

1 Beyond Food, Flag, and Fun

The Current State of Employee Resource Groups

The aspirations for this book are not meek, nor are they muted. The purpose of this book is to help employee resource groups (ERGs) achieve excellence. Every company that has approached me to help with their ERGs wants to know how to get them to perform at their best and with distinction. This book intends to inform these efforts.

In today's polarized world, employee resource groups are now more necessary than ever. The work of ERGs is too important, and the need is too great, for them not to perform at their best. My experience with employee resource groups goes back 30 years to my first jobs in corporate America back in the early 1990s. Ever since, my relationship with employee resource groups has evolved and matured and resulted in having a much more textured understanding of, and appreciation for, all the great things employee resource groups provide.

This personal journey with employee resource group includes being an ERG member, an ERG leader, running ERG consortiums, conducting research on ERGs, establishing contests to identify "best-in-class" ERGs, helping companies launch ERGs, serving as a

judge to determine the top ERGs in the country, writing ERG white papers, and helping ERG to pivot on their strategy and so on. It is without any hesitation that when it comes to employee resource groups, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly. This extensive experience uniquely positions me to write this book – see Table 1.1.

Companies ranging from Amazon to Zillow have all asked me to help with their ERGs. Working with large companies, like Walmart, and small companies, like Zebra Technologies, has given me a unique perspective of ERGs that is not matched by many others. Seeing these groups operate in every industry allows me to take a step back to notice ERG trends, observe best practices, identify key derailers, and hear the discourse associated with these groups. This puts me in a very privileged position. My academic training, including a doctorate in organization development, helps in the analysis of how employee resource groups operate within their larger organizational systems.

This book intends to share these lessons learned and insights. In doing so, the goal is to further help organizations create the conditions that nurture ERG success. For ERG leaders and ERG members, this book will help you create ERGs that have a holistic impact on your members, the company, and the broader community.

The Very Heart of Diversity and Inclusion Efforts

I'm sure that most readers of this book work at organizations that have a diversity and inclusion (D&I) mission statement. Some are short but effective: "To create, nurture and sustain a global, inclusive culture, where differences drive innovative solutions to meet the needs of our customers and employees." Others are a bit more elaborate: "As both a global and local business, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of our values and is an important part of our company's success. For us, creating a diverse and inclusive workplace is not only the right thing to do – it is a strategic business priority that fosters greater creativity, innovation and connection to the communities we serve."

Table 1.1 Dr. Robert Rodriguez Partial List of ERG Consulting Clients (2017–2021)

Abbott	CBRE	Intel	NBCUniversal
AbbVie	Chevron	JetBlue Airlines	Nielsen
Adobe Systems	Cisco	Johnson &	Nike
Akamai	Comcast	Johnson	Northern
Technologies	Cox Enterprises	KMPG	Trust
Alcon	Cracker Barrel	KraftHeinz	Northwestern
Allstate	Diageo	Levi Strauss & Co.	Mutual
Alto Pharmacy	Discover Card	Liberty Mutual	Oppenheimer
Altria	E.J. Gallo Wine	LinkedIn	Funds
Amgen	Electronic Arts	Lockheed Martin	Pacific Gas &
Anheuser-Busch	Eli Lilly	Lowe's	Electric
Aon Hewitt	Ericsson	Manpower Group	Prudential
Associated Bank	Facebook	Mass General	Insurance
Astellas Pharma	FannieMae	Brigham	Raytheon
Asurion	FiatChrysler	McDonald's	Technologies
Baxter Healthcare	General Electric	Corporation	Sanofi
Biogen	Gilead Sciences	McKesson	SC Johnson
BCBS -	GlaxoSmith Kline	3M	Sony
Massachusetts	Google	Medline	Stanley Black &
Blue Shield of	Gusto	Medtronic	Decker
California	Hallmark Cards	Merck	State Street
BMO Harris	Harley Davidson	MetLife	Corporation
Bank	Harvard	Micron	SurveyMonkey
Boeing	University	Technology	The TJX
British Petroleum	Health Care	Microsoft	Companies
Brunswick	Service Corp.	Mondeléz	Uber
BSE Global	Henkel	National	Under Armour
C.H. Robinson	Corporation	Basketball	Verizon
CapitalOne	Herman Millar	Association	VMware
Catalent	Hyatt Hotels	National Credit	Walgreens
Pharma	Ingredion	Union Association	Zillow

Dr. Robert Rodriguez
 Partial List of ERG Consulting Clients (2017–2021)

But regardless of whether the diversity and inclusion mission statements are short or long, the message is the same. Everyone benefits from having a diverse employee population who feel included in the organization. This synopsis of common mission statements puts employees at the very core of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. So, in my opinion, employee resource groups must be at the very heart of any effort to improve the workplace from a diversity and inclusion perspective.

You see, every company says, “Employees are our most important asset,” yet few rarely act as if this is true. Embracing and nurturing groups that are run by employees (a company’s most important asset) to drive diversity and inclusion (a company’s strategic priority) to promote equity (a company value) just goes to show why employee resource groups are critical. Given the important role ERGs play, it is no wonder they are prolific within organizations. Yet, it is still astonishing that ERGs are still mostly treated as a simple tool in the D&I toolbox, as opposed to being the very essence and manifestation of diversity and inclusion itself.

Why is the pursuit of ERG excellence so important? First consider the current environment of today’s organizations. Companies are having to adapt to a workplace that has an increasingly diverse and global employee population. This diverse workforce demands inclusive work environments. Employee resource groups help to create these inclusive environments.

More diversity in the workplace calls for leaders who can effectively manage this diversity. Gone are the days when a manager could treat every employee the same way. Today’s diverse workforce requires managers to be more inclusive. It requires them to know what motivates each employee and the unique strategies that allow them to get the most out of everyone. Diversity requires managers to use a variety of strategies, approaches, and methods to maximize employee performance. A one-size-fits-all strategy to managing large groups of

employees is not effective. Thus, the demand for more inclusive leaders has risen. Employee resource groups help an organization create the more inclusive leaders they need.

Even though organizations have increased diversity overall, employees from historically underrepresented communities are still lacking in most senior leadership teams. Organizations need to do better in grooming executives that come from a more diverse pool of candidates. With their focus on career advancement, ERGs help to create a more representative talent pipeline.

Not only have workplaces become more diverse, so has our society in general. The population growth in the United States is being driven by multicultural communities. The growing size of these minority populations means that their purchasing power is increasing. Thus, companies must cater to a consumer base that is less homogeneous. Multicultural marketing departments have grown in size as organizations look to penetrate previously overlooked market segments. If companies are to leverage diverse markets as a catalyst for economic growth, they need cultural intelligence. Employee resource groups provide this cultural intelligence.

Increasingly, employees want to work for employers that are socially conscious. They want employers who are good corporate citizens in the communities in which they operate. To accomplish this, organizations need employees who are closely connected to their communities. They need employees who want to give back to their neighborhoods, districts, and regions. Organizations also want employees who are involved in local nonprofits because this helps to build bridges with community organizations. Employee resource groups help companies establish stronger relationships in the community.

For these reasons, and many more, organizations need their ERGs to deliver on their goals. We need our ERGs to perform at their peak. And we need organizations to expand their value proposition

to all their stakeholders. We are not asking for perfection from our employee resource groups. Perfection is not the goal. The goal is a desire to achieve excellence. The dictionary definition of excellence is “to surpass”; it is “the quality of being outstanding or extremely good.” When ERGs strive for excellence, they are always looking at where they are and how they can get a little bit better. And since we will be discussing the concept of ERG excellence throughout the book, I’m going to define it here at the very beginning of our journey.

As we continue along this book, we will periodically pause to reflect how this definition of ERG excellence came to exist and how it manifests itself in our organizations.

ERG excellence is a commitment to a data-driven approach, resulting in an inclusively holistic value proposition in which employees drive accelerated career advancement, improved cultural competency, enhanced community relations, and greater company success.

Employee Resource Group Basics

Prior to launching on our journey to ERG excellence, let’s take a quick glance at these groups. These groups go by many names, including affinity networks, power of difference communities (PODs), employee networks, and diversity councils. The most common names used to refer to these groups are employee resource groups or business resource groups (BRGs). This book will reference the groups mostly as ERGs and occasionally as BRGs.

So, what are employee resource groups? ERGs are inclusive communities in which the members tend to share some common

characteristics. ERGs usually focus on traditionally underrepresented groups within organizations and are typically based on gender (women ERGs), ethnicity (Hispanic ERGs), race (Black/African American ERGs), sexual orientation (LGBTQ ERGs), physical capabilities (disability ERGs), shared experience (military veterans ERGs), age (young professional ERGs), or some other common characteristic (parents ERGs). They typically are formed by employees after receiving the approval by the company to establish an employee resource group.

ERGs are quite prevalent in organizations, with approximately 90 percent of the Fortune 500 companies having employee resource groups. Organizations usually have between six to eight employee resource groups with the occasional company having a dozen or more separate ERGs globally. For example, AT&T, the global media, and communications company, has 37 separate employee groups and networks across their enterprise.

When companies do have ERGs, the minimum penetration rate any organization ought to achieve is 10 percent. This means that at least 10 percent of the organization's employees are members of at least one of their employee resource groups. ERGs can exist with a penetration rate less than 10 percent, but it is difficult for these ERGs to thrive in such situations because they lack the sufficient critical mass of the employee population. A gold standard would be a penetration rate of approximately 20 percent. Best in class numbers that I have seen are a penetration rate of about 40 percent. Just imagine, almost half of an organization's employees identifying as a member of an employee resource group.

The obvious question then becomes, what constitutes being an ERG "member"? Sadly, that is a question that does not have a universally accepted answer. Some companies simply count the number of employees who wish to be placed on an ERG email distribution

list as members. Other organizations require employees to formally acknowledge and disclose their membership in an employee resource group through self-identification. And yet some organizations require a certain level of participation in ERG initiatives before they are counted as a member. This leads to the question of who is considered to be an “active” member. Penetration rates simply use the membership definition chosen by each organization.

My diversity consulting firm, DRR Advisors, conducted a study in 2020 on the average annual investment allocated by companies towards employee resource groups. The study included an analysis of 175 organizations with ERGs and found that the average annual investment allocated to each employee resource group was approximately \$8,800 per year for every 100 members. This means that if an employee resource group has 100 members, on average it received an annual budget of \$8,800 per year from the company. If an ERG has 200 members, on average it receives an annual budget of \$17,600 per year and so on. This represents a 22 percent increase in ERGs budgets since 2011, when ERGs received on average \$7,200 per every 100 members, according to a study by the global equality, diversity, and inclusion practice at Mercer. This equates to an average budget increase for employee resource groups of approximately 2.44 percent per year from 2011 to 2020. Personally, I’m aware of one company where the annual budget allocated to just one of their employee resource groups (their women’s ERG) is over \$1 million per year. A significant investment indeed.

But before we celebrate ERG budget investments, interestingly enough, however, the average annual inflation rate in the United States, according to the US Federal Reserve Bank from 2011 to 2020, is approximately 2.4–2.6 percent. This means that while ERG budgets have increased, these budgets are simply helping ERGs keep up with the inflation rate and thus do not demonstrate any significant progress. So, while organizations have been lauding the importance of their

employee resource groups, they have not increased their investment in them over the last decade. ERG excellence hopes to change that.

The allocation of budgets varies from organization to organization. Some companies allocate ERG budgets based on membership, with ERGs that have larger membership receiving more funds than ERGs with fewer members. Other organizations allocate funds based on a business plan. An ERG puts together a business plan for the year indicating its planned initiatives, including an estimation of how much they will need to successfully execute these initiatives. The company then determines how much of their requested budget outlined in their plan they can give an employee resource group. Some companies provide every ERG the same budget amount, regardless of the size of the group. And some companies, albeit only a few, charge employees a fee to become a member of an ERG, and these fees help to fund the employee resource group. I am aware of several organizations where employees pay an annual fee of \$25 to be a member of an employee resource group. Interesting approach indeed.

Once launched, employee resource groups tend to go through a natural evolution over time. Initially, the ERG tends to focus on the more social aspects of the group with a concentration on building community via events promoting networking and establishing connections with people of similar background or interest. Over time, ERGs expand their focus to include career development initiatives for their members and an increased emphasis on external community outreach. Eventually, they launch initiatives aimed at having a greater alignment with business priorities and organizational goals.

And yet, despite this increased impact, many ERGs are in the midst of a major inflection point fraught with uncertainty about what direction to take to remain relevant. We have to ask ourselves why some employee resource groups have prospered, while others have floundered. How do external trends impact this internal groups? What unexpected challenges await today's ERGs? And what principles must

ERGs live by in order to effectively deal with the changing landscape of contemporary global business?

While some managers marginalize and trivialize ERG contributions, other leaders fully appreciate the value ERGs can provide as they feel a sense of responsibility to addressing pressing societal and business issues if they are to build a global inclusive and respectful workplace and develop a global workforce competent to work effectively with an even more diverse set of colleagues and clients.

Seeing Global ERGs as Simply Overseas Extensions of US Groups

Some organizations are worried that a typical response to diversity and inclusion will make them fall short of their goals. That is, seeing global ERGs as simply overseas extensions of US diversity initiatives. As ERGs have gone global, companies have found the most success with groups dedicated to women, LGBT employees, and those with disabilities. Young professionals have also lent themselves to a global ERG approach as they face some shared challenges within organizations around the world. These kinds of networks continue to proliferate quite naturally.

Some efforts flow from a master global strategy while others surface quite organically in the absence of a global strategy, in response to the universal experience of societal pressures, taboos, and even legal restrictions that force people to hide who they truly are in order to have a chance at success.

Going global opens up additional unexpected dimensions that have universal appeal. For instance, one professional services firm has a Global Athlete's Network, which aims to connect people "who are involved in and passionate about the top echelons of sport," including high-level coaches, elite athletes, and those involved in organizing major sporting events or training camps.

The objectives of this group are instructive in the unique take they have on the role of sports in networking within the organization. The following goal and objectives are listed on the company's intranet:

The goal of the network is to gather insights and ideas so that we can offer a unique perspective to clients. To realize this goal, we have established a set of objectives that address the firm's client and talent agendas:

- Establish a global network of people with a common interest in elite sport, who can share knowledge and experience ranging from training tips to managing a balanced lifestyle.
- Provide a real example of where our talent is “Always one step ahead” that illustrates our company's commitment to high performance, flexibility, and choice.
- Apply high performance and coaching expertise to our business.
- Support the development of a center of excellence in delivering major sporting events that can be leveraged throughout the global organization through sporting event knowledge.

So far, the network covers 28 countries and 24 Olympic sports.

Addressing the issue of race and ethnicity around the globe is a greater challenge, however. How does a Latino employee group go global when Latinos in Latin America are the majority and find the whole concept of ERGs foreign? How does an African American group establish a global presence when many Africans look at Black ERGs and see them as more American than African? How do companies address race and ethnicity in places like Peru, China, and France, where people prefer to talk about things other than race (even when they indeed have racial and ethnic societal tensions)?

Accelerating the evolution of ERGs so that they address both domestic and global diversity and inclusion issues will be explored throughout the book. Pushing ERGs to have a holistic value proposition as they strive toward excellence is the main focus of this book.

ERG Trends

Before launching into tips and strategies on how to achieve ERG excellence, it is important to determine the environment that ERGs are operating in today. These trends have been forming for the last 36–48 months but were accelerated in 2020 due to the global Covid-19 virus pandemic. Employee resource groups have had to learn to pivot and adjust in a world where people are coping with a pandemic, struggling with economic uncertainty, dealing with racial inequality, and adjusting to working from home.

Yet even with all these headwinds, employee resource groups are still prevailing. Their resiliency is impressive. Such resiliency is why employee resource groups have existed in corporate America since the early 1970s. In 1970, Joseph Wilson, the former CEO of Xerox, and Xerox's Black employees launched the National Black Employees Caucus. This caucus is considered by most to be the nation's first official employee resource group. The ability for employee resource groups to evolve ever since is what keeps them relevant and what allows them to persist and endure, even in the most difficult workplace environments. With a better understanding of ERG basics and insights about the environments ERGs are operating in, let's explore the trends that are shaping ERGs today and informing how they will operate tomorrow.

Alignment with Talent Management

Organizations are leveraging employee resource groups not only to help them groom their next generation of company leaders but also to make ERGs a destination for existing leaders. ERGs help companies identify an even larger, more diverse, pool of employees who have the potential to become leaders. But now, companies are also encouraging

those deemed high performers, and as having high potential, to consider becoming more actively involved with ERGs.

Employee resource groups have always provided leadership development opportunities, especially for ERG leaders. Imagine being an employee who is an individual contributor in their current role with limited opportunities to demonstrate their leadership capabilities. Now put that same employee as the leader of an employee resource group, and suddenly the employee is developing a strategy, leading a team, managing a budget, establishing new relationships with co-workers, and raising their visibility and exposure to corporate executives. Access to such leadership experiences is often a reason many employees join an employee resource group.

However, companies do not want to create a scenario where the ERGs are helping to groom leaders only to have those leaders leave the employee resource group. Organizations need leadership continuity in order for these groups to have sustainable long-term success. And this has resulted in the greater alignment of ERGs with talent management.

Alignment with talent management initiatives often involves ensuring that strong performers are in the leadership roles of the ERGs. If the employee resource group does not have a strong leader, companies are now starting to appoint someone to the role of ERG leader who is more capable. The person appointed is increasingly someone who is already deemed a high performer or someone with tremendous potential.

The reasons for the need to appoint strong performers into ERG leadership roles are twofold. First, companies realize that employee resource groups tend to be only as strong as their leader. Second, the demand for strong ERG leaders often exceeds the supply. And this has led to greater ERG alignment with talent management. This will be explored further in Chapter 11.

Underutilized Business Assets

There has been much fanfare about turning “employee resource groups” into “business resource groups.” The thinking goes that ERGs cannot just be the “food, flag, and fun folks” who are primarily focused on the social aspects of employee resource groups. Organizations want ERGs to have a broader value proposition. The goal is not to eliminate the social aspects of employee resource groups because we still want them to celebrate over food, waive their diversity flag, and hold events that are indeed fun. But we need to encourage ERGs to also add value in a more holistic way. This broader value proposition is something that I have been advocating for many years as a component of the definition of ERG excellence.

Yet, in my experience, ERGs are not the ones to blame if they do not have a more direct impact on helping an organization meet their goals. In working with thousands of employee resource groups for the past several decades, these ERGs want to have a direct impact on the organization. They are often more than ready, willing, and able to support business initiatives. The real problem exists with the organization itself. Surprisingly, organizations are woefully inadequate at leveraging their ERGs for business impact. This results in employee resource groups being an underutilized business asset still today. We will explore this phenomenon, and how to overcome it, in Chapter 8.

Metrics-that-Matter

In my experience, ERGs have long struggled with articulating the value they provide back to their members and to the organization as a whole. Any measures of success an employee resource group touts typically involves a listing of their activities and membership size. ERGs are quick to tell you how many members they have, across how many locations, and how many events they held in the past year. While these numbers help, they do not adequately convey to others how

successful the ERGs are. The lack of metrics is one reason that middle managers often do not give ERGs the credibility and respect that they deserve. What is needed by employee resource groups is a more sophisticated measurement strategy, a strategy that not only highlights the ERG's activities, but also the impact of those activities.

ERGs need to have metrics that help them tell their story and inform others why they exist. I call these "ERG metrics-that-matter." Without such metrics, employee resource groups are unable to track their progress or compare themselves to benchmark standards. ERGs are not solely to blame for this lack of metrics. Organizations are often reluctant to share data and information that ERGs can use to establish such metrics. Also, not having metrics makes it impossible to have a scorecard or dashboard where an ERG can easily share their results. If an ERG does have a scorecard or dashboard, it tends to usually be a qualitative analysis of their activity as opposed to a quantitative report on their impact. The lack of a measurement strategy is how many ERGs are operating today and we will explore this further in Chapter 10.

Succession Planning

One reason for greater alignment between ERGs and talent management is that ERGs do not typically engage in succession planning. The purpose of succession planning is to make sure an ERG always has the right leaders in place should a leadership change happen quickly or unexpectedly. The lack of succession planning is one reason that some employee resource groups struggle to sustain early success.

The Covid-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on ERG leadership. Some existing ERG leaders left their roles because they had to concentrate solely on their day job. Some left because they were downsized or quit their jobs to focus on their family. And some left their role as an ERG leader because they simply could not run

an employee resource group under the challenging Covid-19 work environment. Those who were able to remain in their ERG leadership role often indicated that the search for the next ERG leader should begin. These individuals burned out due to all the heavy lifting they had to do to run an employee resource group effectively during the dynamic and unprecedented period that began in 2020.

All this sudden and concentrated leadership change at the top of many ERGs has exposed insufficient pipelines of new potential ERG leaders. Not enough ERG members have been groomed to assume leadership roles of an employee resource group. Additionally, companies have not adequately made ERG leadership roles highly desired, resulting in fewer employees wanting these roles. This succession planning crisis, and all its implications, will be analyzed in Chapter 5.

Skeptical Middle Management

One thing that has not changed much in the past 10–15 years is that middle managers at organizations still are mostly skeptical about the value of employee resource groups. These middle managers struggle to see the benefits that ERGs provide. Some are still convinced that ERGs are divisive as opposed to being entities that promote unity and inclusion.

I once spoke to a focus group consisting of managers at one company who saw a lack of engagement by middle management as a key obstacle for their employee resource groups. It was difficult to blame some middle managers for not being more supportive of ERGs because they simply didn't know what these groups were about. Some were not aware they even existed or lacked clarity as to what ERGs do. Given such lack of awareness about ERGs, it was easy to see why there were not more supported.

Other middle managers were more transparent and shared their concerns about employees spending too much time on ERG activities

and not enough time on their regular job. These managers shared their reality of having too few resources to meet challenging goals and that they need their employees focused on their work. And still others conveyed the impracticality of allowing their employees to attend ERG meetings or events when it required their employees, who were mostly hourly, to be at their desks answering calls or on the production line putting out product.

Regardless of the reason, ERGs need more active engagement from middle management. They need managers to support employees who wish to participate in employee resource group activities. Better yet, ERGs need more middle managers themselves to join employee resource groups. But in order for this to happen, both employee resource groups and middle managers have to do their part.

Employee resource groups need to do a better job of defining their value proposition (including metrics-that-matter) to middle management. Employee resource groups must convey how and why their activities are relevant to middle managers. Conversely, middle management should be more proactive in finding out what ERGs are all about and why these groups are prevalent across corporate America and what employees get out of their involvement. However, until both stakeholder groups accomplish this, the lack of middle management support is a reality that ERGs must contend with for the foreseeable future. The strategies highlighted throughout this book will hopefully convince more middle managers of their importance in endorsing and advocating for ERGs. The lack of middle manager support will be analyzed further in Chapter 2.

Narrowing ERG Ambitions

Employee resource groups are struggling to deal with two goals that appear to be mutually exclusive. On the one hand, employee resource groups have been expanding their value proposition beyond just social

activities. Employee resource groups now have robust career advancement initiatives; they strive to elevate the cultural competency within an organization; they support community outreach and as mentioned previously; and they desire to make a larger business impact.

But employee resource groups' budget resources have been depleted due to the changing work landscape that began in 2020. ERGs membership numbers took a dip as overall employment levels dropped. Some companies reduced the budget dollars they had previously allocated to their ERGs, citing reduced budget cuts across the organization as the reason. And with employees now working from home, many previously planned ERG events and gatherings simply were not feasible. The result is employee resource groups with big ambitions being confronted with the reality of a new workplace. The bold plans and activities that ERGs had at the beginning of 2020 have been reduced. Employee resource groups have had to pivot in an environment that now places greater emphasis on prioritization. "Underpromise and overdeliver" is the new mantra being embraced by employee resource groups under this new reality.

Some employee resource groups are handling this transition effectively. They eliminated events that did not align with the overall mission of their ERG. There is increased collaboration amongst the employee resource groups as they partner to do events jointly in an effort to reduce the redundancy that results when ERGs operate in silos. Employee resource group leaders have become better skilled at saying "no" or "not now" when ideas for future activities are given by ERG members. And ERG leaders have improved at delegation, resulting in a broader array of members contributing to doing ERG work. Yet the question remains that when things go back to normal, if they ever will return to how things were before, will ERGs continue with the less-is-more mentality? Will they be successful in having a broad value proposition while being more selective in their pursuits?

I believe the answer is yes, but only time will tell how employee resource groups will operate after the effects of the pandemic have passed.

ERG Leader Development

For many, many years, it was surprising to see organizations ask much of their employee resource group leaders but offer little to help them be successful. ERG leaders are still often left on their own to figure out how to elevate member engagement, develop an ERG strategy, and manage a group that is made up of employee volunteers with no direct reporting relationship. ERG leaders have been asked to articulate their impact on the organization without being given access to data to measure such impact. Companies want metrics from their employee resource groups but offer no training to the leaders on how to establish appropriate metrics. I could go on and on, but you get my point; much is asked of ERG leaders when often not much is given to them in the form of organizational and development support.

Fortunately, many organizations have seen the error of their ways. But to be clear, we are not talking about professional development workshops that ERGs offer their members. We are talking about professional development that organizations offer to the leaders of their ERGs with the goal of making them more effective.

There is tremendous growth in the number of companies holding regular internal ERG summits. These summits usually bring together the leaders of ERGs to hear from corporate executives, learn about diversity and inclusion goals, network with other ERG leaders, hold panels with ERG leaders at other organizations, and so on. These summits usually require a significant investment by an organization. Some companies that do not hold their own ERG summits will send their ERG leaders to external organizations that organize ERG conferences focused on professional development.

In some cases, an employee resource group does not hold a summit per se, but invests in professional development workshops for their ERG leaders. Occasionally, existing internal professional development content is delivered exclusively to employee resource group leaders, especially if such development content might not be available to the employee.

For example, the home improvement retail organization Lowe's Companies, Inc., based in Mooresville, North Carolina, conducted a session for its business resource group leaders on how to use a new internal assessment tool that helped identify employee work style and communication preferences. BRG leadership team members were given the assessment so that each could assess their own effectiveness. The business resource groups were shown how they could generate a report that outlined the communication and work style preferences of their BRG leadership team, all in an effort to help the business resource groups operate more effectively together.

And on occasion, external speakers are selected to provide development to the leaders of employee resource groups. This is how many companies engage with me. I've worked with numerous companies – such as Capital One, Under Armour, Catalent Pharma, The TJX Companies, and Uber, to name a few – where I have established an ERG Leadership Academy that consists of providing regular professional development workshops for their ERG leaders.

Whether it be internal ERG summits, external ERG conferences, or access to professional development workshops, the purpose is the same: to develop the skills and capabilities of leaders so that they can be even more effective at guiding their employee resource groups. This trend is long overdue, and it is gratifying to see so many organizations embrace the idea of ERG leader professional development.

Let's remember why we need employee resource excellence. Excellence is about continuously looking to improve, striving to do the best you can, and looking for ways to be a little bit better than

yesterday. When employee resource groups strive for excellence, they are forced to focus on the things they already are doing well.

ERG excellence is a daily, never-ending journey. ERG excellence requires that the majority of ERG focus is on the things that are working really well and on the next thing they can do, which is often within their reach. Striving to do better is incredibly motivating and inspiring because all employee resource groups have an innate desire to do better. ERGs want to excel.

