Affinity Groups: An Organizational Resource for Diversity and Inclusion

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Building Relationships/Improving Outcomes

Some Opening Questions . . .

→ What’s in place that promotes employees bringing their “total selves” to work?

→ If diversity is knowledge, how does the organization learn from its diversity?

→ How does the organization empower its diversity to contribute?

Is diversity in place, but not in play?
Value of Empowerment

- Validity
- Competency Building
- Ownership
- Acceptance
- Commitment
- Diffusion

Discussion Framing

- Potential Benefits
- Reservations
Affinity Groups → An Evolving Strategy

- EEO/AA Resource
  - Inclusion Strategy
- Social Group
  - Business Resource

Employee Resource Groups

Affinity Groups → Many Approaches

- Company sanctioned groups of employees
- Formed around one identity group/concern, but open to all
- Self-initiated, voluntary, employee driven
- Cross-functional & multi-level
- Function with senior manager sponsors/champions & HR/Diversity professional support
- Purpose related to business relevant activity—professional development, business partnerships & communications
### Examples of Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation in professional conferences and job fairs</th>
<th>Help Executives prepare for meeting with foreign dignitaries &amp; translate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organize career/professional development workshops</td>
<td><strong>Partner with business unit on product development &amp; marketing to targeted communities</strong></td>
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<td>Groups partnered to deliver mentoring programs</td>
<td><strong>Partner with HR on benefit policy development</strong></td>
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<td>Speak at new employee orientations and host welcoming socials</td>
<td><strong>Raise money for Hurricane Katrina relief</strong></td>
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<td>Host lunch-n-learn sessions</td>
<td><strong>Mentor students in school</strong></td>
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<td>Sponsor cultural events</td>
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### Business Value ↔ Employee Benefit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Value</th>
<th>Recruitment &amp; Retention</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Development</td>
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<td>Marketing Outreach</td>
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<td>Product Development</td>
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<td>Community Involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information &amp; Learning</td>
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<td>(2-way: Senior Mgt &amp; EEs)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee Benefit</th>
<th>Personal &amp; professional growth</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community &amp; support system</td>
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<td>Engagement &amp; contribution</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring &amp; networking</td>
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<td>Opportunity to show leadership</td>
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<td>Visibility with senior leaders</td>
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When Affinity Groups/ERGs Work Well . . .

1. Workplace Equity (HR Policy & Practice)

2. Openness to Difference (Culture)

3. Engagement & Influence (Structure & Process)

Outcomes

Affinity Groups

Affinity Groups ➔ Pitfalls & Solutions

Pitfalls

- Foster polarization & divisiveness
- Marginalized as social organizations
- Become grievance forums
- Lack of transparency
- Loose link to executive leadership
- Too independent/no accountability

Solutions ➔

- Open to all
- Communicate
- Focus on the Business Value
- Managed & Supported
- Connections & Relationships
- Partnering
### Managing the Process

**Typical Considerations**

- Develop guidelines for establishing groups
- Proposal review & approval, ensuring there is a business reason
- Reporting & accountability
- Funding & resource support—meeting rooms, e-mail use, web sites, co. logo, etc.
- Leadership training for group chairs
- Professional advisement, coaching and support
- Advocacy, connection building and relationship facilitation

### Authorization...

- What’s the **Purpose**? What are the **Goals**?
- Process
- **Purpose**
- **Resources**
- **Expectations for Action**
- What is it Supposed To Do? What Tasks? What Activities?
- **Boundaries for Decision-Making**
- What decisions can be made? What’s out of bounds? Role & Scope of Decision-Making
- What kind of Budget, Time and Staff Support will be available?
Legal Concerns.

Consult with Legal

- Compliance with anti-discrimination laws
- Workers’ Compensation
- Compensable Time Under FLSA
- National Labor Relations Act

Affinity Groups ➔ Advantages

Advantages
- Open dialogue & learning
- Avenue for constructive contribution
- Build employee commitment and skills
- Develop talent and leadership
- Keep senior management “in touch” with employees
- Support diversity and inclusion culture change
- Strengthen community outreach & reputation
Some Closing Questions . . .

How would affinity groups align with your overall diversity strategy?

What’s in place right now to support them? What would be needed?

What would you like to learn from other’s experience?

Thank You

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