



# Inclusive Design Mindset

How to Practice Inclusive Design as a Mindset?

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## Introduction

What is inclusive design?

- Design that considers the full **range of human diversity** with respect to abilities, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human **differences**
- Inclusive design is a philosophy, **a mindset** and practice that seeks to ensure that products, services, and environments are **usable** by as many people as possible **without** the need for **adaptation** or specialized design.

## Definitions That Shape the Conversation

- **Universal Design (UD):** One-size-fits-all
  - Design that works for as many people as possible, without the need for adaptation.
- **Accessible Design:** Removing specific barriers
  - Design that removes barriers for people with disabilities.
- **Inclusive Design (ID):** Adaptability for human diversity
  - Design that adapts to human diversity, considering the full range of human differences, ability, identity, and experience.
- **Mindset:** Cognitive lens shaping behavior, perception, problem-solving
  - A way of thinking that shapes **how we see and engage with the world.**
- **Conscious Experience:** Each person experiences the world uniquely (Nagel, Chalmers)
  - The deeply personal way in which we perceive and make sense of the world.
- **Inclusive Design Mindset**
  - A commitment to continuous unlearning and questioning, being aware of exclusion.

# Inclusive Design Schools

## □ The UK School of Thought: Accessibility as Compliance

- Rooted in **Universal Design (UD)** and **Design for All** principles.
- Shaped by laws like the **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)** and **Equality Act (2010)**.
- Focuses on **compliance with accessibility standards** (UK Gov, 2018).

## □ Canadian School of Thought – Inclusion as a Mindset

- Sees **exclusion as ongoing**, not a flaw to fix—requires **continuous unlearning and questioning**.
- Advocates for a **“One-Size-Fits-One”** approach: personalized, adaptive solutions.
- Challenges top-down standards—values **complexity, lived experience, and self-awareness**.
- A **dynamic, reflective process** involving power, participation, and representation.

## □ Irish Extension – from access to belonging

- Built on the Canadian mindset model by **Prof. Lizbeth Goodman & SmartLab (UCD)**.
- Enriched by **storytelling, arts-based research, and cultural discourse**.
- Expands inclusion from access to **emotional recognition and belonging**.
- Centers **language, identity, and lived experience**.
- Reflects ID as a **globally adaptable and evolving philosophy** rooted in human dignity

## 5

# Comparing the Schools of Thought

Aspect	UK School of Thought	Canadian School of Thought	Irish School of Thought
<b>Focus</b>	Accessibility and legal compliance	Personalized, evolving inclusion	Cultural, social, and philosophical inclusion
<b>Philosophy</b>	Universal Design (UD) and Design for All	One-Size-Fits-One, Inclusion as a mindset, lived experiences	Inclusion as a lived experience, shaped by culture and emotion
<b>Approach</b>	Fixed accessibility standards, legal frameworks	Adaptive, user-centered, continuous questioning	Interdisciplinary—blending tech, philosophy, and art
<b>Core Question</b>	"How can we make this accessible to the majority?"	"How can we design for individual differences?"	"How do people experience inclusion emotionally and culturally?"
<b>Strengths</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong legal foundation</li> <li>- Broad adoption in public sector</li> <li>- Clear technical guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Highly adaptable</li> <li>- Recognizes subjectivity of inclusion</li> <li>- Challenges traditional design norms</li> <li>- Holistic and deeply human-centered</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Connects design with philosophy and identity</li> <li>- Encourages artistic and cultural inclusivity</li> </ul>
<b>Limitations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Focuses too much on compliance</li> <li>- Can be rigid and prescriptive</li> <li>- Often lacks flexibility for individual needs</li> <li>- it excludes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can be difficult to scale in rigid institutions</li> <li>- Requires a deeper shift in thinking and culture change, to be adopted by the industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- More theoretical, harder to implement in mainstream industry</li> <li>- Needs stronger integration into accessibility policies</li> </ul>

## We all have a unique conscious experiences

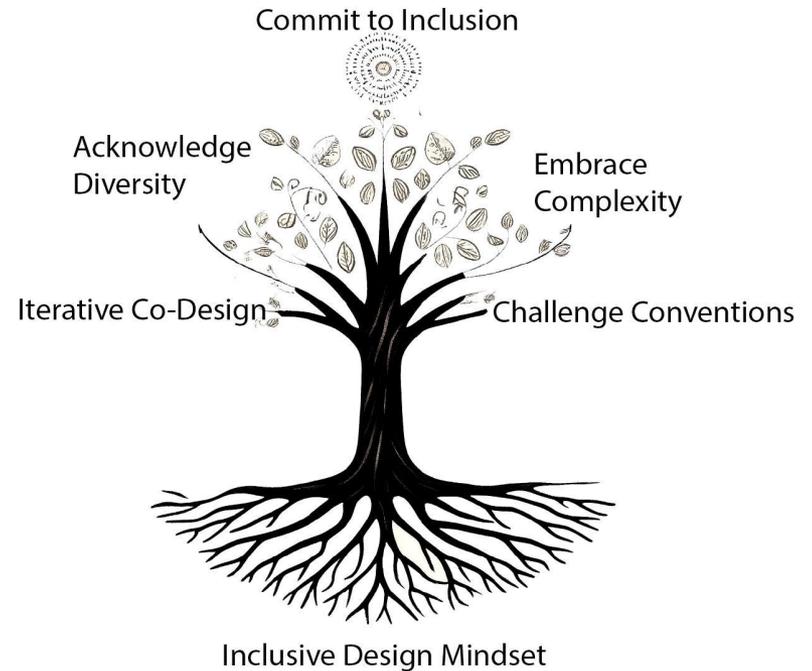
- Just as our perception of **color, taste, or pain** is uniquely personal, so too is our experience of **inclusion and exclusion**.
- *Inclusion cannot be universally defined; instead, it is personally experienced.*
- Adapting the ID mindset means to think beyond **accessibility and compliance**—towards a **reflective, questioning, and evolving mindset**.

## What is Unlearning and Questioning (UQ)?

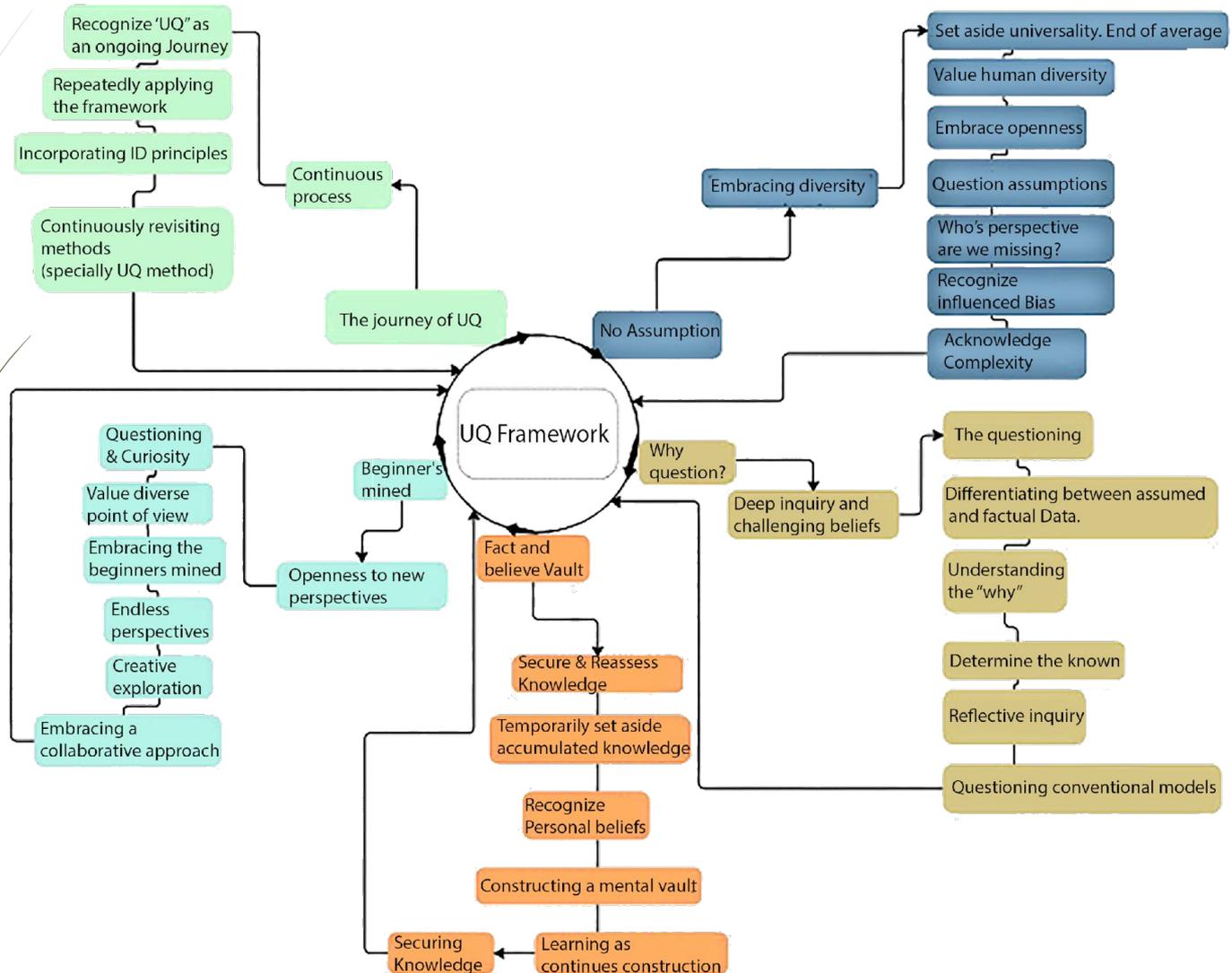
- UQ is the **process of critically examining** deeply held assumptions, biases, and traditional standards.
- It challenges the notion of **fixed truths** and encourages continuous learning and adaptation.
  - Essential for fostering innovation and deeper engagement in Inclusive Design
- Rooted in **philosophy, psychology, and Inclusive Design**, UQ aims to deconstruct **norms that exclude or marginalize individuals.**

## Five Steps of UQ Framework

1. No Assumption
2. Why Question?
3. Fact and Belief Vault
4. Beginner's Mind:
5. Continuous UQ:



# A mind map of the continuous journey of UQ Framework



# The Ripple Effect

- Practicing Inclusion is not just an act—it is a ripple effect.
- When we shift our mindset, we don't just change how we design products or spaces, we reshape how we think, interact, and build society itself.
- A single shift in perspective can influence entire systems.

# Real-World Examples

- **Education:** A teacher applies ID to reframe how knowledge is shared—centering neurodiverse learners.
- **Policy:** A policymaker asks: *Whose voices are missing?* leading to more equitable legislation.
- **Healthcare:** A designer co-creates with patients, ensuring services work across cultures and conditions.
- **AI Ethics:** Teams embed inclusive values into algorithms—reducing systemic bias in tech. And designing an accessible UI for the AI platform
- **Indigenising Inclusion:** Organizations include Indigenous knowledge systems and shifting what “access” means culturally.
- **Leadership:** A manager practices everyday inclusion—changing an entire workplace culture.



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# Inclusive Design – A Mindset for a More Equitable World

- ❑ **Inclusion as a Conscious Choice:** Since exclusion is often unconscious, inclusion must be intentional.
- ❑ **Design for Diversity:** Inclusion begins by embracing human difference in all its forms.
- ❑ **Beyond Compliance:** Inclusion is more than meeting standards—it's about creating meaningful, human-centered experiences.
- ❑ **One-Size-Fits-One:** True inclusion means designing with and for people at the margins; the Edge.
- ❑ **Unlearning & Questioning:** Equity starts with challenging our own assumptions and expanding our perspective.
- ❑ **Inclusive Design Mindset Means:** Listening before designing. Co-creating not designing for Embracing complexity and change, Taking shared responsibility across roles
- ❑ **Inclusion = Belonging, Recognition, and Participation**
- ❑ **Let's design a welcoming, equitable, and inclusive world—together.**

**We are all unique, and in  
uniqueness, we are similar.**



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