

3 innovative ways
to leverage
your ERGs for
better inclusion



Employee Resource Groups or ERGs; this is a term that came up frequently among the members of the LGBTQ+ community and the HR/D&I professionals that we spoke with for our new study, 'Inclusion Without Exception: Where India Inc. stands with respect to the LGBTQ+ community.'

This definitely is indicative that ERGs are fast becoming a norm in Indian Corporates. ERGs exist not only for members of LGBTQ+ communities but also for women employees, specific functions and minority groups. The objective is to bring together members of the organization who belong to the group or those who have similar interest areas or those who want to associate themselves as allies. Here is what ERGs help to establish:

- The organization cares for the diverse employees at work
- The organization wants its employees to learn from and network with other members of different functions and groups
- The organization is committed to creating a culture of inclusion where all employees feel welcome

If we specifically talk about LGBTQ+ groups, there are members from within the community who are active members of these groups in their organizations, and even have goals defined around ERG participation. "With my manager who is straight male – on the first day he made me feel very welcome. He knew that I was going to be a part of the steering committee for LGBTQ and friends ERG from the first day itself. So, he mentioned that if the work in the field becomes too much then to let him know – that he'd make my work in the main role a little bit less or he could adjust. In my goals as well it's mentioned that 20% of my performance is going to be measured in that field as well. I felt very at home from the first day", says Rakesh Kumar Duan, a 29 years old cis gay man working in HR at Finastra in Bangalore

With ERGs acting as an 'influencer' within the organization, here is what leaders, managers and employees can do to leverage them for your inclusion goals:



from global to glocal

Many organizations that are global in nature adopt ERGs as it is driven in the form of a mandate across all operational countries. However, what leaders need to understand is that what works for an American or European workplace may not work in the Indian context.

Instead, if you customize the core value areas and vision of the ERGs especially the LGBTQ+ ERG, then buy-in from the leadership is easier.

Understanding the stage of your organization in the LGBTQ+ focus (link to Equality vs Equity article) and creating programs accordingly will help to drive better inclusion.

“With things like this, you need the senior-most person in the management or the board member to have an equally invested agenda. - Geetha Thiagarajan, Geo HR Head, APAC, Finastra

defining allyship for the average employee

“People just say they are allies. Ally doesn't mean you've simply heard about it. Allyship comes when you spread the word or when you see discrimination, you raise the voice.”, says Sandipan Kushary, a 25 years old open and proud Queer leading Mobbera Foundation and an IT professional in Hyderabad.

This is a common sentiment felt by the LGBTQ+ community, but when you look at allyship from the employee perspective, you may understand that while people sign up as allies and join different ERGs, the problem could be that they actually do not know what to do to contribute.

Creating a clear-cut value proposition and defining why it is important to become allies, expected behavior of the ally, resources to refer and how being an ally or active participation in ERGs can help in professional development within the organization are areas to manage to leverage ERGs to their full potential.

cross linkage of ERGs

Employee Resource Groups specific to certain communities are important but equally important is to create avenues where these groups talk to each other and ensure that isolation does not happen. A senior leader from the HR fraternity explains this. She says, “We do not see the representation of LGBTQ+ members in any other ERG except the PRIDE chapter. We need to get their voice out to multiple other forums, especially the decision-making ones. I hardly see that today. We need to think about how not to make ERGs restrictive but rather make them facilitative.”

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