Inclusion is more than a word: It's a mindset

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I have attended and participated in numerous panel discussions, presentations, conversations and webinars and have read 100's of articles about measuring diversity, equity, and inclusion. Invariably, the metrics presented are based on such things as the number of hires and promotions, training programs, employee or business resource groups in addition to salary audits. However, they reflect diversity and equity; they say nothing about the state of inclusion. While it is recognized as an important part of the equation, inclusion is a word without dimensionality.

Inclusion is an abstract noun; an intangible concept such as an emotion, feeling, or idea which is difficult to measure. This is the problem. Inclusion is perceptual – "Do I feel included?" "Are my actions inclusive?" Perception, according to psychology, is a cognitive function. It is how we see and interpret external events, our attitudes or inclinations, and the way we make decisions. It is a mindset.

To have an inclusive mindset means having a commitment to promote equal opportunities for everyone to be heard, to grow, develop, advance, and succeed.

Traditional approaches to building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace often results in resistance and/or push-back. An inclusive mindset is a set of relatable actions that many people aspire to achieve in their daily lives. They include:

- Respecting and learning from others – everyone has a valid perspective and rich experiences that add depth to a conversation or solution.
- Being open to new ideas and possibilities – innovation stems from a multiplicity of viewpoints and experiences.
- Asking questions – complete information eliminates assumptions that can lead to misunderstandings or limited solutions.
- Demonstrating kindness, understanding, and empathy – builds trust and loyalty.
- Listening more; talking less – fosters engagement and provides additional information leading to a robust solution.

When an organization's culture is built on an inclusive mindset, diversity and equity becomes an integral part of its DNA. It is integrated into every system, conversation, meeting, and interaction. As with tracking the diversity and equity metrics, having a baseline that measures changes in employee perception ensures that the DNA remains "uninfected by a virus".