Feedback** – Set members reflect on how they work as a group process – how focussed where they on the presenter? How helpful were they? What was their own individual learning? (Approx. 10 mins.)

(Adapted from Action Learning Associates and Relational Dynamics 1st)

The Facilitator

- Holds the space for the group by facilitating the process including creating and maintaining safety

- Helps the group establish its agreed the ground rules

- Helps the group establish who will present and then keeps the set to the agreed time/session schedule

- Keep the focus of the set on the presenter

- Facilitates the groups' learning process and creates the right conditions for the set to stretch and grow

Open questions

Throughout the action learning sets set members will build competence in creating effective open questions. Open questions allow the listener to identify their own solutions by encouraging new insights to problems. As with coaching, action learning seeks to increase the potential of the set members.

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WHO?

WHAT?   WHERE?

WHEN?

WHY?

HOW?

QUESTIONS   ANSWERS
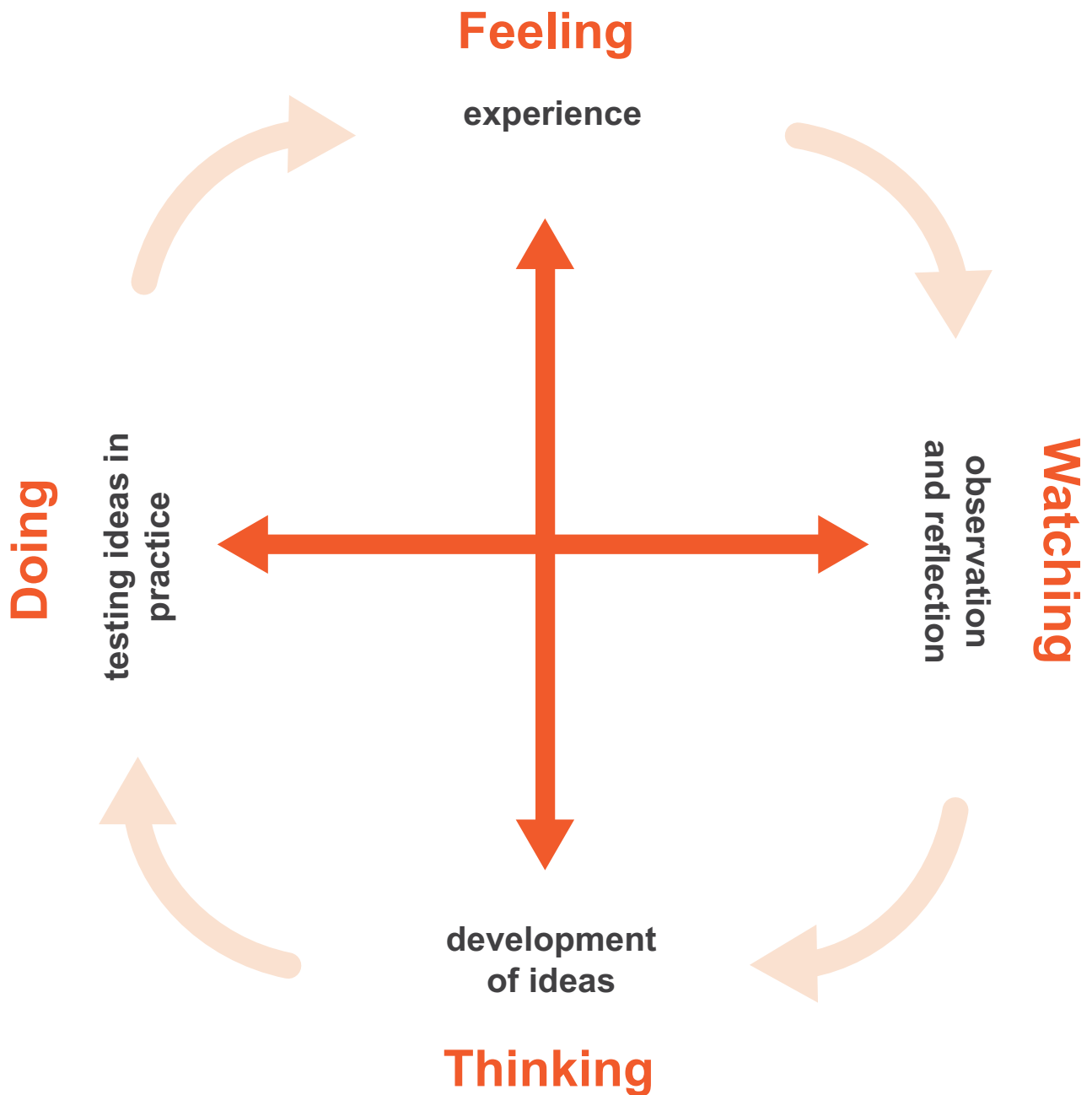
What kind of topics can we bring?

The sets are designed to create a learning space and therefore it is likely that topics brought to sets will cross the intersection between personal, professional and programme. Set members can bring any topics to the action learning sets which relate to themselves as illustrated in the diagram below. Topics need to relate to a professional perspective however, and areas which are specifically personal will not be encouraged by the facilitator.

Personal learning

Professional learning

Programme learning
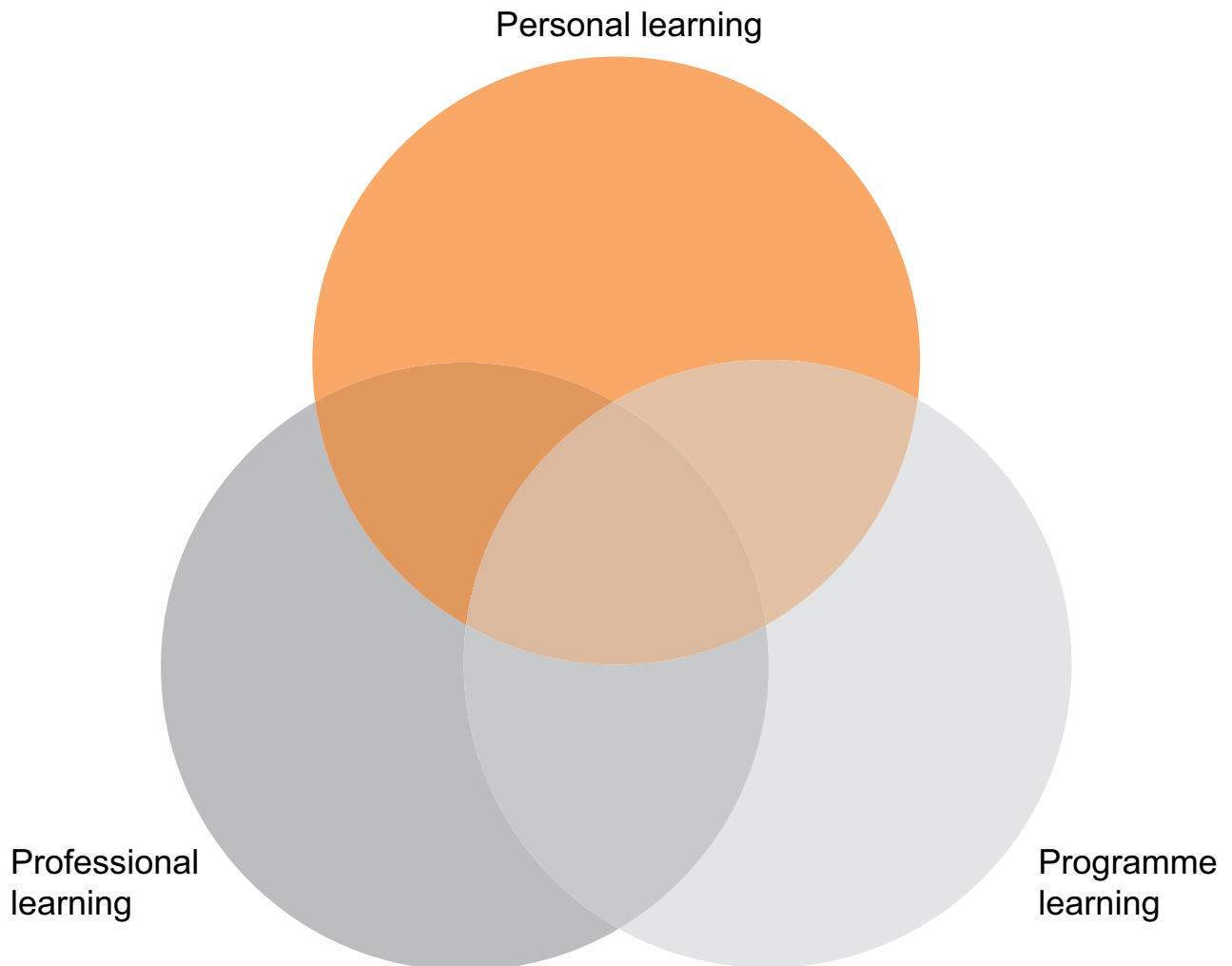
Kolb Learning Cycle

Kolb's learning theory is one which is often used in action learning. It is an explanation of a cycle of experiential learning that applies to us all. In action learning the presenter tells their experience in doing something, they reflection on their experience and make sense of it, set members through open questioning help the presenter to develop their ideas which they are then able to re-test in pactice. We will be using Kolb as one of the core theoretical models and referring to it throughout the action learning sets.

Feeling

experience

Doing

testing ideas in practice

Watching

observation and reflection

development of ideas

Thinking

Johari Window

The Johari Window model is a useful tool used for increasing self-awareness, group development and understanding relationships. The Johari Window model was devised by American psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955, while researching group dynamics at the University of California Los Angeles.

	known by self	**unknown by self**
known by others	free	blind
unknown by others	hidden	unknown
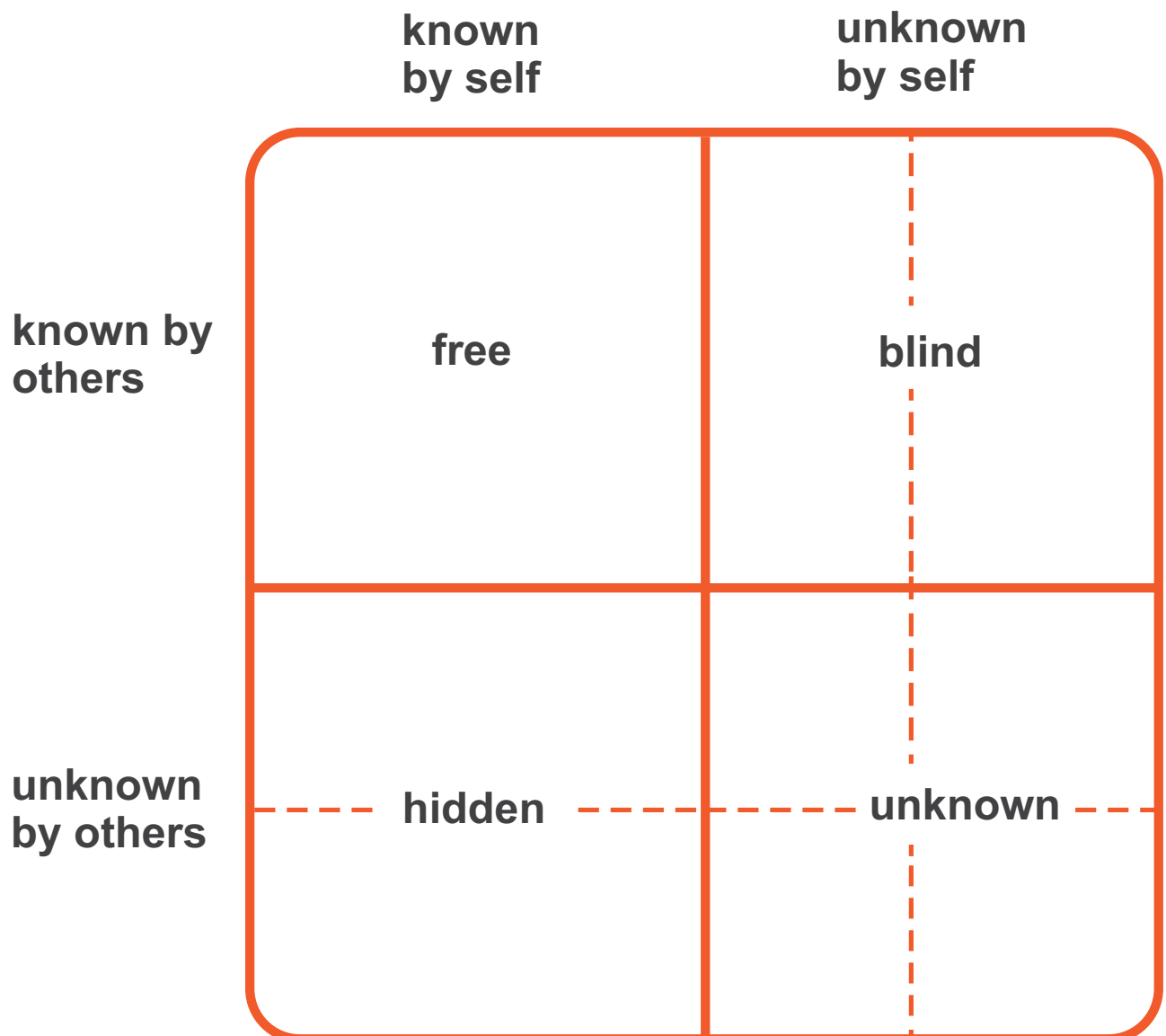
Senge's Ladder of Inference

The model was designed by Peter Senge in his book 'The Fifth Discipline'. It describes the thinking process that we go through, usually without realizing it, to get from a fact to a decision or action. Action learning encourages you to look closely at your own 'ladder of inference'. The questions set members ask are designed to 'expose' your ladder and to question your assumptions and beliefs which are impacting on your actions.

I take actions based upon
my beliefs

I adopt beliefs about
the world

I draw
conclusions

Our beliefs
affect the
data and
assumptions we
select next time

I make assumptions based
upon the meaning I add

I select data from what
I observe based upon
my beliefs

I observe data from
the world around me

The Broadwell Learning Model

This is a four stage learning theory and assumes learning, in whatever context, needs to go through the cycle of unconscious incompetence to unconscious competence. It is widely thought that the originator of the model is Martin M Broadwell and so here we refer to it as The Broadwell Learning Model. This learning cycle sometimes uses the process of learning to drive to illustrate it:

Stage 1: the driver is unconscious about the level of their incompetence – 'unconscious incompetence'

Stage 2: the driver becomes conscious about the level of their incompetence – 'conscious incompetence'

Stage 3: the driver becomes conscious about the level of their competence – 'conscious competence'

Stage 4: the driver becomes unconscious about the level of their competence – unconscious competence'

	Incompetence	Competence
Unconcious	Unconcious incompetence	Unconcious competence
Concious	Concious incompetence	Concious competence
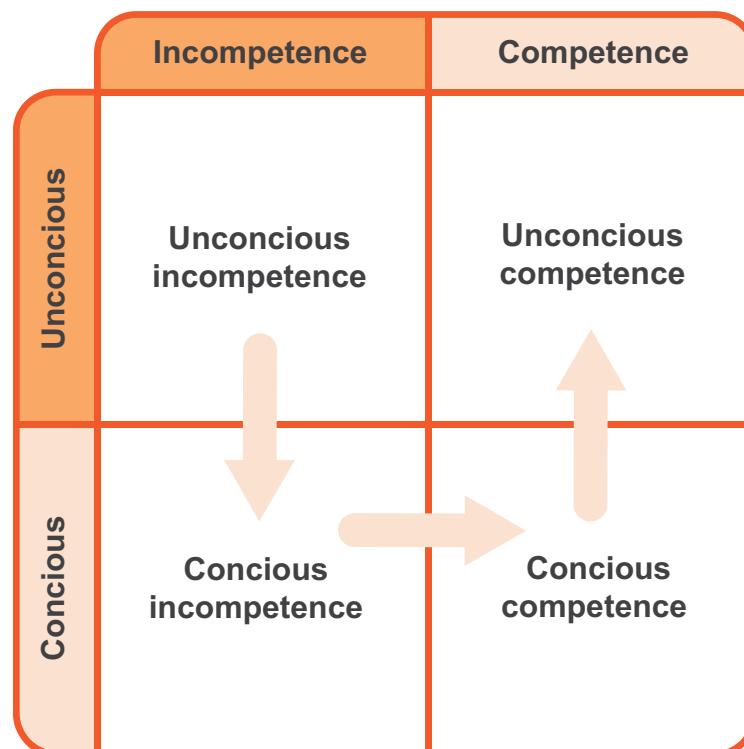
This manual has been devised by Bev Morton, Peer Learning Facilitator for the Lead the Change Programme

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