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

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).

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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 counties 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**[1] and the **Bloomberg Equality Index (GEI)**[2], 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).

Company	Weeks of fully paid global paternity leave	Year policy launched	Headquarters	Number of words in the texts
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

[1] Available online at: https://equileap.com/
[2] 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 preferrable 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).

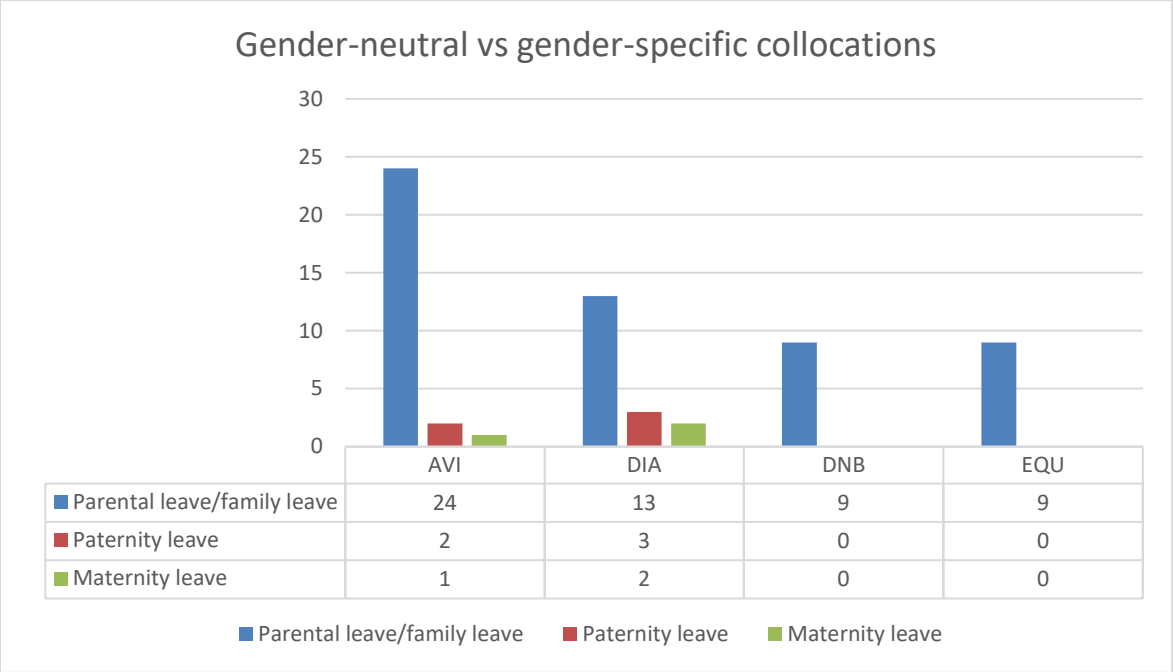

Figure 1. Number of occurrences of collocations relating to the policy

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*.

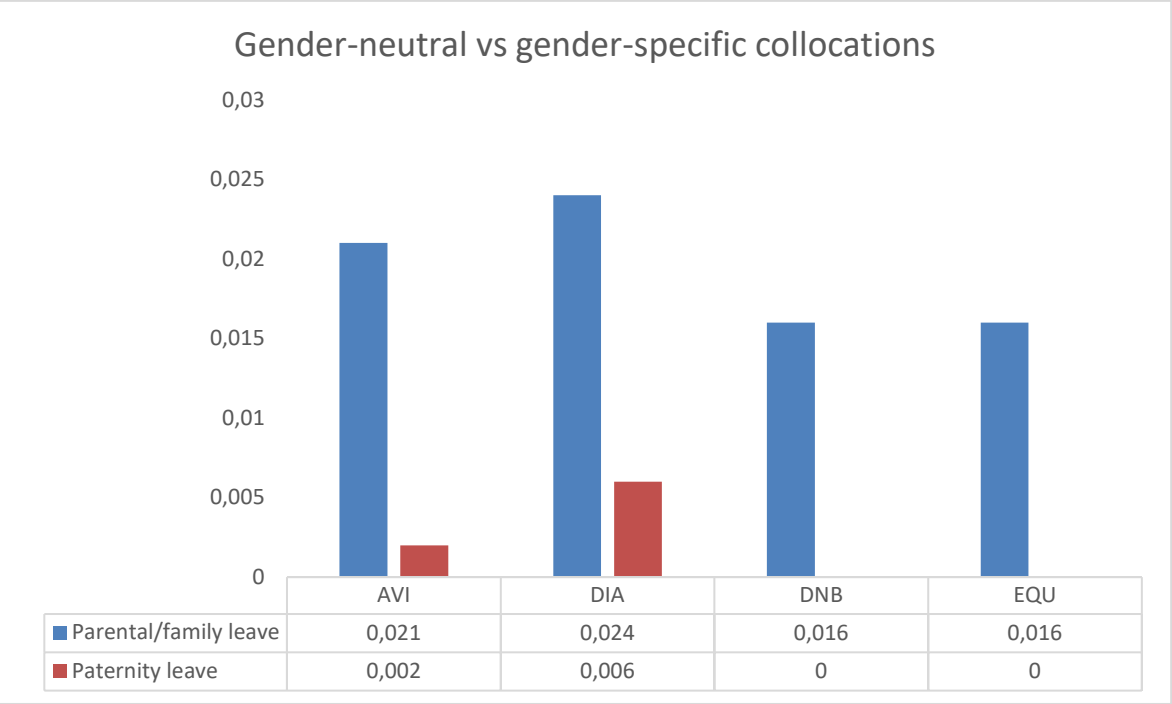

Figure 2. Relative frequency of collocations relating to the policy

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**
The personalised father(s)	**AVI**: *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]* **DIA**: *It gives me great pride to work for Diageo – introducing such inclusive, progressive and bold policies.* **DNB**: ***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.*

	EQU: *On 6 May I start my 16 weeks parental leave paid by Equinor, which is double what my wife was able to take.*
Father and female partner	**DIA**: *When we found out 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.* **EQU**: *On 6 May I start my 16 weeks parental leave paid by Equinor, which is double what my wife was able to take.*
The official MNC voice	**AVI**: *Aviva is one of a growing number of UK companies offering employees equal parental leave.* **EQU**: *By giving time to bond with a new child, we provide more flexibility and support to employees becoming parents*
Company executive	**DNB:** *[…] 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* **EQU**: *With our global parental leave policy, I believe we are leading in our industry and beyond, says [NAMED] and titled executive*
Fathers in general	**AVI**: *Just 1% of UK fathers took shared parental leave in 2018* **DNB**: *The global scheme has especially improved the rights of fathers in South and North America, Asia and Central Europe…*
Acquaintances of the father	**EQU**: *My friends think this is wonderful and they are envious of this type of benefit, [NAME] says*

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.

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

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	*What if both parents could take an equal amount of paid parental leave?*
	The chance to bond
	No longer a 'woman's job'
	A "supreme lack of awareness"
	Take full advantage of leave

	About Aviva's parental leave policy
DIA	*Global standards on maternity and paternity leave*
	Free to enjoy home life. Free to succeed at work
DNB	*Equal parental leave for all employees*
	Small part of a long working life
EQU	*Parental leave part of our diversity and inclusion effort*

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 legitimation 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 e*mbracing 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 gender-neutral 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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