



Employee Resource Groups & Networks Toolkit

Workshop – 22 February 2024

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Context

This toolkit is based on all the information gathered from the Roundtable Discussions during the ERG/Networks Workshop of 22 February 2024, where 60 employees from over 12 companies shared experience.

The information is presented per table topic, and organized into relevant categories.

For an international and more general perspective on ERG/ Employee Networks, you can read this McKinsey paper (12/2022) : [Effective employee resource groups are key to inclusion at work. Here's how to get them right | McKinsey](#)

In case of questions, contact us: info@womeninfinance.be



The 7 roundtable topics

- 1 How to **start** a specific network?
- 2 One **unified network** or **multiple** scope-specific networks?
- 3 How to **expand** our network(s)?
- 4 How to make different networks **work together**?
- 5 How (and why) can **HR support** employee networks?
- 6 How to have more **impact** and how to measure this?
- 7 How to have more **management buy-in**?

Testimonial from an ExCo Sponsor – Khatleen Pauwels (MixCity, BNP Paribas Fortis)

Key characteristics of a Sponsor

1. Alignment
 - Have a real interest in the topics that you are sponsoring
2. Commitment
 - Visibility
 - Communication
 - Reflect & brainstorm
 - Be available to the Board
3. Reliability & Trust
 - Assertiveness
 - Open communication
4. Give Autonomy
 - Take some distance as a Sponsor; essential for people to volunteer
 - Empowerment of the core team
 - Grow the network
 - Give own appreciation

How to select a Sponsor?

1. Carefully select a sponsor
2. What are their interests?
3. Is the enthusiasm shared?
4. What is their motivation: very important as it comes on top of everything else (pitfall!)
5. Deciding for a renewable 2 year Sponsorship may be a good practice. If the sponsor is not doing much you will get a chance to ask for a different one. If she/he is perfect... you can ask for a second 2 year mandate.

Create a Feedback Culture

1. Status meetings on the objectives
2. Ask & give
 - Am I doing well as a sponsor?
 - What is (not) working?
3. Encourage your sponsor to regularly talk about your network's progress in Executive Committee.

Topic 1 – How to **start** a specific network?

General

Starting a network is a true momentum: involving a diverse group of employees and managers from the start, in co-creating this network, may be one of the most important advices in order to develop a broad buy-in from the start.

1. **Genuine interest** in the topic is essential: "the purpose will find you" (having a sincere passion; willingness to give without expecting much in return; investing energy and time into a meaningful cause you believe in)
2. Find good **core team members – start small**
 - Actively recruit members, both women and men, by clearly articulating the benefits of joining.
 - Committed individual members (as it comes “on top of things”)
 - Establish a governance: core team and board members comprising of motivated individuals; maintain a manageable size to facilitate decision-making process
3. **Define the identity** of the network
 - Establish a vision (avoid setting limitations)
 - Develop a clear mission and scope;
 - Set SMART objectives and prioritize
 - Identify core values
 - Conduct a SWOT analysis (considering the company’s culture, vision, mission, and maturity)
 - Make sure your network is not excluding anyone. (for instance, a gender equality network should be open to all colleagues F/M/X)
4. Identify the **stakeholders** and their contribution to reaching the objectives
 - Seek general support (HR, D&I, etc)
 - Secure a strong sponsor (from senior management or ExCo)
 - Obtaining management buy-in early on in a vertical/traditional organization is crucial to ensure that volunteers can allocate their working time to the cause and secure budget allocations for various initiatives such as organizing events, financing diversity trainings, or participating in conferences
 - If the company culture leans towards horizontal structures, promoting a transversal approach by involving key managers from different departments can be beneficial
 - Define budget needs & request a budget from HR (seek financial support)
5. **Practical**
 - Schedule meetings every 2/3/4 weeks
 - Choose convenient times like noon, or 17:00
 - One hour is sufficient for meeting duration; outline a clear agenda for each session



- Arrange at least one lunch or team event per year, for cohesion & fun (as a reward for dedicated energy)
- Maintain informal coffee & tea gatherings
- Maintain an up-to-date register of members

6. **Communication strategy**

- Create a comprehensive one-pager: defining who we are & our objectives
- Use pictures to humanize the network (give a face to the name)
- Design a logo for branding purposes
- Ensure clear communication; involve the Communication Department for assistance

7. **Event** organization

- Begin with a launching event to introduce the network, its members, and the theme; offer coffee & desserts
- Search the help of other existing networks in our sector who can share their experience with your
- Invite **speakers** to address specific themes or topics

Topic 2 – One **unified** network or **multiple** scope-specific networks?

General

Every aspect of diversity may encounter specific challenges related to potential reasons for exclusion. However, the overarching principle is to promote diversity as a whole. There is no one-size-fits-all model; it must align with the specific needs of your company.

One unified network

1. Avoid binary thinking
 - Ensure transparency of initiatives
 - Interconnect the initiatives (cross-link)
2. Advantages
 - Alignment
 - Equal support from HR & Corporate level
 - Networks are treated fairly (same support)
 - One central coordination
 - Continuity

Multiple scope-specific networks

1. Focus is key: define a clear scope of each network
2. Advantages
 - Dedicating focus to one topic allows time for in-depth exploration and discussion of that particular subject
 - Enables the development of more targeted actions
 - Addresses the specific needs of a targeted population
 - Increases engagement among members
 - Aligns with local needs, particularly in an international group
 - Facilitates greater empowerment

Topic 3 – How to **expand** our network(s)?

General

After the first 3 to 5 years of launching a network, several companies experienced a slow-down, a difficulty to reinvent activities, to keep board members motivated, to keep attracting new members especially. Time for assessing, motivating, bringing new talents in.

1. **Assess & evaluate** the network annually
 - (Re-)Define priorities
 - Not solely for the long term
 - Step back and reflect on past achievements and added value
 - Request feedback from participants (note: consider that you are addressing convinced and generally supportive individuals)

2. **Incentivize** the colleagues to maintain their motivation
 - Conduct mid-year assessments to ensure engagement
 - Ensure open & transparent communication within the network
 - Facilitate communication between different networks
 - Emphasize the enriching experience
 - Allow for creativity & innovation

3. **Rationalize** the utilization of available resources within the organization
 - Time
 - Energy
 - Budget

4. **Seek support**
 - From HR
 - From an active and committed Sponsor (ExCo), while ensuring the initiative originates from bottom-up (constructing together)
 - From similar networks in other organisations
 - Define concrete expectations/actions
 - Define & request budgetary allocations

5. Call for **membership applications**
 - Attract individuals based on their interests and how they can contribute
 - Differentiate between Core Team & Ambassadors
 - Ensure that participation in a network remains a choice on a voluntary basis, avoiding top-down appointments
 - Maintain inclusivity within the networks: ensuring they remain open to everyone (e.g. allies)
 - Introduce the networks to new employees
 - Example: select members through interviews to demonstrate commitment

6. **Communication strategy**

- Utilize the intranet for each network to present the networks, their objectives, team composition, etc)
- Establish a newsletter and include the topic in other company newsletters (e.g. HR). Your network activities may even be mentioned in the Sustainability report of your company
- Utilize LinkedIn to share the networks' activities and events
- Connect with other networks and share invitations
- Introduce networks to new employees, especially during their onboarding
- Leverage HR and sponsors to promote the network
- Discuss the networks at informal occasions

Topic 4 – How to make different networks work **together**?

General

In several institutions, there are between 5 and 7 different networks. There is a risk of functioning as an isolated network without connections to other networks. Networks that are connected to each other become more intersectional, organically, which makes them more inclusive. Also, connection between HR DEI team and networks is key to build DEI as part of strategy.

Suggested actions

1. Create **visibility** for all networks
 - Initiative should come from leadership
 - Inform new employees about the different networks
2. Foster collaboration among networks (to grow). Focus collaboration on **themes**, such as
 - Budget
 - Maximizing intersectionality of networks (also inactive members)
 - Efficiency
 - Mutual support
3. Organize **gatherings with representatives** of all networks
 - Schedule recurring in-person or online meetings
 - Establish a chat platform for all networks
 - Arrange a monthly DEI Council involving all ERG leaders
 - Collaborate on organizing joint events
 - Utilize **DEI week/days** as an opportunity to
 - Co-create initiatives
 - Showcase different networks
 - Expand your own comfort zone
 - Share experiences and learnings

Topic 5 – How (and why) can **HR support** employee networks?

General

HR is vital for networks and should be involved, yet the dual role of HR can pose challenges. This includes potential conflicts of interest between advocating for the network on the one hand, and defining company policies on the other. Additionally, HR's time availability and independence may be impacted.

Suggested role(s) of HR

1. Strengthen the networks' **legitimacy**
 - Assist in creating visibility of all networks
 - Facilitate dialogue between networks and other stakeholders in the company
 - Maintain regular contact with the networks' sponsor
 - Appoint an HR sponsor for each network alongside the ExCo sponsor
 - Highlight the positive impact on teams' and company performance, employee engagement, and both the company's and employees' commitment to diversity and inclusion
 - Recognize networks as a tool for talent attraction and retention, as well as a source of innovation and feedback
2. **Facilitate** implementation and expansion of networks
 - Assist in communication, including addressing concerns
 - Encourage cross-network cooperation
 - Aid in defining policies, and not solely focus on activities
 - Allocate budget resources
 - Support evaluation process to keep people motivated, set targets, and challenge employees
 - Assist in conducting surveys on networks and collect feedback from networks to understand their needs
 - Support communication initiatives (together with Communication Department)
3. Make **HR platforms** available
 - In connection with onboarding of new employees
 - Share network's information through the intranet
 - Provide training & learning modules, such as managers' training on effective communication skills regarding bullying prevention
4. Utilize **HR expertise**
 - Address diversity issues at various employment stages, including recruitment, promotions, and leave requests
 - Having a representative of HR ensures that sensitivity to diversity and inclusion is conveyed throughout the HR department



5. **Events** organization

- Assist in organization of events
- Contribute to event planning (agenda)

6. Provide **data** support

- Collaborate with HR/Legal teams to conduct pay gap checks
- Ensure access to relevant data in compliance with GDPR
- Utilize data to support budget requests
- Monitor Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Topic 6 – How to have more **impact** and how to **measure** this?

General

Having impact as a network is key in order to get enough means and sponsorship, and to remain alive in time. Measuring the impact through data, collecting feedback on the network's impact may be difficult, your network's sponsor is there to help.

How to have more impact?

1. Establish a **virtuous circle** where ExCo Sponsor raises awareness of the network and facilitates support for its goals. Ensure that diversity and inclusion are integral components of the company strategy, not just to please stakeholders, but as fundamental pillars of organizational success. Therefore, seek alignment of network objectives with the organization's overarching goals and objectives, and company culture
2. **Open** the network to everyone, particularly allies
3. **Highlight** success stories, achievements, and testimonials, while also addressing areas that require improvement or are not progressing as desired
4. Increase **visibility** of the networks by participating as a team in the various events organized
5. Foster a **secure environment for open dialogue**, where individuals feel comfortable approaching members of the network to share their concerns. If agreed upon, these issues can be relayed to the management team by the lead
6. Develop an **employee journey** that includes the opportunity to join the network, progress measurement, promotion prospects, and feedback on individual experiences
7. Offer **skills** development through mentoring programs or skills workshops. Develop smart skills, such as presentation skills. Encourage employees to step out of their comfort zone, for example by participating in panel discussions, or by active networking
8. Embrace **diversity in hiring** by sourcing candidates from a wide array of universities and diversifying recruitment locations. Ensure inclusive vacancies that address emotional intelligence needs and add diversity to **evaluations**
9. Request **input from the new generation** when reshaping standards and norms
10. Collect **feedback** from members to continuously improve and adapt activities and communication

How to measure ?

1. **Strategic approach:** define the **current** as-is and **desired/target** culture of the organization



- Inequality score: measurement to assess levels of inequality within the organization
- Exit strategy: plan for phasing out or transitioning ERG initiatives once objectives are met or no longer needed

2. Implement culture change through **intermediate goals**
3. Incorporate both **quantitative** and **qualitative** measurement
 - Recurring assessments
 - Use caution with identification; avoid applying predefined labels
 - Utilize broader questions
 - Examples include:
 - satisfaction scores after events
 - # of (active) members
 - # of trainings attended
 - # of communication messages per channel
 - Well-being surveys: assess the perception of inclusion in the company
4. Assess **available diversity data**, both internal and public
5. Assess whether individuals feel like they belong to a **minority** group
6. Identify potential **barriers** at the level of the organizational or group level
7. Ensure reporting on data to the appropriate governance bodies

Topic 7 – How to have more management buy-in?

General

Initiate networks from bottom-up, ensuring effective involvement, but also secure top-down sponsorship from management or the Executive Committee (ExCo) level. Designate a dedicated sponsor for each network. Encourage the different sponsors to be vocal about their role and what they learn through the networks.

Criteria that could persuade management buy-in

Emphasize the “**what’s in it for me?**” aspect. Link into several themes:

1. **Personal values**

- Emphasize human connection and alignment with personal values
- Highlight sponsors with strong people management skills
- Build a human relationship by creating a safe space and fostering trust
- Avoid a generic “diversity and inclusion is a priority for all executives” approach

2. **Company values** and branding. Utilize persuasive narratives (stories) that align with the values

3. Business **objectives** & targets: provide “hard evidence”, such as figures, data, Key Performance Indicators (KPI), ESG targets, and non-financial reporting/statements

4. **Competition**: highlight the actions of competitors and peer group pressure to stay competitive

5. **Client** expectations: address client expectations and emphasize the importance of diversity and inclusion to maintain client satisfaction

6. Expectations from potential **employees**/hires: showcase the networks’ **role in recruitment** and meeting the expectations of potential employees and hires

Specific steps that can be implemented in collaboration between Head of DEI, HR and representatives of networks

1. **Invite** management or potential sponsors for discussions or meetings, or events (both internal & external); Place diversity and inclusion at the centre of discussions and activities; Invite **expert speakers** to bring the message

2. Set-up a **learning track** for (new & existing) managers on diversity & inclusion; Ask support from **HR** (workshops, data on team performance: diverse/non-diverse)

3. Demonstrate **boldness and ambition**; assertively communicate needs rather than simply making requests

4. Introduce a **pledge** : formal high level statement with commitment or promise from management; outline specific actions or initiatives that management commits to in order to



demonstrate their buy-in; serves as a tangible way for management to show their dedication and support, while encouraging greater involvement and cooperation from all levels of the organization

5. Ensure **visibility and transparency** regarding the networks and their sponsorship
6. Actively collaborate with the sponsor(s) and review the activities of the networks and their role as a sponsor, seeking feedback
7. Request the use of personal assistant of the sponsor for administrative tasks of the networks, as a token for actual sponsorship
