

# **EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN CORPORATIONS: THE CASE OF GLOBAL PATERNITY LEAVE**

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## Abstract

This PhD thesis provides insights into the communication and perception of a new global paternity leave policy, emphasising the corporate discourses and the experiences of father employees. The trigger point for the investigation was that four multinational corporations (MNCs) introduced paid paternity leave globally (in 2017 and 2019). The implementation of this type of policy has increasing relevance for companies from an inclusion perspective. A current gender equality issue across countries is how to reduce the gender pay gap, which increases when women reach childbearing age (Bütikofer, Jensen, & Salvanes, 2018). Coincidentally, gender pay gap reporting was made compulsory for companies in the UK in 2017 and in Norway in 2020, the two countries where the MNCs in this study are headquartered. There is growing awareness in many countries that to achieve gender equality in paid work, we may need to emphasise gender equality regarding infant caregiving (Earle, Raub, Sprague, & Heymann, 2023). From a research perspective, paternity leave has become increasingly relevant as more than 50% of paternity leave research has been carried out since 2016 (Pizarro & Gartzia, 2023). So far, paternity leave research has mainly focused on national leave regulations or fathers' experiences in one or two countries. The current thesis contributes to the extant literature by presenting and discussing a global corporate approach to paternity leave and how employees from diverse cultural backgrounds experience it. Corporate texts are analysed to provide insights into the communication of global paternity leave in the four MNCs. Furthermore, interview data provide insights into father employees' and managers' experiences of the policy. The thesis consists of three empirical papers that, together with the introductory chapter, emphasise the following three overarching research aims: (i) Investigate how the four MNCs communicate the offer of global paternity leave within the organisation, (ii) explore how father employees who have taken paternity leave perceive and experience such a policy, and (iii) find out how the leave policy is implemented. A critical insight from the first paper, *Standardising Fatherhood across Cultures: A Linguistic Approach to Studying the Communication of a New Global Company Policy in Multinational Corporations* (Bamford, 2022), is that there is tension between focusing on the aspect of gender equality and that of inclusion when justifying the new measure. The paper contributes to the cross-fertilisation of linguistics and diversity management communication and demonstrates the importance of linguistic choices when communicating diversity management strategies. A critical insight from the second paper, *Global Paternity Leave in four MNCs: a facilitator of paternal agency?* is that the leave contributes to empowering fathers to become more involved parents. Specifically, the paper contributes to the literature on paternity leave by classifying leave-taking fathers along two dimensions: whether they took full or reduced leave and whether they experienced shared or sole care of the child(ren). One critical insight from the third paper, *Global Paternity Leave as a DEI*

*initiative in four Multinational Corporations*, is that for the policy to be successful, the leave needs to make sense to the individual father and must be supported by the corporate structure as well as the work culture. The overall contribution is threefold: (1) to extend the diversity management (DM) literature towards a corporate measure advocating inclusion beyond typical minority groups; (2) to extend our understanding of male agency; and (3) introduce a framework for successful global paternity leave implementation across the four MNCs

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## 1. Introduction

In this section, the topic and rationale for studying global paternity leave will be presented (1.1), followed by the research questions, aims of the papers and the structure of the thesis (1.2).

### 1.1 Topic and rationale – why examine global paternity leave?

The trigger point for the current PhD thesis was the launch of a global paid paternity leave policy by two Norwegian headquartered multinational corporations (MNC) in 2019, Equinor and DNB. As Norway has a relatively long tradition of offering statutory paternity leave, such an initiative from Norwegian MNCs may not be considered radical. However, this initiative sparked my interest in finding out whether similar global policies were offered by MNCs headquartered in other countries. My investigation of further MNCs' parental leave policies was carried out through searches of news articles, company websites and other available public corporate information. I also carried out academic literature searches on corporate parental leave schemes via Scopus and Google scholar. As a result of the above investigation, several MNCs that had introduced parental leave were identified, but very few had introduced global parental or paternity leave. Aviva and Diageo, two MNCs with headquarters in the UK who had introduced globally applicable paternity leave in 2017 and 2019, respectively, were identified. Such global policies emanating from the UK were surprising from an intercultural perspective, as work and care practices are more gendered in the UK (Atkinson, 2023; Kelland, Lewis & Fisher, 2022; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019; Mohun Himmelweit, 2023) than in Norway. The four identified MNCs that had implemented globally available paternity leave, headquartered in Norway and the UK respectively, thus became the natural basis for my investigation (see 3.2. for more information about the companies).

All four MNCs promoted their new global policy in the shape of one or more corporate news articles, which formed the starting point for sampling, data collection and analysis. Furthermore, the perceptions of father employees in each company who had taken paternity leave as well as those of management were explored through interviews. In their 2020 annual reports the MNCs label their policy as either a diversity and inclusion policy (Aviva, Diageo and Equinor) or as an equality and inclusion policy (DNB). Hence, the study has been positioned within a related research area, namely diversity management (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). In addition, paternity leave is a topic that is increasingly being researched in its own right (Pizarro & Gartzia, 2023), often within the discipline of gender studies, which supports taking a transdisciplinary approach. Section 2 provides a more detailed outline of how the thesis has been positioned.

The UN sustainable development goal on gender equality (SDG#5), which is supported by corporations and governments worldwide, specifies “shared domestic responsibilities” (between

men and women) as an outcome. However, women in most countries continue to bear the primary responsibility for infant caregiving and household work (Earle et al., 2023; Pizarro & Gartzia, 2023). Biases exist in the workplace against both mothers and fathers and can be explained by traditional gender norms where women are typically perceived as carers and men as breadwinners. Research from the UK has shown that men who want to be actively involved in their children's care may pay a career penalty (Atkinson, 2023; Holloway, 2024; Mohun Himmeltveit, 2023) and become stigmatised if they wish to take time off to care for their children (Kaufman & Petts, 2020; Kelland et al., 2022; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019). Likewise, gendered work practices imply that the next generation of women is still likely to face the so-called motherhood penalty (Bütikofer, Jensen, & Salvanes, 2018), which may result in career limitations and not achieving their earning potential. The lack of gender equality globally regarding caring for children has been emphasised by Koslowski, Duvander, and Moss (2019), who criticise that so few countries have designed leave policies that are well paid and earmarked for fathers. Research by Earle et al. (2023) shows that as late as 2022, only a small percentage of the total duration of paid leave offered by governments around the world was reserved for fathers. Entitlement to paid paternity leave varies considerably between countries. Research on statutory paternity leave in Sweden and Norway emphasises that giving fathers time off following the birth of a child may act as a double emancipation – empowering men to be involved fathers and empowering women to pursue careers (Johansson & Klinth, 2008; Molander, Kleppe, & Ostberg, 2019). Hence, introducing paternity leave may be a way to break with restrictive gender norms. Furthermore, recent research has documented that non-transferrable paternity leave rights, rather than gender-neutral parental leave rights, are particularly effective in getting fathers to take leave (Brandth & Kvande, 2019; Earle et al., 2023). A recent political outcome from this insight is that the EU implemented a statutory paid paternity leave period of two weeks for all its member countries in 2022.

In terms of geographical scope, existing research on paternity leave mainly focuses on governmental or corporate policies in one or a few countries (e.g. Balan, van den Brink, & Benschop, 2022; Brandth & Kvande, 2022; Humberd, Ladge, & Harrington, 2015; Korpi, 2010; Petts, Mize, & Kaufman, 2022; Rehel, 2014). Research on global paternity leave is new due to the novelty of the policy, and it becomes interesting to find out under what conditions such leave may succeed. Hence, I decided to explore how the four MNCs communicate this issue and how it is perceived and experienced by their father employees who have taken the leave. To my knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the perspectives of both suppliers and users of paternity leave schemes offered globally by a corporate entity, the MNC. As already indicated in this section, the main reason for choosing to research the four MNCs in question was that they were early movers regarding offering global paternity leave. These MNCs are paying for their male employees across the world to have the right

to take from 16 to 30 weeks of paid time off work to care for their new-born children. Hence, the thesis offers a unique empirical contribution to paternity leave literature from the perspectives of both father employees and the companies (see section 3).

## 1.2 Research questions, aims and structure of the thesis

According to Sandberg and Alvesson (2013) research questions are most likely to emerge from society, personal experience, extant scientific literature or empirical material. In the current thesis, the launch of global leave for fathers formed the starting point for my investigation. I also concur with Sandberg and Alvesson (2013) that designing research questions is not a linear process of following specific steps but more of a freely evolving process. The research process resulted in the formulation of the eight research questions (RQs) listed below, which have been explored in the three papers of the thesis. RQ 1, 2 and 3 are investigated in paper 1, RQ 4, 5 and 6 are investigated in paper 2, and RQ 7 and 8 are investigated in paper 3.

Paper 1 aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do the four MNCs present the new policy linguistically?

- a. What linguistic expressions are used to represent the leave?
- b. What social actors are present or absent?

RQ2: What are the communicator's intentions?

- a. Which linguistic expressions of the leave are used in headings, subheadings and text body?
- b. How are social actors presented (active, passive, personal, impersonal)?
- c. What kind of relationships are created between the communicator and audience?
- d. What are the motivations for introducing the policy?

RQ3: What underlying norms and values can be identified in the texts?

Paper 2 aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ4: What fatherhood norms are reflected in the interviews with the fathers from different national cultures who availed themselves of the new global paternity leave scheme?

RQ5: How is the relationship between work norms and fatherhood norms characterised by these fathers? Are there signs of tensions between these norms?

RQ6: What impact has paternity leave had on the fathers' perception of their role in the family?

Paper 3 aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ7: What traces of DM perspectives and discourses are reflected in the material?

RQ8: What contextual factors may explain the successful implementation of GPL in the four MNCs?

Although the three papers are independent of each other regarding their theoretical foundations and angle, they are connected through their shared focus on the phenomenon of global paternity leave in four MNCs. In addition, the papers are united in their approach to the philosophy of science (see section 3). In terms of overall scientific contribution, the thesis aims to contribute to research on paternity leave, particularly within organisational studies and sociology, which I will return to in section 2 and section 4. The overall contribution is threefold: (1) to extend the diversity management (DM) literature towards a corporate measure advocating inclusion beyond typical minority groups; (2) to extend our understanding of male agency; and (3) to introduce a framework for successful global paternity leave implementation across the four MNCs.

The thesis consists of the present introductory chapter and three research papers. In section 1, I have given an overview of the topic and rationale and research questions of the three papers. In the next section (2), I discuss theory and key concepts from different disciplines drawn on in this thesis. The methods section (3) provides an elaboration of my philosophical underpinnings and how they influenced my choice of research methods. I discuss the overall contributions of the thesis and present some limitations and suggestions for future research in section 4 followed by references in section 5. Section 6 contains the three research papers and their references, while appendices are included in section 7.

## 2. Theoretical foundations

In this section, I will present the theoretical foundations underlying the thesis. First, I will position the thesis within the research landscape (2.1), starting with an outline of my philosophical stance, and explaining why I take a transdisciplinary approach before discussing influences from organisational studies (2.1.1), influences from sociology (2.1.2) and a note on the concept of culture (2.1.3).

### 2.1 Positioning the thesis; a transdisciplinary approach

The philosophical foundation underpinning the current thesis is critical realism, as positioned by Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, & Paavilainen-Mäntymäki (2011). Critical realism recognises the existence of a reality independent of our perceptions of it while acknowledging that our understanding of reality is socially determined and subjective. Hence, social phenomena are constituted by the meanings we attach to them (Bhaskar, Danermark, Ekstrom, & Jakobsen, 2005). There is a clear connection between this philosophical starting point for the thesis and the research methods that I have chosen, which I will discuss in more detail in section 3.

Paternity leave is a benefit that impacts individuals, families, workplaces and society at large (e.g., Atkinson, 2022). As a phenomenon, paternity leave may be studied from different angles and academic disciplines, such as economics, sociology, psychology, political science, organisational studies and law. Additionally, researchers and practitioners may collaborate across different areas or fields to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014) using a supra-disciplinary approach (Balsiger, 2004). Balsiger uses the term supra-disciplinary scientific practice to describe “all forms of scientific collaboration where the field of a single discipline is transgressed” (Balsiger, 2004, p. 410), an approach which has been discussed by Ly (2016). Balsiger (2004) refers to three main forms of supra-disciplinary practice; interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary. A study may be classified as transdisciplinary in the following case:

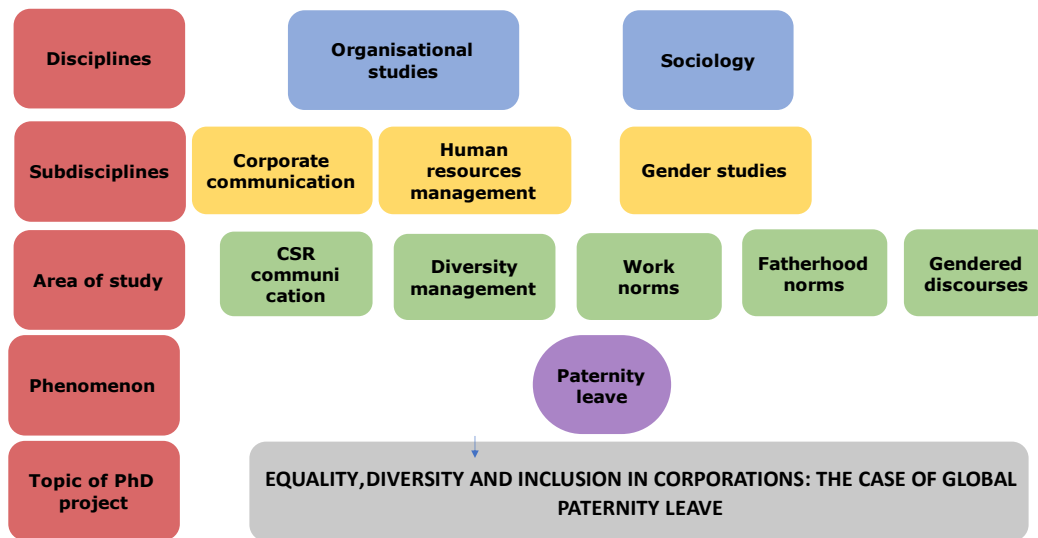
A scientific problem transgressing the boundaries of scientific disciplines arises when (a) the problem is generated in an extra scientific field (economics, politics, the living world); (b) a solution to the problem is urgently required in this field; (c) public opinion considers these fields relevant; and (d) when it is brought to science in an institutional way (research tasks, financing of project)” (Balsiger, 2004, pp. 412-413).

Global paternity leave may be seen as (a) generated in the living world, and a solution (b) to the global problem of gender inequality. Public opinion (c) considers gender equality and paternity leave

entitlement to be of relevance, and it is brought to science in an institutional way (d) through the current thesis. The main reason for positioning the thesis as transdisciplinary is that “the striven solution is explicitly meant to consider experiences from affected persons” (Balsiger, 2004, p. 412). The current study aims to investigate the phenomenon of global paternity leave. The analysis draws on theories from different disciplines, mainly organisational studies and sociology.

Before attempting to link my research to specific academic disciplines, I will admit that I have found it a challenging task. One reason is that the disciplines may overlap due to the constant formation of new research networks (Angouri, 2018; Becher & Trowler, 2001). In addition, there are several understandings of the concept of discipline, including being an academic subject at a university (Hammarfelt, 2019; Ly, 2016), and a department or a body of knowledge (Turner, 2006). Hence, scholars have not been able to agree on a definition or origin of the concept of discipline, according to Hammarfelt (2019). Moreover, loosely defined areas of study may gradually develop into more stable disciplines, even starting as a multidisciplinary field, which then ultimately becomes recognised as monodisciplinary (Hammarfelt, 2019). An additional issue when positioning a thesis within the research landscape is that disciplines are no longer the most important units in scientific communication (Hammarfelt, 2019), as areas of study, topics and phenomena may belong to more than one discipline. In addition, specialisations may separate researchers belonging to the same formal discipline as they are interested in different areas of study (Hammarfelt, 2019). Another reason for not being overtly focused on disciplinary boundaries is that such boundaries may prevent collaboration and cross-fertilisation in research, according to Angouri (2018). Thus, in line with Angouri (2018), the research for the current thesis has involved an openness towards combining ideas, regardless of which disciplines they originate from in order to offer the best possible explanations. The process could be characterised as abductive, and this will be discussed further in section 3. Although positioning the current thesis within clearly delineated areas of study and disciplines has proved to be challenging, a proposed classification of disciplines, subdisciplines and areas of study that have influenced this thesis is presented in figure 1.

Figure 1: Theoretical framework for PhD thesis



As regards figure 1, the disciplines of organisational studies and sociology (in blue) were drawn on to study global paternity leave from a work and family angle, respectively. Organisational studies is regarded as the primary discipline due to the fact that global paternity leave is a policy introduced and practised within a corporate setting. However, the policy influences family life and fatherhood practices and norms, areas of study that derive from the discipline of sociology. Furthermore, the research involved exploring extant theories and literature from the following subdisciplines (in yellow): corporate communication, human resources management and gender studies. One reason for emphasising corporate communication is that it can contain the essence of what the organisation stands for (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019). Corporate communication includes both internal and external communication initiated by management (see 2.1.1 for a further discussion). The policy is also a human resources management initiative related to employee benefits, and human resources management contains extensive research on such benefits. Furthermore, gender studies emphasise gender identity and representation, which are relevant for research on father identity and norms. Moreover, the communication of the policy (paper 1) has been linked to the following areas of study (in green): CSR communication and diversity management (DM), as it is communicated both externally and internally as a diversity and inclusion initiative. In 2.1.1, the influence from CSR and DM is discussed in more detail. Also, paternity leave research belongs to the research areas of gendered discourses, fatherhood norms and work norms. In addition, paternity leave is a phenomenon that is increasingly researched in its own right (Pizarro & Gartzia, 2023). Gendered discourses, fatherhood and CSR norms are discussed more in 2.1.2, as well as the distinction between parental and paternity leave.

### 2.1.1 Influence from organisational studies; CSR communication and diversity management

In figure 1, CSR communication and diversity management are described as areas of study that derive from the subdisciplines corporate communication and human resources management, respectively. In the next section, these areas of study and how they relate to the current thesis are presented in more detail.

CSR communication is a form of corporate communication that can be directed at both external and internal stakeholders. There is no clear and commonly agreed definition of CSR, according to Hansen and Seierstad (2017). However, the following definition, inspired by Carroll (1979) may serve as a basis:

a set of organizational initiatives that go beyond economic and legal obligations and extend to the ethical and discretionary responsibilities that society expects businesses to assume (Maier & Ravazzani, 2019, p. 271).

According to Nielsen and Thomsen (2012), corporate communication and CSR communication have a shared purpose – to enhance businesses’ image and reputation among customers, employees, and other stakeholders. Corporate communication can be defined as:

an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent (Van Riel, 1995, p. 26).

While CSR historically has been mainly externally focused beyond the organisation, the area of diversity management (DM) has been internally focused, at the organisational level (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). Bridging CSR and DM communication in organisations “can strategically create an interface with pressing societal demands and, simultaneously, ensure recognition and a sense of pride among their employees” (Maier & Ravazzani, 2019, p. 280). In the 2020 annual reports of three of the MNCs global paternity leave was communicated as a diversity and inclusion initiative, as opposed to a gender equality initiative, while the fourth MNC referred to the policy as an inclusion and equality scheme. Gender equality refers to “the full equality of men and women to enjoy the comprehensive list of political, economic, civil, social and cultural rights, with no one being denied access to these rights, or deprived of them, because of their sex” (Vasiljevic, Marling & Örtenblad, 2017, p. 16). Definitions of diversity and inclusion are provided below in this section.

The decision to communicate the paternity leave policy externally as well as internally could be seen as an example of bridging corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication and diversity



management (DM) communication. Within diversity management research, Kirton and Greene (2017) point to a change in discourse from equality to diversity from around 1994, which signals a shift in both organisational theory and practice. Diversity management (DM) may refer to either an academic field or an area of study (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). As for organisations, the concept of diversity is often referred to together with that of inclusion (Adamson, Kelan, Lewis, Śliwa, & Rumens, 2021). Corporate labels currently seen are diversity and inclusion (D&I), equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Regardless of the exact label used by an individual organisation, the main point is that there is a strong emphasis on accepting and managing diversity. Hence, it appears relevant to position the thesis within the established area of study referred to as DM by Hansen and Seierstad (2017). A diversity focus is thus aligned with both corporate reporting practices and international research (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017).

However, scholars are not in complete agreement about how to define diversity (Ozbilgin, Tatli, & Jonsen, 2017), the notion has for instance been described as “any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities” (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 81). There is also a lack of scholarly agreement of exactly what diversity categories to include, but there appears to be some general agreement that race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age are recognised (Darics & Koller, 2018; Griggs, 1995; Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2017). Diversity management can be seen as “the voluntary organisational 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, p. 208). Mor Barak’s definition of diversity management has been chosen here as it focuses on creating inclusion. Inclusion from an employee perspective can be seen as “the degree to which individuals feel part of critical organizational processes such as access to information and resources (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 443). From an organisational perspective inclusion can be seen as “ways that organizations can maximize the benefits of diversity by fostering and promoting full rights, access, and privileges of employment and advancement to all organizational members” (Combs, Milosevic, & Bilimoria, 2019, p. 279). Applying these definitions to the current study, paternity leave can be considered both a resource and a right that contributes to inclusion of father employees.

### 2.1.2 Influence from sociology; gendered discourses, work and fatherhood norms

As seen in figure 1, paternity leave is also studied from a sociological gender norm perspective, specifically linked to fatherhood norms and work norms. Norms are here understood as “rules of behaviour that reflect or embody a culture’s values” (Giddens, 2009, p. 1127). While the breadwinner norm is common within fatherhood literature, the ideal worker norm is more

commonly referred to in the international business literature. As the current study draws on these two fields, both concepts will be discussed below. Father identity is a related concept, understood as “an internalised set of father role expectations, which are seen to influence behaviour within that role” (McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014, p. 440). Paternity leave influences both the work and the home sphere. It indirectly affects women’s work and home context, which is relevant from a gender studies perspective. However, paternity leave in relation to women’s work will not be discussed in the current thesis.

In the next sections, the concepts of gendered discourses, the ideal worker norm, fatherhood norms, paternity leave and parental leave are discussed, as they are relevant for the thesis as a whole.

### **Gendered discourses**

Researching the communication of global paternity leave for paper 1 led me to explore extant literature on gendered discourses (e.g., Mullany, 2007; Sunderland, 2004). Discourses can be defined as “broad constitutive systems of meaning” and “ways of seeing the world” (Sunderland, 2004, p6). According to Sunderland (2004), any discourse on gender contains a premise about differences between men and women, which have been “socially or culturally learned, mediated or constructed” (Sunderland, 2004, p14). They operate as parameters through which women and men “are represented or expected to behave in particular gendered ways” (Sunderland, 2004, p21). Hence, gendered discourses have an essential role in the study of the connections between parenthood and work life practices. The gender difference discourse is related to a perception of men as the workplace norm, and managerial competence is linked to qualities associated with men (Mullany, 2007). Relevant gendered discourses that have been identified are *woman as mother* and *man as part-time father and breadwinner* (Mills, 2008; Mullany, 2007; Sunderland, 2004). These discourses imply that men who want to be involved fathers pay a career penalty (Mills, 2008; Sunderland, 2004). Recent studies, such as Schnurr, Zayts, Schroeder, and Le Coyte-Hopkins (2020) show that gendered discourses are still dominant in the workplace. For example, despite an increasing number of women joining the paid workforce, women are still generally expected to be responsible for domestic work and childcare. The women Schnurr et al. (2020) interview describe their men as breadwinners and as part-time fathers, while Weber (2020) refers to men who justify being absent fathers due to traditional gender discourses.

### **The ideal worker norm and fatherhood norms**

The ideal worker is typically a man who is available and prioritises work over other responsibilities (Acker, 1990). The norm of the ideal worker is still alive and well in MNCs (Atkinson, 2022; Molander et al., 2019; Niemisto & Hearn, 2022). Employees working for such corporations will often be

expected to adhere to this norm (Koveshnikov, Tienari, & Piekkari, 2019). The norm implies long working hours, which may prevent fathers who wish to be more involved with their children from doing so (Atkinson, 2022). The ideal worker norm is common in all the countries where the fathers interviewed for my studies live and work, and the informants also refer to it as being a common corporate norm in the workplace. The thesis provides new knowledge on a context where fathers are being encouraged by their MNCs to break with this strong corporate norm and spend considerable time with their families, off from work.

As mentioned earlier in this section, while the concept of ideal worker is commonly referred to in international business literature and organisational studies, the breadwinner is a related concept from fatherhood literature (e.g., Brandth & Kvande, 2022). Both the ideal worker and breadwinner concepts are referred to in paternity leave research and have been discussed in the current thesis. The father as breadwinner emphasises the father's function as an economic provider for the family (Molander, Kleppe, & Ostberg, 2019). Another fatherhood concept, which is widely shared across a wide range of literature on fatherhood, is the involved father. Involved fatherhood usually refers to a father who has a close and caring relationship with his children (Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Kangas, Lämsä, & Jyrkinen, 2019; Wall & Arnold, 2007), particularly focusing on the father as responsive to the child's needs and being involved in the children's everyday life (Aarseth, 2013). Although the father as breadwinner and involved father are described as two distinct fatherhood norms (Molander et al., 2019), they are not mutually exclusive. It is possible to be a breadwinner as well as an involved father.

### **Parental leave versus paternity leave**

In this thesis, I investigate how MNCs promote and implement new global leave policies and how father employees perceive these policies. Although the policies are referred to as parental leave policies by the MNCs, I have chosen to call them paternity leave. The reason for this decision is that the novelty feature of the policies is that they are being offered to fathers from 2017 (1 MNC) or 2019 (3 MNCs). The concepts of parental leave and paternity leave are defined by Koslowski, Blum, Dobrotic, Kaufman, and Moss (2022) in the following way:

#### **Parental leave**

Leave available equally to mothers and fathers, either as: (i) a non-transferrable individual right (i.e., both parents have an entitlement to an equal amount of leave); or (ii) an individual right that can be transferred to the other parent; or (iii) a family right that parents can divide between themselves as they choose. In some countries, Parental leave consists only of non-

transferable individual entitlements; in other countries, it is an entirely family right; while in other countries, part of Parental leave is an individual right, the remainder a family right. It is generally understood to be a care measure, intended to give both parents an equal opportunity to spend time caring for a young child; it usually can only be taken after the end of Maternity leave. In some cases, parents can choose to take all or part of their Parental leave on a part-time basis (Kosłowski et al., 2022, p. 3 , italics in original)

#### Paternity leave

a type of leave generally available to fathers only, usually to be taken soon after the birth of a child and intended to enable the father to spend time with his partner, new child and older children (Kosłowski et al., 2022, p. 3)

Kosłowski et al. (2022) distinguish paternity leave (taken straight after birth with the partner) from the so-called *father's quota*, a period only fathers can take. However, the authors emphasise that the distinction between paternity leave and the father's quota can be unclear and confusing. Also, the distinctions between maternity, paternity and parental leave may be blurred, according to Kosłowski et al. (2022). Following the definitions of parental leave and paternity leave presented by Kosłowski et al. (2022), Norway has two weeks' paternity leave (i.e. to be used at the time of birth), plus a further 15 weeks' father's quota (about a third of the total parental leave entitlement that only the father can use (Kosłowski et al., 2022, p. 14). In the three papers of the current thesis, I have consistently compared the leave offered by the MNCs to fathers to the Norwegian father's quota. Labelling the Norwegian father's quota as 'paternity leave' is in line with how other researchers label such leave (e.g., Pizarro & Gartzia, 2023).

As already mentioned, the four MNCs themselves use the label parental leave rather than paternity leave or the father's quota. In this context, parental leave is a gender-neutral benefit offered to both parents by the MNCs as opposed to the father's quota. Distinguishing between parental leave and paternity leave may be an ideological question. It depends on what perspective one chooses and if the intention is to achieve gender equality or not (Johansson & Klinth, 2008). Should a leave period following childbirth be earmarked for the mother or father, or should family leave be offered as parental leave, allowing each family to decide how to divide it between mothers and fathers? Political and commercial actors may have their own agendas in this respect. There are political reasons behind how governments and corporations handle family leave benefits (Korpi, 2010).

In the spirit of gender equality, it is essential to be aware of the historical reasons for introducing and maintaining an earmarked leave for fathers. Since it has been more common to give mothers time off

work following childbirth (Earle et al., 2023), giving fathers an independent and earmarked leave nudges men to take time off when they have a child. When such leave has been offered as parental leave by governments, in practice, fathers are less likely to take it (Miller, 2013). Hence, earmarking the family leave as paternity leave or the father's quota may support the underlying intentions of increasing men's participation in childcare and promoting gender equality (Johansson & Klinth, 2008). As mentioned in section 1.1, the success of the father's quota has not gone unnoticed internationally, and from 2022, all member countries of the European Union were required to offer two weeks of paid paternity leave.

For over 30 years, governments in Sweden and Norway have actively promoted several months' well-paid leave for fathers and used earmarked father quotas to nudge men to take leave. By contrast, governments in countries such as the US and the UK have offered short leave for fathers, with little pay or encouragement for men to take it (Korpi, 2010). The differences between the relatively similar Scandinavian countries, Sweden and Norway, on the one hand and the UK and US, on the other have been captured by Rush (2015) in his 'two worlds' model of fatherhood. He states that the USA and Sweden represent divergent archetypes. According to Rush (2015), the US model, which has influenced the fatherhood debate and welfare ideology in the UK, upheld patriarchal familism and male breadwinning through a combination of laissez-faire and punitive approaches to fatherhood. However, the Swedish model, which is similar to the Norwegian one, has dismantled patriarchy and revolutionised the gender relations of parenting through individualisation and non-transferability of dedicated maternity and paternity leave periods (Rush, 2015). Companies tend to follow the policies that exist in the country of their headquarters (Wiß & Greve, 2020). Therefore, it is pioneering that the four MNCs researched in the current thesis offer parental leave that is more extensive than the legal requirements in the countries where they are headquartered and in the countries where they operate.

### 2.1.3 A note on the concept of culture in this thesis

In the diversity management literature, culture is rarely defined and is often referred to as a fixed category (e.g., Ely & Thomas, 2001, p. 247). Paper 2 starts with the research question (RQ4) of what fatherhood norms are reflected in the interviews with fathers from different national cultures. The expression 'fathers from different national cultures' could be critiqued for containing an implicit assumption that some shared national fatherhood norms and practices are likely to influence the fathers' behaviour and sense of meaning. Initially, I assumed that the informants would express different cultural norms towards fatherhood aligned with the paternity leave entitlements in their countries of origin. However, culture is problematic as a diversity category, as one cannot assume that informants identify with their national culture. In today's culturally diverse societies, it may be

challenging to identify a shared way of life or even shared meaning and behavioural conventions within a nation. Instead, the concept of cultural complexity appears more useful as it recognises that contemporary societies are characterised by variation along many lines. Hylland Eriksen (2007) asserts that it is necessary to view culture not in terms of sameness but in terms of communication and diversity, both at the level of the group and the level of the individual. Hence, trying to conceptualise culture only in terms of what is shared might be less relevant (Hylland Eriksen, 2015). Although I have not put much emphasis on the concept of national culture in the current thesis, the concept has been referred to. It, therefore, seems appropriate to include a chosen definition of culture, which can be applied to national culture. Culture can be defined as:

“... a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behavior” (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 3).

This definition has been seen as relevant in the present context as Spencer-Oatey describes culture as dynamic, allowing for it to change. Another important point is the emphasis on behaviour being influenced by culture, but not determined by it. Therefore, although culture may be shared and influence our behaviour, the relationship between an individual and his/her culture may take many different forms. It is commonly known that individuals adhere to cultural norms to a lesser or greater extent and that the relationship between individual and cultural identity is complex, as stated by Hylland-Eriksen (2015). While I have not discussed the fathers’ relationship with their national cultures as such, many of them identified themselves as belonging to their national culture of origin. I have presented research on national entitlements to maternity, paternity and parental leave and how they influence fatherhood, housework, gender gap and work practices in the countries where the fathers live and grew up in paper 1 and 2.

### 3. Research methods and data

In this section, the chosen approach to research will be outlined, starting with my philosophical stance (3.1), followed by how it has directed the selection of theory, data and method of analysis for the current thesis. The data are presented in section (3.2), followed by data collection (3.3) and data analysis (3.4). Considerations regarding ethics and my role as a researcher will be discussed in section 3.5, and how to ensure scientific quality in section 3.6.

#### 3.1 Philosophical stance

This section includes an account of how the choice of research philosophy was made and how it connects with my choice of methods. According to Bisman (2010), the choice of method is a reflection of the underlying philosophy of science. The philosophical stance comprises a view of ontology (how one perceives reality) and connected epistemological beliefs (how one develops knowledge of the world). A similar view of the link between the philosophy of science and methods is presented by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2024) and Van Maanen, Sørensen, and Mitchell (2007), who state that presenting methods without a link to their theoretical foundation is insufficient. Transparency in the research process begins with being clear about how one perceives reality and how we develop knowledge about the world. Therefore, before discussing the chosen research methods for my study, I will present different perspectives on ontology and epistemology and how they relate to my research philosophy.

##### 3.1.1 Ontological stance

In broad terms, there are two opposing views of the nature of reality (ontology), which can be characterised as either objective or subjective (Bisman, 2010). In simple terms, an objective stance implies that from a methodological perspective one believes that there is one reality, and that the data represent facts. In contrast, a subjective view of reality assumes that meaning is contextually, socially and historically defined. Based on a subjective ontological view, there are multiple realities that are interpreted and constructed by individual minds (Bisman, 2010). Bisman (2010) also presents a third approach to reality, critical realism. This third view of reality implies that it is possible to have multiple perceptions about a single, mind-independent reality. It assumes that a reality exists beyond the self or a person's consciousness, but that it cannot be fully or perfectly understood. Critical realism is inspired by van Maanen, Bhaskar and Ragin (Welch et al., 2011, 2020). Bhaskar (1989) agrees that there is a reality which is independent of our perceptions. Simultaneously, he regards our comprehension of reality as subjective and social phenomena as constituted by the meanings we

attach to them. According to Bhaskar (1979), critical realism combines an external reality with human interpretation. Critical realism makes sense as a philosophy of science as it allows for a flexible view of building knowledge from data, being open to seeing reality as both factual and interpreted. The underlying belief is that humans do make sense of reality in their own subjective way, and they are simultaneously affected by an objective reality, determined by structures in society. In the current thesis, taking a critical realism stance implies being open to the subjective sensemaking of the individual informants regarding paternity leave, while at the same time acknowledging that paternity leave practices are objectively determined by e.g., legal and work structures. A critical realist lens has been applied to explain the underlying mechanisms that produce changes in work and care roles among men.

### 3.1.2 Epistemological stance

In this thesis, the analysis of the different types of data rests on the same critical realist ontological assumptions. Critical realism, with its emphasis on multiple perceptions of reality justifies a hermeneutic epistemological orientation that acknowledges different layers of subjective meaning. The data in the current thesis consist of short texts and interview data, and thus call for a qualitative approach to analysing them. This means to “seek to... come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency of... phenomena in the social world” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520). A hermeneutic approach is compatible with what Welch and Piekkari (2017) label third-generation qualitative research. The third-generation qualitative research approach implies a rejection of the positivist ideal of objectivity as possible or desirable. According to this qualitative approach, the quality of a qualitative study is related to the researcher’s ability to reflect on how interactions, philosophical underpinnings and theoretical preconceptions affect the results and interpretations (Welch & Piekkari, 2017).

The current thesis is inspired by the hermeneutic approach to epistemology, as described by Mees-Buss et al. (2022). Mees-Buss et al. (2022) assert that a hermeneutic approach invites researchers to challenge both their and their participants’ understanding of what is going on or being said in the field setting. They promote guiding heuristics to address three challenges related to interpretation. The first interpretive challenge involves the researcher’s initial interpretation of field data. A relevant question is whether the participants’ social, cultural and historical contexts are critically understood. The second interpretive challenge involves confronting researcher subjectivity in the theorising process, which includes questioning what is this an instance of theoretically. The third interpretive challenge involves establishing plausibility of theoretical conclusions, which includes questioning if conflicting evidence can be found (Mees-Buss et al. 2022). Questions I considered based on this approach included: Are the findings from the interviews trustworthy and authentic? Are the results



aligned with how other researchers conceptualise the phenomenon of paternity leave? Have I thoroughly explored enough relevant evidence regarding the implementation of a paternity leave policy? I have addressed these interpretive challenges further in 3.4.3 (source critique) and 3.6 (reliability and validity).

There are several reasons for why a hermeneutic approach was chosen. One reason is that a hermeneutic approach is aligned with a critical realist view of ontology. Another reason is that a hermeneutic approach to knowledge and theory building is based on exploring different layers of meaning and understanding complex contexts, as stated by Angouri (2018). A hermeneutic approach involves seeking plausible explanations and being open to criticism of results and verification (Mees-Buss et al., 2022). Hence, the role of the researcher in data interpretation can be likened to that of a detective (Mees-Buss et al., 2022; Van Maanen, 1979). Admittedly, a challenge when choosing a hermeneutic approach to epistemology is that it makes the analysis of findings more complex than when the informants' reality is perceived as objective. One question I have asked myself is at what point do I as a researcher accept the informants' reported views on e.g. how they perceive paternity leave and fatherhood and to what extent do I challenge my initial interpretation and explore alternative views? One consequence has been that I have looked for contradictions in what the informants reported (section 3.4.3 on source critique contains an example).

Welch & Piekkari (2017) propose context sensitivity as an alternative to rigorously following a methodological template. Hence, the quality of the research is measured by the researcher's awareness of the contextuality of the research process. In the current thesis, I have taken into consideration what Welch & Piekkari refer to as potential threats to the quality of the research. Such threats include factual errors that may arise when misquoting informants, not understanding the meaning of participants' statements, and not providing clear links between evidence and theoretical claims. I employ what Denzin (2010) calls *within method triangulation*, combining several different qualitative methods, in this case linguistic text analysis, thematic analysis and a case study approach (see 3.4). Bisman (2010) also speaks in favour of triangulation and claims that any kind of triangulation helps to reduce bias and place greater trust upon research results. I acknowledge that different perspectives can be gained from using different data and methods of analysis. At the same time, I also acknowledge that only parts of reality will be captured in my own or any research.

Both the critical realism (ontological) and hermeneutic (epistemological) route to theory building challenge purely inductive or deductive processes of data analysis and theory development and instead suggest an abductive process (Mees-Buss et al., 2022), involving that researchers combine extant theory and new data. Hence, both the ontology and epistemology are consistent with an

abductive approach to data analysis and theory building, where the researcher ‘cycles’ between theory and data in the coding process (Kreiner, 2015). According to Van Maanen et al. (2007, p. 1149), “abduction begins with an unmet expectation and works backwards to invent a plausible world or a theory that would make surprise meaningful”. They argue that abduction is a continuous process in all phases of the research process and involves being open to surprises. Kreiner (2015) advocates an abductive approach to coding and theorising from the start of the data analysis, which involves a concurrent review of data and previous theories. The research for this thesis has involved cycling between extant literature (e.g., on paternity leave) and my data when coding the results, as advocated by Kreiner (2015). For example, when applying social actor theory in paper 1, the search for underlying ideologies involved exploring prior gendered discourses like *woman as carer* and *man as breadwinner*. When applying thematic analysis in paper 2, theory codes and themes from previous research (such as helper, involved father and breadwinner) were compared with codes and themes emerging from the data. In paper 3, prior research was explored to identify factors that have shown to prevent or encourage uptake of paternity leave, which were then compared to findings in the current dataset.

According to Welch et al. (2011), how we contextualise is related to how we theorise and depends on our philosophical orientation. Critical realism forms the ontological basis for the method called contextualised explanation (Welch et al., 2011). According to Welch et al. (2011), “Consistent with critical realism as a philosophy, methodological approaches to contextualised explanation are concerned with accounting for why and how events are produced” (Welch et al., 2011, p. 749). By context, Welch et al. (2011) refer to contingent conditions that produce an outcome in combination with a causal mechanism. In the current thesis, contextual factors that may explain the successful implementation of global paternity leave in the four MNCs are investigated. Inspired by Welch, Piekkari, Plakoyiannaki, and Paavilainen-Mäntymäki (2011)'s approach to theorising from case studies, paper 3 seeks to identify conditions which seem crucial for the successful implementation of global paternity leave using a contextualized explanation. In addition to identifying patterns in the material, I also used my familiarity with the literature on paternity leave to identify such factors in an abductive process (Kreiner, 2015). For example, previous research on barriers to fathers taking paternity leave was useful and helped me attune myself to similar findings in the interview data. According to a contextualised explanation, researchers can only aim for contingent realisations, e.g., circumstances A need to be present in order to achieve outcome B (Welch et al., 2011, p. 750). The method of contextualised explanation offers a way to reconcile context and explanation by recognising the contingency of causal relationships and simultaneous and multiple interaction effects (see 3.4.2 for more information). Critical realism thus includes context without sacrificing the goal of

causal explanation. This reconciliation also allows for explaining phenomena in different cultural and institutional contexts (Welch et al., 2011). Regarding theorising in International Business research (IB) in particular, Welch et al. (2011) contend that IB researchers have to face the epistemological question of how to develop robust explanations about phenomena in the social world and ensure that their theories are sensitive to diverse national contexts. For instance, how can the success of global paternity leave be explained, and to what extent do diverse national contexts need to be considered? Critical realist researchers seek a contextualised explanation for phenomena they would like to understand. In this regard, the thesis has also been inspired by Schwarz and Stensaker (2014) and Ly (2016), who propose phenomenon-driven research (PDR) as a valuable alternative to theoretical contributions. A phenomenon-based approach is compatible with the current PhD project where "the emergence of a new phenomenon is a starting point in the process of discovery and in building knowledge" (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014, p. 486). According to Schwarz and Stensaker (2014), PDR allows for various theoretical lenses to be applied without the restrictions of a specific theoretical approach that may limit interpretation. Additionally, they claim that:

Because PDR is driven by questions based on real problems in organisations and aims to contribute to existing knowledge within a field, rather than to contribute specifically to a particular theory, it could successfully produce research with clear and immediate implications for practice" (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014, p. 491).

From a PDR perspective, this thesis has identified clear implications of global paternity leave for new family policy and work-life balance practice in MNCs, involving factors that other MNCs may include if launching similar policies.

### 3.2 The companies and data

The four MNCs investigated in this thesis are among the largest companies in their respective countries. Diageo is a beverage company with around 28 000 employees and offices in 42 countries headquartered in the UK. Equinor is an energy company with around 22 000 employees in 36 countries headquartered in Norway. Aviva is an insurance company with around 16 000 employees in three countries (reduced from 16 countries in 2019) headquartered in the UK, while DNB is a bank with around 9 000 employees in 16 countries headquartered in Norway. The reason why the study comprises data from these four MNCs is that they were early movers in terms of implementing global parental leave policy schemes. To my knowledge, they were the only MNCs headquartered in the UK or Norway offering global paternity leave when the study was initiated (2019). The four MNCs in the study have all received high rankings from global annual reports and indices on gender equality, such

as Equileap<sup>1</sup> and the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index (GEI)<sup>2</sup>, in the last few years. All four MNCs introduced global paid paternity<sup>3</sup> (parental) leave as an extension of the paternity (parental) leave already offered to their headquarter-based employees in the UK and Norway, respectively. As already indicated in 1.1, paid paternity leave initiatives from Norwegian MNCs is in line with the statutory leave offer for fathers in Norway. One reason why I considered UK-based MNCs particularly interesting to investigate was that the UK government had introduced gender pay gap reporting from 2017. In addition, the UK government also announced plans in 2018 to require large companies to disclose their policies on leave for working parents (Milner, 2019).

The quotes below demonstrate different ways the MNCs measure and report on the uptake of their parental leave.

In a 2019 media article,<sup>4</sup> Equinor emphasised how important it is to measure the success of the parental leave policy:

“Equinor has created a separate code in their payroll system for anyone who uses the benefit”.

Diageo reported the following in a media article in 2020<sup>5</sup> about male employees’ uptake of parental leave:

“Since we launched our Family Leave policy in 2019, we’ve seen our employees’ use of parental leave increase significantly. In the 2020 financial year, our people took more than 163,000 days of parental leave – and the average number of days taken by men increased from 23 to 105”.

In Diageo’s annual report for the fiscal year 2024, they continue to emphasise the high uptake of paternity leave:

“Our family leave policy continues to be popular and amongst market leaders, with 701 employees utilising our extended paternity leave provision and 842 employees utilising our extended maternity leave provision in fiscal 24”.

DNB’s annual report from 2020 includes the following about parental leave uptake, also emphasising uptake by men:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://equileap.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/gei>

<sup>3</sup> The MNCs all use the gender neutral concept parental leave in their communication, see section 2.1.2

<sup>4</sup> <https://takethetime.net/equinors-five-tips-for-launching-a-successful-parental-leave-policy/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.diageo.com/en/news-and-media/stories/2020/leading-the-way-on-inclusion-through-equal-parental-leave>

“We have a gender-neutral parental leave scheme for our employees, regardless of where in the world they are working, with a minimum of 20 weeks of paid parental leave. One of the objectives is to promote gender equality by giving fathers and mothers an equal opportunity to take paid leave. In 2020, a total of 620 employees took parental leave, 44 per cent of whom were men”.

Aviva reported both on the percentage of men taking leave and that they have increased the length of the leave taken in a press release from 2022<sup>6</sup>:

“Take up of equal parental leave at Aviva remains high after four years. 80% of dads take at least five months paternity leave. Equal parental leave has now been taken by over 2,500 people at Aviva, almost half of which (1,227) were men. The average length of paternity leave taken has increased by three weeks over the four years: in 2021 it was 24 weeks, compared to 21 weeks in 2018”.

The data sampled in the current study consists of corporate texts and interviews with informants in the four MNCs. In paper one, I researched internal and external corporate media articles from 2019 and 2020 promoting the MNCs' global paternity leave policy (Bamford, 2022).

As regards the interview sample, 13 men who had taken global paternity leave while working for one of the four MNCs (see table 1) agreed to be interviewed about their experience as well as 9 managers (see table 2). The 13 father informants from the four MNCs were working in four different countries (the UK, the US, Brazil and Australia). As regards the 9 managers; 7 worked in the headquarters in the UK or Norway, while 2 worked in a subsidiary. The material thus comprises external and internal media texts and annual reports from the four MNCs and 22 interviewed informants (see 3.3 for more information on the sampling and data collection process).

All the interviewed fathers were full-time, white-collar workers, and ten of the thirteen had university degrees. Their female partners, the mother of their child(ren), were also working. The fathers' ages ranged from 31 to 47, with a mean age of 40. One father had three children, nine fathers had two children, and three fathers had one child. Three of the fathers took global paternity leave twice, and in the case of the other fathers with two children, their first children were born before the global paternity leave scheme had been introduced. The informants' names, ages, company names and countries of work have been anonymised for data protection reasons.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2022/06/takeup-of-equal-parental-leave-at-aviva-remains-high-after-four-years/>

The thirteen fathers each took between twelve and thirty weeks of paternity leave (see table 1 for details). In so doing, they all departed from the cultural traditions in the countries where they currently live or grew up, behaving instead in compliance with the new practice from the MNCs. These fathers are pioneers in taking global paternity leave from their companies, which means their views may be valuable in informing a new practice. Details about the interviewed managers are presented in table 2. The interviews with the managers are considered to represent the official views of the MNCs in question.

Table 1 presents the informants' age, number of weeks' leave taken, the HQ location of each MNC, the country where the informants live, their country of birth, their educational level and the age(s) of their child(ren). The father informants are presented by numbers in chronological order among the group of fathers.

**Table 1. Information about the father informants**

Informant	Age	Weeks of leave	HQ location	Informant location	Place of birth	Education	Age of children
1	40	30	Norway	UK	UK	High school	5 & 2
2	47	26 + 26*	UK	UK	UK	High school	9, 2.5 & 1
3	40	12 + 8*	Norway	UK	France	University	3 & 1
4	43	12	Norway	Brazil	Brazil	University	3.5 & 2
5	31	26 + 26*	UK	UK	UK	University	3 & 0.5
6	40	30	Norway	UK	UK	High School	1.5
7	40	30	Norway	UK	UK	University	2 & 0.5
8	42	16	Norway	USA	Lebanon	University	3.5 & 0.5
9	43	16	Norway	USA	USA	University	4 & 0.5
10	38	26	UK	Australia	UK	University	5 & 2
11	35	16	Norway	USA	USA	University	3

12	42	16	Norway	Brazil	Brazil	University	3 & 4
13	40	16	Norway	Brazil	Brazil	University	2.5

\* Indicates the length of leave taken by the father for a second child

Table 2 presents the position of the manager informants, the HQ location of their MNC and the country where they live. The informants are presented by numbers, and the order is based on a chronological order among the group of managers. Interviews with informants 14, 15 and 16 took place before any interviews with fathers.

**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	Global HR Manager	Norway	Norway
17	Global Communications Manager	UK	UK
18	Subsidiary HR Manager	Norway	UK
19	Global HR Manager	UK	UK
20	Global Communications Director	UK	UK
21	Global HR Manager	Norway	Norway

22	Global HR Manager	Norway	Norway
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### 3.3 Sampling and data collection

The main goal of qualitative sampling is to find individuals who can provide rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation, which is best achieved by purposive sampling, according to Dörnyei (2007). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a relatively small and purposively selected sample may be employed when the aim is to increase the depth of understanding. Moreover, Welch and Piekkari (2017) advocate using a purposive sample when they argue that participants with first-hand experience of the phenomenon in question should be used. Criterion sampling is a type of purposive sampling based on the researcher selecting data that meet specific, predetermined criteria (Dörnyei, 2007), which has been applied in the current study. The four texts analysed in paper 1 were sampled as they were similar in terms of format and angle; they include personal narratives from fathers, and each presents the MNC in question from an official perspective. The inclusion criteria for father informants were that they were employed by one of four MNCs and experienced taking paternity leave after the introduction of the global policy. A justification for interviewing only fathers who had experienced the leave is that research (e.g., Bühlmann, Elcheroth, & Tettamanti, 2010, Miller, 2011) shows differences between men’s values and attitudes to domestic work before having children and how they practice this after the birth of their child. The father informants were part of a potential target group that was small, due to the recent introduction of the policy in question at the time the study was carried out. The inclusion criteria for manager informants were that they had been involved in implementing the policy. Although the study is purposive, it has a convenience element, given the voluntary nature of the consent process (Campbell et al., 2020). Moreover, voluntary participation also meant that the informants were interested in global paternity leave and motivated to participate in the study (see section 3.3.2 for more details on the collection of interview data).

Data were collected in stages, as recommended by Noor (2008) and Kreiner (2015). These stages formed part of the abductive process of cycling between data and theory (see 3.1). The process of moving back and forth between data collection and analysis is referred to as iteration, another key process within qualitative sampling (Dörnyei 2007). According to Dörnyei (2007), the iterative process should go on until reaching saturation, a point when additional data appear to repeat what previous informants have already revealed. The fathers expressed similar experiences and ideas about fatherhood and similar views on how their employers supported their leave-taking. Saturation



can also be described as “the point when the researcher becomes ‘empirically confident’ that he/she has all the data needed to answer the research question” (Dörnyei, 2007, p127). In my opinion, I had reached such a point. Ideally, I would have liked to interview more informants. Still, my main aim was to collect insightful data on the experiences of the new policy, and this was achieved. Hence, my impression by the end of the interviewing process was that data saturation had been achieved. However, it is worth bearing in mind Saunders et al.’s (2018) view that saturation is a process, not a point (Saunders et al., 2018) and that we can never be sure that new and relevant information will not emerge from additional data.

### 3.3.1 Collecting corporate texts

The sampling and data collection started in the autumn of 2019 when the two MNCs headquartered in Norway granted access to internal communication in the form of textual data presenting their new global paternity leave policy. Corporate texts are interesting as they represent naturally occurring data, instead of researcher-initiated data (Seale & Silverman, 1997). Three of the four MNCs included in the current study had published external media articles referring to the launch of their new global paternity leave policy, while the fourth MNC had published an internal media article on the topic. My first text sample thus consisted of global paternity leave policy communication in the form of four corporate texts, three external and one internal. The fact that the distinction between internal and external communication in organisations has become fuzzy (Cheney & Christensen, 2001) and that the four texts displayed a similar textual form, lent support to the decision to treat them as a comparable sample in terms of genre. All four texts in the sample included statements from fathers who had taken the leave or would be doing so. Documents are social in the way “that they are produced, shared and used socially” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 57) and may contain culturally distinctive values. In this thesis, corporate texts are regarded as social representations of the corporations, signalling how they wish to be perceived. The sample of texts was investigated in paper 1 through different types of textual analysis (see 3.4.1).

### 3.3.2 Collecting Interview data

As mentioned earlier in 3.3, the sampling and collection of informants combined purposive and convenience sampling, a strategy which has also been applied in an interview study of fathers by Atkinson (2023). According to Angouri (2018), “the workplace researcher needs to negotiate their way in and to build a strong and long-lasting relationship of trust. This is evidently a challenge for short projects” (Angouri, 2018, p. 81). The data collection process presented some challenges regarding gaining initial trust from the MNCs and thus access to informants. The first interviews were with managers (informants 14, 15 and 16) from the Norwegian headquartered MNCs conducted in

December 2019. The managers were asked about their MNC's reasons for deciding to implement a global leave policy and how this policy had been perceived among father employees. The next data collection period had to be postponed from spring 2020 to autumn 2021 due to the Covid pandemic, as the HR departments in the MNCs had more urgent concerns to deal with at the time. Manager informant 17 was interviewed during this period. The first step in the collection of interviews with father employees involved the MNCs approaching eligible fathers (employees who had taken the leave after the new global policy had been introduced) and asked if they wanted to participate in a study on global paternity leave. This process required that the MNCs spend time and effort on locating fathers who had taken paternity leave in their companies and also on liaising with me. Secondly, the fathers' participation was based on self-selection and that they contacted me voluntarily. Thus, the identified fathers themselves decided whether they wanted to participate in the research or not. The initial request for father informants resulted in ten interviews, and I approached the MNCs a second time to increase the number of informants. My final sample consisted of thirteen father informants. The focus of paper 2 is the fathers' perceptions and experiences of fatherhood and of the new policy. Based on the finding from fathers, managers and external corporate communication that the policy had been deemed a success, I decided to seek further opportunities for interviews with global HR and other managers who had been involved in the implementation process. Hence, manager informants 18, 19, 20, 21 and 22 were interviewed during the spring and summer of 2022 to explore their views of the global implementation process. Interview statements from these managers and fathers regarding the implementation are presented in paper 3. The interviews with informants 19 -22 were specifically relevant as they were involved with implementing the global paternity leave policies from their MNC headquarters to subsidiaries across the world.

The interview is a conversation with structure and purpose, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), where the aim is to collect systematic knowledge on certain phenomena. I designed one interview guide for father employees and one for managers (see appendix 1). The interviews were semi-structured, hence, the 16 questions intended for the fathers and the 12 questions intended for the managers were asked in a somewhat varying order. Although I had a set of pre-prepared guiding questions, the format was open-ended and the informants were encouraged to elaborate on the topics and questions in an exploratory manner, in line with Dörnyei (2007). According to Dörnyei (2007), the semi-structured interview is suitable when the researcher has a good understanding of the phenomenon in question and is able to develop broad questions about the topic in advance. The guide for fathers was evaluated by researchers studying fatherhood. It started with easy personal and factual questions to set the tone and create an initial rapport, as Dörnyei (2007) advocated. Furthermore, the questions focused on the fathers' experience of the leave, their opinions and

feelings about fatherhood, the policy, and how it was communicated. The final question was if they wanted to add anything, and their answers to this open question contributed relevant information. The interview guide for managers asked about the communication and implementation process in more detail. The interviews took place via the platform Microsoft Teams and had an average length of 50 minutes. The interviews were carried out in English, recorded and transcribed in Microsoft Teams, and then manually quality controlled by me. The informants also signed a written consent form. All in all, findings from the interviews with fathers, managers and company reports showed that the parental policy had been successful (achieved high uptake) among fathers.

### 3.4 Data analysis

#### 3.4.1 Analysing corporate texts

To obtain a comprehensive initial overview of the textual material (Baker, 2020), a simple word frequency analysis of each text was carried out using the software AntConc (Anthony, 2005). This analysis aimed to identify and count various words referring to the policy and the linguistic presence of the direct beneficiaries of it, that is, fathers, mothers and parents. For example, the AntConc frequency analysis revealed that the new policy was first and foremost presented as *parental or family leave*, despite the novelty aspect being that it was offered to fathers.

The qualitative text analysis draws mainly on Social Actor Analysis, as discussed by Darics and Koller (2018, 2019), supplemented by elements from the Appraisal Framework developed by (Martin & White, 2005). The two approaches are inspired by the Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) tradition (e.g. Halliday, 1994) and focus on how texts construe the relationship between communicators, audiences and third parties. In this case, the communicators are the companies, the audience for the internal text are the employees and the audience for the external texts are thought to be employees and potential future employees. The third parties are other stakeholders. Darics and Koller (2019) propose a three-step model for analysing agency among social actors in corporate texts. The model is based on Van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) and aims to identify “who does what to whom in a given text” (Darics & Koller, 2019, p. 220). In my analysis, I started with a descriptive microanalysis of the texts. This generated a foundation for further content analysis, allowing for an understanding of the possible intentions of the communicator and to infer norms and values (inspired by Darics & Koller, 2018; Koller, 2012). Interestingly, despite the preference for a gender-neutral term for the new policy, the qualitative analysis showed that the main social actor present in all four texts was a named father employed by each MNC. According to Angouri and Piekkari (2018), there is a distinction between micro and macro discourses; the former referring to language use in specific contexts, and the latter relating to ideologies and positions. Both macro and micro discourses in my

texts have been explored through the three steps of social actor theory (Darics & Koller, 2019). For more findings and contributions from paper 1, see section 4.1.

### 3.4.2 Analysing interviews

As regards analysing interview text, “there is no true, objective transformation from the oral to the written mode”, according to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 186), The transcription method deemed best suited for the research purposes was chosen. Hence, the interviews were transcribed as a verbatim account, but without pauses or filler words. Thus, I followed guidelines from Mayring (2014), who identifies ‘clean read’ or ‘smooth verbatim transcript’ as a transcription done word for word, but where utterances like ‘uhms’ or ‘ahs’ are left out. Additionally, in line with Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), unintelligible and some repetitive words have been excluded to avoid unethical stigmatisation of informants’ language use. This approach resulted in a coherent text, which is simple to understand, while representing the original wording and grammatical structure. The texts were then analysed both for meaning and linguistic form (Kvale, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The coherent texts formed a starting point for a qualitative and thematic analysis.

The analysis of the interviews has been inspired by thematic analysis as presented by Braun & Clarke, (2006, 2024) and reflexive pragmatism (Alvesson, 2003, 2011) as these methods (like social actor theory) allow for both direct analysis of content as well as underlying ideologies or scripts. A paradox when analysing interviews is that it may require the researcher to simultaneously approach the data as if they represent the truth and knowing that there is no such thing as the truth (Skaerbaek, 2007). Bearing this in mind I considered the relevance of reflexive pragmatism, as outlined by Alvesson (2003, 2011). It implies working with multiple interpretations and accepting that any meaning derived from interviews is debatable. The aim is to allow a critical approach to the interview text but still use it for the best possible purpose (Alvesson, 2011). Reflexive pragmatism fits well with a hermeneutic approach as this also allows for subjective interpretations and being open to layers of meaning (see section 3.1). Josselson (2004) classifies a hermeneutic approach as either one of faith in the informant’s meaning, aiming to restore it, or one of suspicion, aiming to demystify their expressed meaning. After reflecting on these different stances and analysing the data, my approach may be closer to the hermeneutics of restoration, believing that the informants are telling their sense of truth to the best of their ability (Josselson, 2004). I applied theory coding (Kreiner, 2015) from previous research, and semantic and latent coding of interview data in an abductive process. My coding formed the basis for a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2024) of the data in paper 2 and for developing a framework for contextualised explanation in paper 3. Below follows a further description of the analysis of paper 2 and paper 3.

As just indicated, the analysis of interview data in paper 2 is based on thematic analysis. Categorising content may be useful for identifying themes and reducing lengthy interview statements to a few comparable categories (Kvale, 2007). I conducted both semantic coding directly from the data and used theory codes from extant research. More specifically, thematic analysis based on the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied to the interviews with fathers in this paper. Thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing philosophical stance, and therefore, it can be used within different theoretical frameworks. According to Braun & Clarke (2006, 2024), thematic analysis can thus be used as a critical realist method. They specifically state that it is important for a good thematic analysis that the theoretical position is made transparent, as this is all too often left unspoken (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). The thematic analysis of the interviews involved the following phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006): 1. Familiarisation with the data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes and 6. Producing the report.

The thematic analysis permitted a flexible approach to the data analysis process. Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that analysis is not a linear process. Rather, it is more of a recursive process, moving back and forth between the six phases, as needed. Below I outline how the six steps of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis are applied to the data analysis in paper 2.

1. Familiarisation with the data.

The transcription process meant listening to the recordings and reading the transcribed texts several times for accuracy to obtain familiarisation with the data. As part of the familiarisation process, common expressions and experiences among the fathers were noted down.

2. Generating initial codes

A simple word frequency analysis of each text was carried out by means of the software AntConc (Anthony, 2005). The AntConc overview and my research notes formed a starting point for thematic coding. The aim was to code "interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). The semantic and latent coding of the interview material started with linguistic traces, such as common words used by the fathers. As already mentioned above in this section, Kreiner (2015), distinguishes between theory codes, that is use of terminology from extant theory, and codes flowing from the data. One example of codes emerging from previous research are the concepts of fathers as helpers and mothers as managers, taken from Allen and Hawkins (1999).

3. Searching for themes

This phase implied re-focusing the analysis on broader themes rather than codes, which involved sorting different codes (e.g., expressions used by the informants to describe fatherhood) into

potential themes (e.g., fatherhood norms) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Searching for themes was an abductive process, which involved a process of simultaneously starting with theory and data and ‘cycling’ between them (Kreiner, 2015).

#### 4. Reviewing themes

Phase 4 involved the refinement of the chosen themes. The initially established themes relating to fatherhood norms were reduced from five to two. A case in point was removing the theme ‘spending time with the family’, as there turned out to be too little data supporting this theme, and it did not provide information that addressed the research questions (Byrne, 2022). At times it was challenging to distinguish codes from themes, specifically as regards involved fatherhood. According to Byrne (2022) it is not always clear what is a code or a theme. Instead of keeping the initial theme ‘changing fatherhood norms’, I decided to establish two more specific themes relating to fatherhood norms: ‘involved father’ and ‘equal parent’. The other two final themes were related to combining work and fatherhood: ‘tension between ideal worker and father’ and ‘integrating work and fatherhood’.

#### 5. Defining and naming themes

Phase 5 started with a thematic map of the data, which involved ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme. I considered the data analysis in relation to the research questions and potential overlap between themes. I chose to make the themes ‘fathers as helpers’ and ‘developing a bond with the child(ren)’ sub-themes of ‘involved fatherhood’ because, on reflection, these new sub-themes represent two different aspects of fatherhood norms – what fathers do and who they are in relation to the child.

#### 6. Producing the report

This phase encourages the researcher to critically question their choice of themes regarding their meaning, assumptions, implications and why people talk about a phenomenon or theme in a particular way. These types of questions appear to relate to identifying “underlying assumptions, ideas, or ideologies that may shape or inform the descriptive or semantic content of the data” (Byrne, 2022, p. 1397). Phase 6 is dealt with in the findings and discussion sections in paper 2, which include a selection of relevant extract examples, analysis of the selected extracts, including relating them back to the research questions and theory in the paper. For more information on the findings and contributions from paper 2, see section 4.2.

The analysis of interviews with fathers and managers in paper 3 generated a framework for contextualised explanation inspired by Welch et al. (2011) (see section 3.1). 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. (2011) refer to contingent

conditions that produce an outcome in combination with a causal mechanism. The aim of the current analysis was to identify conditions that were crucial for the successful implementation of global paternity leave. The contextualised explanation in paper 3 aims to explain what factors and context cause high uptake of global paternity leave to happen. The technique involves working backwards from the outcome (high uptake of global paternity leave) and identifying the combined effect of the conditions found in the case (Welch et al., 2011). For example, in combination with conditions A, B and C, the availability of paternity leave may cause high uptake (H). Hence, it will be impossible to generalise from the mere availability of a paternity leave policy to H as an outcome without saying something about the context (i.e., variables A, B, C) in which the global paternity leave occurs. The contingent structural factors causing high uptake of the leave in the current research were identified to be full pay, a fixed time period, earmarked leave for fathers, and formal replacement during leave. Contingent cultural factors were supportive management and work culture. Farndale, McDonnell, Scholarios, and Wilkinson (2020) emphasise that qualitative studies can move research forward by adding context that helps us uncover new phenomena. Similarly, Welch et al. (2011) point out that the focus on context also makes theories sensitive to diverse national contexts. In the current study, the framework proposed to explain global paternity leave success has been developed by combining specific organisational practices. The objective has been to establish a framework that could be helpful for other MNCs that are planning to introduce global leave for fathers. A central question to ask myself as an aspiring context-sensitive researcher attempting to take a critical realist stance is, could any of my chosen conditions applied in the framework be wrong? As research is a reflective and critical process, I concur with Welch and Piekkari (2017) that studies should be open to questioning conclusions and theoretical explanations and improve them, if needed. Their so-called third generation qualitative approach (see section 3.1) acknowledges the fallibility of the human observer and the fragility of the knowledge we produce: our conclusions may not endure for long, and it is up to the scholarly community to interrogate and improve them (Welch & Piekkari, 2017, p. 722). Hence, my analysis remains open to critique and alternative findings. For more findings and contributions from paper 3, see section 4.3.

### 3.4.3 Source critique

One source critique of the corporate texts is that they have been written by communication professionals aiming to give a favourable picture of their company, which includes making linguistic choices to fit with their intentions. For example, I noticed a contradiction between an MNCs' internal and external communication. A slide deck presenting the global paternity leave for internal use had a strong and explicit focus on achieving gender equality, while a related external media article written by the same communication manager appeared vaguer and emphasised equal opportunities and

inclusion. Another source critique relates to how the MNCs report their male uptake figures. As seen in 3.2, Aviva emphasises the percentage of men taking leave, while the other MNCs do not include such a figure but focus on the days or weeks of leave taken by men. Diageo and DNB emphasise that there has been a significant increase in the time off taken by men. The MNCs' aim is to demonstrate their policy's success, and they may hide information that does not promote this aim. However, it is hard to argue with hard facts, for example that 80% of the men are taking 5 months off.

Schaefer and Alvesson (2020) advocate source critique of interviews; "a careful evaluation, reflection, questioning, rejection, and probing of interview accounts" (Schaefer & Alvesson, 2020, p. 33). Schaefer and Alvesson (2020) state that interviewees may be influenced by factors besides their perspectives and meaning. The father informants in the current study self-selected to participate in the research after being invited by the MNCs, which might mean that they were favourable to the policy and perhaps less likely to criticise the companies. The fathers may also have tried to satisfy what they perceived to be my interests and views as a female researcher and mother from a country known for gender equality. I took a restorative and empathetic approach in the interview situation, in line with Josselson (2004) and Prior (2018). Prior (2018) asserts that a researcher should aim to establish trust, respect, and consent from the interviewee. Such an empathetic approach to interviewees implies that researchers are co-constructing knowledge and carrying out research with their informants, rather than on them (Prior, 2018). Although the informants knew that the interviews were anonymised, it is possible that knowing about the recording may have affected how open they were in their responses. During the interviews I tried to create a safe environment for the informant in which their experiences became the centre of attention. Although it may have been easier to create trust in a face-to-face interview than via a Teams meeting, business executives have increasingly become familiar with communicating virtually, specifically following the Covid pandemic. I believe that my lived experience and context sensitivity to parenting and international work cultures was critical and allowed me to produce high quality interview data.

One critical question that could be raised is whether one should believe that the fathers in reality share housework and childcare equally with their partner, as they claimed. Another example inviting critique of an informant's view of reality is that he contradicted himself during the interview. Early in the interview the informant claimed that fathers would not be able to bond with their children in the same way as mothers. Later in the same interview, he asserted that if fathers were sole carers, they would be able to establish similar bonds to the mothers. I was mainly interested in the fathers' expression of meaning, in line with Josselson (2004) and the hermeneutics of restoration. I would like to point out that when asked about their views of paternity leave, my informants talked about an action they had already experienced, not just imagined, which gives them credibility. I interviewed



fathers in four companies across four continents, and their views were very similar, which meant I did not come across noticeable inconsistencies. As a researcher I have continuously reflected on how my interactions with informants, philosophical underpinnings and theoretical preconceptions affect the interpretations and results, which Welch and Piekkari (2017) assert are crucial in a qualitative study.

### 3.5 Ethical considerations and my role as a researcher

Ethical issues have been considered throughout the research process. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 62) define ethics as the “oughtness of human existence.” Research ethics is, therefore, what researchers ought to do in the research process. One ethical aspect related to human informants is how to handle that informants may share sensitive or confidential information about themselves or others (Briggle & Mitcham, 2012). I adhered to national guidelines formulated by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, and my research was registered and approved by Sikt (Norwegian Centre for Research Data). The texts were anonymised as advised by Sikt, and the informants signed a consent form prior to participating in the study. Sikt has created a template to inform participants about the nature of the research project and their legal rights to withdraw, which was applied to the current study. I was conscious of protecting the identity of my informants, so they were either given fictitious names (paper 2) or a number (paper 3), while their children were referred to as BABY. In addition, I removed company names from both paper 2 and 3 to further protect the informants’ identities.

In addition to reflecting on ethical considerations throughout the research process, I have reflected on my role as a researcher to maintain integrity and credibility. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 313) assert that the researcher is mastering a “third order”, meaning that I am responsible for handling the subjects’ interpretations (father employees/managers), my interpretation as a researcher, and public interpretations. Being responsible means that I have regularly reflected on my decisions, responses, and interpersonal dynamics during the research process and have been evaluating research methods and outcomes. In this section, I will expand on the different identities I have related to as a researcher, my role in the interview situation, and how I have worked to ensure scientific quality. As a researcher, I have related to different identities. I am a corporate intercultural trainer researching diversity, equality and inclusion among fathers in different countries. I would like the interviewees to perceive me as a researcher who is knowledgeable about cultural differences and as a mother who can relate to the experiences of new fathers. I also encouraged the participants to tell me their stories about their experiences and focused on asking the informants about them. As a

researcher, I have tried to balance being friendly and professional while being understanding and empathetic.

According to Welch and Piekkari (2017), reflexivity implies acknowledging biases. I have been aware of some of my own cultural biases and how I did not wish this to affect my interviews. As an intercultural coach, I have an awareness and understanding of cultural differences, which includes accepting different parenting practices around the world. My curiosity about how male employees in countries with varying fatherhood models would perceive global paternity leave was genuine, and I was open to different views. My interview-based study is an attempt to give the father employees themselves the possibility of categorising their perceptions of fatherhood and work. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I can select focus, theoretical framework, and analytical approach, which ultimately transforms and constitutes individuals externally. I intend for the fathers who take paternity leave, the managers and the companies who support their employees in this way to be given authentic voices.

### 3.6 Ensuring scientific quality: validity and reliability

While scientific quality and congruence between my philosophical stance and methods are crucial for scientific quality, other issues, such as validity and reliability, also need to be explicitly outlined. In qualitative research, transparency, authenticity, deep engagement and reflexivity are important quality criteria (Welch & Piekkari, 2017). Validity is strengthened through a transparent exploration of the research process, including informant statements in text and talk. The philosophical stance, theoretical framework, methods and material have been described and discussed in section 3. The aim is to reveal standpoints and positions (Lincoln, 1995). Lincoln calls this “communicative validity” (Lincoln, 1995, p. 199). Since this thesis contains independent papers that differ in their approach, it has been important to specify each analytical strategy. Another critical ‘criterion’ for securing validity has been acknowledgements from the research community (such as supervisors, fellow researchers, academic conferences and reviewers) regarding the quality of the research (Lincoln, 1995). An additional claim to quality and validity is that I, as a researcher, have in-depth understanding of the context (Welch & Piekkari, 2017) work and fatherhood norms in different countries. Another vital aspect is an extensive use of quotations when documenting analysis and findings. Welch and Piekkari (2017) state that validity threats and strategies to address them are context dependent. One potential validity issue is that my interviews were recorded, which may make interviewees less open in their responses. However, they appeared to be open in their responses as they shared considerable personal information.

Reliability in qualitative research is a question of the consistency and trustworthiness of the research design and findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It depends upon the quality of the empirical material and conceptualizations, the arguments' coherence, and the analysis depth. I have already described aspects important for reliability, such as the reflection on the research process, my role as a researcher, and the relationship between research design and research questions. Welch and Piekkari (2017) state that quality is measured by the researcher's ability to reflect on how their interactions, philosophical stance and theoretical preconceptions shape the interpretations and results. In this thesis, reliability is grounded in the voice the empirical material gives to the phenomenon of global paternity leave. The main group of interviewees, the father employees, shared considerable personal information, and through this, they gave a rich description of themselves. As regards having a small number of interviewees, Welch and Piekkari (2017) state that a quality measure of qualitative research is that interviewees are carefully selected and limited to individuals with first-hand experience of the issue being researched. In the current thesis, only employees who became fathers after the policy was introduced and thereby qualified as beneficiaries of the new global paternity leave policy were entitled to and selected for interview. Thus, although the number of interviewees in this qualitative study is small, the insights emerging from it adds new and in-depth knowledge to the extant literature. Methodological and other limitations of the study are discussed in section 4.5.

#### 4. Overall contributions and implications

The objective of this section is to present the research questions, key findings, contributions and implications of each of the three articles (4.1-4.3), followed by how the thesis as a whole makes theoretical, methodological and practical contributions to research (4.4). In addition, I outline limitations and directions for future research (4.5). I am the sole author of all three papers.

##### 4.1 Paper 1: Standardising Fatherhood across Cultures: A Linguistic Approach to Studying the Communication of a New Global Company Policy in Multinational Corporations<sup>7</sup>

Paper 1 investigates how four multinational corporations (MNCs) communicate the launch of their global paternity leave policy in texts published through corporate media channels. These four corporate texts promoting global parental leave were analysed as representations of naturally occurring data. According to the theory of Communication Constitutes Organisation (CCO), corporate text constitutes what the organisation is (Schoeneborn et al., 2019). Hence, linguistic text analysis of corporate texts offers valuable contributions to organisational research by exploring existing discourses. The text analysis was conducted by applying Social Actor Theory (Darics & Koller, 2019) supplemented by the Appraisal Framework (Martin & White, 2005). The research questions are inspired by the three steps in Social Actor Theory.

RQ1: How do the four MNCs present the new policy linguistically?

- c. What linguistic expressions are used to represent the leave?
- d. What social actors are present or absent?

RQ2: What are the communicator's intentions?

- e. Which linguistic expressions of the leave are used in headings, subheadings and text body?
- f. How are social actors presented (active, passive, personal, impersonal)?
- g. What kind of relationships are created between the communicator and audience?
- h. What are the motivations for introducing the policy?

RQ3: What underlying norms and values can be identified in the texts?

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<sup>7</sup>This paper was published in December 2022: Bamford, A. M. (2022). Standardising Fatherhood across Cultures: A Linguistic Approach to Studying the Communication of a New Global Company Policy in Multinational Corporations. *HERMES - Journal of Language and Communication in Business*, (62), 87–105. <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlc.vi62.129703>

Two research gaps identified by Maier & Ravazzini (2019, 2021) were addressed. Firstly, the paper explores diversity management (DM) communication related to work-life balance and equal opportunities. Secondly, the paper provides new insights into how the concept of DM has been linguistically constructed and communicated in online texts representing external communication. The findings demonstrate a tension between focusing on gender equality and inclusion when justifying the new measure intended to support the MNCs' diversity management efforts. All four texts reflect an intention to change the traditional norms of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as carers. All four MNCs appear to favour inclusion over gender equality in their communication, which aligns with the current trend in international business (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). A key contribution from this paper is an understanding of the importance of linguistic choices when studying underlying intentions, which may have implications for how organisations communicate diversity and inclusion initiatives. Similarly, a practical contribution from paper 1 is to raise awareness of MNCs' communication strategies when promoting global paternity leave. Paper 1 was published in HERMES - Journal of Language and Communication in Business in December 2022.

Having analysed the MNCs' communication intentions, a natural next step was to explore their (father) employees' perceptions and experiences of paternity leave, fatherhood and work. This is the focus of the second paper.

#### 4.2 Paper 2: [Global Paternity Leave in four Multinational Corporations: a Facilitator of Paternal Agency?](#)<sup>8</sup>

This paper investigates perceptions and experiences of paternity leave and fatherhood through interviews with 13 male employees in four MNCs who have all taken leave under the new globally applicable policy offered by their employer. The fathers thus represent a purposive and convenience sample (Atkinson, 2023) of fathers who agreed to share their experiences. The fathers grew up in different countries and at the time the interviews took place, worked in Australia, Brazil, the UK and the US. My aim was to investigate how leave was perceived by new fathers working for the four MNCs. The paper's focus is threefold; it explores fatherhood norms (RQ4), the relationship between fatherhood norms and work norms (RQ5) and the impact of paternity leave on their family life (RQ6):

RQ4: What fatherhood norms are reflected in the interviews with the fathers from different national cultures who availed themselves of the new global paternity leave scheme?

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<sup>8</sup> The thesis contains the prepared manuscript for second resubmission at Journal of Family Studies.

RQ5: How is the relationship between work norms and fatherhood norms characterised by these fathers? Are there signs of tensions between these norms?

RQ6: What impact has paternity leave had on the fathers' perception of their role in the family?

The reason for emphasising the informants' national cultures (RQ4) is that fatherhood, work practices and leave entitlement are strongly linked to national legislation and norms (Earle et al., 2023). In terms of the perception of culture I refer to Spencer-Oatey's (2008) definition, as outlined in section 2.1.3, which points to culture as consisting of values, orientations to life and beliefs that are shared by a group and may influence behaviour. Spencer-Oatey's definition could be applied to national culture, but in my opinion, it may also be applied to organisational culture as the definition does not specify a type of group. It was assumed that the father informants may have been influenced by fatherhood practices in the countries where they grew up or where they live and work. However, the findings indicate that the fathers were mainly affected by the shared values and norms of their MNCs regarding paternity leave and less affected by local fatherhood and work practices. The fathers also appeared to have similar positive views of and experiences of combining fatherhood and work despite their national cultural differences. The findings demonstrate that involved fatherhood is a shared norm among the interviewed fathers in the four MNCs. The fathers give the impression of having been given the chance to transition from an ideal worker/breadwinner norm to a more involved fatherhood norm, valuing time spent at home with their children. However, the interviews also demonstrate a tension between the breadwinner and the involved father norm. Although none of the fathers explicitly describe themselves as breadwinners, some of them demonstrate a breadwinner mentality when expressing a fear of losing out career-wise and prioritising business needs over family needs. Some of the fathers express sharing tasks in the home with their partners as equal parents. One contribution from the study is the insight that taking paternity leave together with the mother may serve as a first step towards empowering fathers to become equal parents. Paper 2 adds to previous fatherhood and paternity leave literature and aims to advance these fields. Specifically, the paper contributes to literature on fathers combining work and care. The paper classifies leave-taking fathers along two dimensions: whether they practiced leave-taking in the role of helper or equal parent, and whether they took full leave or shorter than the policy allowed.

The overarching finding is that the informants viewed their MNC's new policy as enabling them to practice the norm of involved fatherhood, which implied increasing their agency as fathers. Thus, paternity leave may act as a facilitator of paternal agency regarding the work-life balance. The main theoretical contribution is to expand the concept of male agency. Male agency related to work-life balance is different to how male agency is normally perceived in the masculinity literature. I am also

emphasising that giving the fathers choices regarding how to use paternity leave increases their sense of agency. The choices include whether to have the leave with or without the mother, and full or reduced leave.

A practical implication for MNCs concerns offering father employees flexible and concrete solutions as regards combining work and family life. A flexible organisational strategy regarding paternity leave is to give father employees the opportunity to choose if they wish to take full or reduced leave and if they wish to spend it with or without the mother of the child(ren).

The fathers' shared positive perceptions of the leave made me interested in finding out more regarding the considerations involved in the MNCs' implementation of the global paternity leave scheme. This is the focus of the third paper, which is forthcoming (in press) in *Lingue Culture Mediazioni / Languages Cultures Mediation – LCM journal*.

#### 4.3 Paper 3: Global Paternity Leave as a DEI initiative in four Multinational Corporations<sup>9</sup>

This paper is a case study investigating the implementation of global paternity leave through interviews with father employees working in Australia, Brazil, the UK and the US and managers from the MNCs who designed and implemented the policy. The impressions from these interviews are supplemented by information gained from documents such as media articles and annual reports. A diversity management perspective had been communicated by the MNCs in paper 1, which made it interesting to explore whether this perspective was reflected by the father employees and managers responsible for the implementation. Another aim was to identify contextual factors that were crucial for the successful implementation of global paternity leave.

RQ7: What traces of DM perspectives and discourses are reflected in the material?

RQ8: What contextual factors may explain the successful implementation of GPL in the four MNCs?

My findings point to justifying global paternity leave as a diversity management measure with the intention of achieving transnational fairness. The theoretical contribution of the paper is twofold: It (1) extends the diversity management (DM) literature and DEI to include a corporate 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 global

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<sup>9</sup> This paper is forthcoming (in press) in *Lingue Culture Mediazioni / Languages Cultures Mediation – LCM 11 (1)*

paternity leave, thus highlighting the importance of meaning-making practices in policy implementation.

The framework for successful global paternity leave implementation is based on the following contingent generalisations: the leave needs to be seen as positive by fathers, consist of a fixed and earmarked leave period, be fully paid and supported by the work culture. This framework may have implications for how other corporate and governmental paternity leave policies are implemented.

#### 4.4 Overall theoretical, methodological and practical contributions

In this section, I aim to show how my research is relevant to existing research. The thesis offers a deeper understanding of the business context surrounding the introduction of global paternity leave. I will also attempt to demonstrate the originality of my research, inspired by Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997). Locke and Golden-Biddle (1997) assert that there are three main types of scientific contributions in the field of organisational studies: progressive coherence, synthesised coherence and noncoherence. According to Locke & Golden-Biddle (1997), progressive coherence refers to “research linked by shared theoretical perspectives and methods working on research programs that have evolved over time” (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997, p. 1034). They state that consensus among groups of researchers is necessary to advance the field (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). An example of progressive coherence within paternity leave research is the agreement among the researchers that support from employers is required for fathers to avail of paternity leave. The current thesis adds new research to the paternity leave literature in support of this consensus as well as examples of synthesised coherence and non-coherence.

Research papers demonstrate synthesised coherence when they cite and draw connections between works and streams not commonly cited together, suggesting underdeveloped research areas (Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997). Thus, combining concepts from organisational studies and text linguistics methods (in paper 1) may be an example of synthesized coherence. Paper 1 aims to contribute to the linguistic turn in organisational studies, which focuses on how the discipline of linguistics may contribute to exploring organisational processes linked to social and cultural trends. The findings in paper 1 add to the cross-fertilisation of linguistics and diversity management (DM) by accentuating linguistic choices in text that signal tension between equality and inclusion. This contribution represents a new way of combining linguistic tools with concepts from organisational theory. The thesis shows how the qualitative text linguistic analysis frameworks, social actor theory, and the appraisal framework can be combined to analyse diversity management communication. In addition, paper 1 draws connections between the fields of CSR communication and diversity management.



However, the findings from the current thesis counter previous claims that male employees are invisible (Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013) or stigmatised (Petts et al., 2022, Kelland, Lewis & Fisher, 2022) as fathers in the workplace. Hence, the thesis also represents non-coherence. The fathers interviewed for the present study are strongly encouraged by the corporate culture to take time off to practice fatherhood. The originality of the research relates to insights derived from researching new global paternity leave policies and creating a contextual framework for the successful implementation of such policies. Another contribution is to the diversity management area, which has not traditionally emphasised male employees as a diversity-related category, by focusing on the inclusion of fathers in a corporate context. The thesis contributes to extending our understanding of masculinity and of inclusion in work-related contexts. What we know now as a result of the thesis that we did not know before is that paternity leave may contribute to extending fathers' sense of agency to be involved fathers when implemented in a supportive way by their employer. Hence, a theoretical contribution of the paper is to contribute to developing a new understanding of masculinity and of inclusion in MNCs.

It is relevant for the thesis as a whole to differentiate between talked and lived practices in organisations. According to Christensen, Morsing, and Thyssen (2021) talk (language) does not automatically lead to action (implementation) within organisations. Christensen et al. (2021) assert that there is a lack of research on the journey from talk to action in organisations. They claim that the difference between talk and action may apply when the talk (language) is aspirational and concerns complex ideals that require considerable effort and time to implement. The talk may be provided here and now, while the action extends into the unknown future and may conflict with other organisational goals (Christensen et al., 2021). In the current thesis, paper 1 investigates paternity leave as an aspirational form of communication, while in paper 2 and 3 paternity leave is explored as an action and lived practice among fathers and managers within the MNCs. In addition, contextualised explanation (Welch et al., 2011), has been applied and developed as a framework to analyse global paternity leave implementation in corporations.

Even though I argue for having made theoretical contributions, I concur with Schwarz & Stensaker (2014) that a purely theory-driven approach risks becoming too distant from the organisational context. This implies that a narrow understanding of what constitutes a contribution to research could prevent the development of knowledge about change. The thesis is an example of phenomenon-driven research. The target audience for a phenomenon-based research project such as the current one may consist of both academics and practitioners, "by generating insights about problems that are sourced by or relevant to managers" (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014, p. 491). According to Schwarz & Stensaker (2014), "The emergence of a new phenomenon is a starting point

in the process of discovery and in building knowledge" (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014, p. 486). Phenomenon-driven research has clear implications for practice (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014). The practical contribution of the thesis is to provide insights into how fathers' rights can be promoted by MNCs and perceived and used by fathers in the global organisational context. The thesis contributes insights into which practical solutions are crucial when implementing global paternity leave. Both culture and structure are essential for successful implementation of paternity leave. This implies support from the work culture in combination with structural factors, such as fixed, earmarked, paid leave. The thesis contributes to a discussion on how MNCs can generate gender equality and inclusion by introducing paternity leave and how to improve the uptake of paternity leave where it already exists. This may mean that expectations towards male and female employees become more similar. Global paternity leave in the four MNCs represents an equal opportunity measure by giving fathers independent rights to leave, unrelated to the mothers' earnings or entitlement.

#### 4.5 Limitations and directions for future research

The data in paper 1 consist of short texts that have been written by corporate communications professionals and, as mentioned in 3.4.3 their aim was to give a favourable impression of their MNC. However, the findings reported in paper 1 may inspire further studies involving corporate communication on issues relating to diversity management and talent attraction and retention. These findings may serve as a point of departure for gaining new and deeper insights into CSR and DM communication and how the balancing act between an equality and an inclusion discourse is carried out linguistically.

Papers 2 and 3 are small qualitative studies of fathers' and managers' experiences in four organisations that were early movers in offering global parental leave. One advantage of the study is that it includes informants across various countries who were pioneers in experiencing standardised global paternity leave. As more MNCs follow suit, a more nuanced picture of how such a family benefit impacts family/work relations may be drawn. The current study relies on interview data, which limits insights into actual practices. However, we know that the father informants in the current study have all taken paternity leave under the new scheme, so importantly, they describe a real experience. The fathers represent heterosexual fathers in mostly Western societies. Interviewing more fathers from a broader range of national cultures and non-heterosexual backgrounds would be valuable. It would also be interesting to understand more about women's experience of men taking parental leave. As more MNCs introduce global paternity leave, a more nuanced picture of how such

a family benefit impacts family/work relations may be drawn. Additionally, from a business perspective, it might be valuable to further explore the implementation process of such a global family policy in MNCs from a management perspective. Furthermore, it would be interesting to find out if the framework of contextualised explanation developed from the current study would work when implementing global family leave in other contexts. In addition, it would be relevant to find out more about how the organisations benefit from the implementation of global family leave policies and if the policies are sustainable in the long run.

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## 6. Thesis Papers

### Submission status:

#### Paper 1

Bamford, AM (2022). *Standardising Fatherhood across Cultures: A Linguistic Approach to Studying the Communication of a New Global Company Policy in Multinational Corporations*

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- Presented at the Vienna University of Economics and Business conference, “Diversity and Inclusion across Languages”, April 2022
- Presented at Association for Business Communicators (ABC) Europe, Middle East and Africa, Vienna, August 2021
- Presented at ABC Annual International Conference, San Diego, October 2020
- Presented at the Applied Linguistics and Professional Practice (ALAPP) conference, Trondheim, September 2020
- Opinion piece related to this study published in the national outlet for research in Norway, forskning.no and the Norwegian daily, Nettavisen, February 2021  
<https://www.forskersonen.no/kjonn-og-samfunn-kronikk-likestilling/kjonnsnoytrale-ord-og-titler-uten-et-begrep-som-fedrekvote-er-det-lite-sannsynlig-at-norske-menn-ville-tatt-permisjon/1820572>

#### Paper 2

Bamford, AM. *Global Paternity Leave in four MNCs: a facilitator of paternal agency?*

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- Presented at the NHH Alumni conference, September 2022
- Opinion piece related to this study published in the daily, Bergens Tidende, March 2021  
<https://www.bt.no/btmeninger/debatt/i/9O8bV9/forskning-stoetter-ikke-reduksjon-av-fedrekvoten>
- Opinion piece related to this study published in the daily, Vårt Land, May 2022  
<https://www.vl.no/meninger/verdidebatt/2022/05/09/uheldig-ekskludering-av-fedre/>
- Opinion piece related to this study published in Norway’s main financial daily, Dagens Næringsliv, November 2022  
<https://www.nhh.no/nhh-bulletin/artikkelarkiv/2022/november/vet-kvinner-i-norge-egentlig-hva-de-vil/>
- Opinion piece based on this study published in Wearethecity.com, April 2023  
<https://wearethecity.com/paternity-leave-a-norwegian-export/>

### Paper 3

Bamford, Agnes M. (2024). *Global Paternity Leave as a DEI Initiative in Four Multinational Corporations*.

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- Opinion piece based on this study published in national outlet for research in Norway, partnerscience.no in September 2022  
<https://partner.sciencenorway.no/eu-fathers-men/norwegian-men-as-an-export-item/2081755>
- Opinion piece based on this study published in forskning.no in October 2022  
<https://www.forskning.no/kjonn-og-samfunn-likestilling-norges-handelshoyskole/norske-menn-har-blitt-eksportvare/2081412>

## 6.1 Paper 1

**Title:** *Standardising Fatherhood across Cultures: A Linguistic Approach to Studying the Communication of a New Global Company Policy in Multinational Corporations*

**Author:** Agnes Marie Bamford

**Published** in HERMES - Journal of Language and Communication in December 2022

### **Abstract:**

A current trend in multinational corporations (MNCs) is a strong focus on diversity management in order to attract and retain talent. The present study investigates the linguistic manifestation and justification of a very recent company policy intended to facilitate this trend, viz., global paternity leave. The study aims to contribute to the linguistic turn in organisational studies. As a theoretical point of departure, Corporate Communication, and specifically links between Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Diversity Management communication are discussed. Concepts and tools from text linguistics are then applied to investigate the communication strategies employed when introducing the new family leave policy in four MNCs headquartered in the UK and Norway, respectively. The material consists of a set of texts on global parental leave produced by the four companies. The linguistic analysis identifies similarities as well as differences between the British and Norwegian companies in how the new global leave policy is presented. The findings also demonstrate a tension between focussing on the CSR efforts gender equality and inclusion in the justification of the new measure intended to support the MNCs' diversity management efforts.

### **Keywords:**

CSR communication; corporate communication; diversity management; gender equality; parental leave; paternity leave

## 1. Introduction

The overarching aim of the present paper is to show how the discipline of linguistics may contribute to exploring organisational processes linked to social and cultural trends. The corporate issue in focus here is global paternity leave, an innovative policy that some early movers among multinational corporations (MNCs) have recently implemented as part of their **diversity management (DM)** strategy, also known as diversity and inclusion strategy (see the definition of diversity management in section 3.1) Consequently, employees in these MNCs who become fathers are now entitled to a standardised paid leave, as defined by the corporations themselves, when such leave exceeds local government entitlements. Within DM there has been increased attention in recent years on gender equality as well as on inclusion (see Trittin/Schoeneborn 2017; Johansson/Klinth 2008). The phenomenon of paternity leave may be considered a means towards achieving both of these two goals (e.g., Brandth/Kvande 2019). However, the relationship between the two has to my knowledge not been investigated sufficiently. As inclusion may go against gender equality by being open to diverse, individual preferences, this presents itself as an interesting issue worthy of attention.

The current paper therefore presents an exploratory study involving a text linguistic analysis of four corporate texts produced by two British MNCs (Aviva and Diageo) and two Norwegian ones (Equinor and DNB) who have all recently introduced a global paternity leave scheme (see further in section 4.2). The texts will be analysed by applying the framework of **Social Actor Analysis** (Darics/Koller 2019), complemented by elements from **Appraisal Theory** (Martin/White 2005).

The study seeks to discover how diversity management and gender equality are communicated globally as four MNCs launch their paternity leave policies across national cultures. As the UK is characterised by more gendered parenting perceptions and practices than what is common in Norway (Brandth/Kvande 2019) one could expect the communication practices to differ as well. In a broader perspective, the current study may contribute to furthering the cross-fertilisation of the fields of linguistics and **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and DM communication**.

The global standardisation that the new paternity leave policies represent indicates a new direction for family policies in MNCs and a radical break from the common practice that corporate family support is mainly adapted to local regulations and communicated separately in each country (Wiß/Greve 2019).

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 outlines the national context surrounding paternity leave in Europe, with a specific focus on the UK and Norway, two countries that offer universal paternity leave. This context serves as a basis for understanding the MNCs' motivation for implementing global paternity leave. An understanding of the national context in which the MNCs are headquartered is

crucial, as the regulatory environment affects their approach to CSR (Nielsen/Thomsen 2012) and DM (Ozbilgin et al. 2016). In section 3 the focus is on corporate communication and specifically CSR and DM communication, which is relevant to consider in the investigation of how the new policies are promoted by the companies. In section 4 the research questions, material, analytical tools, and frameworks are presented. Section 5 presents and discusses my findings, while section 6 concludes and offers some suggestions for future research.

## **2. Parental leave in a European national context**

While the gender equality and inclusion debate is global, parental leave policies have so far remained a reflection of local (national) welfare models and culture (Wiß/Greve 2019). In a European context, there appears to be a link between the type and level of the financial support for parental leave (available to both parents), maternity leave (available to mothers) and paternity leave (available to fathers) initially offered by a country's government and subsequently by the corporations in that country (Wiß/Greve 2019). Several studies have identified similar classifications of European welfare models (Wiß/Greve 2019; Esping-Andersen 1990; Korpi 2000, 2010). According to Korpi (2000, 2010), who studied family welfare programmes in 18 European countries, there are three main welfare state approaches to family policy: (1) **The dual-earner support model**; policies that include high levels of financial support including subsidised childcare, (2) **The market-oriented model**; policies that include limited financial support, and (3) **The general family support model**; policies that offer various levels of financial support and generally promote a home-working mother.

What makes paternity leave attractive from a talent management perspective is that it enables both men and women to focus on caring for children as well as their careers (see e.g., Johansson/Klinth 2008). An underlying gender inequality issue is that women earn less than men, and that the gender pay gap increases when women reach childbearing age (Bütikofer et al. 2018). Working towards financial equality between men and women in the workplace, the governments of the UK and Norway – the two countries in focus here – have introduced compulsory gender pay gap reporting in companies as a means of measuring and reducing the gender pay gap.

The gender pay gap may be related to the general and well-established norm of **man as breadwinner**, which may result in an unconscious bias against women in the workplace, making them less likely candidates for promotion (Sunderland 2004). Embedded in such workplace biases is an expectation that women will take greater responsibility for childcare than men, while men may receive insufficient support from employers to take care of their children (Miller 2012; Kaufman 2018; Kaufman/Almqvist 2017; Molander et al. 2019).

## 2.1 Fathers in the UK and Norway

Korpi (2000, 2010) characterises the UK welfare state as market-oriented, which involves limited financial support for parents. The UK is perceived to have a culture characterised by gendered family practices (Wiß/Greve 2019; Kaufman 2018; Korpi 2000). Mothers in the UK are still the main carers, while fathers typically are the breadwinners, although recent studies have observed attempts to encourage fathers to take parental leave (Kvande/Brandth 2017; Miller 2012; Kaufman/Almqvist 2017). However, national policy changes providing such rights for fathers in the UK have not translated into significant increases in men's uptake of parental leave. Women continue to be expected to take the main responsibility for reconciling work and family life (Hobson/Fahlén 2009; Miller 2012).

The Scandinavian countries represent a dual-earner model, with extensive financial support and incentives to encourage both parents to work full time (Korpi 2010, 2000). Recent studies involving this region have found changing normative language and behaviours around parenting and work (Brandth/Kvande 2019; Kvande/Brandth 2017; Molander et al. 2019; Żadkowska et al. 2018). A version of fatherhood termed **the involved father**, characterised by being close and responsive to the needs of the child, has been identified (Molander et al. 2019; Holter 2007; Kangas et al. 2019; Wall/Arnold 2007; Brannen/Nilsen 2006; Aarseth 2013). Governmental family policies in Norway are closely connected to work-life policies that encourage gender equality by promoting earnings and caring for both mothers and fathers (Brandth/Kvande 2019). The so-called **father's quota** (fedrekvoten) is an earmarked, non-transferable right for fathers, which is lost if not used within the agreed timeframe. The father's quota was introduced in Norway in 1993, when new fathers were initially offered one month of non-transferable, paid paternity leave. The Norwegian policy has since been amended several times. In 2022 it consists of 15 weeks and is used by 90% of new fathers in Norway (Kvande/Brandth 2017; Brandth/Kvande 2019, 2022).

With regard to workplace attitudes, a study of British fathers found that having a company policy on flexible working and being 'family friendly' did not mean that this would be supported in practice (Miller 2012). While the family policies introduced in the UK from 2015 were aimed more generally at parents, employers in practice often saw women as mothers (or potential mothers) while they tended to ignore men's paternity status (Kaufman 2018). Similarly, Kaufman/Almqvist (2017) and Kaufman (2018) found that employers did not generally replace male employees when they went on paternity leave. Either co-workers were left to take up the male employee's usual tasks, or the tasks would pile up while the father was on leave. This resulted in dissatisfied co-workers as well as guilt from the fathers on leave (Kaufman 2018).

In contrast, Brandth/Kvande (2019) found that fathers in Norway experienced that the earmarked, non-transferable paternity leave had made a clear difference in terms of acceptance of their care obligations. They also found that the participating fathers reported being supported by their employers in the process of planning to take paternity leave. The authors concluded that workplaces in Norway now expect men to make use of the father's quota.

As the cited literature on paternity and parental leave has demonstrated, the perception of fatherhood has evolved in Norway over the last 25 years – from the traditional breadwinning father to the modern involved father, while in the UK, the breadwinner norm of fatherhood is still the most prevalent. We know that paternity leave in Norway has played a crucial role in changing the perception of fatherhood (Brandth/Kvande 2019). How the authorities have communicated the father's rights may have contributed to this change (e.g., Molander et al. 2019) Corporations clearly also have an important role as regards how they communicate with their father employees, which may have an impact on whether fathers choose to spend time away from work to look after their children.

### **3. Corporate communication**

My point of departure for dealing with the communication of global parental leave policies is that of corporate communication research, specifically positioning it within Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Diversity Management (DM) communication. Corporate communication and CSR communication have a shared purpose – to enhance businesses' image and reputation among customers, employees, and other stakeholders (Nielsen/Thomsen 2012). Corporate communication can be defined as

an instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent (Van Riel 1995:26 as quoted from Welch/Jackson 2007:181).

Van Riel's emphasis on harmonising internal and external communication seems to be a choice that is congruent with Cheney/Christensen's (2001) assertion that internal and external communication have become integrated and that the boundaries between them are fuzzy. In the present study the integration of external and internal communication appears relevant when communicating global policies aimed at both retaining and attracting talent. Piehler/Schade/Burman (2019) investigated the effect of external communication on internal stakeholders (employees) and concluded that



external communication is effective when aligned with internal communication. Both external and internal corporate communication are characterised by being predominantly one-way from management.

### **3.1 CSR communication**

CSR communication is a form of corporate communication that can be both external and internal and be transmitted via several channels. It is important to note that there is no clear and commonly agreed definition of CSR, as the content of the concept will vary between countries and companies and change over time (Hansen/Seierstad 2017). However, the following definition may serve as a basis:

a set of organizational initiatives that go beyond economic and legal obligations and extend to the ethical and discretionary responsibilities that society expects businesses to assume (Maier/Ravazzani 2019:271, inspired by Carroll 1979).

At the core of CSR lies the idea that companies cannot ignore societal or stakeholder issues (Golob et al. 2013), and CSR communication focuses on how MNCs communicate these issues (Ihlen et al. 2018).

There is an ongoing debate among researchers about whether to replace the term CSR communication with e.g., sustainability communication. For instance, Andersen et al. (2013) demonstrate that since 2003, the focus on sustainability has become more frequent than CSR in company reporting. The trend towards sustainability reporting as opposed to CSR reporting is also pointed out by Dahl/Fløttum (2019). However, the present paper will focus on CSR communication as most of the research literature uses this term (Ihlen et al. 2018), and Nielsen/Thomsen (2018) demonstrate that CSR communication is still a growing field. Andersen et al. (2013) see CSR as an attractive ethical tool for recruiting and retaining people and find that CSR has contributed to the current holistic focus on employees, to which the organisation has both ethical and economic obligations.

Focussing on CSR and specifically organisations' ethical obligations towards employees appears to be congruent with a diversity management (DM) approach to employees. DM can be seen as

the voluntary organisational 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, as quoted by Maier/Ravazzini 2019:269).

### **3.2 The relationship between CSR and DM communication**

According to Maier/Ravazzini (2019), DM and CSR represent two distinct but interrelated areas of research and management practice. Historically, CSR has been externally focussed beyond the organisation, while DM has been internally focussed, at the organisational level (Hansen/Seierstad 2017). According to Trittin/Schoeneborn (2017), DM can be perceived as an important part of internal CSR as both require that organisations consider a broader societal view and relations with stakeholders. Internal CSR includes a focus on employee well-being, such as work-life balance, equal opportunities, and diversity (Maier/Ravazzini 2019).

DM emerged in the late 1980s as a new individual and voluntary management approach to valuing diversity, in contrast to the previous group focus on equal opportunities and affirmative action (Hansen/Seierstad 2017; Nkomo et al. 2019). With regard to generating equal opportunities in the two countries in question, Norway has a long history of using radical strategies (quotas), while the UK has a tradition of applying voluntary initiatives (Hansen/Seierstad 2017).

DM policies may be considered key components of internal CSR communication in organisations (Maier/Ravazzini 2019). Additionally, Maier/Ravazzini (2019) find that external stakeholders increasingly wish to know more about internal functions of organisations, including diversity, which means that internal DM policies may also be communicated to external stakeholders. Subsequently, bridging CSR and DM communication in organisations “can strategically create an interface with pressing societal demands and, at the same time, ensure recognition and a sense of pride among their employees” (Maier/Ravazzini 2019:280). DM communication can be seen as both representing and producing social reality, according to Trittin/Schoeneborn (2017).

Maier/Ravazzini (2019) point out that few DM studies have focussed on communication aspects, despite the fact that communication plays a crucial role in positioning DM as an organisational objective and as building social legitimacy. Specifically, more research on the interconnection of internal and external DM communication in areas such as work-life balance and equal opportunities policies may provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between these fields. They also point out that how DM communication is realised in corporate online external communication has rarely been addressed (Maier/Ravazzini 2019, 2021).

The current study intends to investigate the communication of a new policy that can be seen as enhancing global DM and addresses two of the research gaps identified by Maier/Ravazzini (2019, 2021). Firstly, it involves DM communication related to work-life balance and equal opportunities. Secondly, it provides new insights into how the concepts of DM have been linguistically constructed and communicated in online texts representing (primarily) external communication (see further below, section 4.1).

#### **4.The study**

This section presents the text material for my exploratory study of how a new internal corporate policy – global paternity leave – is communicated by four MNCs (4.1), the research questions I seek to answer (4.2), as well as the methodological frameworks and analytical tools used to analyse the texts (4.3).

#### **4.1 Material**

The material consists of four texts produced by two MNCs headquartered in the UK (Aviva and Diageo) and two MNCs headquartered in Norway (DNB and Equinor). They are among the largest companies in their respective countries. Aviva is an insurance company with 16 000 employees in three countries (reduced from 16 countries in 2019), while Diageo is a beverages company with 28 000 employees and offices in 42 countries. Equinor is an energy company with 21 000 employees in 36 countries, and DNB is a financial services company with 9 000 employees in 16 countries.

The reason why the study comprises texts from only four MNCs is that these companies were early movers in terms of implementing a new global family policy scheme. They were, to my knowledge, the only MNCs in the two countries in question offering global paternity leave at the time the study was initiated (2019). The texts were published in English in 2019 or 2020. The Aviva, Diageo and DNB texts were communicated externally, via publicly available corporate media channels. The Equinor text, on the other hand, was communicated internally via the corporation's intranet, which might have had an impact on how the text has been constructed. However, as indicated in section 3, the division between internal and external communication is becoming blurred, and the two channels have become more integrated and congruent (see also Cheney/Christensen 2001). All four texts appear similar in terms of format and angle; they include personal narratives from fathers and present the company from an official perspective (see further below, section 5).

Permission to use the internal Equinor text was obtained from the corporation itself, including the use of the company name. In order to protect personal data, proper names of individuals have been removed from all four texts and replaced by [NAME]. The MNCs and texts will hereafter be referred to as AVI (Aviva), DIA (Diageo), DNB (DNB) and EQU (Equinor), respectively.

As mentioned in section 2, both the UK and Norway have recently introduced compulsory corporate gender pay gap reporting. The four MNCs in the study have all received high rankings from global annual reports and indices on gender equality, such as **Equileap**<sup>10</sup> and **the Bloomberg Equality Index (GEI)**<sup>11</sup>, in the last few years. All four MNCs introduced global paid paternity leave as an extension of the paternity leave already offered to their headquarter-based employees in the UK and Norway, respectively (see Table 1, which also provides the number of words in each text).

<b>Company</b>	<b>Weeks of fully paid global paternity leave</b>	<b>Year policy launched</b>	<b>Headquarter</b>	<b>Number of words in the texts</b>
Aviva (AVI)	26*	2017	UK	1157
Diageo (DIA)	26**	2019	UK	528
DNB (DNB)	20***	2019	Norway	555
Equinor (EQU)	16	2019	Norway	484

\* 26 weeks is offered to employees in the UK, while the amount of time and pay varies and is determined locally in the other countries\*\*26 weeks is offered to fathers in the UK, North America, Thailand, Philippines, Singapore, Spain, Netherlands, Ireland, Italy, Russia, Colombia, Venezuela and Australia. A minimum of 4 weeks is offered to fathers worldwide. \*\*\*DNB introduced 30 weeks’ parental leave in the UK from 2015.

Table 1. Global parental leave policies in the four companies.

<sup>10</sup> Available online at: <https://equileap.com/>

<sup>11</sup> Available online at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/company/press/bloombergs-2021-gender-equality-index-reveals-increased-disclosure-as-companies-reinforce-commitment-to-inclusive-workplaces/>

## 4.2 Research questions

The overarching research question of the present study is how diversity management (DM), and gender equality are linguistically reflected in texts produced by two British and two Norwegian MNCs on a new global corporate family policy. This broad question will be operationalised through the following more specific research questions:

RQ1: How do the four MNCs present the new policy linguistically?

- a. What linguistic expressions are used to represent the leave?
- b. What social actors (Darics/Koller 2019; see below, section 4.3) are present or absent?

RQ2: What are the communicator's intentions?

- a. How is the policy represented in headlines, subheadings, and text body?
- b. How are social actors presented (active, passive, personal, impersonal; see 4.3)?
- c. What kind of relationships are created between communicator and audience?
- d. What are the motivations for introducing the policy?

RQ3: What underlying norms and values can be identified in the texts?

## 4.3 Methodological frameworks and tools

The modest size of the material and the phenomenon under investigation call for primarily a qualitative approach. In addition, the software tool Antconc (Anthony 2005) was used to generate frequency-based word lists for each text, as a support for the manual qualitative analysis. These lists made it easy to identify various words referring to the policy as well as the linguistic presence of the direct beneficiaries of it, that is fathers, mothers, parents.

The text analysis draws mainly on Social Actor Analysis, as discussed by Darics and Koller (Darics/Koller 2019; see also Darics/Koller 2018), supplemented by elements from the Appraisal Framework developed by Martin/White (2005) (see further below for details on both frameworks). The two approaches are both inspired by the **Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)** tradition, (e.g., Halliday 1994), and focus on how texts construe the relationship between communicators, audiences and third parties. In this case the communicators are the companies, the audience represents employees, and the third parties are other (external) stakeholders.

Darics and Koller propose a three-step model for analysing agency among social actors in corporate texts. The model is based on van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) and aims to identify “who does what to whom in a given text” (Darics/Koller 2019: 220). In their stepwise procedure, step 1 identifies social actors descriptively, step 2 aims to infer underlying ideologies and step 3 involves recognising the communicator’s possible intentions (Darics/Koller 2019).

Approaching text in terms of social actors is a way of exploring both micro and macro themes in a text (Koller 2012; Alvesson/Karreman 2000). In my analysis I start with a descriptive microanalysis of the texts (RQ1), which generates a foundation for further content analysis, allowing us to understand the possible intentions of the communicator (RQ2) and to infer norms and values (RQ3) (inspired by Darics/Koller 2018; Koller 2012). I have, however, chosen to undertake their step 3 (communicator intentions) before step 2, as it for my purposes appears more logical to first identify and describe the social actors, then undertake an analysis of the same social actors before investigating underlying norms and values. As regards Darics/Koller’s (2019) focus on underlying ideologies, I understand values and norms to be more commonly referred to in organisational theory (see e.g., Schein 2010), and I have therefore chosen to focus on these concepts in step 3 in my analysis. Norms can be defined as “rules of behaviour that reflect or embody a culture’s values” (Giddens 2009:1127). A value can be defined as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence” (Rokeach 1976: 345).

To sum up my stepwise analysis, Step 1 identifies social actors in terms of several dimensions: who is present (explicitly and implicitly), and who is absent; how social actors are represented: as active, passive, as more or less agentive, and in personal or impersonal ways. Step 2 identifies the communicator’s intentions as regards what the communicator tries to achieve with the social actor representation. Step 3 focuses on underlying norms and values that are explicitly or implicitly expressed by this form of social actor representation.

Darics/Koller (2019) distinguish *agency* from *action*, where *agency* is a semantic category that refers to the meaning expressed through language (e.g., the difference between ‘carry out’ and ‘become’), and *action* is a grammatical category that refers to who or what is represented as grammatically active or passive. According to Darics/Koller (2019), a communicator can use language strategically to position people in a text as active or passive or to denote if and how the communicator associates with (includes) specific groups of people. The notions of foregrounding/backgrounding (van Leeuwen 2008) are used in Darics/Koller’s (2019) analysis to characterise social actors. Foregrounding implies that the social actor plays an active role through participation, while backgrounding means that the

social actor plays a passive role. Furthermore, an organisation's strategic goals can be expressed actively or passively (in a grammatical sense, e.g., *The company launched a new policy vs the new policy was launched*), or in a more or less agentive way (in a semantic sense, e.g. *They launched a policy vs They became family-focussed*), which may signify different levels of commitment to the goal (Darics/Koller 2019).

Darics/Koller's identification of social actors appears to be compatible with Martin/White's (2005) focus on voices in text. Some of Martin and White's linguistic concepts for analysing stance will also be used to bring out further nuances in the interpersonal relationship established between communicator and audience. One such concept is 'dialogic expansion/contraction'. According to Martin/White (2005), there is a distinction between utterances that are 'dialogically expansive' and 'dialogically contractive' in their intersubjective functionality. This is expressed as the degree to which an utterance actively makes allowances for dialogically alternative positions held by other voices, reflected, e.g., through hedges such as *may* and *could* (dialogic expansion), or alternatively, acts to challenge, fend off or restrict the scope of other voices, e.g., through negations or unhedged verbs (dialogic contraction) (Martin/White 2005). Another relevant concept from this framework is 'graduation', which implies that authors rate either the force of the utterance (e.g., *committed vs very committed*) or the focus of the categorisation (e.g., *gender equality vs true gender equality*), where the last example signifies stronger alignment than the first (Martin/White 2005). Graduations also play a dialogistic role in that they enable communicators to present themselves as more or less strongly aligned with the value proposition being advanced by the text (through so-called 'upscaling'/'downscaling') and thereby locate themselves with respect to the communities of shared value and belief associated with those positions (Martin/White 2005).

## **5. Results and discussion**

The presentation of the findings will start with how the four MNCs present the new policy and its beneficiaries linguistically (5.1), followed by communicator intentions (5.2) and an analysis of underlying norms and values (5.3).

### **5.1 Linguistic realisations of the policy and its beneficiaries**

The reason for investigating words used to refer to the policy, was to find out to what extent fathers and other beneficiaries are explicitly referred to in the communication of the policy. My initial expectation was that the new policy would be labelled *paternity leave*. However, and interestingly,

the AntConc frequency analysis revealed that the new policy was first and foremost presented as *parental or family leave* (Figure 1 and 2), despite the novelty aspect being that it was offered to fathers. Only the two UK texts also used the gender-specific label *paternity leave*. This raises the question of whether the reason for the word variation and preference for the gender-neutral term is meaningful and intended, an issue that will be discussed in section 5.3.

**5.1.1 Linguistic expressions applied to the leave**

The Antconc analysis revealed that for the material as a whole the collocations *parental leave*, *family leave* and *paternity leave* were used as labels for the new leave. In order to show the distribution of the three collocations within each of the four texts, Figure 1 presents the total number of occurrences for each variant. It turned out that the gender-neutral *parental leave* and *family leave* were by far the most common, both as regards absolute frequency (presented in Figure 1) and relative frequency (Figure 2, included due to the unequal length of the texts; see Table 1).

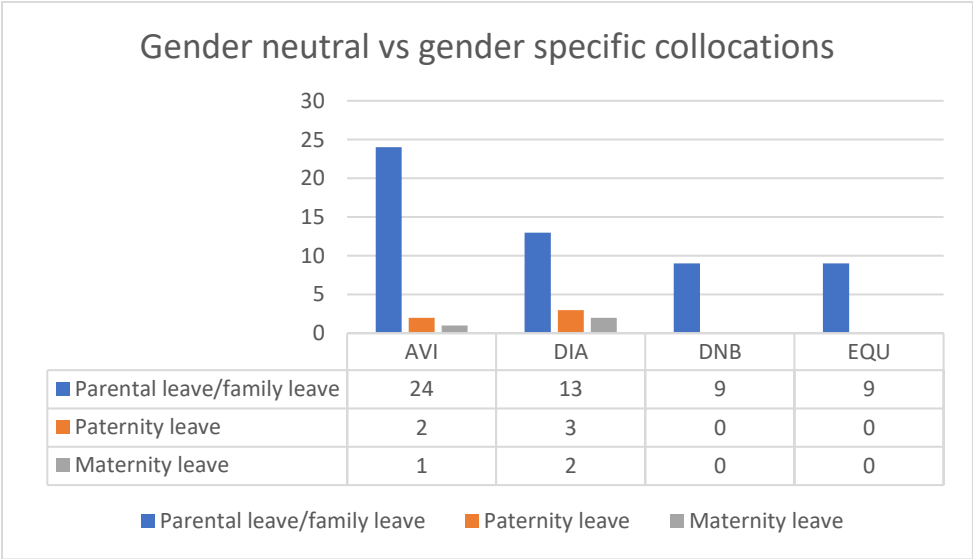


Figure 1. Number of occurrences of collocations relating to the policy

As can be seen from Figure 1, the DIA text has the highest number of occurrences of the gender-neutral collocations *parental leave/family leave*, followed closely by parental leave in the AVI text. As for the gender-specific collocations, *paternity leave* and *maternity leave*, these have a much lower frequency than the gender-neutral ones. As already indicated, there are no occurrences of gender-specific collocations related to the new policy in the Norwegian texts DNB and EQU. In summary, the gender-neutral *parental leave/family leave* are preferred in all four texts over the gender-specific *paternity leave*.



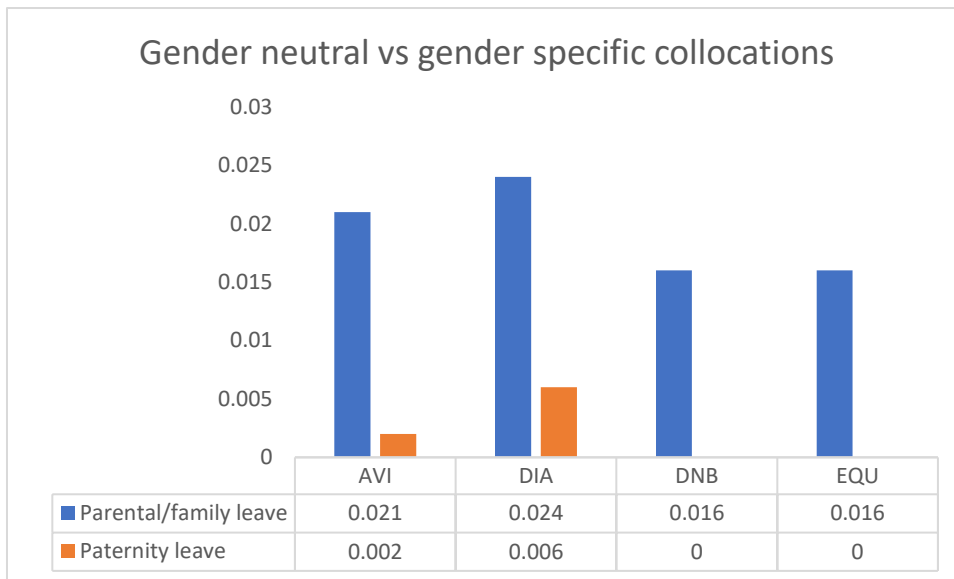


Figure 2. Relative frequency of collocations relating to the policy

### 5.1.2 Social actors in the texts

Despite the preference for a gender-neutral term for the new policy, the qualitative analysis shows that the main social actor present in all four texts is a named father employed by each MNC (some examples of social actors in the texts are provided in Table 3). Other social actors that appear in all texts are the female partner of the employed father and representatives of the company’s official voice. In the UK texts the female partners are personalised by name and job title, while they remain impersonal in the Norwegian texts, without names or job titles. Hence, in all four texts the father employees are named and foregrounded, while the mothers are backgrounded. Three texts (AVI, DNB and EQU) also include the actor category ‘fathers in general’, and two (AVI and EQU) ‘acquaintances of the father’. All four texts include the company’s ‘official voice’, either through the company name (AVI, DNB) or the personal pronoun *we* (DIA, EQU). Three texts in addition feature ‘company executives’ in the form of named senior executives (DNB and EQU) and an unnamed manager (AVI). DIA and AVI focus on stories from fathers who have already taken paternity leave, while EQU and DNB are telling the stories of fathers who are planning to take such leave. I will discuss the significance of the choice of social actors and other findings in section 5.2 and 5.3.

Social actors	Examples
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<p>The personalised father(s)</p>	<p><b>AVI:</b> <i>Taking parental leave meant we were both able to build that bond early on and now we both have a great relationship with him, says [NAMED FATHER]</i></p> <p><b>DIA:</b> <i>It gives me great pride to work for Diageo – introducing such inclusive, progressive and bold policies.</i></p> <p><b>DNB:</b> <i>I’m really looking forward to getting to know her, and I am so grateful that DNB is making it possible for me to stay at home with her for a few months.</i></p> <p><b>EQU:</b> <i>On 6 May I start my 16 weeks parental leave paid by Equinor, which is double what my wife was able to take.</i></p>
<p>Father and female partner</p>	<p><b>DIA:</b> <i>When we found out we were going to be parents we were over the moon, but with [NAME] being self-employed we definitely had some questions as to how we were going to make it all work.</i></p> <p><b>EQU:</b> <i>On 6 May I start my 16 weeks parental leave paid by Equinor, which is double what my wife was able to take.</i></p>
<p>The official MNC voice</p>	<p><b>AVI:</b> <i>Aviva is one of a growing number of UK companies offering employees equal parental leave.</i></p> <p><b>EQU:</b> <i>By giving time to bond with a new child, we provide more flexibility and support to employees becoming parents</i></p>
<p>Company executive</p>	<p><b>DNB:</b> <i>[...]head of [title and NAME] in DNB is very pleased that DNB has finally established a scheme for minimum parental leave that applies in all countries</i></p> <p><b>EQU:</b> <i>With our global parental leave policy, I believe we are leading in our industry and beyond, says [NAMED] and titled executive</i></p>
<p>Fathers in general</p>	<p><b>AVI:</b> <i>Just 1% of UK fathers took shared parental leave in 2018</i></p> <p><b>DNB:</b> <i>The global scheme has especially improved the rights of fathers in South and North America, Asia and Central Europe...</i></p>

Acquaintances of the father	<b>EQU:</b> <i>My friends think this is wonderful and they are envious of this type of benefit, [NAME] says</i>
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Table 3. Examples of social actors in the texts

## 5.2 Communicator's intentions

Dahl (2015) argues that the choice of quoted sources and what they say can be a powerful means of promoting specific aspects of a case being discussed. As shown in section 5.1.2, all four texts are foregrounding (Darics/Koller 2019; Van Leeuwen 2008) the father as the primary social actor and include several personal quotes from him. Foregrounding fathers strongly promotes the fact that men, as a result of the new policy, now can take several months' leave when they become fathers. As well as being backgrounded in all four texts, the mothers are most often referred to in a generic way, which serves to distance the audience from them (van Leeuwen 2008). In the following, I will show how the policy is presented in headlines (5.2.1) and subheadings (5.2.2), as well as in the body of the texts (5.2.3), including selected quotes reflecting the MNCs motivations for introducing the policy (5.2.4).

### 5.2.1 How the policy is presented in the headlines

Headlines represent an important location for signalling the angle given to a text (Dahl 2015; Pan/Kosicki 1993). The headline of each text has therefore been analysed with a view to consider how each corporate 'story' has been presented. The first thing to note is that all four MNCs use the gender-neutral collocation *parental leave/family leave* and not the gender-specific *paternity leave*, in their headlines, as can be seen from Table 4.

<b>Text</b>	<b>Headline</b>
AVI	<i>The dad-friendly parental leave policies changing family life for the better</i>
DIA	<i>Leading the way on inclusion through equal parental leave</i>
DNB	<i>[FIRST NAME] in Houston welcomes the opportunity to take 20 weeks' paid parental leave</i>
EQU	<i>Looking forward to parental leave</i>

Table 4. The headlines

AVI is foregrounding, or drawing attention to, the parental leave policy explicitly, making the company an implied agent. DIA is implicitly foregrounding the company as actor, as understood subject of the verb *leading*. In both texts the headline might indicate to the audience that the company is actively contributing to social change in a positive direction by using the positively laden action verbs *changing (for the better)* and *leading*. The DNB and EQU headlines foreground individual fathers as social actors in combination with less agentive – but still positive – verbs (*welcoming, looking forward to*) than in the UK texts. DNB is personalising the father by using his first name. In contrast, the father in the EQU text may be assumed to be the understood subject, even though the gender-neutral parental, in fact, potentially opens for a female subject. The EQU headline is the most neutral as it neither promotes the company nor the new policy explicitly. The reason may be that the setting is different, as the text is an in-house one (see section 4.1). None of the titles explicitly mention mothers. The AVI headline mentions *changing family life*, and DIA uses the modifier *equal*, both of which could imply mothers as well. However, both these texts contain images of fathers interacting with their children, which promote the foregrounding of the father.

The AVI nominalisation *family life* is an abstraction, representing the social actors in the family, in a passive way. DIA uses the nominalisation *inclusion*, making it unclear who is included, thus backgrounding the social actors involved. The impact of nominalisations is discussed further in section 5.3.2. The AVI and DNB headlines refer to the policy in a gender-neutral way, while also mentioning men (*dad-friendly, [FIRST NAME]*). The DIA headline has an indirect reference to fathers (*equal parental leave*). The EQU headline does not include any explicit linguistic reference to men but is, in fact, a personal statement from the named father in the text body.

### 5.2.2 How the policy is presented in the subheadings

While the headlines announce the launch of the new leave policy (Table 4), the subheadings provide more details about the company’s intentions or promotion of the policy as such. The subheadings from each text are rendered in Table 5.

Text	Subheadings
AVI	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>What if both parents could take an equal amount of paid parental leave?</i></li> <li>2. <i>The chance to bond</i></li> <li>3. <i>No longer a ‘woman’s job’</i></li> <li>4. <i>A “supreme lack of awareness”</i></li> <li>5. <i>Take full advantage of leave</i></li> <li>6. <i>About Aviva’s parental leave policy</i></li> </ol>

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DIA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Global standards on maternity and paternity leave</i></li> <li>2. <i>Free to enjoy home life. Free to succeed at work</i></li> </ol>
DNB	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Equal parental leave for all employees</i></li> <li>2. <i>Small part of a long working life</i></li> </ol>
EQU	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Parental leave part of our diversity and inclusion effort</i></li> </ol>

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Table 5. The subheadings

While AVI subheading no. 6 is primarily informative, the other subheadings tend to reflect specific promotion efforts of the company. Subheading 1 in the AVI text, for instance, encourages equal parental leave by expressing it as a dream – via the phrase *what if*, inviting the audience to share this value. Subheading 2 in the AVI text refers to the leave as *a chance to bond*, and thus promotes a close relationship between parent and child. Furthermore, subheading 3 in the AVI text declares: *No longer a ‘woman’s job’*. In this expression of denial, the authorial voice denounces traditional beliefs about women as mothers by offering an alternative position (Martin/White 2005) where fathers also perform the role of carer for children. Subheading 4, *“supreme lack of awareness”*, is a quote by the father in the narrative. Through graduation by force (supreme lack) the communicator draws attention to the general ignorance and confusion surrounding parental leave in the UK, implying that the company represents the opposite.

Subheading 1 in the DIA text is interesting in that it mentions both *maternity* and *paternity leave*. It also promotes the leave as global and standardised, while the reality is that father employees in Diageo do not have the same leave period in all countries (see Table 1). Subheading 2 in the DIA text is an example of how the corporate voice emphasises working and parenting as a positive combination: *Free to enjoy home life. Free to succeed at work*. The repetition of the positively laden word *free* at the beginning of each sentence is a rhetorical choice, emphasising both home life and work.

Subheading 1 in the DNB text emphasises the leave as *parental* and stresses that it is available to all employees, which accentuates equality both between genders and between employees worldwide. Subheading 2 in the DNB text encourages parents to take leave by downscaling (see section 4.3) the period away from work (*small*) and upscaling the period at work (*long*).

The subheading in the EQU text links the new policy explicitly to the concepts of diversity and inclusion. The focus is on what the policy represents for the company (*our*) rather than for the

employees, a reflection of this being a text published internally. To sum up, the linguistic analysis of the subheadings of the four MNC texts, reveals that the MNCs promote different aspects of the new policy.

### 5.2.3 How the policy is presented in the body of the text

Although each of the four texts feature several social actors (see Table 3), the primary actor is always one or more individual fathers choosing to avail of paid parental leave. The focus on the fathers and their stories creates a personal relationship between them and the audience. The UK texts also feature the names and work contexts of the male employees' female partners. Such personalisation may serve to persuade the audience of the benefit of fathers taking paternity leave for mothers and working women as well, thus indirectly emphasising gender equality. In the Norwegian texts, on the other hand, the women who are partners of the fathers are impersonalised (*my wife, we*), making them less important in the texts (Darics/Koller 2019). The Norwegian texts are instead foregrounding named senior executives supporting the new global policy ([NAMED] and titled executives), which serve as a strong corporate legitimisation of the policy. In contrast, the AVI text includes the executive by an impersonal job title (*my manager*) in the category 'senior executives' (Table 3). AVI and DNB mainly foreground the company by name, generating a formal and impersonal relationship between the corporation and the audience, while DIA and EQU are foregrounding the company by the institutional *we*, making this relationship more personal. The intention behind the formality in the AVI and DNB texts may be to provide legitimacy and credibility (Jaworska/Nanda 2018). DIA and EQU's use of the personal pronouns *we* and *our*, on the other hand, may be intended to generate "group dynamism and unity" between author and audience (Jaworska/Nanda 2018: 380). The official corporate voice in the texts mainly focuses on positive aspects of parenting and parental leave combined with enjoying working for their company. Although the DIA text focusses on how the policy will generate positive changes for parents, nominalisations such as *true gender equality at work requires fundamental changes* and *shake-up of policies* signify a lack of agency (Darics/Koller 2019), making it unclear who will be responsible for changing and shaking up the policies. According to Jaworska/Nanda (2018: 379) such nominalisations "demonstrate commitment in a non-committal way". Likewise, the EQU text mentions the expression *inclusion ambition*, which is a double nominalisation leaving unclear who will be responsible or who will be included in what. Such a lack of agency serves to remove direct responsibility for implementing the policy from the MNCs. On the other hand, the EQU text demonstrates explicit support for diversity management by stating that they are *embracing and driving diversity*, an example of active agency, albeit without very concrete information on what action will be taken.

#### 5.2.4 Motivations for introducing the policy

All four MNCs demonstrate support for parents who wish to spend time with their children. Such corporate support may be intended to increase commitment to the company among employees. The intention may also be to generate a positive image among external audiences (Darics/Koller 2019). As an example, the DIA text frames its paid parental leave as *Leading the way on inclusion through equal parental leave* (Table 4). Another motivation for offering parental leave inferred from the EQU text is that the leave saves the employee the cost of expensive childcare: *the option for most working parents in Washington DC is day-care that can cost more than 2,000 dollars per month*. Such financial advantage again contributes to increasing the company's attractiveness as an employer. The same feature is seen in the implicit comparison with other, less generous employers undertaken in the emotional quote in the EQU text *"my friends think this is wonderful and they are envious of this type of benefit"* (Table 3). Other direct references to the financial benefits of the leave are: *"He will then get 20 weeks **paid** parental leave. This is not an everyday occurrence in the States"* (DNB), *"Diageo's Family Leave policy was announced about halfway into our pregnancy and has been game changing for the way we've been able to live as a family" (DIA)", and [...] making the policy **one of the most generous** in the UK "(AVI).*

All the male employees in the four texts express gratitude towards their employer for allowing them to take parental leave (e.g., *I am so grateful that DNB is making it possible for me [...]*; (Table 3), suggesting that the policy is indeed intended to generate more commitment among employees. According to Welch/Jackson (2007), commitment can be perceived as identification and involvement with an organisation. Thus, it may be argued that an underlying motivation for introducing paid paternity leave is achieving increased commitment from employees, which in turn contributes to retaining talent.

#### 5.3 Underlying norms and values: Gender equality or inclusion?

An overarching observation from my qualitative investigation of the four texts is that they all reflect CSR (e.g., the issue of work-life balance), DM and gender equality as underlying values. The current texts on global parental leave policies can be perceived as examples of CSR and DM communication as they implicitly promote the norm of involved fatherhood (see section 2.1). From a gender equality perspective, men should be encouraged to be involved fathers (e.g., Molander et al. 2019). However, this belief may appear too gender-biased in some of the countries where the MNCs are operating and where other fatherhood ideals prevail. Hence, instead of using the term *paternity leave*, the policy is presented by the gender-neutral term *parental leave* (see section 5.1). Nevertheless, the

term *parental leave* is presented formally in the texts (through an institutional we or the company name) in combination with informal and personal stories from individual father employees. Hence, the personal testimonials may be seen to represent a two-way communication, used strategically, and intended to persuade present and future fathers in the company to take up the leave.

In addition to focussing on including fathers, the DIA text signifies a clear positive attitudinal assessment of gender equality via the phenomenon of upscaling (Martin/White 2005): *We believe true gender equality at work requires fundamental changes to work practices*. Sharpening the expression by calling it *true*, indicates maximum investment from the authorial voice in the value proposition and aligns the reader with it (Martin/White 2005: 138). Both UK texts give a stronger impression of wishing to change gender roles than the Norwegian texts. They explicitly promote the new corporate policy as an example of radical change, in favour of gender equality (DIA: *We believe true gender equality [...]*, AVI: *No longer a 'woman's job'*). The focus on radical change makes sense, as the breadwinner norm of fatherhood is still prevalent in the UK (see section 2). In addition, the two British MNCs' fully paid 26 weeks' leave is ground-breaking in the UK's market-oriented welfare state, characterised by low financial support from the government.

There is less focus on changing gender roles in the texts by the two MNCs headquartered in Norway. A reason for this could be that 15 weeks' earmarked paid paternity leave has been offered to fathers in Norway for many years (Brandth/Kvande 2019). This finding is thus linked to the Norwegian social democratic welfare model, promoting full-time work for both mothers and fathers, and where the fatherhood model for some time has been that of the involved father. The promotion of the policy in the texts from the two Norwegian MNCs, therefore, is linked primarily to the global expansion of already existing rights in Norway. This is reflected in the quotes in Table 2 from the two executive voices in DNB: [...] *DNB has finally established a scheme for minimum parental leave that applies in all countries, and [...] most DNB employees already had equivalent or better schemes than 20 weeks, particularly employees in Norway and Scandinavia*.

Only the two UK texts use the gender-specific term *paternity leave* and justify the policy by linking it to gender equality. The two Norwegian texts justify the policy mainly by focussing on inclusion and gender neutrality (e.g., DNB: [...] *the bank wishes to give all employees becoming parents – women and men alike – the opportunity*). The following gender-neutral family benefit and very explicit justification appear in the EQU text:

*We believe this family benefit is a strong signal of our values and that it will further enhance our diverse and inclusive culture. Embracing and driving diversity is important to us as a*



*company, both because it is the right thing to do, but also because it drives creativity, innovation and better business decisions.*

The expression **We believe** in the EQU quote is an example of dialogic expansion (Martin/White 2005), implying that the proposition becomes recognised as subjective, thereby signifying that the communicator acknowledges other views.

As mentioned in the example above, the EQU text states that *embracing and driving diversity is important to us as a company*, an example of active agency. However, this statement may also signify an inherent contradiction in the EQU text, as it is simultaneously accepting diverse views on fatherhood while also promoting globally standardised parental leave. Specifically, Darics/Koller (2018) point to an inherent tension between a DM discourse and a social justice (or equal opportunities) discourse. My analysis has revealed that all four texts in fact attempt to combine the inclusion discourse with the social justice discourse. Since an inclusion discourse promotes the individual father rather than fathers as a group, taking up the leave becomes an individual choice (Darics/Koller 2018). The voluntary nature of this choice is expressed linguistically through the verb in the following statements:

- *the employees **are entitled** to six months' parental leave (AVI)*
- *the new family leave policy **was introduced** (DIA)*
- *employees across the world **will now be given** at least 20 weeks' paid parental leave (DNB).*
- *the new global policy **was announced and allows** 16 weeks of paid leave for all employees (EQU)*

Thus, all four companies appear to share the contradictory aim of clearly promoting the leave as a benefit available to fathers, while not pushing them too hard to take parental leave. The MNCs appear to use vagueness in the hope of achieving consent and support from father employees for the leave, while avoiding criticism from fathers and stakeholders who might not support fathers taking paternity leave. These findings may illustrate how companies are faced with contradictory demands from stakeholders, which makes CSR and DM communication a delicate and controversial issue. Such contradictory demands may result in ambiguous communication (Nielsen/Thomsen 2012), which the current material to some extent reflects.

## 6 Conclusion

Global paternity leave represents an innovative social policy that differs from the local nature of most corporate family policies (Wiß/Greve 2019). In this paper the overarching research question I

attempted to answer was how diversity management and gender equality are linguistically reflected in corporate family policy texts by two British and two Norwegian MNCs. This research question was further operationalised through three more specific research issues. They were inspired by the three steps in Darics/Koller's (2019) Social Actor Analysis, namely how the four MNCs present the new policy linguistically, the communicators' intentions and underlying norms and values present in the texts.

In all four MNC texts analysed, the new policy is almost exclusively represented by the genderneutral term parental leave. However, the implication of this gender-neutral term is counteracted by the fact that the main social actors in all four texts are personalised fathers. The reason for this linguistic choice, I argue, is that MNCs are attempting to satisfy audiences with different cultural norms. The personalised stories of the named fathers make them foregrounded, while mothers are backgrounded, often by being impersonalised. Hence it seems clear that all four MNCs would like to change the traditional norms of fathers as breadwinners and mothers as carers as they choose to balance the tension between equal opportunities and DM (as different underlying values). However, all four MNCs favour DM over gender equality in their communication, which is in line with the current trend in international business. This also means that paternity leave remains an individual choice for each father, not necessarily a new standard of gender equality with regard to men as carers for their children.

Although the data includes examples of both external and internal communication, the analysis largely supports congruence between internal and external communication of CSR. Interestingly, all four texts represent the communication as two-way, in the sense that they include formal communication from management about the policy in combination with personal stories from father employees about how the policy worked for them.

However, there are some notable differences between the British and Norwegian texts. The most important are that the UK texts focus more explicitly on the policy being an example of radical change and on the importance of changing gender roles than the Norwegian ones. An underlying cultural explanation for these differences may be that the global leave offered by the Norwegian MNCs implies extending current Norwegian cultural norms, such as involved fatherhood, to other countries. Paid leave is also congruent with the Norwegian dual-earner support model and its high level of financial support (see section 2). In contrast, the global leave offered by the UK MNCs represents a radical change from local UK cultural norms, such as the father as breadwinner and a market orientation making parents responsible themselves for funding most of the parental leave.

In terms of what the current study has contributed to the research field, it has extended the DM communication field to policies related to work-life balance and equal opportunities for men. Specifically, the texts are examples of CSR and DM communication, as they promote social change in the form of men as carers. Linguistic vagueness in the form of gender-neutral terms for the policy is used to promote this change globally. The study has also added to the cross-fertilisation of linguistics, CSR, and DM communication by emphasising the tension between equality and inclusion, as illustrated in section 5.3.

The findings reported here may also inspire further studies involving corporate communication on issues relating to diversity management and talent attraction and retention. This exploratory study has involved four 'early corporate movers' and their communication of a new globally available paternity leave policy. As other MNCs follow and a larger body of similar texts becomes available, the findings reported here may serve as a point of departure for gaining new and deeper insights into CSR and DM communication and how the balancing act between an equality and inclusion discourse is carried out linguistically. Another interesting research issue that emerges from the present study is how male employees in various countries employed by the four MNCs view the new global leave policy.

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## 6.2 Paper 2

**Title:** Global Paternity Leave in four Multinational Corporations: a Facilitator of Paternal Agency?

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**Under review at journal:** Journal of Family Studies. This is the prepared manuscript for the second resubmission.

### **Abstract:**

The last few decades have seen changes in the fatherhood ideal. At the same time, paternity leave schemes have been implemented in EU and other countries, which may impact both fatherhood- and work norms and practices. The current study has been inspired by the recent introduction of a ground-breaking corporate policy, globally applicable paternity leave, in four multinational corporations (MNCs). Thematic analysis is applied to investigate fathers' perceptions of such leave through interviews with employees in these pioneering MNCs who have availed themselves of the new benefit. The fathers work in the UK, the US, Brazil and Australia and have diverse cultural backgrounds. As a theoretical point of departure, literature on fatherhood, manhood norms and national cultural differences in the context of fatherhood and work is discussed. The findings indicate that global paternity leave challenges embedded gendered work practices in MNCs and may lead to new and emancipatory ways of combining fatherhood and work. The study finds that fathers in different countries have a desire to be involved fathers and are ready to take time off work to care for their children when this is facilitated by their organisations and supported by peers. The paid global paternity leave policy offered by the four MNCs in the present study may thus be seen to extend male agency by acting as a facilitator of paternal agency.

**Keywords:** breadwinner; ideal worker norm; involved father; gender norms; global parental leave; male agency; paternal agency; paternity leave



## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with a new phenomenon in the corporate sphere, global paternity leave, a far-reaching policy which has the potential to impact both family and work norms and practices. While father roles within the family have seen significant changes in recent decades (Atkinson, 2022; Crespi, Ruspini, Seward, & Rush, 2016), men still tend to be perceived as worker first and father second. According to the EU's work-life balance directive, facilitating men's care for children is intended to reduce gender biases and ultimately lead to de-gendered care and work practices (de la Porte, Im, Pircher, & Szelewa, 2023). However, most studies on fathers in the workplace show that cultural and gendered expectations, such as the *ideal worker norm* and the *breadwinner norm*, often prevent men from spending time with their children (Atkinson, 2022; Tanquerel & Grau-Grau, 2020). The ideal worker is typically a man who is always available and who prioritises work over other responsibilities such as time with the family (Acker, 1990; Atkinson, 2022). Similarly, the breadwinner norm accentuates the father's function as a provider for the family (Molander, Kleppe, & Ostberg, 2019). The two norm concepts are connected and partially overlapping as they both emphasise men's work identity. However, while the breadwinner is a common concept within fatherhood literature, the ideal worker is more commonly referred to in the international business literature. As the current study draws on these two fields, both concepts will be discussed.

Multinational corporations (MNCs) have also been found to promote a gender regime based on the ideal worker norm (Koveshnikov, Tienari, & Piekkari, 2019). While this norm may affect women as well, it is more common to offer female employees opportunities to take time off to care for children (Bataille & Hyland, 2022; Earle, Raub, Sprague, & Heymann, 2023; Moss & Deven, 2015). It was therefore surprising that four MNCs in 2017 and 2019, respectively, decided to introduce a policy of quite extensive, fully paid global paternity leave (between 16 and 30 weeks; see Table 1). The introduction of such a leave in these organisations is a radical measure as it clashes with the ideal worker norm and impacts the private sphere. Since the policy is introduced globally, national fatherhood norms and global work norms become intertwined. The innovation lies in duration, generosity (being fully paid by the company) and being globally accessible. All four MNCs offer more extended leave than the national statutory leave for men in their headquarters and in the countries where they operate. The Norwegian-headquartered MNCs offer 16- or 20<sup>12</sup>-week leave globally. The

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<sup>12</sup> Leave for UK employees was extended to 30 weeks by this MNC in 2020.

British headquartered MNCs offer 26 weeks to all UK employees and to employees in most countries where they operate.

An issue which therefore becomes interesting to explore is whether tensions arise between norms and actual practices related to fatherhood and the workplace. The topic is timely and relevant, as gender equality related to the work-life balance is recognised as crucial for achieving gender equality in the workplace, while our understanding of the effects of paternity leave in organisations is limited (Pizarro & Gartzia, 2023). At the same time, government provision of paid leave for fathers is currently not widespread and only applicable to a minority of fathers worldwide (Earle et al., 2023).

So far, research on paternity leave has mainly focussed on leave offered by governments or organisations in one or a few countries (Atkinson, 2023; Balan, van den Brink, & Benschop, 2022; Brandth & Kvande, 2022; Humberd, Ladge, & Harrington, 2015; Van Gasse, Wood, & Verdonck, 2023). More research on father-friendly organisational practices and work-life balance has been called for (Balan et al., 2022; Koveshnikov et al., 2019), particularly fatherhood practices in the transnational organisational context (Kangas & Lämsä, 2021; Van Gasse et al., 2023). Furthermore, Atkinson (2022) calls for empirical research on the link between access to leave and how it affects paternal ability to achieve involved fatherhood.

The current study appears to be the first to investigate how a paternity leave schemes offered to MNC employees globally is perceived and experienced by new fathers. The material consists of interviews with 13 fathers who grew up in Brazil, the US, Lebanon, France and the UK. The interviewed men were working for the MNCs in Australia, Brazil, the UK or the US and were interviewed after taking the leave offered by these companies. To investigate men's actual domestic practices following the birth of a child was crucial as this may differ from their values and how they anticipated it to be pre-birth (Bühlmann, Elcheroth, & Tettamanti, 2010; Miller, 2011). Although companies increasingly offer paid parental leave (e.g., Kaufman & Petts, 2020), the MNCs in the present study were pioneers in providing global paternity leave when the current study was initiated (2019). Hence, the study involves rare access to in-depth interviews with a small but purposive sample of corporate informants with first-hand experience of such a new and radical policy. The purpose is to explore if paternity leave offered by the MNCs may lead to new ways of combining fatherhood and work. Emerging themes from the informants identified via thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) are related to fatherhood norms: a) involved fatherhood, b) equal parenting. Furthermore, two themes relate to workplace norms: c) tensions between the ideal worker and father and d) integrating work and fatherhood.

The research questions the paper aims to answer are:

- (i) What fatherhood norms are reflected in the interviews with fathers originating from and working in different national cultures who availed themselves of the new global paternity leave scheme?
- (ii) How is the relationship between fatherhood norms and work norms characterised by these fathers? Are there signs of tension between these norms?
- (iii) What impact has paternity leave had on the fathers' sense of agency and their perception of their role in the family?

The study offers a unique look into what happens to the reconciliation of fatherhood and work norms when large MNCs with sites in many countries decide to introduce paternity leave with global applicability. The paper contributes to literature on fatherhood and paternal agency, specifically related to combining work and care. It adds empirically based insights from a culturally diverse sample of new fathers and shows their willingness to execute an involved fatherhood role when given access to an extended leave period. Several of the informants attribute their transformative and valuable experiences of fatherhood to the enabling policies that their MNCs offered.

The paper goes on to discuss some relevant research on fatherhood, manhood, work norms and paternity leave practices, before the MNCs and their new global policies are introduced. Then, an account of the material and methodological approaches taken in analysing it is given before the findings are presented and discussed. The paper presents some limitations and suggestions for future research before concluding.

## **2. Literature on fatherhood and manhood norms, work norms and paternity leave**

This section starts with a presentation of relevant literature on fatherhood and manhood norms (2.1), before turning to research on national cultural differences as regards gender norms, paternity leave, household and work practices (2.2).

### **2.1 Literature on fatherhood norms, manhood and male agency**

## Fatherhood norms

Most research on fatherhood emphasises masculinised norms like the breadwinner as an essential aspect of father identity (e.g. Brandth & Kvande, 1998, 2022). Norms are here understood as “rules of behaviour that reflect or embody a culture’s values” (Giddens, 2009, p. 1127). Father identity is understood as an internalised set of father role expectations, which are seen to influence behaviour within that role (McLaughlin & Muldoon, 2014, p. 440). Fatherhood and manhood norms will be reviewed as they are likely to influence the context surrounding the informants, their perceptions of themselves and how they should behave in work and family situations. The next paragraphs will present a brief history of the literature on fatherhood norms and how they have changed before introducing research on manhood norms, which may inform us about the informants’ challenges related to the work-life balance.

The breadwinning father became the hegemonic fatherhood ideal in the western world following industrialisation. As a result, the motherhood ideal of homemaker and primary carer for children was further accentuated. Over time, increased opportunities for women to enter paid work have weakened the breadwinner/homemaker dichotomy (Giddens, 1991), alongside the masculinities movement, which has sought to promote men as carers and their desire to be involved (Lamb, 2000). Such societal changes in western societies, as well as less stable family and work relationships, have resulted in changed fatherhood norms (Giddens, 1991; Aarseth, 2013), where the father seeks attachment to and involvement with his children independent of the mother.

Fein (1978) introduced the concept of the *emergent perspective* of fatherhood, implying that men could become competent in caring for their children. Nearly a decade later, Kimmel (1987) pointed to hybrid forms of fatherhood, a coexistence of new and older fatherhood norms, “creating a dynamic tension between ambitious breadwinner and compassionate father” (Kimmel, 1987, p. 9). In addition to Fein (1978) and Kimmel (1987), Backett (1982), Lamb, Pleck, and Levine (1985), and Jump and Haas (1987) were among the first studies to propose fatherhood norms that incorporated some kind of shared responsibility for childcare between parents. *Involved fatherhood*, which appears similar to the emergent type of fatherhood (Fein, 1978; Vandeskog, 2009), usually refers to a father who has a close and caring relationship with his children and involvement in their everyday life (Brandth & Kvande, 1998; Kangas, Lämsä, & Jyrkinen, 2019; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Aarseth, 2013). Similarly, Molander et al. (2019) describe involved fatherhood as distinguished through three themes; chores (e.g. brushing children’s teeth and feeding them), play and tenderness. Both the breadwinner and involved father are recognised as cultural models and are widely shared across a broad range of international literature on fatherhood (Johansson, 2023; Vandeskog, 2009). Much of the literature concerns the change in western fatherhood from a pure breadwinner to a more involved fatherhood

norm (Crespi et al., 2016). A more recent norm which may have impacted fathers is the gender-neutral term *intensive parenting* (Grunow, Begall, & Buchler, 2018). The norm of intensive parenting emphasises that both parents share the care for their children, but fathers are still expected to be breadwinners. According to the intensive parenting norm, good fathering means being emotionally involved and present for their children, in addition to maintaining an earner role. Intensive parenting appears to be compatible with involved fatherhood (e.g., Brandth & Kvande, 1998). In addition, both intensive parenting and involved fatherhood are norm that do not require breadwinning and caring to be mutually exclusive, since neither requires that fathers give up their earner role to be present for the children. However, there will be conflicting pressures between intensive parenting and expectations from employers regarding fathers' work commitment (Thébaud & Pedulla, 2016). The next section focuses on manhood norms and pressures and their relevance to fatherhood.

### **Manhood agency and pressures**

Most definitions of masculinity share an emphasis on male agency. However, research on manhood qualities mainly focus on the importance of agency related to achievement and occupational success (Kosakowska-Berezecka, Safdar, Jurek, & Bhardwaj, 2018; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008), not on exercising agency related to the work-life balance. Research on gender stereotypes across cultures confirms a consistent belief in male agency as agency related to influencing their career (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2018). Based on findings from a literature review of fatherhood, Atkinson (2022), asserts that fathers' agency to pursue involved fatherhood will be influenced by the degree of tension or alignment between their rights to leave and the support from working practices and managers. Agency in this context refers to what extent fathers feel capable of practicing the work-life balance of their choice (Atkinson, 2022; Hobson & Fahlén, 2009). Fathers' sense of agency is limited when they feel that they are expected to maintain an absolute commitment to work and that it is not legitimate to acknowledge a conflict between their role as a parent and that of an employee (Atkinson, 2022).

As regards the concept of masculinity, the literature on masculinity emphasises that manhood requires social proof, proposing that "real men" are made, not born (Vandello et al., 2008). Therefore, in many cultures around the world manhood is seen as a precarious and socially constructed status that requires continuous social proof and validation in order not to be lost. By contrast, a woman's actions are not considered to threaten her status as a woman in the same manner (Vandello et al., 2008). Furthermore, precarious manhood reflects an aspect of masculinity associated with men's competitive intra-sex struggle for dominance (Bosson et al., 2021; Vandello et

al., 2008). Hence, it matters to men what other men want, including how male peers perceive work-family policies (Thébaud & Pedulla, 2016).

As a result, there may be underlying resistance from manhood norms favouring occupational success to adopt norms encouraging men to be involved fathers. Men may fear penalties resulting from violating expected gender norms, which is termed backlash (Holloway, Dhensa-Kahlon, & Alexandra Beauregard, 2024; Rudman & Mescher, 2013). Research on backlash against atypical men shows that people judge them as high on weakness and low on agency. Therefore, men who seek family leave may be perceived as poor workers and to 'act like women', which deprives them of masculine agency. Hence, they risk being economically punished by limited career opportunities, a consequence that should invoke concern, according to Rudman and Mescher (2013). Recent scholarship by Kelland, Lewis, and Fisher (2022) reinforces that fathers who deviate from breadwinning norms face penalties. They introduce the notion of 'fatherhood forfeits' for caregiving fathers – being mocked, seen to be idle and viewed with suspicion.

In sum, while involved fatherhood and intensive parenting norms promote that men spend time with their children, manhood norms may counter spending time with children when it is perceived as a threat to their agency. However, an interesting finding in a study of attitudes among university students in Norway by Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2018) is that men who take parental leave and perform domestic work are judged (by male and female students) as having more agency than women. This raises the question of whether the concept of male agency can change when public policy enables male caregiving.

## **2.2 National cultural differences as regards gender norms, paternity leave, work and household practices**

Firstly, I will discuss cultural differences regarding gender norms and leave contexts before presenting housework and gender gap data .

### **Gender norms**

National cultural differences regarding fatherhood norms are likely influenced by gender norms and family leave contexts. Gender norms may be linked to attitudes about paid leave for fathers in different countries (Connell & Pearse, 2021; Li, Knoester, & Petts, 2021). Gender norms are thought to reinforce or weaken the effects of such family policies and may influence future policies (Grunow et al., 2018). In addition, gender norms are considered to be multidimensional, meaning that they cannot be expressed on a single continuum, e.g., from traditional to egalitarian, according to Grunow

et al. (2018). They refer to intensive parenting as an example of a multidimensional gender norm as it is possible for both traditional and egalitarian parents to practice intensive parenting.

The current paper goes on to provide an account of empirical research on contextual norms related to fathers, both in the countries where the informants grew up and the countries where they currently live and work. The countries in question are Australia, Brazil, France, Lebanon, the UK and the US (see section 3.2, Table 1). As the MNCs in the current study are headquartered in Norway and the UK (see Table 1), research involving a Norwegian context is also cited. Scandinavian countries, specifically Sweden and Norway, are unique regarding fathers' high uptake of leave (Brandth & Kvande, 2022; Li et al., 2021). In many other country contexts, there is less support for paternity leave and related norms and practices (Li et al., 2021). Even when unique and progressive leave offers are made available in a supportive context, this does not necessarily translate to a change in perceptions and actions among fathers (Li et al., 2021), which the current study aims to address.

### **Leave contexts**

The studies by Aarseth, Brandth and Kvande and Molander and colleagues cited in section 2.1 first and foremost refer to a Scandinavian context, where an involved fatherhood model has been facilitated through national family policies since the early 1990ies. As a result, an involved father has become the natural state of family life in Norway (Børve & Bungum, 2015). Similarly, Brandth and Kvande (2022) find that in the Norwegian work context, taking the statutory 15 weeks' paternity leave has become the norm. This, in turn, has changed employers' attitudes and strengthened the role of employees who are fathers to the extent that the ideal worker norm (Acker, 1990) has been challenged (Brandth & Kvande, 2022). The ideal worker is typically a man who is available and prioritises work over care responsibilities (Acker, 1990).

In many countries neither governmental policies nor prevailing work or gender norms support fathers who wish to spend time caring for their children (see e.g. Earle et al., 2023; Ladge, Humberd, & Watkins, 2015; Liebig & Oechsle, 2017). Aunkofer, Meuser, and Neuman (2018) assert that different legal frameworks and cultural differences in gender regimes imply that the uptake of paternity leave by fathers in Scandinavia is not simply transferrable to other countries. In his 'two worlds' model of fatherhood, Rush (2015) states that the US and Sweden represent divergent archetypes as regards fatherhood. According to Rush (2015), the American model, which has influenced the fatherhood debate and welfare ideology in the UK, upholds patriarchal familism and male breadwinning through a combination of laissez-faire and punitive approaches to fatherhood. In contrast, the Swedish model, which is similar to the Norwegian one, has dismantled the patriarchy and revolutionised the gender relations of parenting through individualisation and non-transferability

of parental leave. However, it is important to point out that the current discussion relates mainly to parental leave and not general welfare offerings. For example, the UK is a welfare state and offers a national health service and a social welfare package that far exceeds welfare benefits in the US.

In the following paragraphs, research on paid leave for fathers and related work norms and practices in Lebanon the US, Brazil, Australia, the UK, France will be discussed as it is relevant to gain a deeper understanding of the national context that the fathers experience.

Universal paid paternity leave is not available in Lebanon (Abi Akl, 2023) or the US (Blum, Dobrotić, Kaufman, Koslowski, & Moss, 2023; Kaufman, Petts, Mize, & Wield, 2023), however companies in the US offer various types of family leave (Kaufman & Petts, 2020). Abi Akl (2023) conducted a study involving two MNCs in Lebanon that offer leave for fathers and suggests that the possibility of taking fully paid paternity leave will be an essential step forward for fathers. Foss-Heggen and Kvande (2017) find a lack of alignment between ideal and lived practices in the US when attempting to transfer a Norwegian-inspired corporate model of paternity leave to the US work context. Another example of paternity leave not being a lived practice in the US is found by Petts, Mize, and Kaufman (2022), who assert that many fathers who take parental leave are seen as less committed to work and, therefore, become stigmatized. Similarly, Rehel (2014) found that many fathers taking leave were concerned about how “violating the image of the ideal worker would impact their work lives” (Rehel, 2014, p. 120).

New fathers in Brazil are entitled to five days of paid leave (Sorj & Fraga, 2020) if they work in the private sector and twenty days if they work in the public sector (Blum et al., 2023). In Brazil, despite the fact that men tend to assume the breadwinner role, the availability of some paternity leave has resulted in a change towards a more involved fatherhood norm (Schmidt, Schoppe-Sullivan, Frizzo, & Piccinini, 2019). Alcadipani (2020) found that practices during the COVID-19 pandemic challenged macho masculinity in organizations, raising the question if an alternative gender dynamic will emerge. However, with just five days’ statutory leave, Brazil is one of the Latin American countries with the shortest paternity leave period (Sorj & Fraga, 2020). In 2016, the Brazilian government introduced tax deductions to large corporations that voluntarily offered extended paternity leave to 20 days (Hawley & Carnes, 2021). To date, there is a lack of research on whether and potentially how this has had an impact on paternity leave practices.

New fathers in Australia are entitled to ten days of paid leave, but fathers are reluctant to take it (Widiss, 2021). In Australia there has so far been a general lack of inclusion of men in work-family policies, and the male breadwinner model is still practiced (Whitehouse & Nakazato, 2021). New fathers in the UK are also entitled to ten days of statutory paternity leave (Kaufman & Grönlund,



2021). The statutory family leave policy has remained overwhelmingly focused on the mother (Holloway et al., 2024; Mohun Himmelweit, 2023). Although statutory paternity leave has been available since 2003, uptake is less than 30%, which indicates that involved fatherhood is not generally supported by workplace or gender norms (Atkinson, 2023; Burnett, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013; Kaufman, 2018; Miller, 2013). Shared parental leave was introduced in the UK in 2015 to supplement maternity and paternity leave, enabling parents to share up to 50 weeks of leave during the child's first year, but only 5% of eligible fathers avail of it (Atkinson, 2023). One factor contributing to the low uptake is that statutory pay for shared parental leave and paternity leave in the UK is below the minimum wage (Atkinson, 2023; Kaufman & Grönlund, 2021; Koslowski & Kadar-Satat, 2019). Strict eligibility criteria for shared parental leave, perceived workplace resistance and gendered expectations have also been identified as a barrier to fathers' uptake (Holloway et al., 2024). Hence, in such a gendered cultural climate, the description by Burnett et al. (2013) of father employees in the UK as "ghosts in the organizational machine" still seems fitting. Although the fathers in Burnett et al.'s (2013) study knew that parental leave policies were available to them in theory, they perceived the policies to be mainly aimed at working mothers and even felt excluded or discouraged from using them. Recent data from the UK seems to confirm this, as a study by Atkinson (2023) finds that parenting norms may be changing, but that the norm of caring fatherhood is relatively new. Hence, the ideal worker norm continues to influence workplace culture in the UK and leads to "fatherhood forfeits" (Kelland et al., 2022) and self-restraint among fathers requesting shared parental leave (Atkinson, 2023).

In France, paid paternity leave is 25 days (Blum et al., 2023), but there are also barriers to men taking up the leave due to strong dominant norms of ideal worker as opposed to caregiver (Tanquerel, 2022). Tanquerel's (2022) findings show that in France, fathers' cultural norms of masculinity and fatherhood remain strongly linked to work.

In the following section, empirical data on men's share of housework and women's economic contributions in the countries relevant to the study will be discussed.

### **Housework and gender gap differences**

Although men around the world have increased their contributions to domestic work since the 1960s, women worldwide still perform the majority of household obligations (Li et al., 2021). When comparing men's recent contribution to domestic work in the countries relevant to the current study, OECD data (2023)<sup>13</sup> show that Norwegian men have the highest contribution to unpaid work in

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.oecd.org>

minutes per day, 77% compared to that of women, while American men spend 61%, French men spend 60%, British men 56% and Australian men 55% time on household work compared to women's share. Data from Brazil and Lebanon are not included in the OECD survey. However, World Bank data<sup>14</sup> comparing men's proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work shows that in Brazil, men's share was less than half compared to that of women. In addition, Worldbank data show that Brazilian men's share of unpaid domestic work was considerably lower than that of men in Norway, France, Australia, the UK and the US (worldbank.org, 2023). There was no World Bank data for Lebanon in 2023.

Another significant data source on cultural variation is The Global Gender Gap Index<sup>15</sup>, as measured by the World Economic Forum. The 2023 results for the sub-index of the Global Gender Gap Index measuring economic participation and opportunity for women show a clear pattern. For the countries of relevance here, Norway leads the way in 11<sup>th</sup> place, followed by the US on 21<sup>st</sup> place, Australia on 38<sup>th</sup>, the UK on 43<sup>rd</sup>, France on 51<sup>st</sup>, Brazil on 86<sup>th</sup> and Lebanon on 127<sup>th</sup> place. While Norway ranks high on both measures, Brazil ranks low on both. Hence, there is most likely a correlation between men's share of domestic work and women's economic participation. In addition, Bosson et al. (2021) found that the more men outrank women in a country, measured by a more significant gender gap, the more likely it is that men and women in that country view manhood as a precarious social status that can easily be lost (Bosson et al., 2021). Thus, in countries with a significant gender gap there may also more resistance to men becoming involved fathers.

In the next section, the difference between attitudes and experiences of care will be discussed.

### **Differences between attitudes and practices**

Although care practices are gendered in most countries, attitudes toward men spending more time caring for children and domestic work are changing. In a study of attitudes towards leave for fathers in 26 OECD countries, Li et al. (2021) found that 61% of their respondents favoured some paid parental leave for fathers. However, attitudes do not necessarily translate directly into practices, and there may be differences between the two. Gender equality has been shown to be valued more by couples without children than by new parents (Bühlmann et al., 2010, Miller, 2011). Bühlmann et al. (2010) investigated gender values and practices among European couples before and after the birth of their first child. They found that the experience of parenthood resulted in a mismatch between the couples' prior egalitarian values and their subsequent gender unequal practices regarding domestic

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.worldbank.org>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024>

labour. Importantly, couples who recently had a baby reported more gender unequal practices than couples who had school-age children. Another relevant finding from the study is that a return to egalitarian practices among parents is more likely in countries such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland, that have long parental leave and early state supported childcare. According to Bühlmann et al. (2010), there is more tension between values and practices in liberal regimes (such as the UK) than in social democratic regimes. In liberal regimes, there is likely to be tension between egalitarian values and gendered practices, resulting in lasting gender inequality in care work. In social democratic regimes, there is likely to be congruence between egalitarian values and egalitarian practices. Governmental policies such as parental leave and subsidised public childcare, more prevalent in social democratic regimes, may reduce the inequality in care work between men and women (Bühlmann et al., 2010). The social democratic and liberal regimes relate to Rush (2015)'s Swedish (Norwegian) and US (UK) models, respectively. Australia, Brazil and Lebanon could also be characterised as liberal in the sense that the state offers little support for families, including leave for fathers.

Based on the cited research on gender norms, access to paid paternity leave, domestic work contributions, the gender gap and care practices one may conclude that gender egalitarian practices are not normally encouraged. The limited opportunities for fathers to take leave from work may serve to maintain traditional gender norms. Atkinson (2022) argues that in countries where fathers are positioned as breadwinners or secondary parents, which includes the US, Lebanon, Brazil, Australia, the UK and France, their opportunities to practise involved fatherhood are limited.

### **3. The study: MNCs and policies, material and methodological approach**

#### **3.1 MNCs and policies**

The four MNCs involved in the current study are among the largest companies in their respective countries. (They have been named MNC 1-4). Both informant name and company name have been anonymised for data protection reasons. MNC1, headquartered in the UK, is a beverage company with 28 000 employees and offices in 42 countries. MNC2, headquartered in Norway, is an energy company with 21 000 employees in 36 countries. MNC3, headquartered in the UK, is an insurance company with 16 000 employees in three countries (reduced from 16 countries in 2019), while MNC4, headquartered in Norway, is a financial services company with 9 000 employees in 16 countries. All four MNCs have

received high rankings in global annual reports and indices on gender equality, such as Equileap<sup>16</sup> and the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index (GEI)<sup>17</sup>, in the last few years.

MNC3 introduced global paternity leave in 2017, while the other three introduced their new policy in 2019. All four introduced global fully paid paternity leave (launched as *parental leave*, but with the novelty factor being that it was available for men) as a geographical extension of the paternity leave already offered to their headquarter-based employees in the UK and Norway, respectively. The policies either represent an extension of the available statutory paternity leave in some of the countries where the MNC has offices (e.g., Australia, Brazil and the UK) or as a new benefit in countries where no statutory paternity leave exists (e.g., in Lebanon and the US). In Norway, paternity leave typically requires that the mother goes back to work during the father's leave. However, the two Norwegian-headquartered MNCs changed their policy in 2021, making it independent of any leave the mother was taking, as fathers in the international subsidiaries reported that they did not wish to take leave if it reduced the mother's leave period.

### **3.2 Material**

The material comprises 13 interviews carried out in English with father employees from the four MNCs (see Table 1) who themselves had taken the new globally available paternity leave. This is in line with advice from Welch and Piekkari (2017), who advocate using participants with first-hand experience of the phenomenon in question. Another justification for interviewing only fathers who had taken leave is that research (e.g., Bühlmann et al., 2010) shows differences between men's values and attitudes to domestic work before having children and how they practice this after the birth of their child. The recruitment process to the study took place in 2021, that is, just a few years after the implementation of the policies in the MNCs. The recruitment was based on fathers self-selecting to take part. This resulted in a combination of purposive and opportunity sample, similar to that of Atkinson (2022).

These 13 fathers took between 12 and 30 weeks of paternity leave, depending mainly on their specific MNC's leave entitlement. As many as 11 of the fathers took their full entitlement (see Table 1). Five fathers took leave as sole carers. Four of them state that they did so mainly because their partner had fewer leave rights than them during the child's first year. The fifth father (Xavier, not his

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<sup>16</sup> <https://equileap.com/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/gei>

real name) took leave as a sole carer for his first child because the policy from his MNC at that time implied that he could only take leave if his wife had returned to work. However, by the time his second child arrived, the MNC had adjusted their policy to be independent of the mother's leave, which made him decide to take leave together with her.

The informants are all white-collar workers, with female partners who are also working. They represent five nationalities (British, American, Brazilian, French and Lebanese) and live and work in either Brazil, the US, the UK or Australia. The informants have been given fictitious names (see Table 1). Any children mentioned by the fathers in the interview extracts are referred to as BABY. The interviews took place on the digital platform Teams and lasted 50 minutes on average. They were semi-structured and consisted of 16 questions (see Appendix 1 for the interview guide).

The informants' age ranged from 31 to 47, with a mean age of 40. Table 1 presents the number of weeks' leave taken by each father, the statutory leave available in their country of origin, the full leave they were entitled to, their country of origin and their work location.

Table 1. Information about the father employees

Name	Weeks of statutory leave offered in the fathers' country of origin	Weeks of corporate leave taken	Weeks of statutory and corporate leave offered	Sole care or shared with mother	Work location	Country of origin
Martin	2	30	30	Shared	UK	UK
Tony	2	26 + 26*	26	Shared	UK	UK
Xavier	5	12 + 8*	30	Sole + shared	UK	France
Luis	1	12	16	Shared	Brazil	Brazil
Tim	2	26 + 26*	26	Shared	UK	UK
Lucas	2	30	30	Shared	UK	UK
Sebastian	2	30	30	Shared	UK	UK
Ali	0	16	16	Sole	USA	Lebanon

James	0	16	16	Sole	USA	USA
John	2	26	26	Shared	Australia	UK
Chuck	0	16	16	Sole	USA	USA
Pedro	1	16	16	Shared	Brazil	Brazil
Jose	1	16	16	Sole	Brazil	Brazil

\* Indicates the length of leave taken by the father for a second child.

### 3.3 Methodological approach

Due to material size as well as the nature of the research questions, the main methodological approach is qualitative, and interview based. The interviews were automatically transcribed by Microsoft Teams and then manually quality controlled by the author. The transcription was verbatim but without pauses or filler words, as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). The data analysis has been inspired by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as this method allows for both direct analysis of data and uncovering of underlying ideologies or scripts. The thematic analysis includes the following six phases set out by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1. Familiarisation with the data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Reviewing themes, 5. Defining and naming themes and 6. Producing the report. Below follows a more detailed account of the analysis process.

As part of the familiarisation process, common expressions and experiences among the fathers were noted down. A simple word frequency analysis of each text was carried out by means of the software AntConc (Anthony, 2005). The AntConc overview and the author's own notes formed a starting point for thematic coding. The semantic and latent coding of the interview material started with linguistic traces, such as common words used by the fathers. Kreiner (2015), distinguishes between theory codes, that is use of terminology from extant theory, and codes flowing from the data. One example of codes emerging from previous research are the concepts of fathers as helpers and mothers as managers, taken from Allen and Hawkins (1999). Searching for themes was an abductive process, which involved simultaneously starting with theory and data and 'cycling' between them (Kreiner, 2015). At times it was challenging to distinguish codes from themes, specifically as regards involved fatherhood. According to Byrne (2022) it is not always clear what is a code or a theme. Two specific themes relating to fatherhood norms were established: 'involved father' and 'equal parent'. The themes 'fathers as helpers' and 'developing a bond with the child(ren)' were established as sub-themes of 'involved fatherhood' as, on reflection, these new sub-themes represent two different aspects of fatherhood norms – what fathers do and a relational aspect. The other two final themes

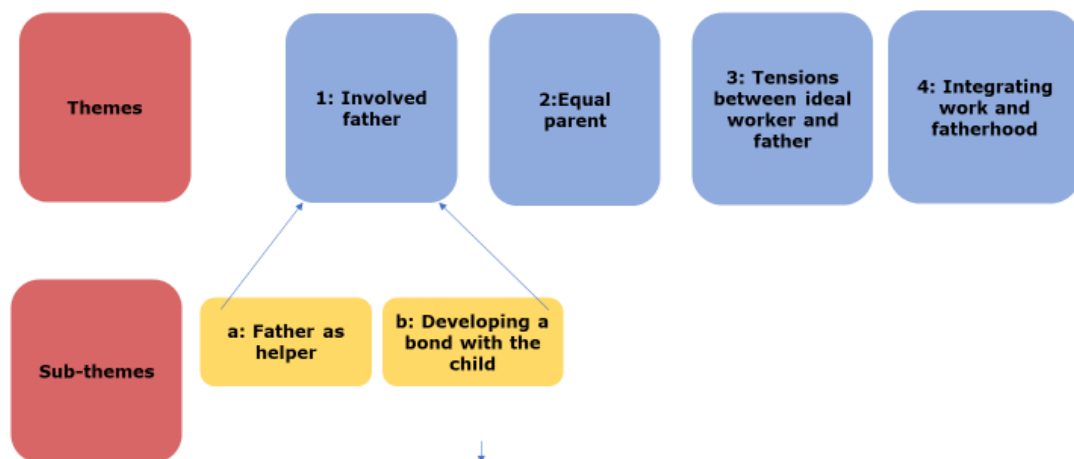
are related to combining work and fatherhood: 'tension between ideal worker and father' and 'integrating work and fatherhood'.

#### 4. Results

With a basis in the research questions set out in section 1 and the analysis of the data as described in section 3, four main themes were identified. These are set out in Figure 1. Research question 1 asked what fatherhood norms are reflected in the interviews, and two related themes were identified: (1) Involved father and (2) Equal parent. The involved father theme was found to comprise two sub-themes, (1a) Father as helper and (1b) Developing a bond with the child. Research question 2 asked about the relationship between fatherhood and work norms, and a third theme was identified: (3) Tensions between ideal worker and father. Research question 3 concerned the impact of paternity leave on the fathers' perception of their role in the family, and a fourth theme was identified: (4) Integrating work and fatherhood.

The interviewed group of fathers is particularly interesting as they were pioneers in experiencing a new corporate global leave scheme. The results emerging from the analysis of the interviews are important as they point to new insights into fathers' sense of agency related to managing work-life pressures.

Figure 1: Themes and sub-themes



##### 4.1 Theme 1: Involved father

The fathers in the sample all emphasised the involved father as the ideal. The analysis of fatherhood norms showed that all 13 informants displayed similar views regardless of the amount of leave they

took (from 12 to 30 weeks), and whether they took leave with the mother or on their own. Theme 1 was identified as *involved father*, which may not be surprising considering that all the fathers took extensive leave to be with their children. The instances of this theme turned out to relate to two aspects of involved fatherhood, (a) *the father as helper* (to the mother) and (b) *developing a bond with the child(ren)* and these have been posited as sub-themes to theme 1. Eleven of the fathers describe themselves as either being '*involved*' (a word used by both native and non-native speakers of English) or '*hands-on*' (a phrase used only by informants who were native speakers of English). The two fathers who did not use these expressions still indicated that they were actively participating fathers in relation to being an involved father. Unsolicited, seven fathers mention the task of changing nappies/diapers as a concrete example of their involvement with the child. The informants' answers revealed that this kind of activity in fact represents a behavioural distinction that separates their generation from the previous ones.

I suspect my dad never changed a nappy or did anything in terms of being hands-on (Tony). Several of the fathers explicitly acknowledge the importance of paternity leave in enabling them to be more hands-on and involved in their child's life and development:

This paternal policy that we have, which allows us to exercise this role, to actually be involved (Ali).

Many of the fathers, regardless of what country they have grown up in or now live in, see the development of the involved fatherhood norm as a consequence of a generational change in gender norms as women focus more on their careers after having children.

I think fathers are a bit more hands on, probably, than they used to be in my dad's generation. I think when I was growing up, my dad would be at work all day, and my mum would look after the kids. I think now, especially with women being very more career minded, the balance has shifted across a lot. And yeah, I think it's a bit more 50:50 than it ever used to be (Martin).

In this example, Martin refers to the practice of equal parenting (see theme 2), emphasising that this is driven by women's work participation. Another driver for changed gender norms is emphasised by Xavier, who focuses on the positive aspects of involved fatherhood and that this is something men embrace, hence the opportunity has contributed to increased agency as fathers.

I think I can see dads in general are really happy to embrace that new side, which we have not necessarily grown up with (Xavier).



All the interviewed fathers see paid paternity leave from their MNC as facilitating involved fatherhood and agency both during the leave and afterwards. They make no explicit references to being breadwinners, but they all returned to full-time work following paternity leave. It may appear that the fathers in the current study only started doing housework while on paternity leave, although the examples above from Martin and Xavier indicate that today many men tend to be involved in domestic work. There is a clearly expressed divergence between these fathers' involvement in domestic labour and the more traditional masculine norms surrounding their own fathers.

### **Sub-theme (a): The father as a helper**

The helper sub-theme was uncovered when asking the fathers to describe their experience of being on leave (see question 2 in the interview guide). Eight informants describe themselves as helping out or supporting the mother.

My wife was breastfeeding, but it meant I felt I could help and contribute with sort of making sure the house was clean, having the baby when she's... to give her rest (Tony).

You're allowed to support your partner through the early nights when the baby can't sleep (Tim)

It was obviously a big help for her for to have me there full time (Lucas)

The help alluded to general chores (housework) as well as tasks specifically related to the baby, such as changing nappies or bottle-feeding if the child was fed by formula. The main reason for the prominence of this sub-theme may be that the fathers who talk about this all took leave together with the mother. Several of them comment specifically on making this choice. Another reason is that a prerequisite for taking the leave was that it had to be taken within the child's first year. This is the period when mothers in the UK are entitled to national statutory maternity leave.

### **Sub-theme (b): Developing a bond with the child**

While the helper role mainly focuses on what activities the father carries out, sub-theme (b) reflects more relational aspects of fatherhood. In the next example, Tony describes how taking part in the basic act of feeding his child contributes to a stronger connection with his second child than with his first, who was breastfed.

BABY had to be bottle-fed. And I felt that in terms of myself and having that connection, I got more of a connection, probably, with BABY because it didn't really matter who fed him (Tony).

Several of the fathers stress the importance of spending time together with the child for developing a close relationship.

I could see her changing every day, and there was just more interaction with her, and I'd see her obviously a lot more than I would have done if I was going to work every day (Lucas).

Our relationship changed, and she got very used to me. I was there for emotional comfort as well (John).

The father in the next example emphasised the bonding process in his justification for taking leave. When interviewed, Jose was about to take 16 weeks' paternity leave for his second child under the new leave policy, and he also anticipated that it would generate a stronger bond between him and his older child.

What I call this bond, this connection with my kid; I will also be more present to the older daughter (Jose).

Taken together, the examples cited to illustrate the two sub-themes reflect the two-sided importance of parental leave for the father: the ability to provide support for his partner, including child-related tasks such as feeding and nappy-changing, as well as the opportunity to establish a stronger emotional connection with their child.

#### **4.2 Theme 2: Equal parent**

As sub-theme (1a) demonstrates, most of the fathers refer to taking a helping role during the leave. However, several fathers state that following their return to work they now share housework and childcare equally with their partner. It thus appears that taking paternity leave acted as a facilitator of equal parenting regardless of whether the fathers acted as sole carers or being on leave with the mother. The fathers do not use the label *equal parent* explicitly but indicate that they see themselves an equal to the mother in terms of managing child-related activities.

We just muck in together the whole time, I think my wife already does the lion's share of the cooking, and I do the lion's share of washing like clothes and kids' clothes and stuff (John).

I think now we try to do things, from my experience, doing things as a team. We share the duties, even in the morning (Tony).

Sometimes it's me that takes the kids to school and picks them up. Sometimes it's the wife, sometimes I feed them, sometimes she does. There are no specific roles (Pedro).

As already mentioned (4.1), five fathers took on the role of sole carer for their children when taking paternity leave. Although they found it tough, they emphasise how it increased their parenting competence.

So, I was the primary caregiver for BABY during that time, which of course you're thrown right into it then. And changing diapers and feeding him and getting him to nap and all that kind of stuff. And it's a lot, but looking back, I think that was very valuable. It made me a lot more comfortable being a parent (Chuck).

It was tough. And there was a lot to do, I mean, obviously as you know. It was quite intense, but that's how I think I created the great bonds. And I'm now able to do lots in helping with the kids, I think because of that time I've spent with BABY being completely alone and have to figure out everything (Xavier).

Interestingly, Xavier early in the interview claims that children will always be closer to the mother. However, in the example below he contradicts this claim and emphasises that when given the chance of being sole carer, fathers may create a similarly close bond:

That special bond that a baby has with his mother, to create that, you've got to be alone with the child in the way, to create that bond (Xavier).

Thus, Xavier ends up promoting men as equal parents. This and other examples indicate that even taking paternity leave together with the mother appears to encourage equal parenting after the leave.

Another father praises his MNC for offering equal parental leave to mothers and fathers:

So, when MNC said they were going to do equal parental leave for six months, I thought it was really refreshing that there was no distinction between primary and secondary carer. And I often think that that definition by business really misunderstands the family dynamic because we're both primary carers (John).

In this example, John refers to a more implicit parental gender bias that exists in other organisations in Australia. He is pleased that in his organisation the new policy demonstrates gender equality, both in terms of its labelling and content.

#### **4.3 Theme 3: Tension between ideal worker and involved father**

Since the fathers clearly appreciate being involved with their children, many of them find it challenging to split their time between work and caring for the child. They have been socialised to

believe in being an ideal worker, but now they see the father roles as changing or having changed over the last decades to that of an involved father.

The interviews reveal that underlying the sensed challenge of combining family and work is a fear of losing out career-wise.

Will I keep my role? Am I going to be at a disadvantage being off? You know, they're real sort of fears. I'm not saying women don't go through it as well, but I think it's quite new for men to think about this (Tony).

Obviously, there was always the question. How will it be seen? I remember at the time I had some comments from management when I took time off, which made me think, well, I'm glad I didn't take six or nine months. I'm glad I just took three months (Xavier).

Xavier demonstrates one concrete manifestation of the tension between ideal worker and involved father; a shorter leave than the father was entitled to (see Table 1). Xavier did not feel sufficiently supported by management in his MNC. Although most of the pioneering fathers in the current study found their workplaces supportive of the new policy, several (like Tony and Xavier) still had concerns about whether their career would be negatively affected. Luis, who also took less leave than offered, 12 instead of 16 weeks (see Table 1), gave the reason that he was unable to take all the leave due to the project he was managing at the time.

On the other hand, Pedro, who holds a management position in the same MNC as Luis, describes that he started out being reluctant to prioritising time with children over business needs but ended up fully embracing paternity leave. His eventual decision to take the leave was in fact due to pressure from his own manager, who told him that taking leave was non-negotiable.

At first I was a little bit reactive I must say. "But how on Earth am I going to take leave in such a troublesome time?" But it worked well and I'm glad we did for me and for the company, because afterwards I also heard from many that this was seen as a very good example actually to take the leave that we're entitled to, even in tough times for the company, for the business. But if it depended upon me solely, at that time, I would have not taken the leave (Pedro).

Pedro thus bears witness to a personal transition process from being focused solely on business needs to becoming committed to prioritising time with his family.

If I decide to have another one [child], we would like to have that [leave] again, as that does make a difference (Pedro).

As regards attitudes from peers, most of the fathers (85%) experienced positive reactions to taking paternity leave from colleagues, friends and family, as shown in the next example, which may have affected their willingness to take leave:

My friends think this is wonderful and they are envious of this type of benefit (Chuck).

At the same time, two fathers refer to their own parents' concern and negative reactions when they told them they were taking paternity leave.

My dad was sort of a bit sceptical about whether you should do it, really. Whether you should take time off from a job, he's a bit old school (Sebastian).

The previous example provides a good demonstration of changing fatherhood norms through the informant's rejection of his father's '*old school*' fatherhood norm and his own implicit adherence to an involved father or equal parent norm.

Another example indicating a generational difference within the workplace comes from Xavier:

But you know, male management of a certain age, which, you know, still, see this as, you know, it's a holiday. A six-month holiday, paid. It disrupts the team because that person needs to be replaced (Xavier).

By labelling them 'management of a certain age', Xavier is also distancing himself from their beliefs and generation. Since 85% of the fathers experienced positive reactions to them taking paternity leave and even envy from their peers who did not have access to such leave, this also indicates a generational difference and potentially a new sense of agency regarding having the choice to take time off work to spend it with the children.

However, seven of the interviewed fathers report that some men in their environment refer to paternity leave as a holiday. Four of the fathers in the study (including Xavier and Tony) explicitly reject this label.

Wow six months you're very lucky, you're going to have a, it implies that you're on holiday. And I think that the reality is very different. Don't get me wrong, I had a fantastic time being off, but it's certainly not a holiday. It's certainly not (Tony).

Similarly, Jose describes how he too, when the policy was being introduced, thought of paternity leave as a holiday but then changed his perceptions after taking the leave:

Oh great, whenever I have a kid, I'm going to have like 16 weeks off, right? That would be amazing, but yeah, so this is something that came to my mind first. But then this of course

changed because it's not really days off. You're going to be involved with several duties while at home (Jose).

The reference to paternity leave being like a holiday comes from men who have not yet experienced it; hence this serves as an example of the difference between attitudes towards and actual practices of paternity leave.

#### **4.4 Theme 4: Integrating work and fatherhood norms**

Theme 4 focuses on the post paternity leave period as a distinction from the previous theme. Despite the fact that there may be tension between being an involved father and a dedicated employee, many of the fathers express that they now manage to integrate the two roles. The three first examples mentioned under theme 2 (equal parent) emphasises how they continued to share domestic work with their partner after the paternity leave period. Although theme 3 showed that several fathers had concerns that taking paternity leave might have a negative effect on their career, they all chose to take the leave.

And we said, is this a good idea? Is it the right thing to do to step away from work for six months? Am I risking my career progression? And the way I always thought of it was that this career will always be there, and if I press pause for six months, I can pick it up again, whereas if I don't take this, it's gone forever (John).

Statements like these indicate that the fathers appear to have come to terms with integrating their work and care identities. In the next example, Luis indicates that he continues to be an involved father also after returning to work, despite finding it a challenge.

It's very difficult. I really didn't imagine how difficult it was to adjust our routine with the routine of the kids and the routine of the work (Luis).

Thus, Luis recognises that combining fatherhood and work after being on leave requires adjustment for both parents. The fathers all returned to full-time work, and did not consider working part-time, although MNC3 offers part-time work following parental leave. However, several of them mention that they appreciate some flexibility around being able to work from home during and after the covid pandemic.

### **5. Discussion**

The current study aims to explore how the opportunity to take extensive paternity leave offered globally through a new policy in four multinational corporations is experienced by thirteen managerial level employees with different national backgrounds and working in different countries.

Taking a qualitative approach and combining purposeful and opportunity sampling of interview data from informants who had personal experience with the new scheme, the study set out to identify recurring themes in the interviews related to fatherhood norms, work norms and the fathers' sense of agency.

The overarching finding is that the informants viewed their MNC's new policy as enabling them to practice the norm of involved fatherhood, which implied increasing their agency as fathers. 85% of the fathers chose to take the full paternity leave quota offered by their company, whether that was 30, 26 or 16 weeks. They all returned to full-time work but continued to practice involved fatherhood. As regards agency, Kosakowska-Berezecka et al. (2018) found it surprising that men conducting domestic work in Norway were perceived as more agentic than women. More recently, Atkinson (2022), who conducted a literature review on paternity leave research, concluded that fathers' agency is related to practicing the work-life balance of their choice. Atkinson (2022) specifically called for new empirical studies on paternity leave that emphasise its relevance for facilitating work-life agency, and the current study is the first to do so in a global organisational context. The current study presents a significant empirical finding on fathers' agency related to the work-life balance and is the first to do so in a global organisational context.

The current study has shown that employed white-collar father employees in MNCs will spend more time with their family when given the opportunity and when they experience support from colleagues and peers. Paternity leave clearly facilitates the fathers' agency, and the flexible organisation of the globally available policies, e.g., in terms of taking leave together with the mother or alone, has contributed to the high uptake.

The study also investigates what fatherhood norms are reflected in the interviews with fathers from different national and work contexts (RQ1). An important finding here is that the informants already shared the norm of involved fatherhood, although they originate from and work in countries where neither statutory paternity leave, nor gender norms or the work culture facilitate this norm. The fathers describe involved fatherhood as comprising both specific tasks they help out with and the type of bond they develop with the child. This dual description aligns with the findings related to involved fatherhood reported by Brandth and Kvande (2022) and Molander et al. (2019). Six of the fathers have grown up in the UK, where the public discourse surrounding leave for fathers is related to 'helping' mothers (Mohun Himmelweit, 2023), which may have influenced these fathers' perception of their role and how to relate to their partner. Another way to explain the fathers' involvement is to link it to the prevalence of intensive parenting, which promotes parenting as being active both in the home and at work: "Men see good fathering as being involved and emotionally

present to their children in addition to their earner role” (Grunow et al., 2018, pp. 45-46). As the data collection occurred after the fathers’ paternity leave and in light of potential selection effects, it is perhaps not surprising that the theme of involved fatherhood/intensive parenting is promoted.

Another focus of the study, (RQ2), was to explore how the relationship between fatherhood norms and work norms is characterised by the fathers who took paternity leave, and if there are signs of tension between these. The informants bear witness to a tension between the breadwinner/ideal worker norm and the involved father/intensive parenting. The worry about being at a disadvantage career-wise after taking paternity leave is clearly present and so is the issue about how they will be perceived by management. At the same time, some manage to distance themselves from such worries by labelling critical attitudes as ideas of the past (*old school* and *management of a certain age*). In spite of not knowing whether or how the leave will impact their career, the fathers choose to take paternity leave as they recognise the value of this opportunity. Thus, they experience having a sense of agency as fathers related to practising work-life balance. However, there are also signs of a conflict between performing well at work and at home, or between the ideal worker/breadwinner and the involved father/intensive parent. Interestingly, only two fathers took less than the offered leave, Xavier and Luis (Table 1). While Xavier feared being judged negatively by his managers, Luis appears more focused on maintaining the status of ideal worker in his own eyes. Both examples appear to be emphasising male agency linked to assertiveness and performance, not to work-life balance. Hence, they both appear to have a strong internalised ideal worker norm, which makes them cautious (Atkinson, 2023) regarding taking their full leave entitlement. Previous research has shown that fathers wishing to take leave may experience resistance from managers (Murgia & Poggio, 2009) or being mocked, perceived as being idle and viewed with suspicion in the workplace (Kelland, Lewis & Fisher, 2022). Fathers in the corporate sector can experience a career disadvantage if they take more than two months’ leave (Aunkofer et al., 2018). All of the fathers in the current study take more than this. In this sense they may be considered as risk takers, willing to explore extending paternal agency to that of involved fatherhood/intensive parenting. Only time will tell if this has a penalising effect on their career.

However, the experience of Luis, Pedro and Jose in Brazil is unusual, as they are exposed to and accept a corporate culture that not only encourages father employees to take leave, but even more strongly encourages managers to be role models for the corporate culture. Their MNC’s culture thus contrasts sharply with the masculinised culture in Brazil but may instead reflect a changed international management ideal. Powell, Butterfield & Jiang (2021) find that the good manager ideal exhibits a decreasing emphasis on masculinity and an increasing emphasis on femininity over time, culminating in a balanced or androgynous manager profile. Furthermore, the importance of



managers as role models regarding taking paternity leave has been shown by Kangas and Lämsä (2021). Pedro in his interview mentions that he would prefer an employer that offered paternity leave as part of the package, should he decide to change companies. Hence, offering paternity leave may be beneficial to other companies in Brazil.

Although the fathers do not explicitly describe themselves as ideal workers, they demonstrate an ideal worker mentality when expressing their fear of losing out career-wise and prioritising business needs over family needs. However, it appears that the fathers have made a transition from a pure ideal worker norm to integrating it with a more involved fatherhood norm when deciding to take paternity leave, or as a result of having taken paternity leave. In the current study, involved fatherhood is found to be a lived norm (Schön & Argyris, 1996) encouraged by the four MNCs. This norm, exemplified by practicing paternity leave, contrasts sharply with findings by Burnett (2013), Foss-Heggem (2017), Liebig & Oechsle (2017), Kelland et al. (2022) and Petts et al. (2022) that paternity leave is simply an available policy and not encouraged or practiced by fathers in corporations. Recent research (e.g. Kelland et al., 2022 and Petts et al., 2022) has found that fathers taking paternity leave tend to be perceived as less committed to work and may become stigmatised. Hence, their sense of agency to pursue involved fatherhood is limited (Atkinson, 2022). However, this is not the case in the present study, as the four MNCs by offering extensive and paid leave encourage the fathers to combine fatherhood and their work role. It thus appears that many of the fathers through this policy have achieved stronger agency or a changed view of what male agency may entail.

An important focus of the study, (RQ3), was to explore the impact of paternity leave on the fathers' perception of agency and their role in the family. In terms of leave taking, regardless of which MNC the father works for or what country he works in, 85% took the standard paternity leave offered by their corporation. A majority, (62%) of the fathers chose to share the care with the child's mother, while 38% practised sole care. Xavier, who experienced both situations, expresses himself in paradoxical terms regarding whether he prefers sole or shared care. Although he found sole care difficult as regards the amount of practical tasks involved, he admits that it made him create a closer bond with his child than shared care. Ultimately, he realised that paternity leave as a sole carer created a similar bond between father and child as between mother and child. In line with Brandth and Kvande (2022), the present study, too, finds that the experience of sole care is perceived as a step towards equal parenting, developing the fathers' competence, confidence and the bond with the child. However, findings from the present study indicate that taking paternity leave together with the mother also appears to promote equal parenting between the mother and father upon return to work. When talking about their return to work following paternity leave, many of the fathers

(regardless of whether they were sole or shared carers) state that they continue sharing tasks in the home with their partners, as equal parents. Equal parenting thus appears to be less related to whether the fathers were sole carers and more related to the experience of spending considerable time with their families. This raises the question if fathers taking leave under generous policies have much the same experiences. If this is the case, we may conclude that a particular merit of this radical new policy is increased gender equality among mothers and fathers.

Informants Tony and Martin point to a generational change regarding what constitutes male agency. While they, along with the other fathers in the study practice male agency by choosing to be involved in childcare and housework, their own fathers seemed to practice male agency by focusing on their careers. One factor that may have contributed to the informants' sense of agency is that 85% of them experienced positive reactions and even envy from peers regarding their leave taking. These peers did not have similar opportunities to take leave. This finding is in line with research from Thébaud and Pedulla (2016) showing that family policies are perceived more positively by men when they believe that most of their peers would prefer to have the same opportunities. Similarly, a study by Dahl, Løken, and Mogstad (2014) shows that men in Norway were more likely to avail themselves of paternity leave if their male coworkers or brothers had taken it. Hence, positive attitudes from peers may have been a crucial factor influencing the fathers in the study to take paternity leave.

The fathers in the current study can be classified in four ways regarding how they practiced paternity leave: (1) as a sole carer, (2) as a shared carer with the mother, (3) taking full leave entitlement and (4) taking reduced leave entitlement. The classification may be useful as it represents a specific contextual condition that is likely to have an impact on the fathers' sense of agency and their perception of their role in the family.

In addition to the findings from the interviews, company reports and data from HR managers in the MNCs, show that the policies have achieved high uptake and that it is common for fathers to take the full leave available (author, forthcoming). As the policies are described as successful both by the father informants, HR managers and company reports, this strengthens their relation to facilitating paternal agency. The theoretical contribution of this paper is related to extending fathers' agency regarding how they manage the work-life balance (Atkinson, 2022), adding to the literature on male agency. Agency in this context means that the fathers feel more able to practice the work-life balance of their choice and that it is legitimate to acknowledge the conflict between their role as a parent and that of an employee. Acknowledging such a conflict also means challenging the assumption of the ideal worker norm and traditional manhood theories. This paper emphasises the empowering function of equal parental leave entitlements and practices when supported by

management. Gender regimes in MNCs are also related to management ideals, and there has been a change from a masculine to a more feminine or androgynous manager ideal (Powell, Butterfield & Jiang, 2021), which may include a stronger acknowledgement of work-life balance.

The paper is an example of phenomenon-driven research, where "the emergence of a new phenomenon is a starting point in the process of discovery and in building knowledge" (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014, p. 486). Phenomenon-driven research has clear implications for practice (Schwarz & Stensaker, 2014). In the current study, global parental leave offered in a corporate context turns out to be an enabling factor for father employees who wish to practice being involved in the care of their children. A practical implication for MNCs concerns offering father employees flexible and concrete solutions as regards combining work and family life. A flexible organisational strategy regarding paternity leave is to give father employees the opportunity to choose if they wish to take full or reduced leave and if they wish to spend it with or without the mother of the child(ren).

## **6. Limitations and future research**

This is a small qualitative study of 13 fathers' experiences in organisations that were first movers in offering global parental leave. Limitations include potential selection effects from using an opportunity sample. In addition, there is a lack of comparison with fathers who did not take leave in the four MNCs. Hence, it would be interesting if future studies focus on comparing the experiences and views of father employees who avail of paternity leave with that of father employees who are non-takers. One might speculate whether it is more likely for men with gender egalitarian attitudes to choose to work for family friendly organisations. Furthermore, men who endorse egalitarian gender ideologies may be more likely to take an active role in housework, as asserted by (Thébaud & Pedulla, 2016). In addition, there may be social desirability effects related to how much time the informants self-report that they spent on housework and childcare. Furthermore, the study captured attitudes towards global paternity leave during the covid-19 pandemic, which meant more flexibility in the participants' work-life balance. More research is also needed to capture any long-lasting effects on fathers' attitudes to paternity leave.

However, the insights provided by the data may provide a useful starting point from which to discuss findings from further studies on paternity leave among working fathers. As more MNCs follow suit, a more nuanced picture of how such a family benefit impacts family/work relations may be drawn. The current study relies on interview data, which limits insights into actual practices. The informants represent heterosexual fathers in mostly Western societies. Interviewing diverse parents from a broader range of national cultures and from non-heterosexual backgrounds would be valuable. It would also be interesting to understand more about women's experience of men taking parental

leave. Additionally, from a business perspective, it would be valuable to explore the actual implementation process of such a global family policy in MNCs. As regards whether taking paternity leave of up to 30 weeks will have a penalising effect on career prospects, only time will tell, and this may also be an interesting topic to research.

## **7. Concluding remarks**

The globally available paternity leave offered by four early-mover MNCs contributes to challenging the ideal worker norm within such companies and extend male agency to making choices regarding the work-life balance. Somewhat contrary to expectations rising from previous studies on fatherhood and men's domestic work practices in various contexts, the current study finds that the interviewed fathers share the practice of involved fatherhood/intensive parenting. Hence, the new leave policy may be seen as a facilitator of paternal agency and to contribute to promoting gender equality at work and at home.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

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### 6.3 Paper 3

**Title:** Global Paternity Leave as a DEI initiative in four Multinational Corporations.

**Author:** Agnes Marie Bamford

**Forthcoming (in press) at journal:** *Lingue Culture Mediazioni/ Languages Cultures Mediation* – 11 (2024)<sup>1</sup>

**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 & 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 & inclusion or equality & 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 & Kvande, 2022; Earle, Raub, Sprague, & Heymann, 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 corporate 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, & Piekkari, 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, p. 208). DM policies and programmes have been central in enforcing inclusion of diverse groups in global organisations (Hansen & 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 & 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 & Janssens, 2004). According to the economic rationality discourse, “Diverse employees bring additional value to the organization” (ibid., 66). For Ely & Thomas, a leading principle is to ensure market shares by leveraging similarities between workforce and customers (Hansen & 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 & Seierstad, 2017; Özbilgin et al., 2016). 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 & Koller, 2018, p. 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, & Alexandra 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, & 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 & Deven, 2015, p. 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 & Gartzia, 2023). This often results in parental leave being taken only by the mother (Moss & 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 & 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. RQ1 focuses on DM perspectives and discourses as objectives for GPL in the four MNCs, while RQ2 seeks to identify factors that may contribute to successful implementation.

RQ1: What traces of DM perspectives and discourses are reflected in the material?

RQ2: 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 Equileap<sup>18</sup> and the Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index (GEI)<sup>19</sup>, 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 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 1). 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.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://equileap.com/>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.bloomberg.com/gei>

**Table 1. Information about the father employees**

\* Indicates the length of leave taken by the father for a second child.

	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

**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

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.

### **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 (2011)'s 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 & 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. RQ1 asked what traces of DM perspectives and discourses are reflected in the material. This will be discussed in sections 5.1-5.2. RQ2 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 & 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 & 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 & Blake, 1991; Ely & 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 & 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 & 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 & Janssens, 2004) and inclusion (Darics & Koller, 2018).

To sum up, traces of several DM perspectives and discourses have been identified in the material, emphasising primarily cross-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 & 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 & Kvande, 2022). Unpaid leave may also prevent fathers' leave-taking (e.g., Atkinson, 2023; Petts et al., 2022), while well-paid leave increases uptake (Brandth & 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 & 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, Gatrell, Cooper, & Sparrow, 2013; Kaufman, Petts, Mize, & Wield, 2023; Petts et al., 2022; Rehel, 2014). 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 & 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 (Brandth & Kvande, 2022; Earle et al., 2023; Valarino, 2019), 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.

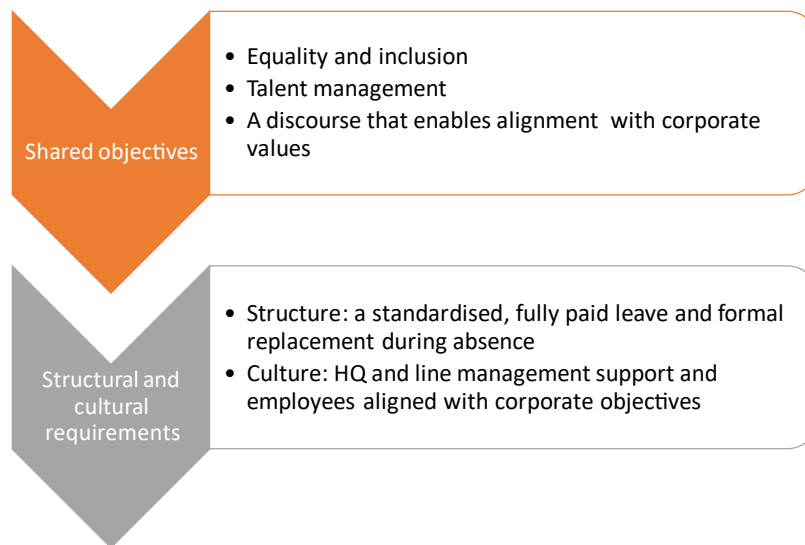
### **5.5 A framework for successful implementation of GPL**

Inspired by Welch et al. (2011)'s theorising from case studies (see 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).

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.



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



## 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.

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## 7. Appendices

### A) 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?

## **B) 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?