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Discourses, Methods and Practices of Diversity, Equity,
Inclusion and Belonging: Towards a Global Shared Framework

Discorsi, metodi e pratiche di diversità, equità, inclusione
e senso di appartenenza: verso un quadro condiviso globale

*Edited by
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Global Paternity Leave as a DEI Initiative in Four Multinational Corporations

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ABSTRACT

Studies of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in corporations typically involve ethnic minorities or women. In this case study, however, the focus is on men, and a new DEI policy implemented successfully in four multinational corporations (MNCs), namely, paternity leave rights with global applicability. The MNCs' rationale for introducing this policy, and the perception of it by male employees who have taken such leave are explored mainly through interviews. These fathers are working for one of the MNCs and based in the UK, the US, Brazil and Australia. The aim of the case study is twofold: (i) contribute new insights into how the MNCs discursively justify the global policy, and (ii) develop a contextual framework explaining the MNCs' successful implementation, which involves both discursive and practical action. In terms of underlying corporate DEI discourses, they mainly emphasise either economic rationality, inclusion or fairness. Regarding factors influencing uptake, a supportive work culture, a standardised period of fully paid leave and formal replacement during leave turn out to be important for informants across all four MNCs.

Keywords: diversity; diversity management; economic rationality discourse; equity; global parental leave; inclusion; inclusion discourse; paternity leave; social justice discourse; talent management.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, most corporations have diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies. The corporate approach to diversity is mainly focused on getting

more people who are not white, male, middle-class, able-bodied and heterosexual into positions of power and influence (Darics and Koller 2018). In contrast, the initiative reported on in this paper, global paternity leave (GPL), is a recent DEI initiative that specifically targets men. GPL was launched by four early mover multinational corporations (MNCs) in 2017 and 2019 (see section 3 for more information about the companies). The term used by the MNCs is parental leave. However, the novelty factor is that fathers have become recipients of the policy; hence, it will be referred to as paternity leave (PL) in this paper.

The fact that these MNCs present leave for fathers as a diversity and inclusion or equality and inclusion policy may be considered radical and even controversial. Men, particularly white men, are not normally perceived as being excluded or suffering from discrimination. The intersectionality of white and male usually implies privilege (Crenshaw 1989). However, intersectionality (*ibid.*) is a frame that considers the whole human, which also means addressing men as fathers. Hence, intersectionality acknowledges that the cultural structures surrounding family leave tends to exclude fathers. Furthermore, we know from prior research on PL that discourses on fatherhood and practices regarding the enactment of fatherhood tend to differ across cultures (e.g., Brandth and Kvande 2022; Earle *et al.* 2023), which suggests that it might be challenging to implement a globally applicable standardised PL.

The current paper is a case study that includes interviews with father employees who have taken PL in the four MNCs, interviews with managers and archival data from the same MNCs. The paper explores two aspects of the new policy; firstly, what the informants see as the MNCs' underlying rationale for implementing the policy as a DEI measure, and secondly, what factors they perceive as crucial for taking PL. The fathers have diverse cultural backgrounds and work in the UK, the US, Brazil and Australia. The interview data represent rare access to corporate informants' views on a policy encompassing both work and private life. The paper aims to contribute insights into organisational efforts that may be important for fostering discourses of fatherhood that may encourage the successful uptake of their PL policy intended to be global in scope. Success in this context relates to a high uptake of PL among father employees. I am not aware of other studies that have been undertaken on the implementation of a PL scheme that is global in scope.

The theoretical contribution of the paper is twofold: it (1) extends the diversity management (DM) literature and DEI to include a cor-

porate measure advocating inclusion beyond typical minority groups, therefore effectively broadening the meaning and public understanding of the notion of ‘minority’; it (2) introduces a framework for linking corporate objectives with specific institutional requirements for successful implementation of GPL, thus highlighting the importance of meaning-making practices in policy implementation.

The paper proceeds as follows: section 2 presents theory from DM research. Section 3 presents the research questions, material and analytical approach. Section 4 presents findings, while section 5 discusses these, adds concluding remarks and offers some suggestions for future research.

2. THEORY: DM RESEARCH AND PL IMPLEMENTATION

This section provides an overview of research on DM in organisations (2.1) before discussing relevant literature on PL implementation (2.2).

2.1. *The discourse of DM in organisations*

As already indicated, the MNCs in this study discursively present their policy as part of their DEI initiatives, even though it is directed towards the inclusion of the majority of employees and not a disadvantaged minority. Focusing on male employees is also new within DM literature, as this field has typically focused on how ‘the other’, as women or ethnic minorities, are excluded from opportunities at work (Koveshnikov, Tienari, and Piekari 2019). DM can be defined as “voluntary organizational actions designed to create greater inclusion of employees from different backgrounds into the formal and informal organizational structures through deliberate policies and programs” (Mor Barak 2005, 208). DM policies and programmes have been central in enforcing inclusion of diverse groups in global organisations (Hansen and Seierstad 2017), a fact that highlights the importance of discursive action in fostering social change.

The DM literature often justifies diversity from a business perspective, although a fairness or equality perspective is also prevalent (Hansen and Seierstad 2017). In the next section, DM literature emphasising both perspectives will be briefly presented.

2.1.1. The business perspective on diversity

Özbilgin, Tatli, Ipek, and Sameer (2016) introduce two approaches to the business case for diversity: a shareholder approach aiming to impact the single bottom line (profitability) and a stakeholder approach, aiming to impact the triple bottom line (profits, people and planet). Both approaches perceive diversity in the workforce as a competitive advantage, a perception which was introduced by Cox and Blake (1991). One of Cox and Blake's six arguments for how managing diversity can yield a competitive advantage is linked to the company developing a favourable reputation for valuing diversity and attracting talent. Similarly, Ely and Thomas (2001) present the access and legitimacy perspective based on a market-orientated logic, promoting economic rationality (Zanoni and Janssens 2004). According to the economic rationality discourse, "Diverse employees bring additional value to the organization" (*ibid.*, 66). For Ely and Thomas, a leading principle is to ensure market shares by leveraging similarities between workforce and customers (Hansen and Seierstad 2017), a principle which resonates with Cox and Blake's (1991) marketing argument. Furthermore, Ely and Thomas' integration and learning perspective resonates with the creativity and problem-solving arguments from Cox and Blake (1991) as a diverse workforce may generate creative and improved business decisions. Here, each employee is given a voice, and inclusion is core. In sum, the business case for diversity can be exemplified in many ways, including reputation management, creativity, problem-solving and an understanding of the market, all ultimately intended to improve business results.

2.1.2. The fairness perspective on diversity

In contrast to the business case for diversity, the fairness perspective within DM emphasises equal treatment of all employees. The fairness approach to justifying diversity presented by Özbilgin *et al.* (2016) aims to reduce cross-national power inequalities in global economic, social, legal and political systems (Hansen and Seierstad 2017). This kind of DM approach has a similar justification to Ely and Thomas' discrimination and fairness perspective on diversity. The rationale behind the transnational fairness approach (Özbilgin *et al.* 2016) is that there is a need to address the unequal treatment of diverse groups beyond national borders. Furthermore, the equality and fairness perspective on DM

appears to resonate with “the social justice discourse of equal opportunities” (Darics and Koller 2018, 198) as both emphasise legally binding regulations for groups of employees.

Having discussed some of the main perspectives on the justification of DM policies, I now turn to research on the implementation of PL policies in organisations.

2.2. PL policy implementation

Kirton and Greene (2017) argue that line managers play a crucial role in the implementation of a company’s policy on diversity and greatly influence the equality and inclusion climate experienced in the workplace. As regards PL implementation, research has shown that unsupportive workplace culture and perceived resistance to PL policies can act as barriers to uptake (Holloway, Dhensa-Kahlon, and Beauregard 2024). Barriers include traditional gender norms and long working hours (Atkinson 2022). Such societal norms imply that many men fear being stigmatised at work or losing out on career opportunities after taking PL (Petts, Mize, and Kaufman 2022). Studies have also found structural barriers to fathers’ leave-taking (e.g., *ibid.*). An essential barrier of this kind is financial; leave is more likely to be used by fathers when it is “well paid” (Moss and Deven 2015, 139). Another structural issue discussed by Moss and Deven (2015) and Rehel (2014) is that fathers find it problematic when their access to leave depends on the mother transferring some of her leave to them when there is only one leave per family (Pizarro and Gartzia 2023). This often results in parental leave being taken only by the mother (Moss and Deven 2015). Likewise, Foss Heggem and Kvande (2017) find that fathers are less likely to take any leave when they have to negotiate the length of their leave. Studies from Norway have shown how important it is that PL is “pre-negotiated” in terms of a fixed and earmarked period (Holter 2007; Kvande and Brandth 2019). Another structural issue emphasised by Atkinson (2023) is the lack of replacement arrangements for fathers taking parental leave. Previous studies identify several cultural and structural barriers to men taking PL. Whether these or other factors are relevant for the successful implementation of a PL policy that is global in scope will be addressed in the present study.

In the next section, I present the research questions that the current study seeks to answer, along with descriptions of my material and analytical approach.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS, MATERIAL AND ANALYTICAL APPROACH

3.1. *Research questions*

Two research questions were formulated to gain insights into the various aspects of my study. RQ 1 focuses on DM perspectives and discourses as objectives for GPL in the four MNCs, while RQ 2 seeks to identify factors that may contribute to successful implementation.

- RQ 1: What traces of DM perspectives and discourses are reflected in the material?
- RQ 2: What contextual factors may explain the successful implementation of GPL in the four MNCs?

3.2. *Material*

The material for the case study, comprises 22 interviews, external and internal media texts and public reports from four MNCs, two headquartered in the UK and two in Norway. The four MNCs are among the largest companies in Norway and the UK. They were interesting because they were early movers in terms of implementing a GPL policy. All four MNCs introduced GPL as an extension of the PL already offered to their headquarter-based employees in the UK and Norway, respectively. To my knowledge, they were the only MNCs headquartered in the two countries offering a global PL policy when the study was initiated in 2019. In addition to headquarter location, the MNCs vary in terms of subsidiary locations and industry sector. An important commonality for the four MNCs is that they have all received high rankings from global annual reports and indices on gender equality, such as Equileap¹ and the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index (GEI)², in the last few years.

The research process was conducted in stages as advocated by Noor (2008). In order to gain a deeper understanding of PL policies I first engaged with prior research on PL to find out if a study of GPL was relevant. I researched the MNCs' internal and external textual data about their GPL policy (textual analysis of their corporate media articles was addressed in Bamford 2022). Four exploratory interviews were

¹ <https://equileap.com/>.

² <https://www.bloomberg.com/gei>.

conducted with managers in two MNCs (*Tab. 2*) to explore their justification for introducing GPL. Furthermore, an interview guide to be used in interviews with father employees was constructed (Appendix). The specific target group for the study was fathers working for one of the four MNCs who had taken GPL after the policy was implemented. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling was chosen, as suggested by Atkinson (2023). Firstly, the MNCs approached only eligible father employees (permanent employees) and asked if they wanted to participate in a study on global paternity leave. Secondly, the fathers' participation was based on self-selection and that they voluntarily contacted the author. When the interviews with fathers were initiated (November 2021), a limited number had been eligible for the leave. 13 men who had taken GPL while working for one of the four MNCs (*Tab. 1*) agreed to be interviewed about their experience. Findings from these interviews and company reports showed that the policy had been successful (achieved high uptake). Therefore, further semi-structured interviews were carried out with five managers from three MNCs to explore their views on why the implementation of the policy was a success (*Tab. 2*).

For GDPR reasons, the informants (fathers and managers) are anonymised. Similarly, information in the answers that might identify the company in question has been anonymised. The fathers were from diverse cultural backgrounds and were based in the UK, the US, Brazil and Australia. The informants took between 12 and 30 weeks' leave, and only two took less than their full entitlement (16, 26 or 30 weeks, depending on their company's specific policy; *Tab. 1*). The managers were based in Norway or the UK (*Tab. 2*). All interviews were semi-structured and lasted, on average, 50 minutes.

The interviews were conducted in English via Microsoft Teams and transcribed using the Teams live transcription option before being quality-checked by the author. They were transcribed verbatim but without pauses or filler words. In line with Dörnyei (2010) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), some unintelligible and repetitive words were manually excluded to avoid stigmatising informants' language use. This approach resulted in a coherent text representing the original wording and grammatical structure.

Table 1. – Information about the father employees.

INFORMANT NUMBER	WEEKS OF LEAVE AVAILABLE	WEEKS OF LEAVE TAKEN	HQ LOCATION	INFORMANT LOCATION
1	30	30	Norway	UK
2	26	26 + 26*	UK	UK
3	30	12 + 8*	Norway	UK
4	16	12	Norway	Brazil
5	26	26 + 26*	UK	UK
6	30	30	Norway	UK
7	30	30	Norway	UK
8	16	16	Norway	US
9	16	16	Norway	US
10	26	26	UK	Australia
11	16	16	Norway	US
12	16	16	Norway	Brazil
13	16	16	Norway	Brazil

Note: * indicates the length of leave taken by the father for a second child.

Table 2. – Information about the managers.

INFORMANT NUMBER	POSITION	HQ LOCATION	INFORMANT LOCATION
14	Subsidiary manager	Norway	UK
15	Global DEI manager	Norway	Norway
16	Communications manager	UK	UK
17	HR manager	Norway	Norway
18	HR manager in subsidiary	Norway	UK
19	Global HR manager	UK	UK
20	Communications manager	UK	UK
21	Global HR manager	Norway	Norway
22	Global HR manager	Norway	Norway

3.3. *Analytical approach: theorising from case studies*

The study is framed as a case study, “a research strategy that examines, through the use of a variety of data sources, a phenomenon in its naturalistic context, with the purpose of confronting theory with the empirical world” (Piekkari *et al.* 2009, 569). The phenomenon being studied is GPL policies in four MNCs. In order to answer the two research questions, the current case study first explores DM perspectives and discourses reflected in the material.

Secondly, contextual factors that may explain the successful implementation of GPL in the four MNCs are investigated. Inspired by Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki’s (2011) approach to theorising from case studies, the current case study seeks to identify conditions which seem crucial for the successful implementation of GPL using a contextualized explanation. A contextualized explanation aims to account for why and how events are produced or what factors and context cause an outcome to happen (Welch *et al.* 2011). By context, Welch *et al.* (*ibid.*) refer to contingent conditions that produce an outcome in combination with a causal mechanism. The technique involves working backwards from the outcome (high uptake of GPL) and identifying the combined effect of the conditions found in the case (*ibid.*). For example, in combination with conditions A, B and C, the availability of PL may cause high uptake (H). Hence, it will be impossible to generalise from the mere availability of a PL policy to H as an outcome without saying something about the context (i.e., variables A, B, C) in which the GPL occurs. In addition to identifying patterns in the material, I also used my familiarity with the literature on DM and PL to identify such factors in an abductive process (Kreiner 2015). Previous research on barriers to fathers taking PL was useful and helped me attune myself to similar findings in the interview data.

4. FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the material. In 4.1, the focus is on traces of DM perspectives and discourses reflected in the material, and in 4.2, the informants’ assessment of conditions for successful implementation of GPL is presented.

4.1. *Traces of DM perspectives in the material*

In their 2020 annual reports, the four MNCs label their newly launched GPL as either a diversity and inclusion policy (three MNCs) or as an equality and inclusion policy (one MNC). However, this difference between the MNCs is not visible in the interviews.

Several father informants state that they appreciate being treated equally as employees by gaining access to PL regardless of the country they are based in. The father in example (1) compares the current situation to what used to be the case, reflecting on his employer's justification for introducing the change:

- (1) Well, the local market is what it is. But we're working for a company from [country X]. We're told we're one group [...]. So, I think, in the end, [the company] eventually adopted that sort of blanket policy for all the different offices. To make sure there's no frustration or different treatment wherever you're based. (INF4)

The aspect of equal treatment across the organisation was linked to alignment with company values:

- (2) I think they wanted to live their values. (INF9)

Two of the MNCs have *care* as a corporate value, and the interviewed global HR managers from these companies (informants 19 and 21) stated that the policy was partly justified as an alignment with this value, implying a focus on work-life balance. This view was echoed in an external news article from one of these MNCs, which emphasised that one way to make *care* meaningful for employees was to offer new fathers and mothers equal access to leave in all countries where they operate. GPL was also perceived by the fathers across the MNCs as a gender equality measure, ensuring that both male and female employees' roles as parents are recognised. Informant 19 said the MNC intended to break social stereotypes around how men feel about taking parental leave.

The following example shows that the father perceives the policy as something the company has implemented as a talent management measure.

- (3) It is a business advantage for the company, for retention and attraction of talents as well. If I had a proposal from the markets to assess, I would really take into account salary, bonuses, etc., but also do you have extended parental leave? If I decide to have another kid, we would like to have that again so that does make a difference and it also builds a sense of belonging and pride to being in a company that takes this

bold move in countries where there's nothing forcing, no force in society pushing [company X] to take this decision. (INF13)

The policy thus contributes to boosting the corporation's progressive identity ("a company that takes this bold move"), which seems to create a sense of belonging and pride among the employees. The policy represents a key element it would be relevant to bring into the discussion in a job-seeking process, alongside remuneration issues.

To sum up, the main DM perspective identified in the material emphasises equality, exemplified by the MNCs 'living' their shared corporate values (example 2) across borders. In addition, the business case for diversity exemplified by talent management (example 3), has been identified as an objective of GPL.

The next section focuses on requirements to implement GPL as a success.

4.2. Institutional requirements for successful implementation of GPL

The findings related to this aspect point to several factors at the institutional level that should be present if fathers are to take the offered leave. Section 4.2.1 focuses on how the informants relate to different structural factors, while section 4.2.2 concerns cultural factors.

4.2.1. Structural factors

A fixed-length, earmarked right

It appears important to the informants that the leave is offered as a fixed and earmarked right, as opposed to them having to negotiate the length of the leave. One father who took paternity leave from his MNC twice stresses the importance of a policy with a formally fixed period:

- (4) I took six months both times, and so I used it as much as the policy allowed. (INF5)

Several fathers expressed that they would have been uncomfortable taking leave if it had meant reducing the leave period available to the mother. The two Norwegian headquartered MNCs initially insisted that fathers could only take leave if their partners were back at work, which is in accordance with the general Norwegian PL model (Brandth and Kvande 2022). However, this practice was subsequently changed by the MNCs due to negative feedback from fathers.

The UK-based MNCs, on the other hand, recognised from the start the need for independent leave for both men and women:

- (5) Our policy was not about sharing or having to sacrifice. It was about, even if both parents work for us, they could both take 26 weeks of paid leave. (INF19)

The fathers in the current study acknowledge the significance of a policy which grants them an independent entitlement, thereby recognising them as individuals and as belonging to fathers as a group. Another perceived advantage is that the leave has a fixed maximum time off, so they do not have to negotiate how much to take with their employer or the mother. As many as eleven of the 13 fathers took their full entitlement (*Tab. 1*), regardless of whether it consisted of 16, 26 or 30 weeks, demonstrating the importance of a fixed entitlement.

Full pay

All four MNCs offer fully paid leave, which is an important precondition for taking leave, as the fathers are unlikely to have been able to afford such a substantial loss of income. This assumption is confirmed in the next example:

- (6) You can't afford to be off work for six months. So, you won't have that opportunity as a family, it was just fantastic. (INF2)

In addition to the importance of the financial aspect, this father indicates how radical the policy is by saying that "you won't [normally] have that opportunity". The fact that the opportunity to take PL is framed as exceptional highlights the emergence of a novel discourse in contrast with existing standards (or perceived standards).

Formal replacement practices

Another crucial structural element in all four MNCs is formal replacement practices when the father is on leave. In one MNC, the practice was to replace fathers on leave by external contractors. At the same time, the other three used the replacement period as an internal learning and promotion opportunity for more junior staff. From their perspective, replacement was a complicated task that was best left to local line managers. In addition, responsibility for replacements was a way to empower local line managers. One father describes how six months away can be easier for the companies than shorter leaves, as it coincides with standard external contracting agreements.

- (7) I think if you're away for six months, it's a standard contract time to appoint somebody. (INF7)

Statement (7) indicates that longer PL may be worth considering when replacement practices are to be formalised. Discursively speaking, this highlights the fact the interviewee frames his leave in the context of corporate productivity. Hence, there may be discursively retrievable implications of his claim.

4.2.2. Cultural factors

In examples (8-10), the fathers describe their perspectives on how the companies contributed to the successful implementation of the policy globally by generating a supportive work culture. Essential factors in this respect are buy-in from line managers and supporting fathers who fear losing career opportunities. The fathers thus emphasise how they felt encouraged by their managers to take PL:

- (8) I was lucky that I moved over to a manager who had had children, and he said: "If I was you, I'd take the time off", and that felt so reassuring [...]. He just said that I want you as part of my team, you will have a job when you get back. And I think that for me this is what you want to hear from your manager. (INF2)
- (9) My line management has always been supportive that you can take the full 26 weeks. I guess you're not going to be favoured for coming back early. You're not going to be punished for taking the full 26 weeks, which is really well-embedded. I thought, again, as a male, there's no shame in having the full 26 weeks off it. It's encouraged, so I've found it to be very, very supportive. (INF5)

Examples (8) and (9) show how important it was for the fathers to feel supported by their line management to take the entire leave period offered. In example (10), the father in question enthusiastically shares that his line manager was so committed to him taking the leave that she would not allow him to cut it short to take up a new position, even though it might have benefited the company:

- (10) I was really impressed by how she made it non-negotiable, this is your right to take, and you should take the whole thing. And if you do get offered the role, then we'll just adjust even if there's an urgent need for it [...]. They honour it, and they take it seriously, and there's no negative perception around it [...]. It's not just talking about it, people do

respect it, and it almost feels sacred [...]. This leave feels sacred now to leaders. (INF9)

Examples (8-10) are representative of attitudes expressed by informants across the four MNCs, showing that the father employees perceive GPL as a lived practice in their MNC. They do really 'walk the talk'. These formulations may be interpreted as suggesting the emergence of alternative discourses of fatherhood and management within the MNCs.

However, the present material also reflects the fear of a lengthy leave impacting one's career negatively. Informants 3 and 4 in the current study chose not to take all their leave (*Tab. 1*) and instead prioritised their work roles. Informant 3 stated that he did not feel sufficiently supported by management in his MNC to take the full leave. He experienced resistance from older male management, which, in contrast, points to more conservative discourses of fatherhood and management.

In this context, managers taking leave themselves are vital in serving as role models. Informant 13 recognises the importance of leading by example. He held a management position and took the full PL available to him. Informant 18 asserted that they and the line managers actively encouraged the employees to take the leave, emphasising to the fathers that their careers would still be there for them afterwards. Another HR manager emphasises the importance of a supportive culture in the following way:

- (11) It [GPL] landed in the right way, and the culture is such that people are not afraid to take leave. In fact, quite the opposite. (INF19)

The fathers in the study all express that GPL is a successful corporate initiative, as shown in examples (12-16) below:

- (12) It has been received very well, and people are taking advantage of it. (INF1)
- (13) It is working; they have implemented it fine. (INF7)
- (14) I would say success because people are doing it. (INF8)
- (15) I don't know a new father who hasn't taken it. (INF9)
- (16) It is a huge success, with high uptake and very well thought out. (INF11)

GPL is perceived as successful, characterised by high uptake, as demonstrated by fathers, HR managers and in company reports.

5. DISCUSSION

The current study took its point of departure in two research questions. RQ 1 asked what traces of DM perspectives and discourses are reflected in the material. This will be discussed in sections 5.1-5.2. RQ 2 asked what factors can explain the successful implementation of GPL, an issue discussed in 5.3 and 5.4. In 5.5, a framework for the successful implementation of GPL is presented, based on the findings in section 4, followed by concluding remarks in 5.6.

5.1. *Equality and fairness*

Regarding DM perspectives, an important finding is that the introduction of GPL is perceived by several of the fathers as a form of equal treatment of employees worldwide (see section 2.1.2 and interview examples 1 and 2). Thus, GPL may be perceived as an initiative promoting fairness (Özbilgin *et al.* 2016) and equality for parents as a group, which is related to the social justice discourse of equal opportunities (Darics and Koller 2018). Father employees link fairness to the MNCs living their corporate values, which are shared between all employees in HQ and subsidiaries. This is also confirmed by HR managers. Two of the MNCs have chosen *care* as one of their corporate values, and GPL is perceived as an example of practising *care*. Although fairness and equality are reasons why the MNCs implemented the policy, a DM approach ultimately recognises taking GPL to be each father's personal choice, a fact reflected in the decisions of informants 3 and 4 to take shorter leave than offered. GPL is, after all, a voluntary, individual right and benefit.

5.2. *Talent attraction and retention perspective*

Some fathers perceive GPL as a talent management effort that positively impacts the perception of the MNCs as progressive companies. Such a view is reflected in example (4), where the father asserts that if he were to consider working for another company, their parental leave offer would impact on his decision. In such a perspective, PL becomes a competitive advantage (Cox and Blake 1991) and represents a stakeholder approach to DM (Özbilgin *et al.* 2016). In addition, the material comprises traces of a learning and problem-solving approach to DM (Cox and Blake 1991; Ely and Thomas 2001), in that the initial policies of two of the MNCs

were changed to being independent of the mother's leave in response to feedback from the fathers. Listening to employees appears to be in line with Ely and Thomas' (2001) learning perspective. A learning perspective is predicated on giving employees a voice on how best to achieve a work mission, where inclusion emerges as a result (Hansen and Seierstad 2017). The vocabulary the fathers use to construct meaning regarding GPL features expressions such as "builds a sense of belonging and pride" (example 3) and "feels sacred" (example 9). Generating a sense of belonging and pride around GPL appears to promote the MNCs' progressive identity and an inclusion discourse, as presented by Darics and Koller (2018). These business perspectives on DM are linked to the diversity discourses of economic rationality (Zanoni and Janssens 2004) and inclusion (Darics and Koller 2018).

To sum up, traces of several DM perspectives and discourses have been identified in the material, emphasising primarily across-the-board equality and attraction of valuable employees. Both interviewed managers and father employees relate to equality by mentioning treating employees fairly (example 1) and living the MNC values across countries (example 2). Ultimately, the MNCs' willingness to implement what is a costly policy seems rooted in the objective of securing a competitive advantage for the business. However, the strong emphasis on equality and fairness when implementing this costly policy across borders could be said to take DM further in the direction of transnational fairness, as emphasised by Özbilgin *et al.* (2016). The paper's first theoretical contribution is to extend DM research towards a corporate measure advocating inclusion of fathers, thus extending the DEI discourse to go beyond typical minority groups.

5.3. *Structural factors: standardised, fully paid leave and replacement*

One factor identified as crucial for the successful implementation of GPL is drawing up a policy with a fixed duration that is earmarked for fathers. Previous research (e.g., Foss Heggem and Kvande 2017) has shown that fathers are reluctant to take PL when this right has to be negotiated individually or when it means reducing the leave available to the mother (e.g., Brandth and Kvande 2022). Unpaid leave may also prevent fathers' leave-taking (e.g., Petts, Mize, and Kaufman 2022; Atkinson 2023), while well-paid leave increases uptake (Brandth and Kvande 2022). These findings have been confirmed in this study. A new and important finding in

the current study concerns replacement practices. The globally available policies offered by the MNCs that are represented in the current study include formalised replacement practices, which seem to have positively impacted uptake as well as encouraged taking all the allocated weeks. This suggests that leave-takers construct their rights within the framework of a broader corporate efficiency, which demonstrates the relevance of discourses of economic rationality as a counterpart to that of fairness.

5.4. Cultural factors: support from management and work culture

As stated in 2.2 (e.g., Kirton and Greene 2017), managers need to actively support DM initiatives if they are to be successful. Few studies beyond those carried out by Brandth and Kvande in a Norwegian context (e.g., 2022) have found support from managers and work culture for fathers taking PL. A common finding in PL research has rather been the lack of support from the work culture as a barrier to fathers' leave-taking (Burnett *et al.* 2013; Rehel 2014; Petts, Mize, and Kaufman 2022; Kaufman *et al.* 2023). In contrast, most of the interviewed fathers in the current study assert that their line managers, HR and other colleagues supported them in taking leave, which appears to be a vital factor for the policy's success. Hence, there appears to be convergence (Darics and Koller 2018) between the informants' view of GPL as they all express that they consider it to be a success (examples 12-16). While previous research on PL has found divergence regarding if and how much leave is taken by fathers (Valarino 2019; Brandth and Kvande 2022; Earle *et al.* 2023), in the current study, there are shared positive perceptions and a practice of taking the full GPL available. However, informant 3 presents a divergent view to that expressed by the majority of the fathers by emphasising that he perceived resistance from management. His view is thus in line with previous research (cited in 2.1) from more conservative corporate contexts where resistance to fathers' taking PL is common. Hence, there are indications of a struggle between traditional and emerging discourses.

5.5. A framework for successful implementation of GPL

Inspired by Welch *et al.*'s (2011) theorising from case studies (section 3.3), the findings in the current case study can be expressed as a framework of factors contributing to GPL success (*Fig. 1*). To my knowledge, a

framework for the successful implementation of GPL has not featured in previous PL research. The framework emphasises alignment between management and employees regarding the objectives of the policy and structural and cultural requirements for implementation. It can be expressed as a formula for a contextualised explanation of paternity leave success: H (high uptake of paternity leave) = A (shared objectives) + B (fixed, independent leave period) + C (full pay) + D (replacement procedure) + E (support from managers and work culture).

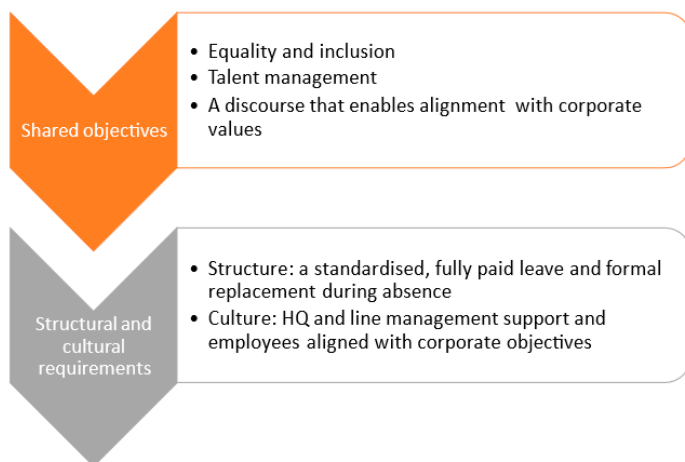


Figure 1. – Framework for successful implementation of global paternity leave in four MNCs.

Shared objectives between management and fathers are crucial for the successful implementation of GPL, and in the current study, these objectives are found to be equality and inclusion of employees regardless of where they work, justified through corporate values, such as *care*. The business case for diversity is acknowledged, specifically talent management or attracting and retaining talent. Regarding institutional requirements, structural factors are identified as a standardised leave period, which is fully paid and includes formal replacement of the employee. Cultural factors include support from both HQ and line management so that the employees trust that there is alignment between the corporate objectives and the MNCs' practice when encouraging the uptake of GPL.

5.6. Concluding remarks

This study offers new insights regarding implementing a DEI policy in four MNCs. It is based on recent data on a radical corporate policy, affecting both the work and family sphere. The aim of the study has been to explain how the MNCs discursively justify implementing the GPL and why it turned out to be a success, an outcome measured in terms of uptake. The data represent interviews with management and father employees from diverse cultural backgrounds who have taken such leave. The informants demonstrate that they are aware of and support the main rationale they assume to be underlying their company's decision to offer GPL, namely equality, which may be aligned with a social justice discourse. Some father employees mention that GPL is aligned with the MNCs' objective of attracting and retaining talent, which emphasises an inclusion and an economic rationality discourse. In terms of other factors that make the leave policy a success, it is critical that the leave consists of a fixed length and earmarked period, is fully paid, and is supported by the work culture.

Limitations and future studies

The data analysed in this case study consists of a pioneering but limited sample. The sample provides interesting insights from early corporate movers and culturally diverse individual voices. At the time of data collection, few MNCs had introduced GPL. As more MNCs introduce such policies, this should encourage more studies on implementing such leave. It might also be interesting to apply the framework of contextualised explanation developed from the current study to explore similar implementation processes of GPL in other MNCs and among more culturally diverse male employees.

APPENDIX

Study: global paternity leave in multinational corporations

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FATHERS

1. *Demographic data*

1. Age
2. Position
3. How long have you worked for company X?
4. Where were you born and where did you grow up?
5. How long have you lived in your current country of residence?
6. In what countries have you lived and worked?
7. If you have lived and worked in other countries, for how long did you work there?
8. Do you have children? If so, what are their ages?

2. *Interview questions for current fathers*

1. Have you taken or would you like to take parental leave?
2. If you have taken parental leave, can you tell me something about your experiences?
E.g. How did you experience relating to your child(ren), partner, other relatives, employer and colleagues?
3. What were your main reasons for taking parental leave?
4. How did you find out about your company's parental leave policy?
5. Could you tell me about some of the ways that the company informed staff about this policy?
6. Can you recall what you thought when you found out that your company had introduced this policy?
7. What did you think were the reasons why your company introduced the policy?
8. What do you think about the policy now?
9. How would you say your company has implemented the policy? Is it a success or failure? How did they follow up the communication of the leave?
10. How do you combine being a father and being an employee?

11. How did your own father combine working and fatherhood?
12. Do you see the role of the father changing/has it changed during the last few years? If so, please describe in what ways
13. What do your colleagues in your office think about the parental leave policy?
14. Do you know of colleagues who have taken the leave? If so, what is your impression of how it worked out for them?
15. What is your view of parental leave in general?
16. How would you describe the kind of father you would like to be?

Implementation of global paternity leave in multinational corporations

INTERVIEW GUIDE HR MANAGERS

1. What was your company's main motivation for introducing parental leave globally?
2. How does it align with your corporate values?
3. What were the main challenges you imagined would arise regarding implementation?
4. What were the main challenges you experienced regarding the implementation?
5. How did you engage local and line managers to commit to the policy?
6. How did you engage potential male takers of the leave in the organisation to commit to taking it?
7. Were there any cultural issues? If so, could you tell me about them? (e.g. country specific issues)
8. Could you tell me how the company informed staff about this policy?
9. How did the company follow up the internal communication of the leave?
10. Were there examples of local interpretations of the policy?
11. Based on your own experience, what advice would you give to other MNCs that are planning to implement global parental leave?
12. What is the percentage uptake of parental leave among men in your organisation? Country data?

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