

Diverse and inclusive environments and communities

Lately there has been a lot of discussion around the topics related to diversity and inclusion but what do these terms mean and how to we move towards more inclusive environments and communities?

Diversity can be explained by the many shared and different individual and group experiences, values, beliefs, and characteristics among people and *inclusion* is the active and intentional promotion of a sense of belonging and dignity that ensures all people are safe, respected and valued.

Diversity is a fact and a very real part of every environment we work in and community we belong to. Diversity is embedded in every person and action, but the key question is how do we move towards inclusion and the sense of belonging that is important in the workplace and community.

The impact of our actions matters more than our intention, so it is important to understand that our behaviors may lead to actions that are not inclusive.

Let's look at unconscious or implicit bias for example (terms are interchangeable). Biases are associations that our brain makes that are so well established that we aren't aware of them. These associations are sometimes inaccurate and can be based on limited facts or from our own experiences. What the research shows and refers to as unconscious bias is a form of mental association that impact our decisions automatically, quickly and without our awareness.

People make decisions outside of their conscious awareness all the time. The associations people make are linked to ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, language, etc. on top of associations with things like, dress, non-verbal cues, tone, pitch, speech patterns, etc.

So, as you can see, we can say or do things that are inaccurate or not factual. We can say or do things that in our own brains, make perfect sense, but to the outside observer or to the receiver, it can come across much differently.

A key part of this is that we often don't intend to be biased, and we often don't intend to say or behave in a way that others may find hurtful, offensive, or discriminatory. But simply because we didn't intend to, does not mean that it does not have an impact.

The important piece here is that the ***impact of our actions matters more than our intention.*** We know that we all have bias, and we will all make mistakes. So, if someone tells us that our actions or words had a negative impact on them, we need to realize that our bias could be clouding our better conscious judgement and we need to take action to be more aware and mindful, especially when it comes to making decisions, assigning people to projects, hiring etc.

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