



Employee Resource Groups:

How to Use Strategy and Technology to Maximize Business Value

Introduction

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)¹ are affinity groups formed in organizations big and small to promote the needs of underrepresented identities. These groups have emerged as a critical tool for maximizing employee engagement, evolving workforce culture, and supporting diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Acting as the voice of key employee demographics, organizations are increasingly leveraging these groups for concrete business value: for inclusive product development, audience targeting, recruitment, and more besides.

In October 2022, Affirmity collaborated with [Teleskope](#), the technology partner responsible for [Affirmity's Employee Resource Group platform](#), for a webinar focused on the business value of ERGs moderated by Maneet Sarai (Chief Product Officer at Teleskope). Our panelists were all DE&I leaders at a range of global corporate businesses (listed in order of appearance):

- Angela Curley, Senior Manager, DE&I at Henkel Corporation
- Samantha Renovato, Director, Global DE&I at Ingredion Inc.
- Walé Soluade, Vice President, DE&I at Centene Corporation
- Jennifer Gamboa-Copeland, DE&I Leader at McKesson Corporation



¹ Organizations, including those interviewed for this guide, use a range of different terms to describe their affinity groups, sometimes to place different emphases on their focus and goals. For ease of understanding we've used ERG as a generic in this guide and noted where internal nomenclature differs.

Contents

In this guide, we've collected some of the insights our panelists shared in the session, all with the goal of exploring how you can drive the business value of your ERGs. We cover the following questions:

- 1 What groundwork is needed to enable ERGs and ERG technologies to thrive?**
- 2 How can ERGs strategically drive business value?**
- 3 How can organizations leverage technology to measure ERG ROI?**
- 4 How can ERGs build organizational culture during acquisitions and mergers?**
- 5 How can organizations offer ERG membership to the extended workforce?**
- 6 How should organizations budget for ERGs, and what are some of the mechanisms for formulating ERG budgets?**
- 7 How are you continuing to evolve your ERGs in the next 12 to 36 months?**

At the end of the guide, we'll also look into the capabilities of the ERG platform.

1. What Groundwork Is Needed to Enable ERGs and ERG Technologies to Thrive?

Angela Curley: It's important for an organization to get employees engaged and invested in the success of the company, wherever it operates. Henkel is a 145-year-old company, based in Düsseldorf, Germany, operating globally and with numerous acquisitions in North America. To create employee engagement, we have to provide platforms through which employees can be heard—and ERGs are one of the most important platforms available to us.

Our employees take an active role in our ERGs in terms of professional development, and community outreach. The people who run our ERGs are champions, doing this work on top of their daily responsibilities. They've bought into the growth of their company culture and the sense of belonging that ERGs can create.

Technology that supports these employees and the operations of your ERGs is critical, but it also needs to be supplemented by training and technical support. Affirmity and Teleskope have been fantastic partners, helping everyone involved in getting the most out of the systems.

Another key element has been ERG training separate from the platform—specifically, ERG Masterclass sessions from PDT Global², which we've offered at an employee summit as part of a wider package of support for our ERG leaders. This helped us provide the framework for the why, what, and how of ERGs, and equipped our people with tools to create an 18-month plan of actions and activities that align with our business priorities.

This training helps us deliver on leadership development, and helps reinforce our commitment to the ERG concept—we can leverage the masterclass and additional training to help our leaders feel closer to the business and its objectives. We believe that it's important to support and empower our ERGs, providing them the training, tools, platform, and resources to be successful individually and collectively.

Samantha Renovato: Because, as Angela says, ERG leaders are typically doing this job in addition to their day job, technology has a critical role to play in taking away some of the administrative work. Organizations have to minimize the time burden of effective ERG operation to maximize their appeal and their effectiveness. It helps that such platforms make it a lot easier for new people to join, and to find information as well—as far as possible, barriers to entry and participation have to be removed.

² PDT Global and Affirmity are part of Learning Technologies Group (LTG), a global provider of integrated talent management and learning software and services. PDT Global is part of GP Strategies, one of the operating businesses within LTG. For more, visit ltgplc.com.

2. How Can ERGs Strategically Drive Business Value?

Samantha Renovato: Ingredion has nine ERGs³, and one of the major things that our groups are tasked with doing is closing the gap between business and product knowledge. Like many global companies, it can be difficult for employees to understand everything we do as an organization. Our ERGs can help us reframe this conversation in terms of the communities that our products have an impact on.

So, for example, our “Empowered” ERG, which has the goal “Empower Employees with Disabilities”, partnered with some of our business leaders to improve organizational knowledge about one of the starches we manufacture. This starch adds texture to a product called “thick water” which helps people with dysphagia (the medical term for anyone experiencing difficulty swallowing) to stay hydrated.

The ERG was able to provide context on some of the medical conditions that prompt people to use thick water, as well as a general overview of the history of its use. Even as a well-established product, the group was able to have speculative product innovation discussions as part of their work.

The starch is currently available as a stir-in powder or as a pre-bottled solution, but the session saw a couple of ideas around how we could package the product differently with the view of improving the everyday experience of anyone who needs it. For example, what does it look like when someone with dysphagia goes to a restaurant? Are there more portable formats that would make this experience easier?

Our other affinity groups are doing similar strategic work that brings value to the business. PRIDE (our LGBTQ+ ERG) and WIN (Women In Ingredion) have been especially good at establishing and deepening our relationships with customers. We’re primarily a business-to-business organization, rather than a consumer-facing one, so this kind of work is important in deepening our relationship with the wider community. There’s also been a number of cross-company ERG events that we’ve put together to promote knowledge sharing around these relationships, as well as DE&I best practices more generally.

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³ Internally, Ingredion uses “BRG” (Business Resource Group) to refer to its groups. You can find out more about these groups on its website.

3. How Can Organizations Leverage Technology to Measure ERG ROI?

Walé Soluade: One of Centene's core priorities when it first established its DE&I office was to create the most robust reporting that it possibly could. We got to work with our partners in our HR IT and HR information systems groups and set about looking at the full spectrum of humanity within our workforce via every dimension that technology would allow us to capture. We also wanted to look at trend data in unique ways.

For example, we wanted to be able to forecast where we would land 10 or 15 years from now if the business continued hiring a specific demographic at a certain rate. This was possible by pulling in our Power BI data into Tableau⁴. So in the same way that we forecast sales or goals, we do the same thing for DE&I—and we believe this speaks to the fact that DE&I is seen as a business priority.

When we brought the ERG⁵ platform on board, it was important to us that we were able to plug this new data source into our existing DE&I business intelligence systems. So we went ahead and enabled a daily flow of insights from the ERG platform via Workday and Power BI⁶. This allows us to create segmentations, so we can look at a wide range of demographics and consider our ERG and non-ERG populations. This process then arms us with information that helps our ERGs be more strategic in responding to the needs of their groups.

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We're able to leverage those insights to show the organization that our ERGs, and our DE&I efforts more generally, are helping to reduce turnover, attract new talent, and develop talented people. This robust, real-time system of data drawn from all these different systems has been a real game changer for us as an organization.

- Walé Soluade, Vice President,
DE&I at Centene Corporation

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⁴ Power BI is a business analytics service provided by Microsoft that can analyze and visualize data, extract insights, and share it across various departments within your organization. Tableau is a powerful Business Intelligence tool that manages the data flow and turns data into actionable information.

⁵ Centene's affinity groups are called EIGs (Employee Inclusion Groups). You can read more about them [here](#).

⁶ Affirmity's Telescope-powered ERG platform can be easily integrated with the Workday cloud service via an existing integration. Workday is itself interoperable with a large number of HR and business intelligence systems, such as the prior-mentioned Power BI and Tableau.

One example of this in action is that a large number of our employee network members are individual contributors—they have some very unique needs that our groups can intentionally support, and data allows our ERGs to be a lot more tactical in responding to those needs. But simultaneously, we want to understand the value that our groups are adding to our organization in terms of reduced turnover and talent nurture.

The data we collect from our systems can be used to connect the dots to see, for example, if someone has been part of an ERG for a certain amount of time, or if they actively participated via the ERG platform, how do they perform in terms of employee engagement scores and other measures? We're able to leverage those insights to show the organization that our ERGs, and our DE&I efforts more generally, are helping to reduce turnover, attract new talent, and develop talented people. This robust, real-time system of data drawn from all these different systems has been a real game changer for us as an organization.

The way that we approach DE&I within our organization is by being very explicit that DE&I does not own DE&I. We're here to consult and partner with the business. We want a strategy and a structure that's sustainable, which means that it has to be embedded and aligned with our business operations. Our DE&I office is here to provide subject matter expertise, but it can only be an organic part of what happens within the organization when DE&I itself is co-created.

Similarly, the decisions we make about our data systems—such as when we originally brought the ERG platform on board—require collaboration with business partners such as our HR information systems team. Most of what we build, whether tools, resources, or dashboards, is for the day-to-day use of others in the organization. So we have to make decisions that support their ability to deliver the highest-level talent management and business operations outcomes.

Jennifer Gamboa-Copeland: McKesson is similarly dedicated to measurement, and as Walé mentions, the feed into Workday is critical for how we use Power BI to provide our numbers and data on retention, promotion, and new hires. For new hires particularly, we can analyze how quickly they engage with and join an ERG.

From an integration perspective, we're also able to bring our employee opinion survey in and connect that to our data to understand the sentiment of employees inside of ERGs compared with our general populations. With this, we can easily see areas of opportunity and take action based on what employees are telling us.

I think all of us lead with data first because that's what our leaders and executives expect of us. And so it's very, very important for our systems to work together and create that kind of reporting.

Samantha Renovato: Reporting also helps us drive accountability among our leadership, something that's so important in companies that make public commitments.

Capability in this area depends on the organization's maturity within people analytics—if you have a dedicated people analytics department, that can help accelerate the visibility of data to managers and HR business partners. If visualizations are available, rather than reports that must be filtered through, that's even better. In this way, how the data is presented helps to kind of level up a company's game within DE&I, because everybody can see exactly where they're at and know exactly where they're going.

However, if you're even earlier on in this journey, you shouldn't be discouraged. Obviously, partnering with your HRIS team and your HR business partners is very important. Having conversations about not only what happened with the numbers, but why it happened, is important. Through a partnership with HR, you'll be able to understand acquisition and retention issues, and whether new compensation plans are working or not. There are a lot of really cool things you can do with the data, and having that per-employee data from an ERG platform helps tie in the numbers and bring more of those high-level insights within people analytics.

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at McKesson Corporation

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4. How Can ERGs Build Your Culture During Acquisitions and Mergers?

Walé Soluade: Centene is often in acquisition mode, and our ERGs give us the opportunity to hit the ground running from a culture standpoint. We've got a pool of existing champions and are able to say: this is who we are, these are the things we do to engage with one another. Because our groups are employee-driven and employee-led, this is seen as less of a corporate thing. We get to build new relationships, and that's something we've tried and driven home.

The point of a lot of our work is to deepen interpersonal relationships and find how we work better together. We had a recent acquisition where, in the absence of an existing DE&I framework in the new organization, we knew that it would take a while before full systems integration. But we knew there would be a strong appetite for what our DE&I team does, and for our employee networks. So we focused on getting the ball rolling so that our new colleagues could get insight into what already exists.

It has always been rewarding to see everything kick in, and to start seeing the passion build with folks as they start to tap into our personal and professional development tools within the groups. Even the networking stuff alone can be a really powerful way for organizations to show who they are as they go through acquisitions and seek to build consistency across employee experiences.

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DE&I at Centene Corporation

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5. How Can Organizations Offer ERG Membership to the Extended Workforce?

Jennifer Gamboa-Copeland: A lot of these groups start internally with the exempt employee populations—basically, the folks who have email addresses. We came to realize that McKesson’s ERGs needed to address a much wider audience: our distribution center staff, our drivers, and call centers. This presents a significant challenge: how do we engage these groups when they lack access and/or don’t have time to participate in ERGs?

Access required the development of our ERG mobile app—connected directly to the ERG platform—which works with our single sign-on to keep it protected while being accessible via employees’ personal devices. So we’ve made it possible for everyone to have access to the same (or at least, similar) information, so they can join, see announcements, manage and attend events, and access a calendar. Calendar access is obviously very important in an ERG context, and it’s important that our front-line employees are able to see when events are happening.

We’ve also acknowledged the need to ensure that the mentoring element of the ERG platform is available beyond our “wired” employees, and are in a pilot process for extending it to our “non-wired” population in our distribution and call centers.

With access opened up in this way, we’ve also had to partner with our corporate communications team in order to achieve a successful rollout.

We’ve created a microsite on our internal website and set up tables at our distribution centers, both operating in multiple languages to help us get the word out. Frontline leaders are able to access the information, download and print one-pagers with QR codes, and distribute those to their reports.

We want to make it really simple and easy to access the platform and to access our groups. It isn’t “solved” by any means—but as an ERG operations team we’re here to help continue to educate and help as many people benefit as possible.

Samantha Renovato: In addition to the technology, we have inclusion leads in place for most of our ERGs. Where we don’t, we’re actively promoting the groups through certain affinity months and events, with plenty of free swag to hand out. Where employees don’t have visibility on the ERGs, this swag helps get the word out, and our efforts help to get people interested in starting new chapters.

It’s important to be proactive and to use these events and our inclusion leads to raise awareness. We also have to think about accessibility: from our side, it often makes sense to have a lunch-and-learn session. However, for some of our employee groups, especially those in plants or manufacturing facilities, it may make more sense to schedule things around their 2pm shift change.

Walé Soluade: A lot of the work in our claim centers is very time-specific, so we bring in our workforce management people, our teams responsible for our people's shift scheduling, to help us create the space for people to participate in things. We recognize that not everyone's going to be able to take an hour away from the phone or the computer, but we can try methods such as demand-based scheduling that make participation possible.

Conversations with leaders have also been key, helping them understand their role in helping to prevent employees feeling like they don't have time or are unable to attend. By taking everything: the microlearning, the intentional communications pieces, and then creating the space for people to consume what's being built, we're making sure that leaders understand that this is as much a priority for the organization as any other business activity within our company.

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6. How Should Organizations Budget for ERGs, and What Are Some of the Mechanisms for Formulating ERG Budgets?

Walé Soluade: We fund our ERGs directly out of our enterprise DE&I budget. We fund our groups at the enterprise level, and their budget is allocated based on the size of local chapters and the business unit in which they sit. We set minimum thresholds based on size. So we've got sort of a grid that says, "get this many members, here's what the minimum expectation is" and the leadership at that business has to agree to that before we actually place the chapter there.



7. How Are You Continuing to Evolve Your ERGs in the Next 12 to 36 Months?

Samantha Renovato: Having sponsorship is very important for us. We have members that are direct reports to our CEO—our executive leadership team—and each one is a sponsor to one of our ERGs. This expectation keeps them connected to our employees, and their day-to-day experiences and concerns. They also help sponsor some of the local activities—these ERGs do need a budget to help put together events and engagements, but they also need influential people to help champion the initiatives and remove barriers.

Long term, we're definitely looking to expand the current ERGs that we have. Activating on the intersectionality of the membership is something that our ERGs have already been doing a really great job on, and we want to help further that. We also want to look at the ERG leaders themselves, positioning ERG leadership as a leadership development program and making it clear to the business at large that these are people with great leadership skills that are willing to go the extra mile to create a more inclusive culture.

Our ERG leaders are already building on the skillsets that are required to run a successful team, so we're going on a journey right now, looking at some of the different coaching, training, network, and leadership visibility opportunities we can give them. We held our second ERG forum a couple of weeks ago, where, similar to how you'd usually bring in your team to plan your strategy for the next year, we brought all of our ERG leaders together and we gave them two days of uninterrupted time. We made it clear that "you're here to learn to develop as a leader and to plan your 2023 strategy".

We're also looking at new data analysis angles. Once we have all the historical information we want from the ERG platform, I know other organizations have compared things like promotion rates for ERG leaders compared to the regular population, and we're also interested in differences in engagement.

Jennifer Gamboa-Copeland: We have a few near-term and long-term activations that we're working through. We're considering how we make things work as we pivot to more members and we're trying to come back to the office a little more frequently. This is something that I think all ERGs are trying to work through, especially as the current workforce stays as is—most people want to continue to work from home if their jobs permit that, so how do we keep people engaged in this virtual space where everyone's just a box on a screen?

To add to what Sam mentioned about amplifying the career and leadership skills we can develop in an ERG context and how that can feed into your own succession planning, we're also considering the succession planning for our ERGs themselves. Because there's an inevitable risk of burnout and falling engagement, and that kind of filters down, so how do we help to reduce that effect?

We'll also continue to focus on driving business value, as well as considering what our ERG leaders and ERG operations team can bring to our supply chain in terms of diversity—examining where our involvement could really bring a positive impact to the business.

Walé Soluade: For us, it's this evolution to a "fit-for-purpose" approach. We're looking at this idea of increasingly distributed work environments, shrinking relational ecosystems, and greater responsibility for the employee experience within the organization. We're really focused on how we can leverage our groups to support these transitions. We're now a majority hybrid remote environment, so our ERG members are working in these distributed work models. We're asking them to do more, but they've also gone through this exhausting period of change, so we have to be careful.

We're now looking at what the ERGs can do to deliver value and how they can continue to meet the needs of their members. And the answer can't just be "we're doing Zoom" or "we're doing in-person", and we also need to consider asynchronous options that help us capture a broader population.

We're also considering where else we can leverage technology to drive impact. Our mentoring programs are largely conducted through a manual matching process—we feel that the human touch is important. However, we're aware there are absolutely ways we could be streamlining how that works with some degree of automation.

Alongside the technology, we're really focusing on our programming, considering how we can listen better, analyze better, and commit better to giving what our members need from the groups. We're working on a system of priorities that will help us better equip our ERG leaders, working out what are the consistent, predictable, and cyclical priorities that ERGs should be accounting for.

This advance planning helps us to align with business priorities. We provide services to the under-served in our society, so we have very clear opportunities to align what our groups do with what those groups need from us.

We're not necessarily planning on creating a bunch of new groups. We want to take the groups that we have, what we're doing, and just crush it. Do it even better. Continue to deliver value in a way that's so undeniable that we can be even more intentional and authentic about what we're putting forward. For example, we want to get to the point where we recognize and reward our people. This is something that people are doing in addition to their day job, but that doesn't mean we cannot compensate them for doing that.

So the thread through all of this is that we'll be tightening the alignment of not just our employee networks, but DE&I as a whole to the business and to the priorities. Creating that sort of inseparable bond, where if for some reason the DE&I lens isn't applied to a business or talent management process, everyone in the organization will be equipped to call it out.

About Our ERG Platform

Do you face the DE&I challenges covered in this discussion? Are you inspired by the innovative solutions suggested by our panelists? The organizations in this Q&A all use Affirmity's Telescope-powered ERG platform as part of their approach to connecting and managing their internal affinity groups.

The ERG platform helps DE&I professionals and ERG leaders struggling with inefficient processes and limited visibility by providing event calendars, on-demand reporting, and helpful automation features. It aims to help you grow your ERGs, increasing participation and engagement.

Key features include:

- ERG event management and integrated calendars
- On-demand reporting and real-time updates
- Online social collaboration
- Configurable snapshots
- Budget and ROI tracking
- Mobile application
- Systems integration via Workday

**For more information about our ERG platform,
please [visit our website](#), [download the product sheet](#) or [contact us](#) for more information.**

Contact Us

To learn more about Affirmity's DE&I measurement, analysis, training, and consultancy solutions call one of our experts today at +1 800-782-1818 or email info@affirmity.com.

About Affirmity

[Affirmity](#) provides a robust portfolio of software, consulting services, and blended learning solutions that help our clients experience long-term business value gained by a diverse and inclusive workforce, while minimizing workforce compliance risk.

Drawing on more than 45 years of experience, our software, learning solutions, and team of experts guide DE&I and HR leaders to easily analyze diversity across the organization, identify gaps and insights into causes, develop inclusion strategies, execute learning pathways, and track progress over time.

A part of [Learning Technologies Group plc](#) (LTG), Affirmity serves more than 1,200 organizations—including global corporations, mid-sized organizations, and small businesses.

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