JOURNAL OF SUSTAINABLE SOCIAL CHANGE

*Journal of Sustainable Social Change*
2025, Volume 17, Pages 1–22
DOI: 10.5590/JSSC.2025.17.1394


Original Research

WALDEN UNIVERSITY

# Impactful Programs and Initiatives for Employee Resource Groups That Promote and Sustain Positive Social Determinants of Health

**Lisa Kangas,** PhD
*Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States*
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3702-9830

**Maureen Hall,** MD, MEd, BSc
*Ross University School of Medicine, Barbados*
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0341-2505

**Julie James,** MSLIS
*Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States*
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1236-6811

**Gladys Peters**, EdD, MPH
*Walden University, Minneapolis, Minnesota, United States*

**Contact:** *Lisa.Kangas@mail.waldenu.edu*

## Abstract

Organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leaders' lack of interest in employee resource groups (ERGs) and related programs can negatively impact an organization's culture, operational excellence, and employee retention and have detrimental implications for social determinants of health (SDOH). Prioritizing ERG programs and initiatives is essential for organizational success and can positively affect SDOH. This qualitative pragmatic inquiry study identified and explored ERG programs and initiatives that support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention. The research question for this study was: What ERG programs and initiatives support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention? The study included eight DEI leaders from various organizations with ERG expertise. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews and by reviewing public and government documents. Grounded in the conceptual framework of SDOH and organizational theory, five themes emerged using thematic analysis:

*Note.* This research was supported in part by funds received from a 2023 Social Determinants of Health in Distance Education Research Grant, which Walden University created to encourage research in the name of the university that contributes scholarship on distance education and its relationships to and impacts on educational justice and equity and the Social Determinants of Health more broadly.

Adtalem EDGE. Adtalem EDGE is a network of leadership scholars and professionals who promote women's enhanced career experience and advancement in leadership roles. It was created to accelerate the advancement of women working at Adtalem Global Education while fostering a culture of diversity and overall inclusiveness.

EDGE Research and Analytics Research Committee. The goals of the EDGE Research and Analytics Research Committee continue to identify "different types of resources and ideologies" that will inform our sponsors about potential solutions and how best to implement them to nurture a more diverse and inclusive Global EDGE of women in leadership.

(a) improve the culture, (b) promote marginalized ethnicities in leadership, (c) elevate employee performance, (d) advance operational excellence, and (e) foster employee retention. A key recommendation for DEI and ERG leaders is to integrate SDOH within their ERG programs and initiatives. The implications for positive social change and SDOH include the potential to create and sustain inclusive environments, support career development, foster social support networks, and engage with local communities. Implications for positive social change and SDOH emphasize the broader impact of these programs and initiatives on individual and community well-being and a healthy society.

**Keywords**: *affinity groups, employee performance, employee resource groups (ERGs), ERG programs and initiatives, employee retention, operational excellence, organizational culture, social determinants of health*

**Date Submitted**: February 28, 2025 | **Date Published:** July 16, 2025

**Recommended Citation**

Kangas, L., Hall, M., James, J., & Peters, G. (2025). Impactful programs and initiatives for employee resource groups that promote and sustain positive social determinants of health. *Journal of Sustainable Social Change, 17*, 1–22 https://doi.org/10.5590/JSSC.2025.17.1394

## Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s, affinity groups, which women and Black employees initially formed for social connection, evolved into what we now refer to as employee resource groups (ERGs) or business resource groups (BRGs). These groups started as informal networks among employees with similar identities and interests (Keenan et al., 2022). Today, affinity groups, or ERGs, have become more sophisticated and can provide significant value to organizations.

Affinity groups and ERGs are related concepts and can take various forms within organizations. An affinity group comprises employees with common interests or identities, such as gender, race, age, or sexual orientation (Seramount, 2009). These groups foster connections among all employees, particularly those new to the organization, enabling them to build mutually beneficial relationships throughout the workplace (Seramount, 2009).

ERGs, on the other hand, are specialized affinity groups that focus on supporting specific communities, such as parents, veterans, or employees with disabilities (Githens & Aragon, 2009). Over time, ERGs have become more organized and essential to company culture, strategically demonstrating their value and securing the funding necessary for their success (Seramount, 2009). They have developed into structured, company-sponsored entities with mission statements and executive champions, emphasizing recruitment, education, and career advancement (Keenan et al., 2022). This study highlights findings about impactful ERG programs and initiatives that add value to organizations.

The research question for this study was: What ERG programs and initiatives support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention? This study aimed to identify and explore ERG programs and initiatives to support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention to succeed. ERG business plans should include a 2-year calendar detailing programs and initiatives focusing on training, education, recruitment, mentoring, new employee engagement, community outreach, and company representation roles (Seramount, 2009). Within the organization, promoting education, developing recruitment strategies, and participating in celebrations all contribute to company-wide recognition, engagement, and implications that advance positive outcomes. Organizations need robust ERG programs and initiatives to thrive, positively impact individual and community well-being, and contribute to a healthy society. Social and innovative programs, such as community activities and university outreach, are crucial in

fostering community engagement (Seramount, 2009). This includes understanding impactful programs and initiatives for ERGs that promote and sustain positive social determinants of health (SDOH).

## Organizational Theory

Organizational theory in the context of this study includes research on how organizations operate, evolve, and achieve their objectives. According to Blackwell and Lilly (2022), organizational theory is about how an organization works by assessing organizational structure, workflows, and plans. This theory encompasses various aspects of organizational behavior, structure, culture, and strategies (Blackwell & Lilly, 2022). Establishing and integrating diversity and inclusion (D&I) and ERG programs and initiatives demonstrates a conscious effort to change the organizational structure, policies, and leadership roles.

Organizational theory is relevant to this research study because it aligns with HR's role in managing leadership talent and fostering social support networks. It is also appropriate because the content aligns with D&I and HR talent management and development initiatives that promote and sustain D&I, including leadership and career development, mentorship, and sponsorship. Organizational theory and SDOH influence ERG programs and initiatives to enhance and sustain the well-being of individuals, organizations, and communities.

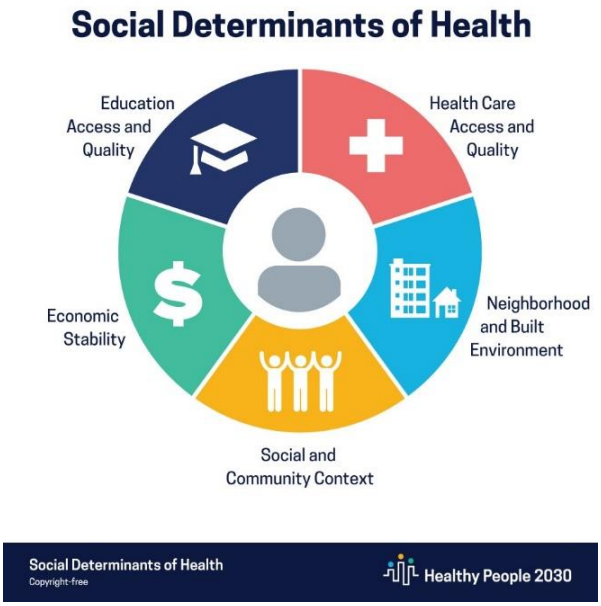
## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research study was based on organizational theory and SDOH. This framework was the foundation for the literature review and strategies for ERG programs and initiatives to support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention to succeed.

## Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) established the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) to promote global action on health equity and improve the well-being of people worldwide (WHO, n.d.). The CSDH was created to bring SDOH to the attention of governments and the public. In 2008, the CSDH issued its recommendations in a report, which included three key actions and principles. These recommendations aimed to improve daily living conditions; address the unequal distribution of power, wealth, and resources; and measure and understand the problem and evaluate the impact of actions taken (WHO, n.d.). This research study provides findings about organizational ERG programs and initiatives that can potentially address issues in the five domains of SDOH (see Figure 1): economic stability, education access and quality, healthcare access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context (Healthy People 2030, n.d.).

**Figure 1.** *Social Determinants of Health*




Note. From Healthy People 2030, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health

## Literature Review

### Employee Network Groups

Many companies have employee network groups that senior executive sponsors support. According to Seramount's *Diversity Primer*, these employee network groups should participate in formal and informal training, mentoring, networking, community outreach, recruitment, and marketing products to diverse markets. Additionally, these groups serve as platforms to identify and address any barriers or opportunities within the company that may not have been previously expressed. They also promote participation in relevant events and help extend the company's presence through community outreach and networking (Seramount, 2009). For companies to grow, employee network groups must create value for employees and the organization.

Friedman and Craig (2004) conducted a case study and found that minority employees are not motivated to join networking groups out of dissatisfaction; instead, they are drawn to these groups because of a strong sense of group identity. For instance, individuals are more likely to become members if they have a stronger identification with the ethnic or racial group represented by the networking group. Furthermore, Friedman and Craig's qualitative case study revealed that the members of networking groups who received the most benefits and support for their engagement were also the ones who were the most active.

Employee networks are vital in a company's D&I strategy as practical tools to promote and sustain programs and support individuals. These networks include diverse demographics such as race, age, disability, and gender (Seramount, 2009). They typically have formal structures, designated leaders, regular meetings, and specific objectives. Leading companies actively support these networks by providing resources and sponsorships and involving them in recruitment, retention, and market expansion efforts (Seramount, 2009). When managed effectively, ERGs significantly contribute to business success by enhancing recruitment and

retention strategies, improving product development, fostering a positive workplace environment, and aligning with the company's commitment to D&I.

Employee networks often function like departments within an organization. They are allocated an annual budget and receive executive support to help advance their mission (Seramount, 2009). The benefits of employee networks include shaping or revitalizing the corporate diversity vision, offering valuable insights for D&I policies, and assisting in the recruitment and retention of minority employees (Seramount, 2009). These groups play a vital role in recruitment, mentoring, and business growth while focusing on member development, forming business partnerships, and fostering community relations to enhance the company's reputation.

## Employee Resource Groups

A 2022 research survey by Seramount revealed that 70% of diverse ERG members believe affinity-based ERGs are essential in their organizations (Keenan et al., 2022). Additionally, a survey from Bentley University found that 90% of Fortune 500 companies have ERGs or business resource groups (BRGs), yet only 8% of employees are members. Jensen (2021) noted that, despite the low membership, 85% of respondents see these groups as valuable to employees. These quantitative studies provide relevant survey results for this qualitative pragmatic study, emphasizing the importance and value of ERGs in organizations. The Bentley University study (Jensen, 2021) is particularly relevant, as it highlights an increasing trend in membership among Fortune 500 companies despite the current low participation rate of 8%. By elevating the voices and experiences of underrepresented employees, ERGs serve as powerful agents for cultural transformation within organizations, ultimately reinforcing systemic changes that support the well-being and advancement of all employees (Byrd, 2022). ERGs help employees align their personal and professional identities within the workplace, fostering psychological safety and enhancing organizational commitment (Welbourne et al., 2017). By promoting inclusivity, supporting employee engagement, and fostering equitable workplace practices, ERGs cultivate developmental relationships that support diversity and inclusive efforts, underscoring the significance of ERGs in driving positive social change (Welbourne et al., 2017).

Beaver (2023) explored the expectations and experiences of LGBT ERG members through a qualitative case study design. The research involved interviews with members to gain insights into the development and evolution of their expectations and experiences. The findings revealed that the nature of membership in these groups is continuously changing. According to Beaver, LGBT ERGs serve as valuable sources of information, social support, and career advancement opportunities, leading to positive outcomes for sexual minority employees.

However, members of LGBT ERGs also face unique challenges related to their identities. The significance of these findings lies in their illumination of members' perspectives on ERG membership. Beaver found that ERGs provide various benefits to their members. Sabat et al. (2017) identified potential challenges that LGBT ERGs may pose, often stemming from the fear of publicly identifying with a marginalized and defamed social identity. Despite these challenges, Beaver's (2023) study demonstrated that ERGs could enhance the workplace climate for sexual minority employees by fostering a sense of community among members. Green (2018) noted that organizations increasingly recognize the benefits of creating and supporting ERGs, as shown by the growing number of social identity–based groups within large companies.

Understanding how ERGs operate in different organizations and their various types is crucial for grasping their purposes and goals, which can benefit employees and employers (Schlachter et al., 2023). Schlachter et al. conducted a qualitative exploratory study on ERGs that included various types of companies, including smaller firms across different industries. This study revealed that employers believe implementing ERGs will benefit employees and the organization.

ERGs serve as internal advocates and support networks, promoting professional development and learning opportunities for their members. According to Green (2018), formal learning activities tailored to members' interests can create engaging experiences that help them thrive within the organization.

Informal learning is also crucial for helping members navigate the organizational culture and understand the unwritten norms of a company, which can ultimately lead to higher employee retention and more opportunities for advancement (Green, 2018). Additionally, learning activities designed for all employees can provide valuable insights into the experiences of ERG members (Green, 2018).

However, as Green (2018) pointed out, the effectiveness of learning largely depends on the types of activities offered. ERGs can extend beyond advocacy and community building and deliver benefits through group interactions and activities. Green emphasized that recognizing ERGs as facilitators of learning, through formal and informal channels, even when the outcomes are not easily measurable, could allow organizations to leverage these networks more strategically.

Experienced leaders in DEI oversee ERGs and have a coordinating council that reports directly to the CEO. According to the *Diversity Primer*, companies implementing best practices require these groups to report at least every 6 months. Leading organizations actively invest in their networks and ERGs by providing speakers and sponsorship opportunities. They also encourage these networks to help recruit, retain employees, and build market share (Seramount, 2009). Additionally, organizations should support and empower ERG leaders by equipping them with the necessary resources for their development. Rodriquez (2022) noted that many organizations have overlooked the efforts and contributions of ERG leaders. Therefore, organizations must recognize the valuable work done by ERG leaders and members. This recognition can take various forms, such as offering additional compensation, expressing gratitude, and acknowledging their contributions during performance appraisals.

Some examples of ERGs include the Latino Resource Group (LRG), which is pivotal to enhancing marketing efforts targeting the rapidly growing Latino population in the U.S. (Seramount, 2009). It contributes to recruiting and retaining Latino employees, promotes cultural awareness, and creates opportunities for personal and career development within organizations (Seramount, 2009). According to *Diversity Primer*, the Women's Leadership Network (WLN) is another example of an ERG that focuses on researching and recommending solutions to issues affecting women, raising their visibility, offering leadership development opportunities, and reaching out to women, students, and teens in the community.

People Like Us (PLUS) serves as a network and resource for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) employees, promoting awareness of their contributions and advising human resources and management. This ERG also focuses on providing information about the needs of disabled individuals for both internal and external customers, supporting mobility progress in the United States and Europe (Seramount, 2009). According to *Diversity Primer*, this ERG aims to assist in becoming a worldwide leader in promoting religious tolerance, corporate integrity, and human dignity by increasing and maintaining religious diversity, attracting and retaining talented employees of faith, and being aware of the needs of religious consumers and investors.

The findings of our research study indicated several programs and initiatives developed through ERGs that could enhance organizational culture, improve operational excellence, and increase employee retention. These programs and initiatives include career development programs, mentorship opportunities, sponsorship initiatives, and employee collaborative efforts. These diverse programs and initiatives align closely with the purpose of our research study and the impact ERGs make on SDOH.

## Organizational Culture—Programs and Initiatives

As the workforce continues to diversify, organizations face the critical responsibility of fostering an environment in which all employees feel respected, welcomed, and valued—key factors that enhance performance, effectiveness, and overall job satisfaction (Liden et al., 2014). DEI practices, especially those focused on inclusion and creating a sense of belonging, are crucial for cultivating a positive organizational culture. ERGs, initiated by DEI leaders, play a significant role in enhancing workplace culture. According to Rodriquez (2022), ERGs are essential for achieving an organization's DEI goals and improving its cultural competency. However, if ERGs do not impact the organizational culture, their effectiveness, along with the initiatives they pursue, may decline (Rodriquez, 2022). Numerous studies on ERGs are pertinent to organizational culture.

Lamba et al. (2021) suggested that allocating funds to DEI strategies and promoting employees' efforts can further strengthen a culture of inclusion and belonging. Kirilin and Varis (2021) also highlighted that ERGs represent an untapped opportunity for enhancing organizational culture and developing new staff. This view aligns with a Deloitte (2022) report stating that ERGs are critical to creating an inclusive company culture. Organizations that prioritize DEI practices and support them through ERG programs and initiatives will likely thrive in the long run.

Allyship fosters an inclusive organizational culture (Keenan et al., 2022; Nayani, 2022). According to Nayani, collaboration among ERGs can enhance engagement and allyship, helping to develop DEI practices and strategies that leaders should consider. Allies can advocate for policy changes that promote a more inclusive environment. ERGs can facilitate the involvement of allies within existing groups, and organizations can establish an ERG specifically dedicated to allyship for all groups (Nayani, 2022). According to Nayani, one example is Allyship for All, an ERG that brings together employees who support each other while creating opportunities for underrepresented individuals to join the organization.

According to Gould et al. (2022), building a culture of disability inclusion begins with recognizing diversity and creating a strategy that includes initiatives to identify employees with disabilities. An ERG initiative can assist in this effort, as its members may consist of individuals with disabilities, caregivers for those with disabilities, or allies representing ERG members (Gould et al., 2022). These examples illustrate how DEI practices and strategies can encourage employees from dominant identities to engage in ERG programs and initiatives.

## Operational Excellence—Programs and Initiatives

ERGs play a vital role in supporting organizations. They help companies attract and retain talented employees, foster leadership development, build internal support systems, and promote D&I at all levels (Seramount, 2009). ERGs provide career development opportunities, mentoring, and initiatives to support and sustain work-life balance. They should also focus on professional development, establish business partnerships, and engage in community relations (Seramount, 2009).

According to Jensen (2021), membership in ERGs and BRGs is rising. Research indicates that ERG membership is positively influenced by employees' career decisions by helping members navigate organizational culture, find mentors, gain sponsors, and address workplace issues. Compared to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) leaders surveyed about their priorities for 2024, 71% prioritized ERG programs and initiatives, along with investments in internal training and learning development (Fairygodboss, 2023).

For ERGs to thrive, it is essential to implement certain best practices and strategies. One of the most critical factors is a strong commitment from leadership, which includes clear support from the CEO and the executive leadership team (Seramount, 2009). Additionally, ERGs should engage with key stakeholders, actively

participate in diversity initiatives, foster community relations, align their objectives with business goals, and establish a proper organizational structure. According to *Diversity Primer*, this structure should encompass chapters, governance standards, trained leaders, executive advisors, annual funding connected to business plans, dedicated resources, and ongoing oversight for accountability.

Emphasizing executive involvement aligns with leadership theories, highlighting leaders' vital role in shaping the organization. Advocating for a distinct branch dedicated to D&I leaders demonstrates a commitment to strategic alignment and corporate governance. Promoting D&I at the executive level positively influences the social and community context within the organization and, by extension, impacts the broader community.

To succeed, ERGs must have a strategic purpose, actionable plans, and adequate budgets. Companies should establish standard guidelines for ERGs by implementing baseline requirements in the application and approval processes (Seramount, 2009). Consistency can be achieved using a structured application process that adheres to specific organization-supported guidelines. This approach will also encourage employees to create ERGs aligned with these standards. The goal is to establish a consistent structure and standardization for all ERGs.

## Employee Retention—Programs and Initiatives

ERGs play a vital role in employee recruitment by providing valuable insights into techniques that resonate with target populations (Seramount, 2009). Their impact extends beyond attracting new talent; they promote and sustain D&I throughout the corporate hierarchy. These groups enhance the representation of women and minorities across the organization and foster an inclusive environment, leading to higher retention rates (Seramount, 2009). ERGs are advantageous for companies, as they help reduce employee turnover and significantly benefit organizations that want to retain talented employees.

Employee turnover is a significant issue for companies; employee replacements can be costly. According to Castrillon (2024), more than half of the employees who leave their company state that their manager or company could have done something to prevent them from leaving. Conservative estimates indicate that replacing an employee can cost half to twice the employee's annual salary. For a company with 100 employees, this could amount to costs ranging from $660,000 to $2.6 million annually (p. 2). According to Castrillon (2024), LinkedIn's 2023 Workplace Learning Report revealed that organizations prioritizing employee learning and development have up to 32% higher retention rates and 28% higher employee satisfaction (p. 3).

Additionally, Castrillon (2024) reports that a recent survey by Korn Ferry found that 67% of employees (p. 3) would choose to stay in their jobs, even if they were dissatisfied, if offered career development opportunities. Employee turnover is a preventable problem, and companies that strategically invest in career development for their employees garner additional revenue. A 2022 Deloitte study revealed that a 1% increase in learning and development spending correlated to a 0.2% increase in business revenue. This means that every $1 invested in an employee equals an additional $4.70 in revenue (Deloitte, 2022, p. 4). The evidence shows that learning and career development are vital for reducing employee turnover and enhancing retention. ERGs can effectively contribute to this reduction in turnover and improve employee retention.

Minorities must see others in similar roles to support their professional growth (Seramount, 2009). *Diversity Primer* states that some organizations establish groups, networks, and forums focusing on individual and group development opportunities. For example, the African American Leadership Network and Executive Forum are designed to help African Americans enhance their leadership skills through career and personal development, networking, training, and mentoring. This initiative aids organizations in recruiting and retaining top talent, providing employee training, and establishing mentoring opportunities.

Retaining new employees is a crucial responsibility for organizational leaders. One key DEI strategy is ensuring new hires feel included and productive. According to Cross et al. (2018), new employees require two fundamental things during their first year: the ability to be valued and the feeling of inclusion within the organization. Team members and employee networks play a critical role in fulfilling these needs. Cross et al. suggested three essential practices to help first-year employees build the right network: creating opportunities that attract new hires, helping them connect quickly with well-connected coworkers, and leveraging ERGs.

People naturally seek out and value relationships with those with common interests, values, experiences, and backgrounds (Seramount, 2009). These relationships often form quickly, as individuals feel more comfortable approaching those with similar backgrounds for help, advice, and support. Research consistently shows that organizations that create and nurture cohorts experience significant benefits (Seramount, 2009). Data in our research study validates these findings.

According to *Diversity Primer*, new employees who establish connections with employees of similar tenure, whether through large entry classes or informal networks, are more loyal and stay with the organization. Practical orientation, training, and social integration help new employees feel more satisfied and committed. Cohorts enable new hires to become productive more quickly because they connect them with peers with valuable knowledge, insights, and perspectives that might not be as accessible through project work alone (Seramount, 2009). Kirilin and Varis's (2021) study emphasized the potential of ERGs for fostering the development of soft skills in new employees. The research showed that ERGs are valuable platforms for promoting learning and cross-functional skill development. However, there are still untapped opportunities for enhancing soft skills.

Kirilin and Varis's (2021) research findings can help clarify how ERGs contribute to employee development, organizational culture, and management interactions, and they can be applied across various organizations. Additionally, by sharing the everyday experience of starting the organization, these cohorts often develop into supportive groups that fulfill individuals' needs for belonging (Seramount, 2009).

## Monitor and Measure—Programs and Initiatives

Demonstrating value is essential for employee network groups to secure corporate funding and benefits. As membership levels rise, leaders need practical tools to quantify the impact of these groups and evaluate their return on investment concerning diversity recruitment, inclusion, employee satisfaction, corporate reputation, and sales generation (Seramount, 2009). Measuring the effects of employee network groups can be challenging. According to *Diversity Primer*, the impact of employee network groups may not always lead to immediate financial rewards. Instead, effective, quantifiable results can take time to become evident. According to Rodriquez (2022), ERGs must use data analytics and metrics to make impactful data-driven decisions.

Measurable objectives should be established to measure and evaluate the success of employee network groups effectively. These measurement techniques must be adapted based on corporate goals, stakeholders should be included in the process, and regular assessments should be conducted (Seramount, 2009). According to Rodriquez (2022), ERGs need to collect metrics that not only measure their activity but also quantify their impact. The objective is to have reliable tools that efficiently measure how effectively employee network groups achieve membership growth and corporate goals.

## Purpose of the Study: Research Question

The research question for this study was: What ERG programs and initiatives support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention?

This study aimed to identify and explore ERG programs and initiatives to support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention to succeed. ERG business plans should include a 2-year calendar detailing programs and initiatives focusing on training, education, recruitment, mentoring, new employee engagement, community outreach, and company representation roles (Seramount, 2009). Within the organization, promoting education, developing recruitment strategies, and participating in celebrations all contribute to company-wide recognition, engagement, and implications that advance positive outcomes.

## Methods

This study used a qualitative methodology with a pragmatic inquiry design. The qualitative pragmatic inquiry approach reflects the principles established by Dewey, including pragmatism, human experience, and problem-solving (Dewey, 1938). Dewey argued that qualitative pragmatic inquiry lies at the core of problem-solving (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). Dewey's principles emphasize actionable knowledge, practical actions, and experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). This aligns with the objective of this pragmatic inquiry study, which aimed to identify and explore effective ERGs that support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention.

### Data Collection

We used purposive sampling to select eight ERG leaders from eight organizations and institutions. We intentionally selected participants or cases that were most likely to provide rich, relevant, and diverse insights into the phenomenon being studied. Each participant who volunteered for the study possessed expertise in DEI strategies, practices, and ERG programs and initiatives. Data for this study were collected from semistructured interviews and by reviewing public and government documents until data saturation was achieved. Data saturation is when no new information or themes emerge from the collected data (Guest et al., 2006). To ensure the validity of the results, methodological triangulation was employed, which involved using multiple data collection methods to confirm that the findings were consistent. Validation is established when the data aligns across different sources (Guion et al., 2011). We used data from semistructured interviews and documents to employ methodological triangulation, which validated the study results and ensured reliability and validity.

### Data Analysis

We used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process in this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study. Qualitative studies use thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and narrate themes revealed from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process to analyze data includes becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, depicting themes, reviewing themes, naming themes to reflect action-based results, and producing meaningful themes. The thematic data analysis in pragmatic inquiry aligns with Dewey's principles, aiming for practical, contextually grounded, and action-oriented outcomes.

## Results

The results of this study reflected practical outcomes in programs and initiatives used by ERGs that support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention in organizations and have applicable implications for SDOH.

The five emerging themes pertinent to ERG programs and initiatives that were identified from the results of the data were: (1) improve the culture, (2) promote marginalized ethnicities in leadership, (3) elevate employee performance, (4) advance operational excellence, and (5) foster employee retention.

### Theme 1: Improve the Culture—Programs and Initiatives

Theme 1, improving the culture, consists of three subthemes: (1) engaging and supporting leaders and more women in leadership positions, (2) ongoing employee training and learning in D&I initiatives and strategies, and (3) developing effective policies and HR processes that include diverse language and address potential legal concerns.

Many participants highlighted the significance of fostering and promoting a culture of inclusivity within the organization by integrating DEI into the core values. One participant stated that their "organization implements global and regional D&I initiatives, tailoring programs to address specific cultural contexts and holidays, which demonstrates a commitment to inclusivity on a global scale." One participant shared some initiatives within their organization, which included "creating rooms for breastfeeding mothers and providing parental leave." Many participants highlighted the significance of company culture within their organizations, emphasizing that it is showcased and encouraged through inclusivity, community involvement, and a strong sense of purpose. Lamba et al. (2021) concluded that employees must feel included, and organizations and departments should foster a culture of belonging. This underscores the importance of DEI practices and initiatives in the workplace.

Fostering a culture of inclusivity aligns with theories that emphasize how culture influences behavior. Community involvement demonstrates an organization's social responsibility by highlighting the importance of stakeholder relationships. Creating an inclusive culture addresses SDOH by promoting a sense of belonging and minimizing workplace discrimination. By actively participating in the community, organizations can show their commitment to addressing societal issues and positively impacting SDOH.

Participants noted that values, inclusivity, and various factors, such as abilities, ethnicities, and religions, shape company culture. Many participants agreed that a culture of inclusivity and career satisfaction stems from strong leadership in these areas and is crucial for employee retention. One participant mentioned that "it is a key factor in retaining employees, even in challenging times." Participants from various organizations shared their experiences regarding employee retention, highlighting the importance of spousal benefits, challenges in rural locations, and the influence of an inclusive company culture on job satisfaction and commitment to the organization.

Many participants expressed a sense of belonging to a larger community and contributing to social causes. One participant provided examples, which included "building community relationships, supporting inclusive initiatives like food drives, volunteering, and contributing to community service activities." According to Lamba et al. (2021), the study concluded that employees felt a strong sense of connectedness and community when applying DEI strategies. Another participant noted that "affinity groups are portrayed as a vital aspect of community building and retention, and the sense of belonging, support, and shared experiences within these groups is a powerful factor in retaining employees." Another participant highlighted the importance of "genuine commitment from companies beyond symbolic gestures during specific months, such as Pride or

Cancer Awareness Month." According to one participant, "the effectiveness of efforts should be measured quantitatively and qualitatively, with a focus on results and impact."

Some participants shared their experiences with ERGs focused on racial and ethnic backgrounds within their organization. One participant specifically highlighted three ERGs in their organization, which included Sustaining, Active Black Leadership and Empowerment (SABLE), Hispanic Organization of Leaders in Action (HOLA), and Asian Learning, Leadership, and Innovation (ALL IN). This participant explained how their organization aims to "raise awareness of different cultures and assess representation numbers to address the lack of diversity in leadership positions, particularly by identifying gaps utilizing U.S. Census data." This participant stated: "We focus on ensuring that affinity for our culture is well known, identified, differentiated, appreciated, right, like that is the awareness piece. Then, we share our representation numbers." Another participant shared experiences and stated how they initiated an LGBTQ group within their company, emphasizing "the organic growth of such groups from a small number of members to a larger community." This participant continued:

> Their organization was highly effective and helped support the affinity groups. The folks aligned with that affinity group created a sense of community. The most critical and first thing, especially in the early years, was knowing that there was a group out there.

According to the documents reviewed, most organizations in this study had an average of eight to 10 ERGs. Some of the ERGs mentioned in interviews and the reviewed documents included the Women's Inclusion Network (WIN), Spectrum Network, PRIDE or GLAAD (LGBTQ+ Groups), Hispanic and Latin Network (HLN), RISE - New ERGs, Middle East/North African Intercultural Network (MENA), Veterans Network (Vet Net), Disability Employee Network (DEN), Global African Affinity Network (GAAN), Black Employee Network (BEN), People Representing the Interests of Minority Ethnicities (PRIME) and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI).

A survey of Fortune 500 companies found that 90% have ERGs, but only 8% have employee membership (Keenan et al., 2022). Jensen's (2021) quantitative study revealed that 85% of the survey's participants believe ERGs to be valuable to employees. These studies confirm the significance of ERGs or BRGs in organizations and that programs or initiatives developed by ERGs can support organizational success.

Several participants mentioned how ERGs could focus on various D&I programs and initiatives, which range from cultural awareness to employee differentiation. The participants also noted that ERGs are instrumental in promoting goal setting and discussions about topics on diversity, portraying how they are integral to creating an inclusive environment and ensuring everyone's voice is heard.

The focus on cultural awareness and differentiation reflects the acknowledgment of the role of culture in shaping organizational behavior. The content emphasizes the importance of fostering an inclusive culture within the organization. Organizational theory, particularly from a cultural perspective, highlights how shared values, beliefs, and practices contribute to an organization's overall functioning (Blackwell & Lilly, 2022). The programs and initiatives discussed in the content align with efforts to shape a culture that values diversity.

Several participants emphasized that remote allyship is a crucial initiative. They noted that encouraging individuals outside specific ERGs is essential for actively supporting and advocating for marginalized communities. One participant stated, "Progressive allies are essential for pushing issues and promoting positive change." This participant also praised the concept of allyship, emphasizing that "support for underrepresented groups should extend beyond the group members." Gould et al. (2022) confirmed in their research on disability inclusion that organizations need to understand this issue better and improve their inclusion practices and ERG initiatives. This involves establishing initiatives that feature disability inclusion

champions and allyship programs within the organization. Many participants noted that ally programs have effectively promoted inclusivity, allowing individuals to support a group without needing to belong to it.

Participants agreed on the importance of expanding allyship programs to include all ERGs and fostering a culture of support and understanding. They highlighted the significant role of ERGs in promoting diversity, which consists of allyship programs where individuals outside a specific ERG can participate and support related initiatives. This approach underscores the value of sharing information and ideas among ERGs to enhance awareness and create a more inclusive environment. Insights gained from these discussions can then be integrated into broader company programs and initiatives, such as apprenticeship programs and efforts to build a more diverse and inclusive workplace. One participant mentioned "an inclusive program and apprenticeship initiative called Rise and Prime, which includes efforts to cater to employees from all walks of life."

Participants and company documents highlighted the importance of allyship and its evolution within organizations over time. Nayani's (2022) study validated that ERGs could enhance engagement and allyship within an organization. This includes developing strategies that leaders can use in ERGs. According to Welbourne et al. (2017), social identity theory is relevant to the outcomes of individuals, groups, and organizations of ERGs. It can positively affect all three levels, impacting the holistic identity within the business.

Most participants agreed that allies support D&I programs and initiatives beyond specific ERGs. Promoting allyship is consistent with social identity theory, which emphasizes the significance of social categorization and group dynamics. Expanding allyship programs demonstrates a commitment to creating a supportive organizational culture that includes increasing the inclusion of underrepresented talent (Keenan et al., 2022; Nayani, 2022). Allyship programs can contribute to developing supportive social networks within the organization, addressing a critical SDOH.

### Theme 2: Promote Marginalized Ethnicities in Leadership—Programs and Initiatives

Theme 2, promote marginalized ethnicities in leadership, consists of four subthemes: (1) promoting women in leadership (for example), (2) leveraging the support of men in leadership to promote marginalized ethnicities, (3) regularly surveying affinity group populations to gather what they would like to gain from affinity groups, and (4) networking.

Several participants indicated the importance of organizations investing in and implementing ERG leadership development programs. One participant said, "There is an indication that these efforts improve the quality and services of the company through various programs." Participants highlighted how ERG leaders gain leadership skills through their roles, even if not in leadership roles or managing a team. Several participants mentioned leadership development programs and initiatives, and how leading summits, campaigns, and changes to HR policies impact company culture. One participant revealed that "investing in leadership skills provides a clearer path for career progression."

Participants also explained how impactful ERGs are to leadership development. One participant said, "The success of their Women in Networking (WIN) program and how female representation played a critical role in addressing gender leadership representation issues, advocating for fair recruitment practices, and the need for parental leave in their organization." The participant credited this program with "influencing some HR processes and policies and fostering conversations on better representation of women in leadership."

A case study conducted at the Mayo Clinic highlighted the value of ERGs for female leaders. This study focuses on the Greater Leadership Opportunities for Women (GLOW) and demonstrates how Mayo Clinic's Employee Resource Groups (MERGs) have positively impacted leadership development. Seegmiller Renner et al. (2022) examined female leaders' growth, resilience, inspiration, and tenacity (GRIT). The GLOW MERG hosted educational events to equip female healthcare leaders with the knowledge, skills, and attributes

necessary to develop GRIT capabilities. As a result, the initiative increased opportunities for advancement among female leaders at the Mayo Clinic while remaining aligned with its mission and vision. Seegmiller Renner et al. (2022) emphasized that the GLOW MERG has effectively promoted, educated, and empowered female leaders. Additionally, it has worked to dismantle barriers that often hinder women from attaining leadership positions.

Another participant in our study emphasized the importance of "leadership development programs relevant to the Presidential Rotation Group (PRG) program and how it is a key strategy for retention, especially when focusing on D&I efforts." The emphasis was on "investing in employees and retaining them to become future leaders." Several participants mentioned the importance of retaining and helping colleagues grow into leadership positions and attributed their success to those who did the same for them.

Many participants mentioned the importance of ERGs, such as the Latinx Veterinary Medical Association (LVMA), Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and Voice of Immigrants Committed to Equity (VOICE). They highlighted how they created communities within their organization to provide leadership development programs and mentorship initiatives, such as Supporting One Another as We Rise (SOAR), discussed as part of supporting these groups. One participant explained, "how they support diversity through this program, SOAR, aimed with women leaders in mind." Participants emphasized the importance of ERG leaders collaborating with the broader team and organizational leaders to identify areas for improvement in representation, promotion, and attrition. One participant highlighted the significance of diversity in leadership roles and provided examples of how affinity groups, such as the Council of Deans, contribute to efficiencies and innovations. Other participants stressed the need for diverse leadership representation during the initial stages of creating products, processes, services, and decision making.

ERGs shape business decisions, product ideation, innovation, and development. Leadership development and educational programs provide learning opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds. By fostering leadership skills and offering professional development within ERGs, organizations can improve their social environment, promote inclusivity, and help reduce health disparities. For example, Beard and Ezike (2025) emphasized the urgent need for a diverse healthcare workforce, particularly in Chicago's West and Southwest communities. Having more diverse healthcare providers to serve these populations can significantly help reduce health disparities. Our study validates that ERGs are essential and relevant in addressing critical SDOH.

### Theme 3: Elevate Employee Performance—Programs and Initiatives

Theme 3, elevate employee performance, consists of three subthemes: (1) sharing success stories to motivate members into great work, (2) building connections that meet specific needs of the meeting, and (3) promoting committees within EDGE to incentivize members' engagement.

One participant said, "Launch Diversity Dialogues is a program for open conversations about power, privilege, race, gender, and intersectionality led by ERG leaders." Participants acknowledged the importance of organizational leaders' need to consider intersectionality and address issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, and disabilities. Several participants mentioned how ERGs initiate programs and initiatives within their organizations to create inclusive environments that support employees from various backgrounds. A few participants highlighted how conference presentations helped promote their company's D&I efforts. One participant noted that "programs and initiatives promote D&I within their organization and include Diversity Dialogues, Stories Worth Sharing Presentations, and a podcast series titled My ____Story." Several other participants highlighted how programs promote D&I initiatives, such as trans inclusion guidelines and language programs to overcome communication barriers.

Participants also stressed the importance of having courageous conversations that include sensitive topics about power, privilege, race, gender, and intersectionality to understand diverse perspectives and experiences. One

participant said, “Sharing personal experiences and stories can exemplify ERGs’ impact on employees and their lives.” Another participant said, “Some members shared stories about gender transition, psychological safety, and generating safe spaces that highlight the human side of people.” Another participant stated, “Personal experiences are related to biases, illustrating the need for open discussions.” Another participant said that “conversations can cover various aspects, including the role of the affinity group in influencing product design and business decisions.” An example included “involving women in developing a fibroid treatment product and seeking input from the Blend group to enhance skincare products for a more diverse customer base.” One participant also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic brought about challenges, particularly the impact on women.” However, conversations, open communication, and initiative-taking measures such as creating parenting networks displayed the organization’s adaptability to D&I challenges.

In conclusion, launching diverse dialogues reflect transparency and open communication within organizations. Encouraging conversations about power, privilege, and intersectionality align with the need for effective communication to address D&I challenges. Open conversations foster social support networks within the organization, a critical social determinant influencing health outcomes. Dialogues that address power, privilege, and intersectionality contribute to a healthier community within the organization.

### Theme 4: Advance Operational Excellence—Programs and Initiatives

Theme 4, advance operational excellence, consists of three subthemes: (1) creating plans, applying practices that measure people, using data metrics, and using evaluations at all levels; (2) promoting ERG’s public image and contributing, communicating, and supporting diverse materials, examples, and actions by leaders, and (3) developing recognition programs that improve quality and service.

Several participants highlighted the significance of continuous improvement in D&I practices and strategies. They emphasized that learning from past experiences can enhance language and practices in this area. Emphasizing continuous improvement aligns with the learning organization concept, where organizations adapt and improve based on experience. Some organizational leaders stressed the need for constant improvement by actively seeking feedback, adapting strategies, and maintaining efforts to strengthen DEI and ERG programs and initiatives. This commitment was reflected in the ongoing development of ERGs, training programs, and inclusive policies established within their organizations. These continuous improvement programs and initiatives align with the concept of a learning organization, positively impacting education and serving as a critical SDOH.

Several participants also stressed the importance of measuring ERGs’ impact on company performance by tracking the promotion rates of ERG leaders and celebrating their successes. One participant said, “Their organization uses data points, such as promotion rates of ERG leaders, to track progress and celebrate achievements.” Another participant mentioned that “celebrating milestones, sharing company values, and committing to D&I initiatives were core reasons for attributing to their company’s longevity and being respected in the industry.” Participants acknowledged the importance of measuring these programs’ impact, even though participants expressed challenges in quantifying certain aspects. Participants cited success stories, company culture changes, and ERG leaders’ professional development as positive indicators to measure quantifiable programs and initiatives.

One participant stated that leaders should share representation numbers and develop practices and strategies to improve the company’s performance. Many participants mentioned how data and evaluations resulted in diversity-related improvements and activities for their company. Sharing representation numbers aligns with the idea of transparency in corporate culture, promoting accountability and informed decision making. Some participants acknowledged the need for data to be measured. Measuring the impact of ERGs reflects a commitment to evidence-based decision making and organizational effectiveness. One participant said, “Some challenges also come with collecting and analyzing data to determine the impact on D&I programs and

initiatives." Another participant emphasized, "One way of assessing impact was by tracking promotion rates of ERG leaders."

A study by Rodriquez (2022) validated the importance of collecting metrics that measure activity and impact. The goal is to measure how effectively employee network groups achieve membership growth and align them to corporate goals (Rodriquez, 2022). Measuring the impact of ERGs and aligning them with evidence-based data and company goals ensures that contributions are recognized and validated. This assessment also includes impact goals related to the organization's social and community contexts.

### Theme 5: Foster Employee Retention—Programs and Initiatives

Theme 5, foster employee retention, consists of six subthemes: (a) investing in employees with leadership and career development programs to promote and prepare for subsequent roles and leadership positions and have goal setting and regular check-ins with managers that include meaningful connection, (b) promoting an inclusive culture that includes diverse dialogues through conferences, presentations, podcasts, and conversations, (c) supporting work-life balance, mental health, and well-being initiatives, (d) recognizing employees through appreciation, (e) offering education, training, and mentorship programs, and (f) engaging employees and supporting groups that provide value to the company and give back to the community.

Many participants emphasized the importance of training, mentoring, and educational programs, especially concerning DEI and career advancement. They highlighted the need for education and support for minority groups within ERGs. These initiatives focus on establishing and improving mentorship programs that pair new employees with mentors from ERGs to provide guidance and support.

One participant shared their experience of how the organization implemented initiatives such as Culture Buddies, mentoring programs, and training sessions on bias and LGBTQ+ awareness. Many participants recognized the significance of mentoring for employee growth and retention. Some noted challenges in effectively pairing individuals with suitable mentors to facilitate their success.

Participants also emphasized the value of mentoring employees for key roles, particularly leadership positions, and shared how their mentors positively influenced their career advancement. Findings from quantitative studies by Keenan et al. (2022) and Jensen (2021) further reinforced the importance of mentorship and career development programs initiated by ERGs, which enhance organizational culture, operations, and employee retention.

Many participants highlighted the importance of a career development program that collaborates with managers to align with employees' career goals and encourages enrollment in relevant courses. One participant shared that their organization's recent launch of a career development program became an integral part of their employee retention strategy. Another participant mentioned that spousal benefits, such as assistance finding a partner's job during relocation, are significant factors in retaining employees. Several participants noted that recognition initiatives, such as business impact awards and educational programs, enhance their career development efforts. One participant discussed how generational differences suggest that younger generations may be less attached to companies and more motivated by pay increases, bonuses, and career advancement. Overall, career development programs directly impact employment conditions by providing opportunities for advancement and skill development, addressing a critical SDOH.

Many participants noted that recognition and appreciation, such as awards and incentives, are crucial for employee retention. One participant suggested that "these elements may significantly impact the younger generation." Several participants acknowledged the importance of recognition programs. One participant shared that "business impact awards boost employee morale and performance," and another said they have "recognition programs aligned to International Women's Day."

Participants emphasized the importance of supporting ERG leaders in setting goals and ensuring their efforts are aligned through regular check-ins and objective evaluations. This process involves ERG leaders collaborating closely with senior leadership to address representation issues and develop programs that enhance skills and promote talent development, particularly among underrepresented groups. Furthermore, participants pointed out that ERG programs indirectly influence economic stability by providing networking opportunities to enhance career advancement and improve the well-being of underrepresented groups.

The participants also discussed the challenges of minority representation in leadership positions and suggested strategies to support diverse talent through improved recruitment, interviewing, and retention practices. They noted that initiatives such as sponsorship and mentoring programs are effective ways to foster the career growth of marginalized groups. One participant remarked that "expanded programs like Vet Net, RISE, and PRIME are needed to support and address these concerns."

One participant mentioned an initiative called Council of Diversity Leaders in their organization. This initiative was created to "evaluate DEI efforts during annual reviews for promotion and tenure." The discussion also touched on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting "an increased interest in D&I initiatives and ERGs." Several participants shared insights about programs they have supporting diversity. For example, one participant mentioned they have an "English as a second language program." This program focuses on training, hiring practices, and mentoring for women from diverse backgrounds. Most participants agreed that ERGs are essential for fostering a sense of belonging and enhancing communication. These elements promote and sustain D&I initiatives within organizations, including mentoring programs that support career development.

Participants emphasized the importance of organizations regularly conducting employee engagement surveys to understand employee concerns, assess engagement levels, and identify areas for improvement. These surveys focus on employees' emotional well-being and work-life balance. Many participants highlighted the significance of these surveys, stressing the need to address concerns related to emotional health, work-life balance, education, training, and mentorship. One participant mentioned that "their employee engagement survey intends to identify common themes and address areas of improvement." Another participant mentioned "the importance of prioritizing well-being initiatives" and how this was done in their organization with "inclusive training, spousal benefits, and on-site medical facilities like the Quad Med Facility."

Several participants indicated that employee engagement surveys play a significant role in employee development by prioritizing mentorship, work-life balance, and growth opportunities. Representatives from various organizations emphasized how these surveys have empowered ERGs to drive positive change, foster inclusivity, and improve employee performance and well-being. Additionally, some participants remarked that these surveys have prompted policy changes that enhance organizational diversity initiatives. One participant shared an example of a successful organizational initiative that allowed employees to "leave early on Fridays to support work-life balance." Another participant noted, "Policy modifications are being considered to attract and retain employees, particularly those with specific needs, such as working mothers."

Conducting employee engagement surveys that align with human resource management practices is crucial for understanding and addressing employee concerns. These engagement initiatives help to foster supportive social networks within the workplace, which, in turn, positively impact employees' mental health. Organizations prioritizing well-being demonstrate their commitment to employee welfare and performance, directly addressing SDOH related to work and living conditions. Additionally, support from executives contributes to a positive social environment within the organization, further enhancing the health and well-being of employees. By fostering community within the organization, ERGs can contribute to a positive social context that positively impacts mental health and overall well-being.

One initiative mentioned by a participant involved grant-driven engagement within the local community. This included establishing an LGBTQ group and efforts to create a global Pride chapter in the county where the company is located. The support of the company and its employees led to local initiatives and projects that positively impact the community. These efforts encompass programs and initiatives beyond the workplace and organize events that support the local community and contribute to its overall well-being. Engaging with the local community through grants provides an opportunity to contribute to community well-being, directly impacting the social and community context of SDOH.

A study by Green (2018) acknowledged the significance of ERGs in facilitating learning and development for their members, which can provide management with essential insights and help establish relevant company norms. The Community of Practice (CoP) framework, derived from Green's study, offers a lens through which to understand how ERGs operate as learning communities that support their members. Grounded in social learning theory, this framework emphasizes how learning happens within these communities (Green, 2018). It highlights how ERGs function as social learning environments and explores ways to facilitate learning and development through member interactions. According to Green, by gaining a deeper understanding of ERGs as CoPs, organizations can better support their members, promote more learning opportunities, and enhance D&I programs and initiatives.

Several participants emphasized engaging with the local community through programs and initiatives, such as local Pride groups and events, and providing necessary resources. They agreed that Pride and LGBTQ groups collaborate closely with GLAAD to foster positive public relations for the company. ERGs engage with external organizations and NGOs, forming partnerships to support their causes. This external engagement also relates to talent acquisition strategies for ERGs, promoting diversity in hiring initiatives and practices.

## Discussion

### Integration Into Current Literature

Grounded in the conceptual framework of SDOH and the organizational theory, the findings in this study offer valuable insights that future researchers, DEI leaders, ERG members, and ERG leaders can transfer to their research. These insights can be used to develop effective ERG programs and initiatives to enhance organizational culture, promote operational excellence, and improve employee retention. Conducting a further research study with a larger representative sample size of DEI leaders with expertise in ERG programs and initiatives could enhance the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, future research on ERG programs and initiatives could include a larger sample size and population that provides for more diverse participants from various organizations and industries.

### Limitations and Future Research

This qualitative pragmatic inquiry design has numerous limitations regarding data collection and sampling methods. First, data were collected using purposive sampling, and the data techniques employed included semistructured interviews and a review of public documents from businesses and government organizations. The participants in this study were volunteers who met eligibility criteria, and the documents reviewed were from publicly available websites. This may introduce potential bias, which means the findings might not represent all DEI leaders who are experts in ERG programs and initiatives in organizations. Additionally, using purposive sampling may result in volunteer bias, further limiting the representativeness of the sample population.

This research study was limited to a qualitative pragmatic inquiry design in which we used two data collection techniques to collect and analyze data. Future research could be completed using other qualitative research

designs that use different data collection techniques, such as a case study or focus group, potentially yielding more and varied data used in methodological triangulation to reach data saturation. Additional options for future research include using a quantitative or mixed-methods research approach that includes different instruments, such as a survey.

### Implications for Positive Social Change

The implications for positive social change and the significance of this study lie in understanding how SDOH affect both individual and community well-being and society's overall health. This qualitative pragmatic inquiry examined various implications of SDOH and their relevance to the five key domains: economic stability, education access and quality, healthcare access and quality, neighborhood and built environment, and social and community context within organizations (Healthy People 2030, n.d.).

While the primary purpose of this research was to identify and explore ERG programs and initiatives that foster organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention, the results also highlighted the importance of DEI practices and strategies. The SDOH conceptual framework applied in this study emphasizes how these domains can drive and sustain positive social change. By promoting ERG programs and initiatives through effective DEI practices and strategies related to SDOH, organizations can enhance and sustain their impact on their environments, communities, and society.

## Conclusion

In this qualitative pragmatic inquiry study, we identified and explored ERG programs and initiatives that support organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention. These programs and initiatives are grounded in the framework of SDOH and organizational theory, which provide a foundation for understanding, analyzing, and optimizing their effectiveness. This alignment ensures they meet broader organizational goals and principles.

ERG programs and initiatives enhance organizational effectiveness and address SDOH by creating inclusive environments, supporting career development, fostering social support networks, and engaging with local communities. The intersection of SDOH and organizational theory highlights the broader impact of these programs and initiatives on individuals, organizations, and overall community health and well-being.

The study clarified essential themes related to DEI practices, strategies, and ERG programs used by DEI and ERG leaders. These initiatives enhance organizational culture, operational excellence, and employee retention. Specific practices and strategies identified in the study include the significance of leadership development, mentoring programs, policies promoting work-life balance, an understanding of market dynamics, effective communication, and employee recognition.

In today's increasingly complex social and legal climate, diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives operate within heightened expectations and intensified scrutiny. Legal challenges to affirmative action and broader societal debates on equity have placed pressure on organizations to demonstrate both ethical commitment and measurable outcomes (Jensen, 2021). Employee resource groups (ERGs), when implemented without strategic intent, can inadvertently introduce risks, such as tokenism, forced disclosure of marginalized identities, or the reinforcement of in-group/out-group dynamics (Sabat et al., 2017). However, when thoughtfully designed and integrated into an organization's structural and cultural frameworks, these risks can be significantly mitigated.

The findings of this study reinforce that ERGs—when resourced appropriately, aligned with institutional goals, and overseen by experienced DEI leaders—serve as mechanisms for both professional development and

organizational learning. As internal change agents, ERGs enable environments that support collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and the dismantling of systemic barriers (Beaver, 2023; Keenan et al., 2022). Rather than symbolic gestures, effective ERGs function as critical levers for advancing positive social change, improving operational excellence while reinforcing a culture of inclusion that extends beyond the workplace (Rodriquez, 2022; Seramount, 2009).

Moreover, the research emphasizes the need to adapt these practices and strategies to meet the challenges presented by the current job market, acknowledge generational differences, and foster a sense of community and purpose, factors essential for improving employee retention. These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and successes associated with DEI efforts, ERG programs and initiatives, and the implications for positive social change. This includes strategies to promote SDOH in the workplace and the broader community.

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