



# Translation of equality, diversity, and inclusion ideas in a foreign subsidiary

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## Abstract

Drawing on a sociological approach, this paper examines how the subsidiaries of multinational companies (MNCs) translate equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) ideas from their headquarters (HQs). International business (IB) studies emphasize the context-sensitive and socially constructed nature of EDI. Through a single case study of an Italian subsidiary translating EDI ideas from its U.S. HQs, we present a power-laden EDI translation process and broaden the extant research by revealing the power relations underlying the EDI translation process. We portray the sociology of MNCs in which different professional categories engage in “translation spaces”, i.e., social spaces where they interact throughout various phases of the translation process. Specifically, we identify two key phases: the signification and negotiation phases. In these phases, intentional and unintentional translators play varying roles in either facilitating or hindering the translation of EDI ideas within the subsidiary. Thus, we first advance the sociology of EDI translation in IB by revealing how EDI understanding is constructed and reconstructed through the interactions of translators. Second, we contribute to translation research in IB by depicting the iterative and recursive nature of the translation process. Finally, we reveal forms of resistance to EDI and the emergence of new power relations shaped by professional diversity within the subsidiary, unearthing the generative nature of the EDI translation process in MNCs.

**Keywords** Translation · Equality · Diversity · Inclusion · Multinational company · Case study · Process

## Introduction

Individuals increasingly manifest a range of visible and invisible differences related to race, gender, professional status, and other categories, contributing to a more diverse workforce composition within multinational companies (MNCs). Moreover, the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda calls for MNCs to contribute to tackling challenges related to “gender equality” and “reduced inequalities” within and

between countries. Accordingly, many MNCs are progressively adopting targeted corporate practices, often under the umbrella of “equality, diversity, and inclusion” (EDI). This entails the dismantling of barriers rooted in differences and the promotion of more inclusive attitudes in the workplace, offering equal opportunities to all employees, regardless of their differences, and contributing to the overall betterment of society (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). Achieving such a cultural shift demands time and collective efforts within MNCs at the corporate, subsidiary, and individual levels (Hennekam et al., 2017). In this context, a central challenge for MNCs is fostering EDI across the multiple countries in which their subsidiaries operate (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). EDI is highly context-sensitive, with variations in regulatory and sociopolitical environments shaping how “E,” “D,” and “I” are prioritized across countries. For example, U.S. MNCs emphasize diversity and inclusion for competitive advantage, whereas European MNCs focus on equality through social justice frameworks (Özbilgin, 2024; Tatli et al., 2012). Thus, headquarters (HQs) and subsidiaries’ countries may differ in terms of the meaning of EDI,

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as well as the related normative foundations and regulatory frameworks. Moreover, EDI practices in subsidiaries can destabilize entrenched power relations that are deeply embedded in both organizational and national contexts (Hennekam et al., 2017; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011). By challenging existing power relations, these practices can expose structural barriers faced by underrepresented groups (Hennekam et al., 2017; Özbilgin, 2024).

To support MNCs' transfer of EDI practices, scholars have developed a relational framework (Hennekam et al., 2017; Özbilgin, 2024) that aligns with the sociological approach in international business (IB) by recognizing the contextual and multilevel understanding of EDI. The sociological approach emphasizes the social nature of the MNC, suggesting that the interactions between MNC actors enable the social construction of EDI understanding (Koveshnikov et al., 2019). This approach challenges static views of EDI, suggesting that EDI meanings are continuously shaped by the actors involved and the contexts they inhabit.

Although many studies in IB have explored how MNCs and their subsidiaries address EDI across countries (e.g., Bader et al., 2022; Ferner et al., 2005), investigations of the actions and interactions that shape the understanding of EDI within a foreign subsidiary, i.e., microlevel analysis, still seem “at the periphery” of IB research (Van der Straaten et al., 2023: 1624). Since the understanding of EDI is context sensitive (Fortwengel et al., 2023; Thein et al., 2010), current studies on the transfer of organizational practices do not properly explain the process through which EDI practices are decontextualized “from their time and place of origin” (namely, HQs; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996: 18), and the related *ideas are translated* in a new context (namely, a foreign subsidiary). The organizational translation approach, grounded in Scandinavian institutionalism, suggests that while practices are transferable across countries on behalf of MNCs, their enactment in a subsidiary varies depending on the translation process shaped by subsidiary actors and the local context (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996).

Drawing upon the sociological approach in IB (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001; Koveshnikov et al., 2019; Thein et al., 2010) and studies of translation processes (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010), we explore *how subsidiaries conduct a translation process of EDI ideas from HQs*. We investigate the translation process of EDI ideas within an Italian subsidiary from its U.S. HQs by analyzing the case study of “2LMP” (the MNC's name is anonymized), which operates in the healthcare industry in the U.S. and internationally through foreign subsidiaries in four different nations.

Our study reveals that subsidiary actors either enable or hinder the translation process on the basis of their professional category and the different understandings of EDI that arise from it. Additionally, we conceptualize a *power-laden*

*EDI translation process*, as the translation of EDI significantly shapes the power relations inherent within the foreign subsidiary. This is of paramount importance because intrasubsidary relations impact HQ-subsidiary relationships and, consequently, MNCs' transnational strategies (Ciuk et al., 2019). The way through which subsidiary actors translate EDI ideas cannot be taken for granted within an MNC. By analyzing this process, we offer three contributions. First, we advance the sociology of EDI translation by showing how actors belonging to different professional categories interact in designated translation spaces in which they construct and reconstruct their understanding of EDI (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). Second, we contribute to translation studies in IB. By employing a microlevel analysis of the translation process within the subsidiary, we identify two key phases of the translation process (i.e., signification and negotiation) and highlight the specific roles (i.e., intentional and unintentional) that translators, influenced by their professional categories, play in this process. Our in-depth analysis reveals that translating EDI ideas imparts distinct meanings to different professional categories within a subsidiary, necessitating an iterative and recursive translation process. Finally, we reveal that the translation of EDI ideas actively shapes power relations between professional groups within the subsidiary while simultaneously revealing forms of resistance to EDI. We highlight a power-laden EDI translation process that reinforces the hierarchical divides inherent in the professional diversity within the subsidiary, revealing its generative nature.

We structure our paper as follows. In the next section, we review the EDI literature and research on translation processes in the IB field. Successively, we describe the methodology adopted in this study. We then present our case study and discuss our findings. Finally, we discuss our contributions to IB and managerial implications before presenting our conclusions.

## EDI in MNCs: A translation approach

### Defining EDI in IB

Given the rising trend of global mobility and the expansive reach of many companies, a growing number of MNCs are now faced with the imperative of effectively managing an increasingly diverse workforce (Ciuk et al., 2023; Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). Consequently, recent IB studies have progressively emphasized the importance of EDI research (see a review by Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). Many existing IB studies have explored the management of workforce diversity as a strategic resource to increase the performance of MNCs and their subsidiaries, contributing to the development of the “business case for diversity” (e.g., Donnelly,



2015; Saeed et al., 2024). Since the late 1980s, U.S. MNCs have adopted a performance-oriented perspective, highlighting the competitive advantages associated with the management of workforce diversity (Tatli et al., 2012). In contrast, European MNCs have approached workforce diversity from a social justice standpoint, prioritizing equality through moral and ethical dimensions (Özbilgin, 2024; Tatli et al., 2012). Accordingly, workforce diversity management across nations reflects two distinct foundations: one driven by instrumental and strategic goals and the other driven by increasingly focused on principles of human rights and equality, grounded in social and moral rationales (Özbilgin, 2024). The former, particularly prevalent in U.S. contexts, has led to a narrower emphasis on diversity and inclusion (the “D” and “I” in EDI), often overshadowing broader systemic issues of inequality, represented by the “E” for equality (Özbilgin, 2024). For example, in France, EDI ideas are deeply rooted in state regulations inspired by the principles of the French Revolution, whereas in the U.S., they tend to align more closely with performative business objectives (Özbilgin, 2024; Tatli et al., 2012).

Acknowledging that the studies we draw upon utilize different approaches – some focusing on diversity (e.g., Ferner et al., 2005; Hennekam et al., 2017), others on diversity and inclusion (e.g., Donnelly, 2015; Noon & Ogbonna, 2021), and others specifically on EDI (e.g., Ciuk et al., 2023; Fitzsimmons et al., 2023) – we adopt the term “EDI” in this paper. This decision reflects the dual influences present in our case study, which is shaped by both U.S. and European contexts, thereby aiming to embrace the different but interconnected approaches represented in EDI (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023)<sup>1</sup>. To define EDI, we leverage the definitions provided in the study of Ciuk et al. (2023). Specifically, we refer to *equality* as “the way in which an individual (or group) displaying specific manifestations (of any dimension of diversity) is related to that individual’s (or group’s) (un)equal achievements, status, or access to resources” (Köllen et al., 2018: 439). The concept of equality encompasses relative equality (or equity), where resources are distributed on the basis of specific needs (Özbilgin, 2024). We indicate *diversity* as “an umbrella concept under which any individual characteristic could be subsumed, diminishing the risk of intergroup conflict between the majority and minorities” (Zanoni et al., 2010: 12). Finally, we refer to the term *inclusion* as “the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical [organizational] processes such as access to information and resources,

involvement in work groups, and ability to influence the decision-making process” (Mor-Barak & Cherin, 1998: 48).

## Addressing EDI in MNCs

Given the interconnection among *equality*, *diversity*, and *inclusion*, MNCs increasingly implement related practices (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023), serving as vehicles for their dissemination between home and host countries (Bader et al., 2022; Ferner et al., 2005; Fitzsimmons et al., 2023) and influencing the workplaces of their subsidiaries (Ferner et al., 2005; Saeed et al., 2024). Extensive research in IB has emphasized that national contexts embed societal expectations surrounding EDI, suggesting that fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces and reducing systemic inequalities within MNCs require context-sensitive, gradual processes (e.g., Beamond et al., 2016; Ferner et al., 2005; Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). IB scholars have discussed how national contexts address EDI differently, revealing the importance of conferring autonomy to subsidiaries to adapt the related practices to local requirements (Bader et al., 2022; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Ferner et al., 2005).

Most IB studies on EDI have traditionally advanced research exploring gender and national diversity in the relationships between HQs and subsidiaries (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). They have typically portrayed forms of diversity as relatively static, where cultural diversity often revolves around nationalities acquired at birth, while gender is perceived as a binary attribute, i.e., male–female (Koveshnikov et al., 2019). However, the recent *sociological* approach in IB advances the idea that actors within MNCs socially construct the understanding of EDI once considered static, continually infusing them with new meanings (see, for instance, the approach toward “doing gender in IB” in Koveshnikov et al., 2019; Fernando, 2021; Thein et al., 2010). Exploring how the understanding of EDI is socially constructed by actors within an MNC requires a microlevel analysis due to the contextual diversities between HQs and subsidiaries (Marfelt & Muhr, 2016; Vaara et al., 2021).

In line with the sociological approach in IB, some scholars have proposed a relational framework supporting the international adaptation of EDI on behalf of MNCs (Hennekam et al., 2017; Özbilgin, 2024). This framework highlights the social nature of MNCs by conceptualizing EDI ideas as fluid and context-dependent, shaped by the interactions between multiple diversity categories within MNCs (e.g., gender, race, age, and professional status; Halsema & Halsema, 2006; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012). For example, gender diversity is not viewed as an inherent characteristic of individuals but is instead constructed and reconstructed through daily workplace interactions and discussions (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001). The relational framework suggests that EDI practices are likely to fail if implemented

<sup>1</sup> We examine the differences between the U.S. HQs and the Italian subsidiary in terms of their approach to EDI in the “Data analysis” subsection. Despite these differences, we decided to use the term “EDI” throughout this paper to provide uniformity and to avoid confusing the reader with multiple acronyms. Furthermore, our objective is not to emphasize a linguistic translation process but rather to highlight an organizational translation process.



in organizational contexts that uphold a binary or static nature of EDI that confines individuals to their designated and expected roles (Halsema & Halsema, 2006; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012).

Similarly, corporate EDI practices fail within subsidiaries when they overlook embedded power structures, leading to resistance and diminishing the effectiveness of EDI efforts (Hamza-Orlinska et al., 2024; Hennekam et al., 2017; Kangas-Müller et al., 2024). In line with this, IB research has increasingly explored how power relations and status differentials among diversity categories construct the understanding of EDI (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023; Hennekam et al., 2017). MNCs function as “gendered social spaces,” emphasizing the importance of analyzing individuals and groups to explore the intraorganizational power and individual variability involved in the adoption of EDI practices (Koveshnikov et al., 2019). For example, EDI efforts aimed at including LGBTQ employees in subsidiaries located in developing countries may face opposition from colleagues, who fear stigmatization from more conservative managers (Röell et al., 2024). EDI resistance may also arise from the distinct norms and expectations inherent in different professions, leading individuals to perceive these initiatives as threats to their established professional roles (Fernando, 2021; Özbilgin, 2024). Gender diversity could be perceived to “lower[ing] the value of a profession” if that profession is typically male-dominated (Özbilgin, 2024: 68).

The current landscape of MNCs extends beyond mere corporate structures; they function as complex social spaces and transnational communities (Morgan & Kristensen, 2006), underscoring the need for a comprehensive understanding of the social relations within these organizations. Therefore, we refrain from discussing the transfer of standardized EDI practices, as it would imply believing in the feasibility of implementing a one-size-fits-all approach and taking for granted the understanding of EDI. Instead, we propose the theoretical approach of *translation* to shed light on the process in which EDI ideas are not only adapted but also interpreted and negotiated by subsidiary actors (Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010).

### Translation approach in IB

IB scholars have increasingly utilized translation approaches (for a detailed exploration, see Westney et al., 2022). Notably, the organizational translation approach, informed by Scandinavian institutionalism, has gained particular prominence in IB to analyze the translation of organizational practices or, more generally, ideas from HQs to subsidiaries within MNCs and investigate how these ideas “are reinterpreted in their new context” (e.g., Gutierrez-Huerter et al., 2020; Westney et al., 2022: 1). In this context, Czarniawska and Joerges (1996: 18) pioneeringly proposed the metaphor

of *translation* to explain the process through which ideas are “transferred from their time and place of origin and materialized again elsewhere.” Specifically, ideas need to be disembodied from the transferring unit and translated into “objects” (e.g., texts), and in turn, these objects must undergo further translation into “actions” to be successfully integrated at the receiving unit. Scandinavian researchers developed the translation approach to assign agency roles to both global and local receiving actors and reject the rationale that managerial practices can exert irresistible power over them (Boxenbaum & Pedersen, 2009; Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Wedlin & Sahlin, 2017).

Building on Scandinavian institutionalism, IB scholars have increasingly applied the organizational translation approach to investigate how ideas travel across MNC borders. This body of work identifies translators and translation processes through which an idea can be decontextualized from the originating context (usually HQs) and recontextualized in the new context (typically a foreign subsidiary). This process often unfolds through intricate microprocesses involving multiple editing phases of original practices to better suit the needs of the national and organizational context (Gutierrez-Huerter et al., 2020; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008).

Similarly, some IB scholars have focused on a different translation approach, i.e., the interlingual translation approach, which encompasses the translation process between languages in MNCs (Westney et al., 2022). This research has shown that linguistic diversity can act as both a tool for resistance and a means of control by subsidiary actors in response to corporate-level practices, revealing the power relations at play during the translation process (Ciuk et al., 2019). Additionally, these studies break down the translation process into specific phases, helping to identify when a successful linguistic translation takes place (Ciuk et al., 2019; Westney & Piekkari, 2020). For example, the phases of foreignization and domestication have been shown to facilitate practice-oriented translations within MNCs across different countries (Westney & Piekkari, 2020). These phases create translations tailored to distinct audiences. Expanding on this idea, Westney et al. (2022) introduced the concept of “translation spaces,” which are crucial for achieving “mutual comprehensibility” through translation.

In this paper, we adopt the concept of *translation* that occurs within the subsidiary after the transfer of *ideas* from the HQs. The organizational translation approach grounded in Scandinavian institutionalism allows us to reconcile the rationale that EDI practices, while object-like and able to cross countries within MNCs, can be enacted in diverse ways depending on the actors at play and their organizational contexts. This is analogous to how a text can be interpreted differently by different readers (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996). Within the context of an MNC, when the HQs aim to promote EDI in their organization overseas, subsidiaries receive



EDI ideas that are then enacted in actions through distinct phases of translation. The actions and interactions of translators during this process inherently lead to the emergence of something new (Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010; Whittle et al., 2016).

## A case study

This research presents a single case study. This methodological choice, particularly useful when the topic is not well developed in the extant literature, meets the need for a fine-grained investigation that is not reasonably possible with a large sample (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993). We select a case study that ensures that the empirical phenomenon “can be observed in a manner which facilitates theoretic insights” (Reuber & Fischer, 2022: 29). In this specific case, we study how the Italian subsidiary translates EDI ideas from its U.S. HQs. The current paper focuses on investigating the “microlevel detail of situated (inter) action” (Whittle et al., 2016: 1328), namely, how the translation process of EDI ideas occurs within the subsidiary. Moreover, the broader study provided extensive insights into the surrounding context. Case studies are widely recognized for their capacity to deliver comprehensive contextual insights (Welch et al., 2022), and they excel in examining how research participants interpret and construct meaning, thereby revealing the “meanings held by people within the case” (Stake, 2000: 441). The analysis of processes over time in single case studies reveals generative elements within social contexts, highlighting the unique factors that shape people’s behaviors (Buchanan, 1999; Pratt et al., 2022).

To bring together contextualized explanations with interpretive research traditions, we combine contextualized explanations (Welch et al., 2022) with a social constructivist approach (Stake, 2000). We investigate how actors of the subsidiary translate EDI ideas and construct meaning around them, as suggested by Czarniawska and Joerges (1996: 24): “translation encompasses both what exists and what is created.” In this context, Langley (1999) claims that qualitative data – specifically, process data – allow researchers to examine the translation process occurring over time through direct observations, interviews, and artifacts. These data reflect varying degrees of temporal embeddedness.

## Case study selection

The selection of a single case study is the outcome of a purposive case selection process that, with the advancement of the study, seems very similar to “phenomenal variation sampling” (Sandelowski, 1995). We selected the 2LMP healthcare MNC based in the U.S. and focused attention

on the translation of EDI ideas within its Italian subsidiary. 2LMP traces its origins back to the last decade of the 19th century in the U.S., evolving through a series of mergers involving hospitals and university medical centers. Today, it stands as a private leader in the healthcare industry in the U.S. The Italian chapter of 2LMP was founded in the late 1990s, owing to a public–private partnership between the U.S. 2LMP and Italian public institutions. Following a number of expansions, its Italian subsidiary now manages multiple facilities nationwide.

The choice of 2LMP is grounded in two reasons. First, it offers the possibility to focus specifically on the initial phase of translation within the subsidiary. Indeed, the translation of EDI ideas from the U.S. HQs to the Italian subsidiary began at the end of 2021, and our research was initiated at the beginning of 2022. The time and energy spent on managing the translation of the EDI ideas represent a part of the efforts to increase the workplace well-being of the Italian subsidiary of 2LMP.

Second, the choice of analyzing the translation process within the Italian subsidiary lies in differences explained in terms of the number of years dedicated to addressing the theme of EDI and the cultural differences between the two countries. Moreover, while Italy could be considered an advanced country, it appears to lag behind in terms of norms and incentives to promote EDI compared with both the U.S. and the European context (see subsection “**Research context**” for more detail).

## Data sources

The advantage of a single case study is the possibility of exploiting the contents of multiple data sources (Graebner et al., 2012; Stake, 2000). In line with the social constructivist approach, we do not seek to achieve convergence of findings but rather embrace the plurality of experiences and interpretations that emerge from the different perspectives gathered. Instances in which data sources diverged were not interpreted as a lack of coherence but as a valuable opportunity to reflect on how specific inconsistencies contributed to findings. A single case study allows us to collect data through open-ended questions (see Appendix) in interviews, enabling us to capture the individual experiences of employees and the perceptions that they develop during the translation process of EDI ideas (Stake, 2000). Additionally, the vividness and richness of a single case study offer an in-depth understanding of the underlying circumstances affecting “how” a phenomenon happens, in our case, how the EDI ideas are being translated within the foreign subsidiary.

Data collection consisted mainly of conducting interviews with 2LMP’s employees, participating in online meetings, and gathering secondary data (see Tables 1 and 2). We conducted 56 interviews (53 at the subsidiary level and three



at the corporate level) and participated in 7 EDI meetings organized by the Italian subsidiary. The interviews lasted 30–90 min, and all the interviews were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed by at least two researchers. The interviews conducted at the Italian subsidiary were held in Italian, whereas those at the corporate and other subsidiaries were conducted in English. Two of the authors are Italian native speakers with proficient English skills, whereas one author is a native speaker of both English and Italian. This author was responsible for translating the Italian interviews into English, ensuring that the nuances and contextual meanings were accurately preserved in the final analysis. This approach also enhanced our ability to recognize and capture perspectives and experiences that may not be easily conveyed in the English language (Tietze, 2018).

In Morse's footsteps (1991: 129), "the researcher selects a participant according to the needs of the study." Correspondingly, we initially interviewed an informant with broad general knowledge of the Italian subsidiary and its new EDI ideas. As the research progressed, we targeted individuals with specific knowledge in the EDI translation process (e.g., Gender & Equality Plan–GEP; Coyne, 1997). Using a *snowball sampling procedure*, we asked each interviewee to provide us with the names and emails of other potential informants. By repeating this procedure, we achieved a cumulative and dynamic effect known as the snowball effect (Noy, 2008). The snowball sampling procedure provided us with easy access to informants who were otherwise challenging to contact, as previous informants established connections with subsequent informants. Additionally, this method made the informants feel more at ease and open to expressing themselves, as they were introduced by a colleague. However, there are drawbacks to this approach: not all potential informants have an equal chance of being selected, and prior informants may tend to recommend colleagues who share their own perspectives. Arguably, we explicitly requested that informants suggest both clinical and administrative staff and at least one informant from a different organizational level.

The interviews were conducted in two main rounds. The first round of interviews took place before developing our framework (50 interviews). The second round (six interviews) served the purpose of presenting the framework to the actors we had identified as playing an important role in the translation process under scrutiny and asking them to assess its validity.

## Data analysis

Our data analysis began during the data collection phase. Following our first informant's suggestion, we examined 2LMP's websites (HQs and Italian subsidiary) to understand their EDI commitments. We observed that the U.S.

HQs primarily frame initiatives under "diversity and inclusion," often omitting "equality," whereas the Italian subsidiary follows European regulations, emphasizing gender equality (e.g., GEP). Despite this, the subsidiary's initiatives incorporate all three EDI dimensions, reflecting both U.S.-driven diversity management and the European regulatory emphasis on equality issues (see Fig. 4 in the Appendix). This highlights the varying national approaches to EDI (see the "Research context" subsection).

Our analysis revealed a higher level of EDI integration and formalization at the HQs than at the Italian subsidiary (see Table 2). The U.S. HQs dedicate an entire website section to EDI and have established a "Center for Engagement and Inclusion," which provides measurement tools such as the Healthcare Equality Index<sup>2</sup>. In contrast, the only EDI-related element of the subsidiary website is the GEP document that aligns with the UN's Agenda 2030 goals. However, the subsidiary fosters EDI through technical committees and internal events, as evidenced by flyers promoting initiatives such as a "right to disconnection," which is aimed at enhancing workplace well-being.

Direct observations took place during the "EDI Month" meetings within the subsidiary, where researchers documented group discussions and captured participants' personal opinions. Detailed notes were taken and later analyzed alongside the interview transcripts. Researchers also recorded demographic observations, noting no significant gender disparity, fewer young participants, and a greater presence of administrative staff than clinical staff. The meetings featured both external speakers and internal employees sharing personal EDI-related experiences. Notably, those with direct experience with EDI challenges, such as individuals with disabling illnesses, were the most active, highlighting the deep personal connection between EDI and lived experiences.

Furthermore, during each interview, participants were asked about their role in translating EDI ideas, their understanding of EDI, and related work experiences (see interview questions in the Appendix). These inquiries aimed to elucidate how they construct meaning around EDI and integrate their understanding into their personal and professional experiences.

The data collected enabled us to deepen our comprehension of the case study's context, engage in collective discussions on EDI ideas, and capture diverse individual narratives. These insights set the foundation for providing a contextualized explanation (Welch et al., 2022) of the translation process of EDI ideas. We recognize that, as researchers with diverse linguistic backgrounds, the cross-cultural

<sup>2</sup> This index is a national LGBTQ benchmarking tool assessing healthcare facilities' policies and practices related to the equality and inclusion of LGBTQ patients, visitors, and employees.



Table 1 Data sources

Timeline	EDI translation	Type of primary data	Level
2019	Building the “Gender Medicine” committee	No data collected	
June–December 2021	Building the “GEDI” committee Publication of the GEP Building the “EDI” committee	No data collected	
January–April 2022	Organizing the “EDI Month”	1 interview with Director of Management Control and Decision Support	1 interview in the Italian subsidiary
May 2022	Online meetings of the “EDI Month” (specific dates below)	1 interview with Chief Quality Officer 1 interview with Talent Manager 1 interview with Recruitment and EDI Expert	3 interviews in the Italian subsidiary
May 16, 2022	A presentation of an external organization to support 2LMP in developing their EDI practices	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	Italian subsidiary
May 17, 2022	A presentation of the PRIDE events (testimony of the local PRIDE coordinator)	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	Italian subsidiary
May 19, 2022	A presentation of the GBSICIDP FOUNDATION INTERNATIONAL (testimony of an internal employee that is a member of the same organization)	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	Italian subsidiary
May 24, 2022	A presentation of an organization that focuses on sports that are practiced by disabled people (testimony of an internal employee that is a member of the same organization)	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	Italian subsidiary
May 26, 2022	A presentation about the “Big resignation and diversity” phenomena in the healthcare industry	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	Italian subsidiary
May 27, 2022	A presentation of the Italian laws and regulative tools supporting the theme of EDI (testimony of an internal director)	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	Italian subsidiary
May 30, 2022	A presentation of the main points of the Gender & Equality Plan (GEP)	Observation–I-h meeting of the “EDI Month”	2 interviews in the Italian subsidiary
July 2022	Building the “We for Woman” committee	2 interviews with Medical Doctor 1 interview with Grants Department Director 1 interview with Senior Specialist	4 interviews in the Italian subsidiary
August 2022		1 interview with Clinical Research Associate	1 interview in the Italian subsidiary
September 2022		2 interviews with Study Coordinator 1 interview with Recruitment and EDI Expert	3 interviews in the Italian subsidiary
October 2022	The first meeting of the “We for Woman” committee	No data collected	
November 2022		1 interview with Nurse 1 interview with Operations Manager 1 interview with Executive Assistant 2 interviews with Medical Doctor	5 interviews in the Italian subsidiary



Table 1 (continued)

Primary data	EDI translation	Type of primary data	Level
December 2022	The first meeting of the “EDI” committee	4 interviews with Medical Doctor 4 interviews with Senior Analyst and Controller 1 interview with IT Specialist 1 interview with Nurse 3 interviews with Interpreter and Translator 1 interview with Talent Manager 1 interview with Insurance and BTB Development 2 interviews with Public Relations Manager 1 interview with Innovation and Engagement Manager 1 interview with Engineer 2 interviews with Administrative Assistant 2 interviews with HR Business Partner 1 interview with Junior Controller 1 interview with Training Manager 1 interview with Director of the Department of General Affairs and Personnel 2 interviews with Radiologic Technologist 1 interview with Director of the Department of Business Development 1 interview with Director of Management Control and Decision Support 1 interview with Talent Specialist 1 interview with HR Director—Italy 1 interview with Director of Administration and Finance—Italy 1 interview with HR Director—Ireland 1 interview with HR Vice President—U.S. 1 interview with Senior Director of the Center for Engagement and Inclusion—U.S.	31 interviews in the Italian subsidiary
October–November 2023			2 interviews in the Italian subsidiary, 1 interview in the Irish subsidiary, and 3 interviews at the corporate level
Secondary data			
Source/audience		Type of document and webpage	
Internal/external		The gender & equality plan (GEP) document	
Internal/internal		The “EDI Month” program	
Internal/internal		Flyer and program of the “We for Women” committee	
Internal/external		Web page of the Italian subsidiary of 2LMP	
Internal/external		Web page of the parent company of 2LMP	
External/external		Eurostat web page	
External/external		EIGE (European Institute for Gender Equality) web page	



Table 1 (continued)

Secondary data	
Source/audience	Type of document and webpage
External/external	Report representing Italian statistics of the personnel of Local Health Authorities (A.S.L.) and public hospitals and equivalent institutions
External/external	U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
External/external	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe web page
External/external	La Repubblica web page
External/external	World Economic Forum web page

influences on our language shaped how we coproduced interpretations of the narratives we gathered (Thomas et al., 2009). In our data analysis, we adopted an abductive approach that integrates, rather than dismisses, theoretical preconceptions (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). The abductive approach allows researchers to iteratively refine and develop their understanding and interpretation of the case study, enabling them “to articulate and make visible the generative moments of doing qualitative research” (Welch et al., 2022: 18). Specifically, we combined ideas from scholars in EDI research and translation studies with our empirical data.

As our research motivation was exploring the translation process of EDI ideas occurring within an MNC context, we initially considered Westney et al. (2022), whose framework provides a comprehensive overview of translation approaches in IB. We then framed our case study in the organizational translation approach within Scandinavian institutionalism. We adopted the lens of Czarniawska’s studies, which explore the phenomenon of organizational change and draw on theories emphasizing the construction and deconstruction of institutions as the most fruitful way of conceptualizing social order (Czarniawska & Sevon, 1996). This enabled us to employ a social constructivist approach to analyze the actions and interactions of the translators within the subsidiary and to explore how they construct and reconstruct their understanding of EDI during the translation process. In doing so, we drew on both EDI and translation studies in IB to interpret our empirical findings while juxtaposing them with these studies to discern emerging theoretical concepts (Reuber & Fischer, 2022). This allowed us to engage in iterative analyses between theory and our dataset (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). Each iteration between “(previous) theory and empirical facts (or clues)” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009: 5) facilitated a shift from our initial inductive approach toward abduction (Locke et al., 2008) and inspired a new understanding of the translation process of EDI ideas (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009).

We began by thoroughly reading our collected data through the theoretical lens of organizational translation proposed by Czarniawska and Sevon (1996). We first collected information – primarily from the GEP, flyers, websites, and interview transcripts – to reconstruct the sequence of translation activities, especially when EDI ideas were received by the Italian subsidiary from HQs. We then delved into the data – mainly the GEP, interview transcripts, and observation notes – to gain a deeper understanding of how the translation process unfolded within the subsidiary.

We mapped the translation activities over time into distinct periods using temporal bracketing, allowing us to identify the key actions, objects, translators’ decisions, and activities beyond the control of the subsidiary, as well as the disjointed nature of actions between the professional



**Table 2** EDI repository: A comparison between HQs and the Italian subsidiary

U.S. HQs		Italian subsidiary	
Existing already	Existing already	Still in program	Still in program
Internal Center for Engagement and Inclusion with focused expertise on diversity and inclusion	A partnership with an external organization with expertise in EDI	Any other	Any other
n. 4 Internal Centers Partners of the Center for Engagement and Inclusion (e.g., Center for Social Impact and Center for Women with Disabilities)	None	None	None
n. 11 Diversity Directors	The presence of an HR middle manager with expertise in EDI	Any other	Any other
n. 9 Employee Resource Groups (i.e., they are employees' networks formed around shared experiences and serve as a forum for discussing business opportunities and challenges, offering input to enhance experience for employees, patients, and the community, and fostering team building, e.g., PRIDE Health)	n. 1 "We for Women" committee (including 3 main areas: Professional Development, Right to Health, Work-Life Balance)	Any other	Any other
Board of Directors Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee	"EDI", "GEDJ", and "Gender Medicine" committees	"Guarantee" committee which will include the already existing "Bullying" and the "Equal Opportunities" committees	"Guarantee" committee which will include the already existing "Bullying" and the "Equal Opportunities" committees
Diversity Councils at Business Unit Levels	None	None	None
Several learning opportunities and programs on the theme of diversity and inclusion implemented within the company (e.g., Senior Services, Understanding Sexual Orientation)	"EDI" month (online meetings to offer learning opportunities on the theme of EDI)	None	None
Several indices (e.g., Inclusion Index, Diversity Inclusion Index, Healthcare Equality Index), formal documents (e.g., The Interfaith Pocket Guide), and tools (e.g. Culture Vision) provide an overview of various religious, ethnic, and social communities, including LGBTQ patient care, offering knowledge and best practices to ensure sensitive and inclusive interactions with diverse groups.	Inclusion Index and Diversity Inclusion Index (adopted during the HQs' survey after the pandemic) and GEP (including a plan of action and the related measures, and a timeline)	Inclusion Impact Index (from the external local partner)	Inclusion Impact Index (from the external local partner)
Several Partnerships with the community to provide culturally competent care	None	Partnerships with external organizations serving local communities (e.g., local LGBTQ community)	Partnerships with external organizations serving local communities (e.g., local LGBTQ community)



categories (Langley, 1999). This analysis revealed three main periods: (a) Period 1: Collecting EDI ideas and working to construct understanding; (b) Period 2: Divergences in constructing a common understanding of EDI; and (c) Period 3: Negotiations in constructing a new understanding of EDI (see Fig. 1).

We revisited the data through the lens of translation studies in IB (e.g., Ciuk et al., 2019; Gutierrez-Huerter et al., 2020; Westney & Piekkari, 2020; Westney et al., 2022), identifying two distinct phases of the subsidiary's translation process: *signification* and *negotiation*. The use of observational notes and certain interviews particularly emphasized the negotiation phase. Each meeting during “EDI Month” (i.e., our direct observations) concluded with a Q&A section, during which employees were encouraged to raise questions or propose ideas for advancing EDI within the organization. These discussions revealed organizational weaknesses that might not have surfaced in interviews, where informants often portrayed a more positive image of their workplace, offering researchers deeper interpretive insights.

Our parallel data analysis helped unpack the translation process by identifying key phases where EDI ideas were enacted into actions. During the signification phase, translators contextualized EDI ideas and initiated their translation within the subsidiary. This was followed by a negotiation phase, marked by divergences between administrative and clinical staff along with efforts by certain actors to facilitate and undermine the translation process. We then examined how individual actions became collective, analyzing drivers and challenges in this process. At this stage, we focused primarily on our notes of the observations and reflections generated during the rereading of the interview transcripts. In analyzing these data, we made an effort to become sufficiently integrated in the context to explore whether organizational actors embraced or resisted EDI ideas, how they understood these ideas, and their interactions in constructing a collective understanding of EDI within the subsidiary (Mees-Buss et al., 2022; Stake, 2000).

After developing our framework (see Fig. 2 in the following section), we conducted follow-up interviews with key actors, whose feedback confirmed and refined our findings.

## Findings

Our study is dedicated to explaining the translation of EDI ideas within the specific context of an MNC's subsidiary, “rather than away from context” (Welch et al., 2022: 8). Thus, the contextualization of our case study becomes crucial in the explanation of the translation of EDI ideas from the U.S. HQs to the Italian subsidiary, and there arises a critical need for an understanding of the national

(Fitzsimmons et al., 2023) and industry contexts (Han et al., 2024) involved.

## Research context

In the national context, the U.S. and Italy have distinct cultural and regulatory influences on EDI (Pulcher et al., 2022). In the U.S., the discourse surrounding EDI is intricately woven with issues of race, ethnicity, and a historical legacy of systemic discrimination, shaped by a complex history of slavery, segregation, and ongoing Black people's struggles for civil rights. In this context, the U.S. shows long-term experience in fostering a culture of diversity management (for a detailed argumentation, see Ferner et al., 2005). In contrast, the Italian context frames EDI primarily as a gender-related issue (Ravazzani et al., 2021). The focus is on addressing gender imbalances in the workplace, such as the gender pay gap, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, and the higher unemployment rate among women, which stands at 9.1%, compared with 6.8% for men (De Ceglia, 2023). The EU suggests that gender disparity issues should be addressed through European regulatory mechanisms (Corsi et al., 2021; the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) website). Nonetheless, Italy ranks lowest in the EIGE's Work Index (with a score of 65.00 in 2023), which measures gender equality in access to employment and favorable working conditions. Data regarding gender equality show that the U.S. has a significantly better position in gender equality rankings. According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, the U.S. ranked 43rd, with a score of 0.748, in (2023), whereas Italy was 79th, with a score of 0.705. In 2020, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which measures the proportion of women in senior and middle management, revealed a clear difference between the two countries: the U.S. shows a proportion of 42.29%, and Italy exhibits a proportion of 22%.

Additionally, to the best of our knowledge, there is no available official data that represent ethnic minorities within the Italian workforce distinguished by industry and/or professional category, in notable contrast to the comprehensive data accessible for the U.S. workforce (see U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Concerning the industry context, 2LMP is a healthcare company. Although healthcare companies frequently declare that they promote equitable access to quality healthcare for all (which is closely tied to EDI efforts), achieving this goal can be particularly challenging, especially in instances where healthcare services are privatized, as observed in the U.S. context (see the recent “Equal Health Care for All Act”). The discourse on EDI within the healthcare industry transcends the patient sphere and extends to encompass the workforce, which consists mainly of three professional



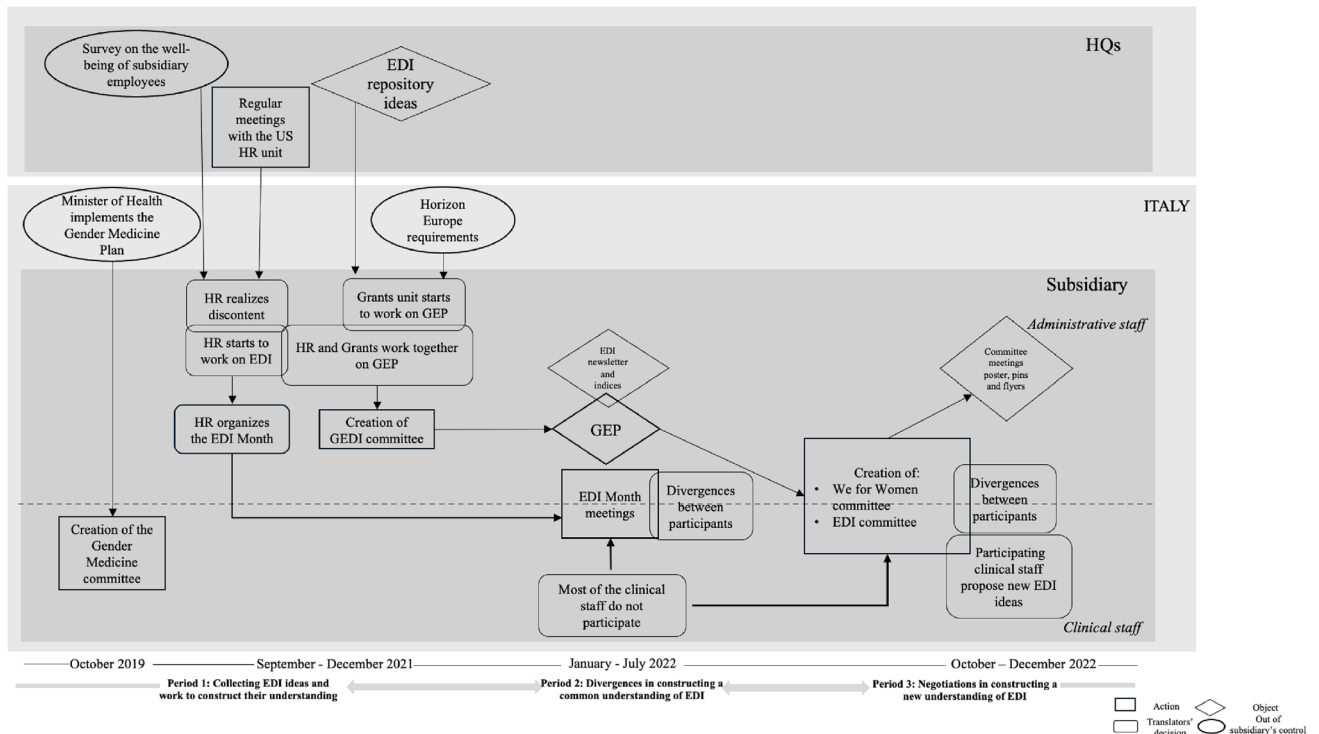


Fig. 1 Mapping activities during the translation process

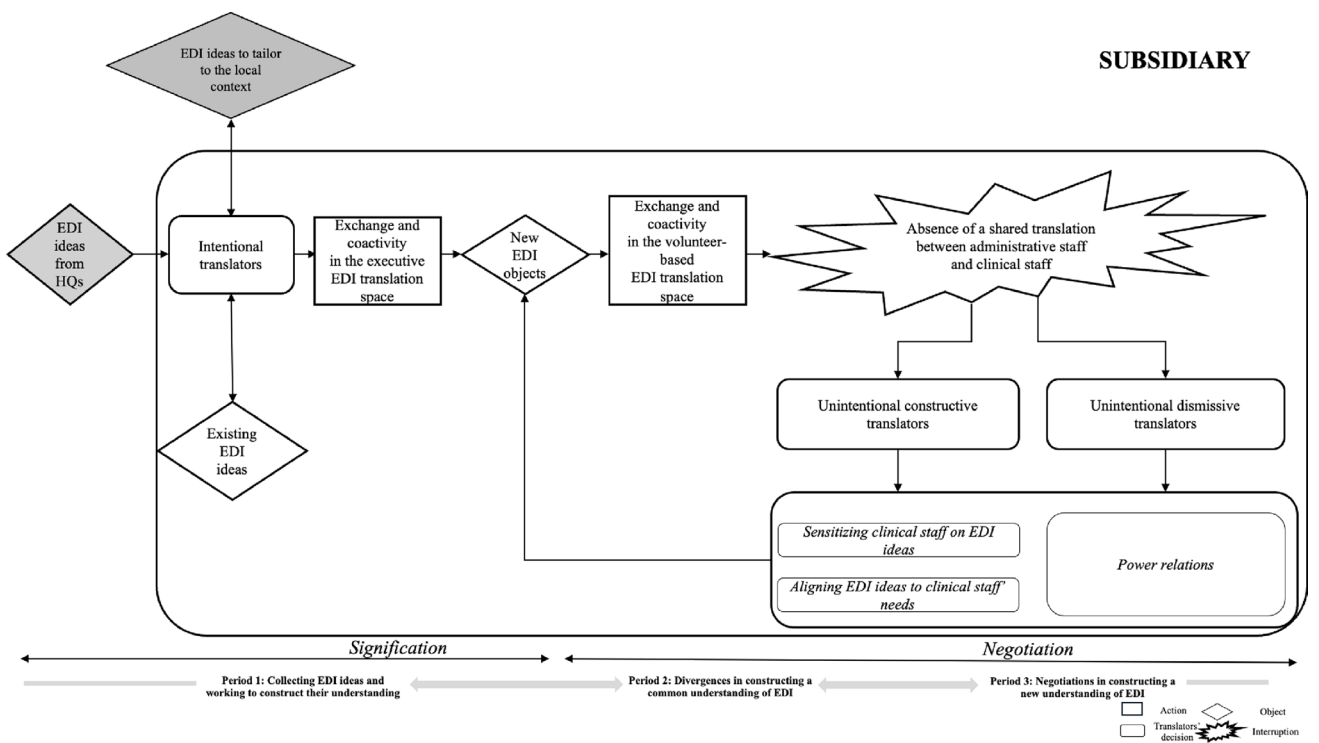


Fig. 2 Translation process of EDI ideas within the subsidiary



categories (administrative staff, doctors, and nurses). A predominant presence of women notably characterizes the demographic composition of the healthcare industry workforce. In the Italian healthcare industry in 2021, women accounted for 69.1%, whereas men constituted 30.9% (Boldrini et al., 2021). A similar trend was observed in the U.S. healthcare industry, with 74.3% being women and 25.7% being men in 2021 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). This gender distribution is particularly pronounced in nursing, where women make up 77.8% of the workforce in Italy and 86.7% in the U.S. in 2021 (Boldrini et al., 2021; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). This cohort of employees faces long working hours and the challenge of balancing personal and professional lives, which strains their well-being and complicates EDI efforts.

Finally, as far as we are aware, there seems to be no available data on the representation of women in top management positions in the Italian healthcare industry. While U.S. data on the presence of minority ethnicities in the healthcare industry are available, there is very limited data on the representation of different races in the Italian healthcare industry (Dotsey, 2021). The reason could be that in the Italian healthcare industry, citizens of different races hardly make any requests to enter or progress in a company. Additionally, another plausible explanation is Italy's tendency to overlook race as a category for differentiation, with gender being the primary focus of diversity efforts.

The research context of 2LMP, shaped by national and industry-specific EDI challenges, directly influences the translation process within the subsidiary, where organizational actors conduct phases of signification and negotiation (see Fig. 2). The phase of *signification* involves translators constructing an understanding of EDI ideas from the HQs in a way that aligns with the subsidiary and its national context. The phase of *negotiation* involves translators engaging in discussions about the reconstruction of EDI understanding. Some actors support the translation process, whereas others resist and challenge it, creating tensions that may destabilize the process. The process is *iterative* because it involves repeating a series of signification and negotiation phases, proposing new stimuli, and shaping the outcomes. It is also *recursive* since these phases are generated through the actions and interactions of actors within the subsidiary. Finally, the translation process is *generative*, as it produces new outcomes that extend beyond the act of translation itself. In the following, we disentangle the framework and intersperse the narrative with meaningful quotes to support our interpretations (Pratt et al., 2022).

### Signification

Several years ago, 2LMP expanded through mergers and acquisitions, with each hospital bringing its own values and

culture. The U.S. HQs established standard values across its entire organization, referred to as “cascading goals,” which include EDI goals:

So, we have the sort of standard goal focused on diversity and inclusion, but then we have the flexibility as that cascades down that our leadership teams in each of those markets can determine what their priorities are to impact that goal [...] we share how we may do it in the U.S., but really give them the autonomy to build and drive these types of initiatives. It's very different from market to market. You know, like in Italy, there's a lot of focus on gender, and I think culturally Italy is sort of a male-dominated society. (Vice President HR, male - HQs)

These goals encompass a variety of EDI ideas that gained prominence in the Italian subsidiary after organizational weaknesses were revealed in 2020, following an HQ survey on the subsidiary's well-being (as reported in the GEP). This survey enabled the subsidiary to assess the postpandemic challenges faced by employees, especially the clinical staff, highlighting the critical importance of embracing EDI:

...especially after the COVID-19 period, when staff well-being was put on the back burner because other priorities took precedence. You know... maybe they [HQs] saw us so tired and worn out. Perhaps they sensed a need for something more concrete that had never surfaced before and that COVID-19 brought to light. (Nurse, cancer patient, female - Subsidiary)

Following the survey results, the Italian HR unit began aligning with the HQ EDI standards in 2021, despite the challenges posed by the Italian context. Simultaneously, the Italian Grants unit applied for a “Horizon Europe” program requiring the elaboration of a GEP. Consequently, both units realized that they were working on EDI ideas but with different intents and were unaware of each other's efforts. Their roles positioned them as *intentional translators*, meaning that they were specifically designated to translate EDI ideas into actions, reflecting together on “how to do EDI” (Westney et al., 2022) within the subsidiary. The initial efforts focused on reconciling the U.S. approach to EDI with the European–Italian tradition, which places emphasis on gender and equality issues (see our “[Research context](#)” subsection).

I said, “I must have the GEP formally; we will then make it work with EDI”. Everyone must understand, even from the HQs, that they [GEP and EDI] are the same thing. (Director Grants & Project Management Unit, male - Subsidiary)

When this research began, the Italian subsidiary had only recently implemented uncoordinated initiatives to comply with regulations and align loosely with HQs' EDI ideas.



Various disjointed initiatives, not explicitly labeled “EDI,” were managed independently by different actors. For example, the 2019 implementation of “Gender Medicine” principles for clinical staff, required by the Italian Ministry of Health, led to the formation of a technical committee isolated from other EDI committees, such as the “Bullying” and “Equal Opportunities” committees.

We entered the subsidiary at the early stage of understanding creation around EDI, when both the HR and Grants units were tasked with translating EDI ideas into the Italian context. This phase of *signification* was shaped by the differing cultural beliefs and the heritage between the U.S. and Italy, influencing perceptions and actions toward EDI.

So, here in the U.S., for instance, there is a lot of focus on diversity in terms of people of color and then, certain demographics. So that would be one of our key diversity goals in terms of... that’s a population that we felt was underrepresented and we built some programs around that. In Italy, for instance, people with disabilities, women in leadership roles, that’s the big focus. (Vice President HR, male - HQs)

The explicit mentions of “theirs are all about race” and “people of color” as focal points in the U.S. context indicate a well-established narrative that prioritizes racial issues. In contrast, the references to “people with disabilities” and “women in leadership roles” as key priorities in Italy reveal the subsidiary’s focus on different aspects of diversity. This focus on gender equality is further confirmed by the establishment of technical committees such as the “We for Women” committee. For example, the flier for the opening of this committee outlines key themes related to gender inequality, such as support for women’s professional growth and the provision of tools to help them better balance work and personal life. Indeed, Italy ranks lower than the U.S. in various gender equality and female leadership indices (see the “[Research context](#)” subsection). In this context, our case study shows that the U.S. HQs maintain a broader and more structured EDI repository, which differs from the Italian subsidiary’s focus (see Table 2).

These national differences underscore the importance of a context-sensitive translation process for EDI ideas within an MNC. To facilitate this, intentional translators partnered with Italian civic organizations owning expertise in national EDI challenges, involving them in “EDI Month” meetings. Additionally, the Italian subsidiary trained an HR professional in EDI. These efforts, supported by the HQs’ EDI repository, formed the core of the signification phase, aligning local needs with HQs’ standards.

The phase of signification was stabilized and aided by the setting of the “GEDI” (Gender Equality Diversity & Inclusion) committee (see Fig. 1). As the translation process unfolded, it became clear that the Italian subsidiary needed

appropriate spaces to facilitate the social construction of EDI. Intentional translators formed the “GEDI” committee that served as an *executive translation space* to validate all the EDI ideas already existing within the Italian company and develop the GEP, which is considered a blueprint for EDI action (see Fig. 2). The GEP, integrating both HQs and subsidiary EDI ideas, catalyzed the translation process and provided the foundation for translating these ideas into actions.

The outcome of this initial phase can be found in this first document [GEP], and now we need to turn it into action, which we are currently working on. It is not only labeled as Human Resources but also includes Grants. (Talent Manager, female - Subsidiary)

The collaboration between the HR and Grants units to develop the GEP is the first attempt to translate EDI ideas into a tangible object. This process collectivized separate actions into designated translation spaces (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996), creating new EDI objects such as the GEP, newsletters, indices, pins, and posters. However, since the “GEDI” committee primarily comprised administrative staff and effective EDI translation necessitated engagement from the entire organization, including clinical staff, additional translation spaces were established (as explained in the GEP). These included the “EDI” and “We for Women” committees. The former coordinates all technical committees within the subsidiary, whereas the latter is rooted in the value of inclusivity, welcoming all employees – regardless of gender, professional background, age, or other differences – into a shared space for translation. As a result, we define it as a *volunteer-based translation space* (see Fig. 2) that focuses on professional development, the right to health, and work–life balance, as outlined in the flier for its opening event. The EDI expert explained the rationale of creating a volunteer-based translation space:

If we talk about a policy that has a clinical connotation, I, as an administrative employee, wouldn’t have a say in it. The We for Women committee is completely spontaneous, in the sense that they have indeed issued a call to action, where people participate in meetings spontaneously and voluntarily. There are nearly a hundred people from all professional categories, each contributing with their own perspective to advocate for the issues. (Recruitment Specialist and EDI Expert, female - Subsidiary)

The “We for Women” committee was established to inform the entire organization about the process of translating EDI ideas, particularly reaching out to organizational actors who were initially not involved in the signification phase. The interviews revealed that those who were farther from responsibilities in the translation had a limited understanding of



EDI ideas. Many, especially clinical staff, were unaware of the GEP. However, when asked about the “We for Women” committee, the responses were positive, with clinical staff hearing about it through colleagues and noting attendance at meetings. From this, it became evident that the GEP and its associated technical committees – the “GEDI” and “EDI” committees – were seen as executive translation spaces primarily managed by administrative staff, who struggled to engage the clinical staff fully. Conversely, the “We for Women” committee, which was open to all employees, effectively facilitated engagement among clinical staff. Therefore, the formation of a volunteer-based EDI translation space marked the conclusion of the signification phase, predominantly led by administrative staff, and heralded a *negotiation* phase where interactions between different professional categories significantly influenced the translation process.

### Negotiation

The exchange of EDI ideas and coactivity in volunteer-based translation spaces and “EDI Month” meetings resulted in the absence of a shared translation of EDI ideas across administrative and clinical staff. According to the training manager, the EDI translation process advanced “at two different speeds,” revealing a discernible discrepancy in the perception of EDI among the professional categories. The box labeled “Absence of a shared translation” in Fig. 2 sheds light on the interruption of the process due to the differences between clinical and administrative staff in translating EDI ideas. We explain these differences along five key dimensions. Indeed, administrative and clinical staff differ in *why* they translate EDI ideas: administrative staff do so to enhance organizational well-being, whereas clinical staff focus EDI efforts on making healthcare practices more inclusive. They differ in *how* they translate: administrative staff translate EDI ideas through training, in contrast to clinical staff, who do so through personal humanization toward their patients. With respect to *what* they translate, administrative staff span multiple dimensions of diversity, whereas clinical staff primarily address issues related to gender within therapeutic contexts. This distinction indicates a varying emphasis on the aspects of EDI that resonate most within their respective professional roles. In terms of *when* they engage in translating EDI ideas, administrative staff seamlessly integrate these efforts into their daily working routines. In contrast, clinical staff express concerns that such initiatives may take time away from patient care, suggesting a need for careful consideration of how to balance EDI efforts with primary responsibilities. Finally, regarding *where* the translation occurs, administrative staff engage in both the signification and negotiation phases of translation, whereas a substantial portion of clinical staff does not participate in the translation process at all, with only a modest part engaging

in the negotiation phase. The reasons for these differences lie mainly in the diverse professional logics shaped by educational backgrounds and studies pursued by individuals in these roles. Administrative staff, particularly within the HR unit, align their responsibility of enhancing employee well-being with the translation of EDI ideas. A doctor argues:

The administrative staff are more sensitive, probably due to their training experience... let’s say that because of the work they do and especially because they have taken courses on the topic, they feel obliged to promote these [EDI] initiatives. (Consultant Neurologist, female - Subsidiary)

In contrast, clinical staff followed educational paths focused primarily on medical studies, naturally adopting a perspective centered on patient care. A training manager explained:

It is infrequent for clinical staff to participate in the [EDI-related] meetings because they do not perceive it as their priority. [...] These topics are less relevant compared to [their] professional duties: “I focus on saving lives. Let the administrative staff or the good-willed ones handle this extra stuff.” (Training Manager, female - Subsidiary)

The quotes above show that each professional category develops beliefs influenced by the professional responsibilities and priorities of the other. Consequently, both administrative and clinical staff often fail to adequately recognize, or sometimes even ignore, the contributions each make to the translation process. Hence, administrative staff adopted a perspective of EDI ideas related to their own working sphere, highlighting the value of EDI training courses. In contrast, clinical staff emphasized the humanization of interactions with patients and colleagues. For example, a nurse noted the importance of informal exchanges to promote the core values underlying EDI ideas.

In the end, whether the project is called “EDI” or “we for woman” doesn’t matter much. I think it’s more important to bring out the values, the emotions, and share them. Because there is a lot of sensitivity, considering our structure, our working reality, which is also a transplant center where there are patients waiting for an organ to imagine surviving, or there are people donating their organs to their family members, so you understand? Humanization in terms of health support, for those who suffer, I experience it every day, I can process it. (Nurse, male - Subsidiary)

Furthermore, clinical staff have engaged in the translation process with respect to the gender category of patient care (e.g., through the “Gender Medicine” committee). However, they rarely address other categories of diversity. In this regard, an administrative employee highlights the following:



There are other types of diversity, not related to gender, that create organizational distances. We have an issue of organizational distance between hierarchies, where those not in top positions feel too distant from those who are, in my opinion. There is also a generational diversity that I would really like to address. For people of my generation, born in the late '80s, there is a problem of feeling undervalued. (Senior Analyst and Controller, male - Subsidiary)

The negotiation phase not only revealed the absence of a shared translation process of EDI ideas but also led to the identification of specific roles among clinical staff as translators (see Fig. 2). We define *unintentional* translators as doctors and nurses whose contributions to the translation – whether positive or negative – occur without deliberate intention and were not planned by intentional translators. Among unintentional translators, we distinguish between constructive and dismissive translators. The *constructive translators* demonstrated their commitment to sensitizing clinical staff to EDI ideas and aligning these ideas with the needs of the clinical staff. To understand their commitment in the translation, we asked the interviewees “What was your involvement in the EDI Month?” A nurse responded:

The involvement? It was about becoming aware of what this initiative was because it was an [EDI] month dedicated to a series of online meetings, set up in different ways, including discussions with other professionals, and other organizations, as well as interviews or sharing personal experiences of colleagues and their backgrounds...Listening passively, but then interacting because it's stronger than me – I have to intervene and share my opinion. (Nurse, male - Subsidiary)

However, the active involvement of both intentional and constructive translators faced challenges posed by *dismissive translators* within the clinical staff. In contrast to the administrative staff, who consistently participated in EDI-related meetings, many of the clinical staff members we interviewed had never been involved in such discussions. Some medical doctors, when asked the same question about their involvement in the translation of the EDI, responded:

There were various emails, and there was also a meeting. But honestly, the work in 2LMP is so intense that I never participated in any of this [...] And honestly, I don't really believe in it. Especially because here [2LMP], everything is primarily centered around men, so I don't believe in it, and for me, it would just be a waste of time. (Medical Doctor, female – Subsidiary) While there could be interest, it invariably hinges on the constraints associated with clinical activities. In essence, there's minimal room for additional pursuits beyond clinical work [...] Taking on other projects that

demand time would only serve to further distract me from fulfilling my responsibilities in clinical practice. (Medical Doctor, female – Subsidiary)

These quotes reflect a dismissive attitude toward EDI ideas, revealing how certain clinical staff members prioritize their clinical responsibilities over participation in EDI discussions. The different understandings of EDI influence the translation process, necessitating the negotiation of EDI ideas to align with diverse professional priorities. Moreover, the translation process of EDI ideas sheds light on forms of resistance to EDI arising from power relations that clinical staff manifest against administrative staff and related initiatives. Thus, we observe that translating EDI ideas is not confined to the distinct and subsequent phases of ideas, objects, and actions. Before formulating the new EDI object (i.e., the GEP), translators exchanged ideas and co-acted within dedicated EDI translation spaces, showing that actions can anticipate the translation of ideas into objects. Furthermore, we reveal that the negotiation phase could lead to a new phase of signification, aiming to identify EDI ideas and objects suitable for clinical staff. The translation process of EDI ideas subsequently involves an iterative and recursive relationship where actions can generate new ideas, which in turn produce new objects. However, our research concluded before a new phase of signification began, although we gathered data indicating that intentional translators were receiving stimuli from clinical staff about new EDI ideas. For instance, the training manager shared some of these emerging ideas with us:

Training should be accompanied by a whole series of more concrete activities, which would have been easier to find for administrative staff, such as smart working. For clinical staff, these activities are known but more burdensome. For example, consider psychological assistance programs for healthcare personnel or burnout assistance programs, which require setting up a psychological counseling service...it could mean offering screening programs, something that directly affects their [clinical staff] own health. (Training Manager, female - Subsidiary)

Finally, the presence of dismissive translators reveals that translation in action involves not only adopting an idea but also dismissing it. Dismissive translators among clinical staff reinforce a hierarchical divide between the two professional categories, allowing them to abstain from EDI meetings and resist participation in the translation process. From this perspective, the translation process is generative. By sharing a personal experience, the Chief Quality Officer highlights the inherent power relations within the subsidiary, emphasizing how being a doctor confers significant advantages, even in nonclinical roles. The interviewer describes how doctors



are often preferred for leadership positions, regardless of whether the role requires medical expertise.

Here, being a doctor is an advantage, it's as if it were a sect. If there are coordination roles that have nothing to do with clinical activities and if there's a doctor available... how can I say, they are preferred as if the doctor knows everything [...] I'll give you an example: I've worked in the Quality Office at 2LMP since 2007. Three years ago, a doctor who was going through a personal crisis and was not fit to practice at that time was assigned to the Quality Office. Practically, I was at risk when it was being decided whether I could become the head of the office, and I almost had someone who knew nothing about quality, who we had in the office only from the day before, become my boss simply because I couldn't be the boss of a doctor. There's no way an administrative worker can be the boss of a doctor. (Chief Quality Officer, female - Subsidiary)

The translation process reveals power relations not only between administrative and clinical staff but also between gender-related issues within a single professional category. A female doctor explained that EDI meetings seem like “nonsense” to her:

All the department heads are men, there are no female department heads. [...] And so, it's a bit difficult, there is a lot of distance. I don't feel involved in certain decisions. To me, this “we for women” thing really seems like nonsense. In fact, it's counterproductive for me. [...] The problem is that as long as everything is in the hands of men, nothing will change. (Medical Doctor, female - Subsidiary)

Failure to recognize professional diversity and underlying power relations within a subsidiary can hinder the translation of EDI ideas in an MNC. This resistance ultimately results in a new understanding of EDI that reflects existing hierarchies within the organization, demonstrating the potential of the translation process to generate unexpected outcomes. Clinical staff may perceive EDI ideas as a “threat to the medical mission,” stemming from their role in saving lives – interpreted positively – or a “threat to superiority,” which is typically perceived by administrative personnel – interpreted negatively. In both instances, a paradox emerges, as resistance to the EDI undermines inclusion because it reinforces the hierarchy between administrative and clinical staff. Indeed, this situation reflects a power relationship, while EDI ideas are easily translated by the administrative staff, most of the clinical staff remain resistant.

## Discussion

In this paper, we present a power-laden EDI translation process performed by a foreign subsidiary in an MNC. Through a microlevel analysis, we identified distinct phases and roles in the translation process. The first phase, *signification*, illustrates that “translators rarely work alone: their interactions with other local translators and with receivers, and sometimes with the ‘sources’ of the original, influence their translations” (Westney et al., 2022: 4). During this phase, *intentional* translators – primarily administrative staff actors – develop an understanding of EDI that is relevant to the subsidiary's context, thereby initiating the translation process. The second phase, *negotiation*, is characterized by differences between administrative and clinical staff in understanding EDI ideas, as well as the emergence of EDI resistance forms. This phase begins when EDI objects are enacted into actions within volunteer-based translation spaces, encouraging broader participation and ensuring that different professional viewpoints are considered. In these translation spaces, *unintentional* translators within the clinical staff emerge – specifically, *constructive* and *dismissive* translators – whose functions are to facilitate and undermine the translation process, respectively. These actors lead the translation of EDI ideas into spontaneous or unexpected actions that arise from specific contextual circumstances and diverse understandings of EDI ideas and objects (Beaumont et al., 2016; Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). In line with Gutierrez-Huerter et al. (2020), we acknowledge that the roles of translators are contextually embedded within the social, spatial, and temporal dimensions of EDI translation in MNCs. Intentional translators possess formal power and exercise control over the translation process, especially in its initial phase of signification. As translation spaces open up to all employees, however, interactions between professional categories reveal that roles in the translation process are not clearly defined: unintentional constructive translators acquire a particular significance in reappraising EDI ideas, and the resistance exhibited by unintentional dismissive translators leads to the emergence of power relations that reinforce the hierarchical divide within the subsidiary.

Furthermore, we show that the translation of EDI ideas varies across professional categories – revealing its iterative and recursive nature – and that the translation process itself reshapes those categories and the power relations between them, underscoring its generative nature. Therefore, translation spaces enable the translation process by allowing various actors – often from different backgrounds – to interact with and negotiate EDI ideas from HQs' ideas. They also illuminate the significant role of professional diversity within subsidiaries. These translation spaces are central to exploring how different professional categories interact and



translate EDI ideas, suggesting that the level of professional diversity within each subsidiary influences the EDI translation process across the MNC.

Figure 3, loosely based on Westney et al. (2022), underlines how the local translation of HQ ideas can shape power relations in foreign subsidiaries, offering a key focus for cross-border translation research in the field of IB. Additionally, Fig. 3 captures the nonlinear and generative nature of global-to-local translation in MNCs, showing how a subsidiary's translation process can reverberate across other subsidiaries and shape HQ-subsidiary relationships. Finally, this figure outlines the importance of building multiple translation spaces where actors can construct and reconstruct EDI ideas within a foreign subsidiary.

### Theoretical contributions

In this paper, we challenge nonsociological approaches in IB, which conceptualize the connections between HQs and subsidiaries as static pipelines, where ideas move in a predetermined manner. Drawing on Scandinavian institutionalism, our first contribution is to the sociology of EDI translation by showing how actors' interactions shape EDI ideas in and around the MNC. This process takes place within subsidiary 'translation spaces,' where mutual adjustment efforts among staff during negotiations can facilitate the effective translation of EDI across all areas of the MNC (Westney et al., 2022). Previous IB studies acknowledge that the translation of EDI ideas internationally occurs at multiple levels (Henekam et al., 2017). Within the MNC context, EDI ideas are typically expressed at the corporate level, and subsidiaries need autonomy to customize these ideas to address unique EDI challenges in their national contexts (Bader et al., 2022; Cavanagh et al., 2017; Ferner et al., 2005). By unpacking the translation process at the subsidiary level, we show that the way in which the subsidiaries' actors enact EDI ideas varies according to their professional category and the meanings they attach to them (Halsema & Halsema, 2006; Koveshnikov et al., 2019). Therefore, the rationale behind the formation of translation spaces and the negotiation phase lies in the fact that EDI cannot be captured in a stable repository of practices, and the related categories are not static (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023); it is socially constructed within organizations and is constantly shaped by organizational actors' interactions (Koveshnikov et al., 2019; Westney et al., 2022).

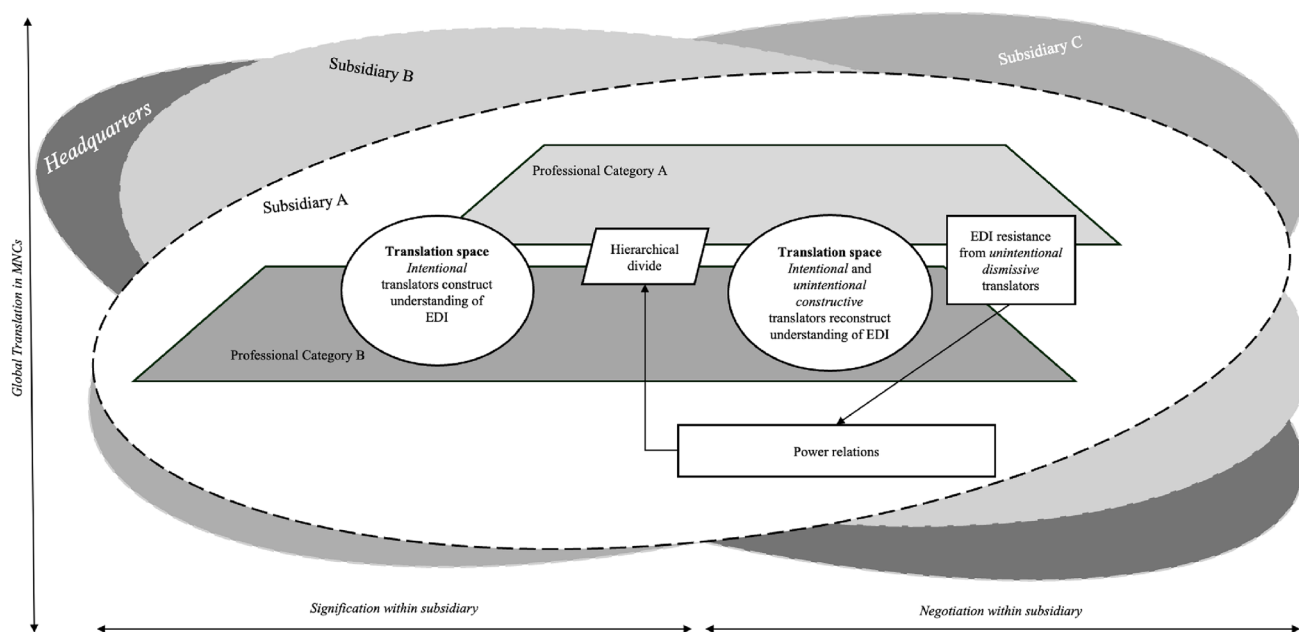
Second, we contribute to translation studies in the IB field by revealing the *iterative and recursive nature* of the organizational translation of EDI ideas within an MNC subsidiary. We show that the initial phase of translation is managed and controlled by intentional translators who participate to varying extents. Successively, during the negotiation phase, professional diversity-induced divergences are raised by unintentional translators, which can trigger a return to a

new signification phase, shifting control to other translators. This highlights a recursive and iterative translation process capable of capturing "the coupling between arising contingencies and attempted control, created by actors in search of meaning" (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996: 47; Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010).

Finally, we propose that the translation process is *generative in nature*. Administrative and clinical staff develop distinct understandings of EDI ideas informed by their professional attitudes and beliefs. Unlike clinical staff, who have only a partial understanding of "gender medicine," administrative staff, particularly HR employees, are more likely to engage in discussions and training related to EDI (Onyeador et al., 2024). Moreover, some of the clinical staff perceive EDI ideas as irrelevant to their professional responsibilities and provide justifications for their disengagement in the translation spaces, as their participation is not mandatory, unlike that of administrative staff. This reveals forms of EDI resistance within the subsidiary (Fernando, 2021; Hamza-Orlinska et al., 2024) that have rarely been explored in IB studies (Fitzsimmons et al., 2023). Dismissive translators within clinical staff resist the translation of EDI ideas to safeguard their perceived superiority, believing that their roles are more critical than those of administrative staff and that their time must be invested in patient care. Consequently, resistance to EDI fosters mutual failure among professional categories to recognize each other's contributions to the translation process, potentially undermining the *ethos* of inclusion that EDI aims to promote. This depends partly on professional categories' expectations and partly on what they can discern in terms of the knowledge accessible to them (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996). Resistance among clinical staff leads to a narrow understanding of EDI, where only certain perspectives are valued, and undermines collective efforts toward inclusivity (Röell et al., 2024). This confirms the paramount importance for an MNC to establish translation spaces in which different professional categories engage in interactions and negotiations to facilitate a common understanding of EDI within a foreign subsidiary. These interactions, in turn, enable the consequent enactment of EDI ideas into effective objects and actions (Pipan & Czarniawska, 2010) while simultaneously alerting resistance to them (Fernando, 2021; Hamza-Orlinska et al., 2024).

The translation of EDI ideas reveals that differences between professional categories are employed to designate certain groups to management and control positions within the subsidiary (Ciuk et al., 2019; Westney et al., 2022). Indeed, EDI ideas challenge established power relations within the subsidiary (Özbilgin, 2024). Our case study highlights that leadership and senior roles remain predominantly male in healthcare companies. EDI ideas, which advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of underrepresented groups within organizational





**Fig. 3** EDI translation in MNCs

roles (Özbilgin, 2024), may be perceived as a threat to the power that male doctors currently hold in Italian health-care companies. Thus, we show that the translation process goes beyond merely adapting EDI ideas to the national and organizational contexts. It possesses a generative nature, producing unforeseen outcomes that go beyond initial expectations.

### Managerial implications

In addressing the challenges posed by the globalization–localization dichotomy in MNCs, it is crucial to recognize that even the most globally EDI-oriented strategies must be customized to local contexts to be effective. However, a purely localized approach can suffer from its own limitations, such as the prevalence of blind spots or dominant local discourses that overlook certain aspects of EDI. These local contexts may perpetuate taboos or biases that hinder the effectiveness of EDI practices (Tatli et al., 2012). To overcome the challenges of balancing global consistency with local relevance, the translation approach presents a valuable alternative. This approach mediates between the need for a consistent global strategy set by the HQs and the necessity for localized adjustments that take into account the specific national and organizational needs of each subsidiary. By conducting a translation process, managers rethink traditional strategies that often pit globalization against localization. The translation approach serves as a worthy takeaway for managers interested in exploring diverse avenues for implementing

EDI, ultimately enhancing their relevance and impact across different subsidiary contexts. Specifically, subsidiary managers need to identify which actors – HR managers, middle management, or diversity officers – are in the best position to facilitate the translation of corporate EDI ideas to subsidiary contexts. However, the translation process is not a mechanical exercise of ensuring equivalence of meaning between corporate and subsidiary EDI ideas. Rather, it is an iterative and generative process that can reveal underlying control and power positions between professional categories. This underscores the need to carefully consider the dynamics of professional relationships when translating EDI and existing hierarchical status. In this context, subsidiary managers should identify which actors may undermine the translation process through the use of specific power positions. This depends significantly on the content of the ideas: the understanding of EDI ideas cannot be taken for granted, as it is socially constructed by the actors at play. Employees from different professional categories may perceive EDI ideas differently, requiring tailored communication and engagement strategies. Failing to involve all the professional categories – at different levels of hierarchy – in the translation process can lead to resistance, misalignment with local needs, or the implementation of policies that feel disconnected from the daily realities of employees. To avoid these pitfalls, it is essential that managers engage all relevant voices in the translation process, ensuring that every professional category is represented and that their unique perspectives are integrated into the process.



Finally, with respect to the healthcare industry, we underscore the critical need for companies to strategically engage clinical staff in the understanding of EDI. Instead of introducing EDI as a novel concept for them, companies should focus their efforts on translating EDI into aspects in which clinical staff already excel.

## Conclusions

The translation of EDI ideas requires the engagement of all MNC actors, transcending inter/intraorganizational settings and prompting them to calibrate their professional attitudes, behaviors, and opinions while concurrently striving to eradicate certain beliefs. We particularly focus on professional backgrounds to show that the subsidiary's actors continuously construct and reconstruct their understanding of EDI within their respective professional categories, revealing their different roles in the translation process. This sets the ground for future lines of inquiry, suggesting new knowledge on the global, local, and professional understanding of EDI. First, our emphasis in this study is on the one-way translation of EDI ideas from the HQs within the subsidiary. While this focus does not capture any translation process from the subsidiary back to the HQs, in principle, this may become a multidirectional translation process in time. It may be intriguing to explore if and how, once the translation of ideas and related objects and actions is stabilized in the subsidiary, new ideas from the subsidiary may travel back to the HQs, envisioning a bottom-up approach. However, the evolving political climate, particularly the backlash against EDI under the Trump administration, may alter the dynamics of the multidirectional EDI translation process between U.S. HQs and foreign subsidiaries. As many U.S. MNCs have revised or deemphasized their EDI strategies in response to political pressures, it is worth considering how these shifts could influence the flow of ideas from subsidiaries back to HQs and vice versa.

Second, our research examines the translation process of ideas from one context to another, intentionally exploring the differences between the U.S. and Italy. Consistent with Welch et al. (2022), our study challenges the traditional separation of phenomenon and context; indeed, the context and the actors operating within it are not merely surrounding factors but, more importantly, play a constitutive role in shaping the phenomenon under observation. Future research could investigate how EDI translation processes differ across various contexts and industries, particularly those characterized by diverse professional categories or differing levels of professional diversity.

Finally, we encourage future scholars to explore the different meanings professional diversity may acquire when a translation process involves ideas beyond those of EDI. Furthermore, although it was not the primary focus of

our paper, we observed that the professional diversity between administrative and clinical staff can be further understood through the lens of power relations (Ciuk et al., 2019). They may be both formal and informal, with formal authority stemming from organizational roles, whereas informal power relations emerge from the discretion exercised by certain groups within the translation process.

## Appendix

### At subsidiary level

#### Interview questions

1. Are you familiar with the objectives of the EDI project that 2LMP is developing?
2. Do you know how the project originated? Are you aware of when the intention to develop the project first emerged? When was it communicated?
3. Is there a measurement system in place to evaluate the achievement of the project's goals? If so, what are the measurement metrics and who sets them? Do they change within the 2LMP Italy Subsidiary?
4. Is there a reporting system? If yes, how frequently does it occur? Who does the reporting go to? Is it an internal reporting system within the Italian subsidiary? And between the Italian and American companies? What variables are considered? Are any of these variables related to compensation?
5. Is there an auditing system? If so, is it managed by an external body?
6. Is the EDI a project imported from the parent company? If yes, do you know when it was promoted at the parent company? How do you think this transfer is happening? Through formal procedures (policies, manuals)? Or through more informal procedures?
7. Do you think it is appropriate to replicate the process followed by the parent company in the American context? What support could the parent company provide or is already providing? What are the obstacles (bureaucratic, cultural, regulatory) you foresee in adapting the project to the Italian context?
8. Do you think the national and European legislative framework affects the development of the project? If so, how?
9. What existed before the EDI project?
10. How do you contribute to the development of the project?
11. How much time do you dedicate daily and weekly to working on the project?
12. Would you like to work more on the project? Do you think there is a trade-off between working on the pro-



ject and your career? If so, how do you justify it? Does the development of the project impact your compensation?

13. Who do you collaborate with within the organization to develop the project? Do you also collaborate with external parties to 2LMP?
14. Are you aware of other organizations in the healthcare (and non-healthcare) sector that are working on a similar project?
15. Do you discuss the project with friends and family?
16. In your opinion, what benefits can the implementation of the project bring and for whom? What disadvantages might it have?
17. Is the project changing existing practices?
18. Do you think there are internal and/or external parties putting pressure for the EDI project to progress? If so, who are they and what do you think their interest is?
19. Conversely, do you think there are internal and/or external parties who want to obstruct the project? If so, who are they and why?
20. What opportunities or moments do you have to discuss the project's progress with other colleagues and/or external parties? Are these formal occasions like meetings? If so, who participates? Does it sometimes come up in less formal moments (e.g., coffee breaks)? Do you think the project progresses faster in formal or informal settings? Why?
21. Equality, diversity, and inclusion: what do these terms mean to you?
22. Is there a relevant episode related to this theme that has marked your career? If so, how?

## At corporate level

### Interview questions

1. What does EDI mean?
2. Does this concept change within 2LMP in the USA, Italy, Ireland, and other 2LMP locations? If yes, why?
3. How do you achieve an equal, diverse, and inclusive work environment within a corporate group like 2LMP?
4. Did (do) you adopt specific practices and/or processes to transfer EDI goals from one location to another?
5. What are the most significant challenges in these processes in the different national contexts?
6. In your opinion, what roles are important in achieving EDI goals in 2LMP?

The Italian subsidiary promotes initiatives defined in terms of diversity and inclusion within the gender equality plan (see Fig. 4)



Fig. 4 Header of the subsidiary's GEP

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