A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia

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A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

of

Drexel University

by

Madlene A. Minassian

in partial fulfillment of the

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the past, the present, and the future: my cherished late parents, my steadfast husband, and my brilliant sons.

I dedicate this work to my graceful mother, Alice, and my generous father, Shahen. Their love, guidance, and sacrifice led me to this moment. I am profoundly grateful for their influence in kindling my sense of wonder, guiding me towards an appreciation of our diverse world, and concurrently strengthening my connection to my own identity. I treasure their memories. This achievement is a small part of their remarkable legacies.

I dedicate this work to my husband, Arthur. Thank you for being open to all the "crazy" I bring into our lives. Thank you for lifting me in life, especially throughout this academic journey, and for being so passionately devoted to our family.

I dedicate this work to my ultimate treasures, my sons David and Shahen. Your bright and curious minds, your compassionate hearts, and your magical smiles filled me with the fuel I needed to accomplish this feat. We have an Armenian saying, ապրոսը ձեզ, which roughly translates to, "may you be next." What I truly wish to convey is my hope that lifelong learning brings you the same joy that it has brought me.

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Thank you to my dear family and incredible friends who supported me through my most challenging days. The week my doctoral journey began, my beloved Armenia erupted in war, and I laid my father's ashes to rest. Amidst this period, my heart further shattered with the loss of my dear student Davit, taken in battle, as well as the passing of my incredible mother to her battle with cancer. From Yerevan to LA, Palm Springs, NY, and Montreal, my tribe not only stood by my side but carried me. When it comes to loved ones, my cup runneth over. Please know you each hold a piece of my heart and my puzzle is only complete with your love.

I would also like to thank those in the arena. Thank you Tammy for encouraging me and gaining the support to make it happen. Thank you to Dr. Kathryn Farrell and Dr. Susan Budde, whose presence made this journey doable, enjoyable, and memorable. Finally, thank you Mimi մորքույր *(mother's sister)* for holding mom's ailing and my trembling hands, when we needed it the most. I admire the mix of grace and strength that lies within you. My grandmother, mother, my adored aunty Alice, my loving Medik մորքույր, and Mimi all personify exemplary educators. Through them, and through my own beloved teachers, I was able to discover my own 'why.'

Lastly, my appreciation goes to my participants, who entrusted me with one of their greatest treasures: their stories. May your narratives illuminate a bright shared future.

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Abstract

A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia

Madlene A. Minassian, Ed.D.

Drexel University, May 2023

Peggy A. Kong

This phenomenological study explored the lived experience of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) among multinational enterprise employees (MNE) in the homogenous Republic of Armenia. Addressing a literature gap in non-Western perspectives, the research emphasized the importance of local context in crafting effective EDI interventions for this population. Through semi-structured interviews with seven employees from a tech based MNE in Yerevan, the study aimed to answer how the participants described their overall experiences with EDI, both before and during employment at the MNE. By employing member-checking and practicing epoche, the study aimed to capture the participants' authentic voices more accurately. In-depth qualitative analysis yielded five key findings: (1) Intercultural competence development: Informal transformative learning drives personal and professional growth within the MNE context; (2) The double-edged sword of commonality: The subduing of cultural differences; (3) The uneven landscape of a lingua franca: Constrained employees and diminished productivity; (4) Perception bias breeds inequity: Non-Armenians are viewed as superior professionals within the MNE environment; and (5) The power of diversity: Multicultural perspectives enrich common goals. The study provides a foundation for diversity management scholars and human resources professionals to build upon in developing targeted interventions for this population.

Keywords: multinational enterprise, Armenia, equity, diversity, inclusion

Chapter One: Introduction to the Research

In 2016, United States President Barack Obama astutely observed, “Globalization is a fact -- because of technology, because of an integrated global supply chain, and because of changes in transportation” (Remarks by President Obama, 2016). The geographic distribution of the 2020 list of Global Fortune 500 companies is a testament to the rise of multinational enterprises (MNEs). Of the 500 companies listed, 68% were based outside of the United States (Global 500, 2020). Consequently, the expansion of global economic relations among MNE employees warrants academic study to provide insight into managing international teams with disparate experiences vis-à-vis equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Equity entails overcoming the history of discrimination and marginalization that disadvantaged groups of people experience (Minow, 2021). Diversity encompasses “valued perspective and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring” (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 6). Inclusion within the workplace enables, encourages, and facilitates individual employees who differ from the mainstream to participate in all aspects of the organization and decision-making processes (Mor Barak, 2000). Diversity can be considered as “the act of counting diverse heads, while inclusion is about making those heads count, and feel counted” (Wilson, 2016, p. 124). Consequently, members of an equal, diverse, and inclusive group have equal access to opportunity and are treated fairly.

The benefits of EDI in the workplace encompass heightened innovation, improved decision-making, increased job satisfaction, and access to a broader talent pool and customer base (Howard & Ulferts, 2020; Ohunakin et al., 2019). A robust EDI presence within an MNE also impacts the bottom line. For instance, companies in the upper quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity within their executive teams outperform those in the lower quartile by 36% (Dixon-

Fyle et al., 2020). Embracing EDI in a business environment results in larger-scale recruitment opportunities improves customer orientation, enhances decision-making and innovation, and increases employee satisfaction (Hunt et al., 2015). However, fostering a nurturing EDI culture poses even more challenges with the rise of MNEs.

The growing demand for EDI interventions, due to the change in workforce demographics and globalization calls for a better understanding of intervention efficacy (Bezrukova et al., 2016). Despite scant scholarship addressing experiences with EDI among diverse global populations, MNEs continue to increase spending on such interventions (McGregor, 2020). The Diversity Best Practices 2016 Benchmarking Report revealed that companies allocated as much as 3% of their budgets on EDI initiatives, one-quarter of which was dedicated to learning and development interventions (DBP Research, 2019).

Understanding the dynamics of EDI in the workplace demands an appreciation of the richness of human diversity and a broad spectrum of criteria against which equal opportunity, entitlements, and outcomes are judged (Sen, 1995). It is especially important to examine global perspectives of EDI as mainstream Western-centric approaches for a global employee base are ineffective (Goodman, 2013). For instance, employees from ethnically homogeneous nations may experience unfamiliarity interacting with others of a different nationality. Thus, concepts and theories developed in Western societies to address EDI approaches lack universal applicability (Bond, 1996). Even the term “diversity” can be met with resistance as it is seen as a US export, and misunderstood outside of the Western context (Rohini & Winters, 2008). Acknowledging that Western theories and solutions may not apply globally presents scholars with an opportunity to recognize and explore lived experience with EDI among global populations.

One such population resides in Armenia, one of the most homogenous nations in the world. According to the Republic of Armenia (2019), the population of three million is composed of 98.1% ethnic Armenians. The landlocked country, situated in the South Caucasus, attained independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 and is presently a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, a regional intergovernmental organization with member countries from Eastern Europe and Asia.

Although Armenia is situated in a predominantly Islamic region, it is a Christian country recognized for its democratic government. The nation has made significant strides in battling corruption and fortifying its democracy, reflected by a 44% improvement in the last decade of its global ranking score (Transparency International, 2022), and a 22% improvement in its freedom score over the last five years (Freedom House, 2022).

Armenia's geopolitical situation has profoundly impacted its development, growth, and interaction with the global community. In 1923, Joseph Stalin transferred the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, populated with 94% Armenians, from the Armenia S.S.R to Azerbaijan S.S.R. (Blakemore, 2021). In 1991, as both Armenia and Azerbaijan declared independence from the USSR, regional clashes for control over Nagorno-Karabakh escalated into a three-year war, culminating in Armenia's victory over said territories (McBride, 2022). Subsequently, Armenia's borders remained closed with two of its four neighbors, Azerbaijan and its ally Turkey (Isayev & Mejlumyan, 2022). In September 2020, Azerbaijan rekindled the war leading to Armenia's capitulation and a renewed presence of Russian influence in the region through a Kremlin-brokered trilateral agreement. As of December 2022, Azerbaijan continued to receive support from Turkey, while Armenia remained dependent on Russia as it continued to explore Western

political alliances as an alternative (Blakemore, 2021). This persistent geopolitical instability resulted in continued isolation and negative sentiments among the Caucasus neighbors.

Since gaining independence from the USSR, and despite ongoing conflict with neighboring Azerbaijan, Armenia has consistently secured strong economic performance scores, graduating to an upper middle-income economy in 2019 with a 2021 GDP per capita of $4,670 (World Bank, 2022). Over 54% of Armenia's economy is dependent on services (Central Intelligence Agency, 2022), propelling the government to foster an attractive international business environment. The U.S. Department of State (2021) Investment Report of 2021 highlights the burgeoning high-tech industry, emphasizing considerable foreign investment by information technology (IT) MNEs opening branches or subsidiaries to capitalize on the pool of Armenia's engineering specialists. As of July, 2022, the IT industry consisted of more than 20,000 employees (International Trade Administration, 2022). This foreign investment was further fueled by Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, prompting hundreds of other IT companies to relocate to Armenia (International Trade Administration, 2022). The presence of MNEs such as NVIDIA and Miro highlight the growing need to study conditions for these organizations in order to ensure their continued success in building effective teams in the country.

At the time of the study the MNE site had operated in Armenia for over a decade, and as of February 2023, had nearly 1,000 employees residing in eight countries. Over 80% of the employees were based in Armenia, which means the majority of the overall team was ethnically Armenian. Employees in the heterogenous nations of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Germany constituted more culturally diverse teams.

At the time of the study, EDI efforts were undertaken by the Legal and Human Resources Teams and a voluntary global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce. The Legal and Human

Resources Development (HRD) Teams organized mandatory training related to EDI including an annual training on Harassment Prevention, developed through a Western lens but distributed for the global team. The volunteer Taskforce produced a monthly newsletter addressing topics related to EDI, organized an annual Global Cause Spotlight to highlight organizations advancing EDI, coordinated events such as Women's History Month, and ran the two employee resources groups focused on Women of Color and Asians within the company. Both the HRD team and the task force planned to expand interventions surrounding EDI in the second part of 2023 to include intercultural communication training and additional employee resource groups.

The Problem Statement

Context is crucial when crafting or implementing relevant EDI initiatives for global work environments, including understanding how employees interpret such initiatives (Umeh et al., 2022). As most of the scholarship on diversity management has taken place in the United States (Van Ewijk, 2011), the lived experience of populations in transitional countries is largely uncharted (Hennekam & Tahssain-Gay, 2015). The problem this study sought to address was the limited knowledge about the EDI experiences of employees residing in the homogenous nation of Armenia while working in MNEs.

Scholarship demonstrates that when MNEs myopically apply Western EDI interventions universally, they can create an unintended effect causing even more problems (Goodman, 2013). Acknowledging that not all Western EDI principles and practices can easily be transferred globally provides HRD scholars an opportunity to examine global experiences with EDI. Moreover, despite the large body of research conducted in the Western context on EDI, it remains mostly unknown if prior theories and findings regarding the effects of diversity management apply to traditionally homogenous cultures (Mehng et al., 2019). Such

understanding can positively impact the development of more globally equitable, diverse, and inclusive organizations (Goodman, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences with equity, diversity, and inclusion of multinational enterprise employees residing in the homogeneous Republic of Armenia.

Significance of the Problem

According to Goodman (2013), “global diversity leaders must begin with an examination of the fundamental assumptions underlying the understanding of EDI to help create truly globally diverse and inclusive organizations" (p. 181). This study sought to provide such insight, which may benefit MNEs operating in the Republic of Armenia and inform future research conducted in other homogenous nations. The findings can be particularly useful to Armenia’s growing IT market as MNEs prepare their global employees to thrive in an equitable, diverse, and inclusive environment and address existing talent shortages in the industry (Hamilton, 2022). Conclusions from the study can contribute to the business industry and beyond, by informing tailored interventions to promote EDI through advancing intercultural management and practice.

Research Questions

This qualitative study explored a single phenomenon to understand the lived experience of employees that live in the Republic of Armenia yet work for an MNE. The overarching question of this study was: How do MNE employees in Armenia describe their overall experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion? The sub-questions included:

1. How has the lived experience of the employee with equity, diversity, and inclusion prior to joining an MNE shaped employee understanding of EDI?

2. How has the lived experience of the employee working with a multicultural team changed their understanding of EDI?

The Conceptual Framework

Researcher Stance

As a qualitative researcher my paradigms, interests, beliefs, and principles influenced the genesis of and shaped this research (Creswell, 2007; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As a social constructivist, I believe that knowledge is individually constructed through one's social interactions. Social constructivism was developed by Lev Vygotsky, positing that social and cultural influences shape how one understands and interprets concepts (Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1989) and that people create meaning through interactions with one another (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

Social constructivism calls for a relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology, and a balanced axiology (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). My relativist ontological assumption is that reality is derived from socially constructed meanings and that an overall shared reality does not exist (Ryan, 2018). In this case, discourse with the study's participants is essential, as there is a need to understand the individual experience rather than universal law (Schreiber & Valle, 2013) emphasizing that context is vital for knowledge. This paradigm leads me to seek an understanding of lived experience. Through this exploration, I hoped to uncover shared perspectives and mutual understanding to find commonalities among the studied population and differences between individual perceptions.

To this end and through my subjective epistemological stance, I understand that I gain knowledge through my personal experiences and interactions with the study participants. I

believe that reality is subjective and differs with each person, and that the lived experience of co-constructors can serve to form a consensus of understanding (Scotland, 2012).

Finally, a balanced axiological perspective asked that I reveal such understanding through the participants' stories and to do so I must bracket my own subjective reality. Through bracketing, I sought to uncover a fresh perspective on the phenomenon (Moustakes, 1994) and a detailed account of the experience from the population. As Moustakes (1994) notes, in phenomenological research, perception is seen as the primary source of knowledge and the researcher must investigate their intersubjective reality and create an epoche or a clearing of judgement or expectation. Rooted in my values, I intended to observe the shared understanding the research surfaces and to quell, to the best of my ability, my subjective understanding of EDI in MNEs that operate in Armenia.

Experiential Base

I spent the first half of my life in West Hollywood/Los Angeles, one of the globe's most diverse cities (Los Angeles Controller, 2021). I then moved to Yerevan, one of the world's most homogenous cities (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021). This journey provided me with tacit knowledge about both environments. For the last nine years and the duration of this study, I have been employed in an MNE with employees similar to the population I intended to study. Although I am Armenian by descent, I believe that my colleagues view me as an outsider to the phenomenon, and I concur. I land somewhere in the middle of a researcher insider or outsider (Merton, 1972) in that I am an employee that resides in Armenia, but as an expatriate to Armenia, I do not belong to the specified social status being investigated. In this sense, I am an in-betweener with both privileged access and empathetic understanding (Chhabra, 2020).

As Head of Learning & Development, I am entrusted with implementing EDI training on a global scale. Having observed numerous interactions with both positive and negative impact on EDI I have come to appreciate the significance of such interventions. I believe that Armenia's future hinges on expanding the global services sector and that research must inform the nurturing of workplace EDI among employees whose lived experience mostly lacks diversity. I also posit that if this area of study is not prioritized and interventions are not tailored or effective for this population, EDI-related issues may hinder the economic growth crucial to Armenia's prosperity.

My objective in conducting this research was to contribute to scholarship on this phenomenon by surfacing participants' experiences that could inform HRD practitioners as they develop and enact interventions to promote EDI for this demographic group. As an American, I have derived immense value from experiencing diversity. As a leader, I propagate this value throughout the organization in my work and as a member of the EDI Taskforce. While I possess a passion and strong commitment towards EDI, I maintain that the value of this research is derived from understanding the participants' experiences, and to illuminate these experiences, I must bracket my own beliefs and perceptions.

Researcher Organization of the Literature Review

Research Streams

The benefits of EDI in the corporate world are supported by scholarship and include better decision-making, increased innovation, higher job satisfaction, and a larger talent pool and customer base (Howard & Ulferts, 2020; Ohunakin et al., 2019). Consequently, MNEs invest substantial resources to train their global employees to value EDI. Despite extensive research on EDI in the Western world, it is unknown if current approaches apply to homogenous nations (Mehng et al., 2019). Thus, the literature review was organized around three streams with this in

mind: Intercultural Competence, Global EDI Management, and the Individual Experience of EDI.

The first stream examined Milton Bennett's (1986) seminal Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) framework. Based on Grounded Theory, DMIS outlines how people experience and engage with cultural differences. A review of Hofstede's seminal Cultural Dimensions Theory provides insight into cultural disparities and is focused on the theory's Individualism vs Collectivism dimension (Hofstede, 1980) as it pertains to openness for EDI.

The second stream on global EDI management was built on the intercultural competence stream, but through a practitioner's lens. The stream included international scholarship on EDI management and reviewed global EDI intervention efforts. A landmark study on diversity perspectives by Ely & Thomas (2001) identified three perceptions on the value of EDI for an organization: the integration & learning perspective, the access and legitimacy perspective, and the discrimination and fairness perspective. The stream also reviewed global EDI interventions to reveal that authority in designing and delivering such interventions should be entrusted to local affiliates of international institutions (Goodman, 2013). Lastly, the lens of civility was presented as an approach to diversity management (Von Bergen, 2013).

The third stream on the Individual's Experience with EDI began with a review of lived experience and the participants' voice, and examined context and materiality to gain insight into the participants' perspective (Umeh et al., 2022). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974) was also reviewed through the lens of ingroup and outgroup dynamics in the workplace. The stream then evaluated EDI through the transformative learning lens to understand how individuals turn lived experience into a new reality (Mezirow, 1990). The stream concluded with a review of MNEs in

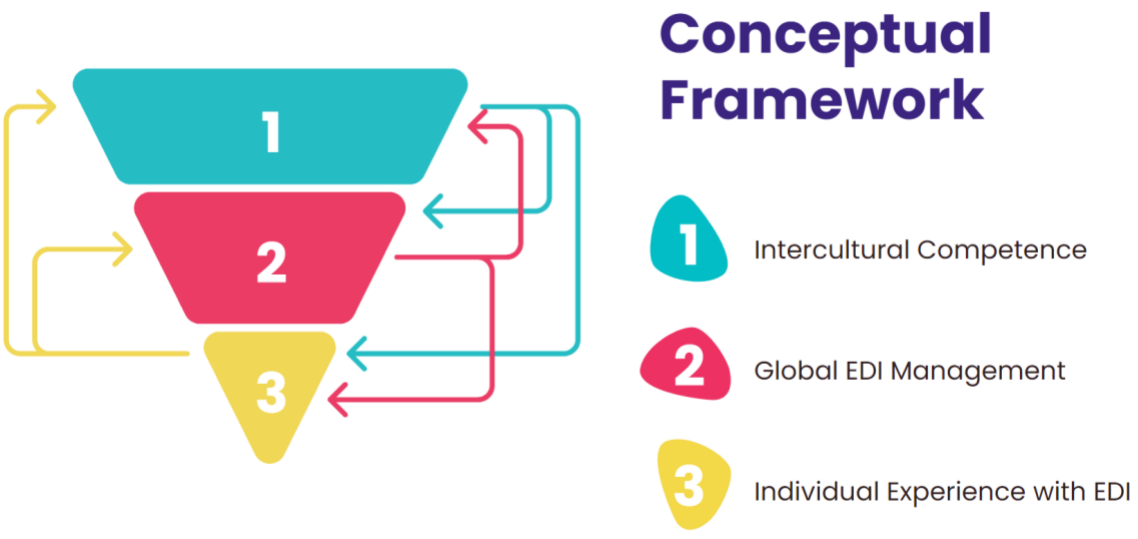
their enforcement of English as a common language, and the barriers and language anxiety that individuals experience as a result (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017).

Graphic Representation

A graphic representation, depicted in Figure 1, illustrates the three research streams to provide an understanding of the state of EDI in the global corporate setting. By examining intercultural competence, global diversity management, and the individual's experience of EDI, the streams offered a convergent understanding, transitioning from a macro-level review of intercultural competence to a micro-level exploration of individual experiences. These streams formed the foundation for understanding and analyzing the research. The arrows demonstrate that although the literature review narrows like a funnel from the broader global lens to the individual lens, the three streams inform one another to create a comprehensive understanding of EDI experienced in the MNE context.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for the Literature Review



Definition of Terms

Access and Legitimacy Perspective:

A perspective on workforce diversity, developed by Ely & Thomas (2001), states that since markets and constituencies are diverse, it benefits the organization to match that diversity in its workforce to gain access and legitimacy within those markets and groups.

Discrimination and Fairness Perspective:

Ely & Thomas (2001) developed a workplace perspective on diversity based on the belief that an organization has a moral imperative to provide justice and fair treatment, practice equality in hiring and promoting employees, and should aim to eliminate discrimination.

Diversity:

"Valued perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring" (Thomas & Ely, 1996, p. 6).

Diversity Perspective:

A group's normative beliefs and expectations surrounding cultural diversity and its role in the work group (Ely & Thomas, 2001) provides a cognitive framework within which group members interpret and act upon their experience of cultural identity differences.

Epoche

A process in which the researcher is disciplined and systematic in setting aside any prejudgements about the phenomenon they are investigating (Moustakas, 1994)

Global Intelligence

The competence to understand, respond to, and work in the best interest and benefit of humankind and others (Spariosu, 2006).

Inclusive Workplace:

Allows, encourages, and facilitates the integration of individual employees who differ from the mainstream in the organization's information network and decision-making processes (Mor Barak, 2000).

Integration and Learning Perspective:

A perspective on workplace diversity developed by Ely & Thomas (2001) which states that insights, skills, and experiences that employees have developed as members of various cultural identity groups are potentially valuable resources that the work group can use to innovate primary tasks and redefine its markets, products, strategies, and business practices to advance the company's mission.

Intercultural Competence

"One's ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude" (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248).

Lingua Franca

An adopted language by an enterprise that serves as a standard means to communicate for speakers of different native languages and serves as a bridge for effective communication (Crystal, 2019)

Lived Experience

The immediate pre-reflective experience or conscious experience of life (Dithey, 1985). "The intersection of occurrences and events individuals live through with their recollections, derived meanings, gained knowledge, choices, and the context in which these encounters rest" (Umeh et al., 2022, p. 3).

Multinational Enterprise (MNE)

Wholly or partially state-owned or privately owned production, distribution, services, or other facilities that also operate outside of the country where they are based (International Labour Organization, 2017).

Social Constructivism Theory

A theory that examines knowledge and understanding as jointly developed by individuals and assumes that humans coordinate such understanding, significance, and meaning (Amineh & Asl, 2015). The theory postulates that human beings create a model of the social world and how it functions (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009).

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

At least three assumptions could have influenced this study. The first assumption was that lived experience in heterogeneous societies and those in homogenous nations yield different perspectives on EDI. A second assumption was that Western developed interventions might not be relevant for employees from the Republic of Armenia. Although previous studies have revealed such findings in other countries (Goodman, 2013), the population of Armenia has not been studied in this respect. A third assumption was that despite individuals from Armenia having access to a global cyber-world, international media and the arts, their lived experience is still limited concerning EDI, as they reside in a homogenous nation.

Limitations

One possible limitation of this study could have been principled resignation by the employees, in which they relay the company's stance on EDI, fearing punishment if they deviate from this stance (O'Toole & Bennis, 2009). As I am a leader within the organization, the participants may have conveyed what the MNE or what I would have liked to hear based on

company strategy, thus, resulting in the provision of socially desirable results (Miltiades, 2008). To mitigate this bias, special consideration was given to emphasizing the anonymity, storage and usage of the data, and my role as a doctoral student, independent of the MNE under study.

Another possible limitation could be my own biases and expectations that could have impacted the interview process. This could have surfaced in unconsciously asking leading questions, or interpreting the data in a way that supports a particular stance (King & Horrocks, 2010). Although the practice of epoche can mitigate such a limitation, it is worthy of mention.

A further limitation of the study was that although participants fit the criteria for the population studied, research conducted within a single organization in the IT sector, representing one industry, may not necessarily transfer to all employees from the Republic of Armenia. In this case, transferability, or the degree that findings from a qualitative study can be transferred to populations in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) presented as a limitation.

Chapter Summary

To contribute to the scholarship on global EDI understanding, this study aimed to explore the lived experience with EDI of MNE employees that reside in the Republic of Armenia. Chapter One presented the purpose and significance of the phenomenological study, the research questions, assumptions, and limitations. Chapter Two encompasses a Literature Review of global EDI research to date, including three streams on intercultural competence, global diversity management, and the individual experience of EDI. Chapter Three reviews the phenomenological methodology and the methods used. Chapter Four outlines the study' findings, and Chapter Five concludes with a discussion of the findings and their significance for current and future global EDI efforts, as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

This phenomenological study explored the lived experience of equity, diversity, and inclusion among multinational enterprise employees from the homogeneous Republic of Armenia. Such a study prompts a review of existing literature on intercultural competence, global EDI management, and the individual experience of EDI.

The first stream in this Chapter, on Intercultural Competence, examined the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, a seminal framework developed by Milton Bennett in the 20th century (Bennett, 1986). Based on Grounded Theory, the framework explains how people experience and engage with cultural differences. Moreover, the seminal work of Geert Hofstede's (1980) Cultural Dimensions Theory provided focused analysis of the theory's Individualism and Collectivism dimension and a collectivist culture's approach to deviation from the norm.

The second stream, on Global EDI Management, accentuated international scholarship on diversity management, encompassing a review of interventions. A landmark study on diversity perspectives by Ely & Thomas (2001) introduced a motivation model for EDI among employees in diverse organizations. Subsequently, a study on the lens of civility was presented as a method to manage diversity within an MNE (Von Bergen, 2013).

The third stream, concerning the Individual Experience of EDI, explored lived experience and the participant's voice, focusing on context and materiality as avenues to gain insight into the experience (Umeh et al., 2022). The stream incorporated Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974), reviewing ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination as well as outgroup favoritism and its implications. An overview of transformative learning explored the process of experiencing and evolving due to such experiences (Mezirow, 1990). Lastly, a review of

language barriers within MNEs was presented, framing lived experience with language barrier and language anxiety.

These three streams informed the research topic and provided a funneled understanding from the macro intercultural lens to the micro individual experience of EDI. This funnel provided information to frame the understanding and analysis of lived experience in a homogenous nation yet encountering EDI within an MNE.

Recognizing that Western approaches may not apply globally presents EDI scholars with the opportunity to explore management practices that transfer across borders and cultures. In order to develop appropriate and effective interventions, it is essential to understand the lived experience different populations have with EDI. The study posed the following question: How do MNE employees from Armenia describe their overall experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion? Sub-questions included: How has the lived experience of the employee with equity, diversity, and inclusion prior to joining the MNE shaped their understanding of EDI? And, how has the lived experience of the employee working with a multicultural team shaped understanding of EDI?

Stream One: Intercultural Competence

In response to the growing need for global business intelligence, scholars have explored cultivating intercultural competence to improve business communications and practice (Mahadevan et al., 2020). Specifically, HRD professionals who work with diverse teams consult the literature in the field of diversity management to gain insight and approaches into improving EDI (Özbilgin & Ahu, 2015). Intercultural competence is defined as “one’s ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitude (Deardorff, 2006, p. 248). Increasing intercultural competence is

to advance global intelligence, or the capacity to understand, respond to, and work towards the best interest and benefit of humanity (Spariosu, 2006).

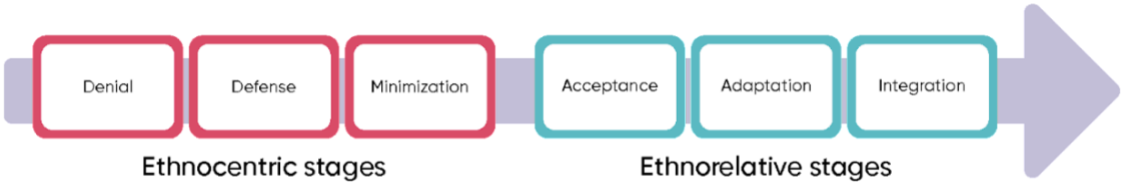
This stream examined the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) Framework reviewing both the theory and its operationalization through empirical research that employed the model. Additionally, the Cultural Dimensions Theory was presented (Hofstede,1980). A seminal work within cross-cultural studies, its Individualism- Collectivism Dimension was further explored in its relationship with the degree of adherence to values and norms that collectivist cultures hold.

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

The significance of intercultural competence is well recognized (Hammer et al., 2003), and MNEs rely on such competence to nurture equitable, diverse, and inclusive teams. The DMIS, a seminal model for intercultural competence developed by Milton Bennett (1986), offers a six-phase spectrum of intercultural sensitivity. Cultural sensitivity is defined as "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (Hammer et al., 2003, p. 442) or to dually observe and recognize one's own cultural values, but also the values of those culturally different (Hyder, 2015). The model's underlying assumption posits that as one's experience of cultural competence becomes more complex and sophisticated, the potential for intercultural competence increases, as depicted in Figure 2 (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

Figure 2

Visualization for Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity



Note: From "Developing students' intercultural competences through international service-learning: a toolkit for teachers." S.K.P. Tong, J. Ho-Yin Yau, & K.P. Kwan (2018). Unpublished. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.14209.20323.

As illustrated, the model shows an individual's progression toward cultural competence. In the first three stages, the individual maintains an ethnocentric view; and in the last three phases, they adopt an ethnorelativist view. In ethnocentrism, individuals consider their own culture as the sole criterion for the interpreting or valuing of other ethnic groups. This manifests by avoiding cultural differences through negative labeling, perceiving themselves as threatened, or by minimizing the significance of cultural differences (Adili & Xhambazi, 2021). As the individual's culture constructs their own reality, their central experience of reality is through their own culture alone (Bennett, 2004). In the first phase, Denial, individuals practice psychological or physical isolation, as individuals see their culture as the only real one (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). In the second phase, Defense, the individual sees their culture as the only good one, denigrating others. In the third phase, Minimization, other cultures are seen as similar to the individuals, with surface differences (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). In this stage, cultural differences are subdued or downplayed, and instead cultural commonality and universal absolutes are highlighted (Anderson et al., 2006). Through emphasis on commonalities, a sense of comfort and unity can be created by the individuals (Hammer, 2012), however such comfort

may cause the underappreciation of different cultures and the complexities involved in intercultural communication (Bennett, 1993; Hammer et al, 2003).

In the final three phases of the ethnorelativist model, individuals experience their culture in the context of other cultures (Bennett & Bennett, 2004) as individuals recognize that their values and behavior are one in many constructs of reality (Adili &Xhambazi, 2021). The fourth phase, Acceptance, involves recognizing that other cultures hold different constructions of reality and understanding different cultural perspectives. In the fifth phase, Adaptation, individuals can switch and shift between various perspectives; moving in and out of other cultural worldviews. The last phase, Integration, allows the individual to seamlessly or fluently move in and out of different cultural worldviews (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

The DMIS can provide a theoretical lens to understand the experiences of MNE employees with EDI and their progression toward intercultural competence. This model identifies an individual's position along the continuum from ethnocentric to ethnorelative and from incompetent to competent. By studying the experiences of various populations, HRD professionals can develop targeted programming for each phase of the journey.

For instance, a questionnaire-based study on 355 students in Armenia's neighboring Republic of Georgia revealed that most students enrolled in teacher education programs were in the ethnocentric phase of the DMIS Model and that their level of educational attainment positively impacted advancement within the phases. Such insight can contribute to educational policy and instructional development within the studied population (Tabatadze & Gorgadze, 2018). In another study, Tabatadze et al. (2020) reviewed 17 Georgian primary-grade textbooks, categorized them as ethnocentric and identified their shortcomings in promoting ethnocentric approaches such as; promoting intolerance, cases of stereotyping, classification of different

groups such as invalids or enemies, and issues with accuracy of cultural information. Such research can change the trajectory of Georgia's students and inform scholarship for similar populations.

Developing Intercultural Competence

The DMIS model proposes that individuals can improve their intercultural competence by subjectively understanding and experiencing cultural differences (Bennett, 1986). Bennett (2021) reveals that intercultural viability, or the probability of a group adapting to increased diversity, is significantly influenced by intercultural training. Research on study abroad programs indicate a connection between such experiences and an increase in intercultural competence (Anderson & Lawton, 2011; Heinzmann et al., 2015; Petrie-Wyman et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2021; & Wickline et al., 2020). For example, a mixed-methods study by Tang et al. (2021) showed that students enrolled in a study abroad program have higher intercultural competence than their counterparts who did not participate in such international experiences. In this study, and following the experience, the students reached the ethnorelativist Acceptance and Adaptation stages in Bennett's (1986) model.

Bennett & Bennett's (2004) article recognizes an American-centric communication, cognitive, and learning style in implementing diversity training across a global audience, which they recognize as contradictory to the training's purpose of diversity and inclusion. Even today, decades later, there is still a need to manage workplace diversity through culturally relevant training in a socially responsible and inclusive manner (Syed & Kramer, 2009). Building on this, Marginson & Sawir (2011) suggest that transitioning from a monocultural to a multicultural viewpoint is a multidimensional process that requires lifelong learning. They recommend a

holistic approach, advocating for multidimensional educational programs including both formal and informal methods.

A relevant component of the DMIS that Bennett (1986) posits is that an individual's interaction with different cultures does not necessarily make them more culturally competent. Rather, the subjective experience drawn from such interactions and the meaning associated with them is vital in advancing their worldview. This is particularly relevant considering Bennett (2004) recognizes that individuals primarily socialized in a homogeneous society find it challenging to differentiate between their own perceptions and those who are culturally different. The fundamental principle that intercultural competence can be learned brings merit to exploring the lived experience of employees of MNEs residing in a homogenous nation. Understanding such experiences can lay the groundwork for developing relevant programming that also meets the learners where they fall within the DMIS Framework.

Cultural Dimensions Theory

One of the most prominent theories to emerge from cross-cultural research in the 20th Century is Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, which has become the foundation for a substantial body of scholarly research (Powell, 2006). As of December 2022, the work of the theorist Geert Hofstede has been cited over 225,000 times (Google Scholar). The international business community has embraced his work to address challenges and opportunities impacting global operations. Hofstede (2001) posits that the exploration of culture is a significant stabilizing factor for organizational success in international markets.

The Theory of Cultural Dimensions characterizes the effects of a society's culture on its members' values and how these influence behavior. Hofstede initially identified four dimensions of culture: Individualism-Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Power Distance, and

Masculinity-Femininity (Hofstede, 2001). In 2010, he added Long versus Short-Term Orientation and subsequently, Indulgence versus Self-Restraint as two additional dimensions (Minkov & Hofstede, 2013). Through these six dimensions, Hofstede sought to uncover ways that cultures differ from one another, where nations lie on the spectrum and the implications that arise in cross-cultural interaction.

The Cultural Dimensions Theory, however, has been subject to academic critique (Powell, 2006). Among the limitations noted, scholars have addressed Hofstede's (2001) assertion that individuals have distinct, transparent, and independent cultural layers. Signorini (2009) argues that the concept of layers, which he metaphorically presents as separate coats one wears and takes off one by one, may not be adequate. Instead, he posits that a multicultural being is better symbolized by a single knitted coat with diverse thread types. Hofstede (1991) responds that generalization serves as an opportunity to understand tendencies, stating, "There is hardly an individual who answers each question exactly by the mean score of his or her group: the 'average person' from a country does not exist" (p. 91).

Hofstede (2001) found that promoting recognition and acceptance of the differences between various cultures is a practical approach to managing cultural diversity. ''At its root, culture is not an intellectual thing – it operates on an emotional, not on an intellectual level. As such, I don't believe that educational level impacts on sensitivities'' (Powell, 2006. p. 14). In this case, understanding differences and context between cultures becomes imperative in order to develop interventions that reach beyond knowledge and skills, and result in attitude change.

Individualism versus Collectivism

Of Hofstede's (2001) six dimensions, the individualism -collectivism dimension reveals the degree to which individuals are integrated within their groups. This dimension, more than

others, is most often studied as it has the most significant predictive power of a society's mentality and culture (Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018) and can provide insight when understanding lived experience with EDI. The index spans from loose ties, such as connection to immediate family, to tight ties where extended families and other groups harness loyalty and support (Hofstede, 1980). Individualistic societies prioritize self and immediate families, while collectivist societies allow the interests of the group to prevail over their own (Hofstede, 2001). The model places cultures on the spectrum based on the "extent to which people are autonomous individuals or embedded within their groups" (Trianidis & Gelfand, 2012). This measure can predict the propensity to deviate from the norm, as collectivist cultures more closely align with the norms and values ingrained in their culture. Mehng et al. (2019), affirm this in a study conducted in South Korea, a homogenous and collectivist culture, which demonstrated that when men faced societal change in gender norms, they were likely to resist. As Armenia is recognized as a collectivist culture in Hofstede's model (Hofstede Insights, 2022), there is merit in exploring the lived experience embedded in the norms and values of a homogenous nation, and thus the lived experience of such employees with EDI.

The notion of trust has also been examined through the Individualistic-Collectivist Dimension. In a business setting, trust increases job satisfaction and motivation which positively impacts knowledge sharing, cooperation, innovation, and creativity, resulting in a competitive advantage (Thanetsunthen & Wuthisation, 2019). Thanetsunthen and Wuthisation (2019) further assert that the main difference in international understandings of trust, defined as the level and radius of trust of the other, are cultural factors and social norms (van Hoorn, 2015). van Hoorn concludes that more individualistic societies have more trust towards others than collectivist

societies who tend to trust their own group members and exhibit less trust towards people outside of their group.

Stream Summary

This stream on Intercultural Competence approached the study by reviewing the seminal works of Bennett's DMIS model and Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory. Through the DMIS model, the study gained insight into the journey of acquiring intercultural sensitivity, through the progression of phases. This model is crucial to consider in exploring lived experience among employees from a homogenous nation at an MNE, considering that such intercultural competence is acquired through a multidimensional approach.

Hofstede's theory provided insight into different cultures and where they fall under specific dimensions. In particular, the ranking of Armenia as a collectivist nation expanded our understanding of openness to deviate from the norms and values embedded in the culture. This knowledge is valuable in understanding such norms and values embedded in lived experience with EDI.

With the next stream, Global EDI Management, the review transitioned from a broader theoretical analysis of intercultural competence to a practitioner-based review of global EDI management. Such understanding provided insight when exploring the lived experience of employees from homogenous nations working within a multinational setting.

Stream Two: Global EDI Management

Understanding the dynamics of EDI management in the workplace involves examining the richness of human diversity and the availability of a wide array of criteria against which equality of opportunities, entitlements, and outcomes are judged (Sen, 1995). Given the changing workforce demographics and the pervasive effects of globalization, the demand for interventions

to improve EDI has increased and warrants a better understanding of the nature of global management (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

The stream examined various approaches to diversity management, specifically within the global context of EDI, by reviewing the literature on global diversity management and evaluating global EDI interventions. The review also covered the seminal work of Thomas & Ely (1996) and their classification of diversity and inclusion perspectives. It further examined studies that revealed different motivations for EDI studied in different cultures (Mehng et al., 2019). Lastly, the lens of civility was presented as an approach to diversity management enabling local cultures to retain their norms and values while agreeing on civility as a common directive.

A Global Approach to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Interventions

Diversity management originated in the United States as the field focused on diversity issues within the country, with particular attention to the business sector (Syed & Özbilgin, 2022). “Diversity is a mainly American concept, with peer-reviewed journals heavily dominated by American publications and Anglo-Saxon publishers’’ (Özbilgin & Ahu., 2015, p. 18). With the rise of the MNE, the study of EDI management has advanced, experimenting with national solutions, as domestic formulations cannot be directly transferred to other nations (Syed & Özbilgin, 2020). This is especially significant since research has demonstrated that a conventional Western-centric approach for the entirety of the MNE does not advance EDI globally (Syed & Özbilgin, 2020). Therefore, when evaluating EDI interventions, it is essential to distinguish whether they were designed for the local/national context.

Bezrukova et al. (2016) assert that additional research is necessary to reconcile the opposing effects of diversity interventions in a global setting to determine if they advance positive learning outcomes. Several global studies have focused on various interventions and

their impact on employee cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal outcomes. A review of global EDI interventions confirms that local affiliates of international institutions should be given the authority to design and deliver EDI interventions (Goodman, 2013). Furthermore, Ferner et al. (2005) suggest that enacting local/national centric interventions instead of a catch-all approach is important in reshaping the nature of the meaning of diversity (Ferner et al., 2005).

An additional gap in the literature is that a majority of EDI research is empirical (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). In the 2020 study, Yadav and Lenka reviewed 123 articles on diversity management published since 1991 revealing that most of the research is quantitative and United States based. An apparent gap in global contextual and qualitative understanding of EDI presents an opportunity to research global strategies to expand existing knowledge (Özbilgin & Ahu, 2015). According to Goodman (2013), localizing such interventions allows companies to avoid propagating an irreverent diversity mandate and instead focus on the outcomes of a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive organization.

Diversity Management

Diversity management has become increasingly vital in today's globalized world, with equitable, diverse, and inclusive teams providing improved decision-making, high levels of task performance, strengthened internal operations, and an increased competitive advantage (Ang et al., 2007; Kaufmann et al., 2014). Multinational enterprises have recognized this and foster cultural intelligence by implementing EDI interventions to increase their team's capacity to operate in an international professional environment. In the United States alone, companies spend an estimated 8 billion dollars a year on EDI interventions (Herbert, 2022). These interventions range from; providing information on EDI issues, changing structure and processes

within the organization, or implementing practices that seek to transform culture or people (Syed & Özbilgin, 2020).

Numerous studies have shown efficacy with EDI training (Naeem et al., 2020; Presbitero & Toledano, 2018; Song, 2022). For instance, a study by Naeem et al. (2020) surveyed 165 expatriates in China and Malaysia after conducting cross-cultural training and found that the intervention significantly increased distinctive features of expatriate adjustment to their host countries. Similarly, Presbitero & Toledano (2018) highlighted the importance of EDI training in improving employees' cultural intelligence and task performance through a survey of 165 offshore IT sector employees. Song (2022) studied the effectiveness of 345 Korean MNE diversity interventions and found an increase in employee understanding about inter-company communication as well the role of cultural context. These studies illustrate the merit of investing in interventions that advance EDI.

However, the success of diversity interventions depends on various factors such as the nature, type, design, delivery, and training features (Dobbin & Kalev, 2013; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Kalinosky et al., 2012). A meta-analysis by Kalinoski et al, (2012) confirmed that diversity training has small-sized to medium-sized benefit on affective-based, cognitive-based, and skill-based outcomes. A meta-analysis of 40 years of Western-centric diversity interventions concluded that contextual and design factors led to distinct diversity-related outcomes for participants (Bezrukova et al., 2016). Moreover, the approach taken in EDI training has been subject to critique with some studies indicating that most efforts to date have effects that do not result beyond a few days and can even result in bias or backlash (Dobbin & Kalev,2016). However, their critique of EDI training as an effective intervention is rooted in the approaches taken in diversity management. For instance the same study purports that voluntary participation

produced better advancement toward EDI than mandatory programming (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Bezrukova et al. (2016), through a meta-analysis, showed positive results for an integrated approach, where the intervention is a connected series of events, such as training resulting in a social networking group for minorities, and a mentoring program. The positive effects of EDI interventions were more pronounced when training was complemented by a series of relevant diversity initiatives targeting awareness and skills development. Chang et al. (2019) confirmed these findings by administering a standalone intervention to over 3,000 MNE employees, examining attitudinal and workplace behavior shifts. The study assessed attitudes and workplace behavior towards supporting women before and after a one-hour gender-bias session. Results revealed that while those with a lower attitudinal tendency to support women did increase their support for women 20 weeks post-training, their workplace behavior towards women remained unaltered (Chang et al., 2019). The study concluded that a more robust intervention was required to change employee workplace behavior and attitude toward supporting women beyond that of a stand-alone intervention. These studies demonstrate that considering relevant content and context, and the use of a multi-faceted approach are important to successful EDI intervention design.

Diversity and Inclusion Perspectives

To materialize effective strategies for diversity interventions within MNEs, it is imperative to study how EDI motivates the individuals comprising said organizations. In their seminal work, Thomas & Ely (1996) identify three perspectives that motivate individuals to value and practice EDI: the integration-and-learning perspective, the access-and-legitimacy perspective, and the discrimination-and-fairness perspective. The integration-and-learning perspective focuses on the insights, skills, and experience that diverse employees bring and its

impact on the advancement of the organization's mission through the reshaping of products, strategies, and business practices to reflect the market (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The access-and-legitimacy perspective values the diversity of the demographic/market it serves and, therefore, matches that diversity within the employee base to gain access and legitimacy with the market constituency (Ely & Thomas, 2001). The final perspective, discrimination and fairness, looks at diversity as a moral imperative to ensure justice and fair treatment of all members within society.

Thomas & Ely (1996) note that the integration-and-learning perspective promotes equality and acknowledges the cultural differences and inherent value such differences bring to the organization. Ely and Thomas' (2001) study in the United States found that while all three perspectives on diversity successfully motivated work groups, only the integration-and-learning perspective provided the rationale and guidance needed to achieve sustained benefits from diversity. Through a qualitative study of three culturally diverse organizations, they examined three main factors through the eyes of the work groups: race relations within immediate workgroups vis-a-vis conflict/conflict resolution, employees' perceptions of value and respect by colleagues and supervisors, and the significance of employees' own racial identity (Ely & Thomas, 2001). They measured success by assessing how well the work group and its members functioned and collected data via observation and interviews with group members. In valuing cultural experiences within the integration-and-learning perspective, employees within the work groups felt encouraged to express themselves through the lens of their racial identity and felt valued for doing so. The study revealed that this paradigm also led to cross-cultural learning, which enhanced the group's work. "Cultural differences can be a source of insight and skill that can be brought to bear on the organization's tasks" (Ely & Thomas, 2001, p. 241).

To test the three perspectives of Ely & Thomas (2001), Mehng et al. (2019) examined local organizations within the ethnically homogenous nation of South Korea. They acknowledged that "despite the large body of research conducted in a Western context, it remains unknown if prior theory and findings regarding the motivation of diversity management apply to traditionally homogenous cultures" (p. 744). The discrimination-and-fairness perspective was the primary motivating factor (Mehng et al., 2019) for the sample. This perspective upholds the belief that cultural diversity within a workforce is a moral imperative that ensures justice and the fair treatment of all individuals in a society and emphasizes how well an organization recruits and retains a diverse employee base (Ely & Thomas, 2001). However, it can be problematic as minorities are often expected to adopt the values and interests of the dominant group, resulting in reduced cultural cohesiveness (Thomas, 1992). Ely & Thomas (2001) suggest that many employees from organizations begin with the discrimination-and-fairness perspective before adopting the other two, which are oriented towards business outcomes. In their study, Mehng et al. (2019) found that Korean businesses may be at this early stage and not yet recognize the value of advanced EDI. This research suggests that the motivation of employees or managers to advance EDI may vary in different contexts.

The Lens of Civility in Diversity & Inclusion Management

In Western democratic societies, tolerance is highly regarded as a virtue (Von Bergen, 2013). The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines tolerance as "sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own, or the act of allowing something" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1995) characterizes tolerance as respect, acceptance, and appreciation of the rich diversity of the world's cultures, forms of expression, and ways of being human. These

definitions imply a divergent understanding of the definition of tolerance, ranging from expecting people to endure or put up with behavior to accepting or celebrating such behavior (Von Bergen, 2013). Tolerance, as noted by Von Bergen & Collier (2016) holds that each person's viewpoint should be courteously heard, but that all views are not equal in worth, merit or truth. They propose incorporating civility, which they place at the midpoint of a spectrum between endurance and acceptance. Furthermore, they argue that civility is a more realistic approach to cross-cultural managerial practice, thus treating people who differ with civility, dignity, and courtesy as opposed to appreciating, endorsing, or accepting differences (Von Bergen & Collier, 2016).

Von Bergen and Collier (2016) argue that such a lens is consistent with widespread East-Asian and African perspectives including Confucianism and Ubuntu. Jiang (2006) corroborates this notion, equating civility with the Confucian philosophy of harmony without conformity (Jiang, 2006). Von Bergen and Collier (2016) also assert that civility is in line with the philosophical foundation of Ubuntu's canon of dignity and respect, sharing that "everything hinges on this canon, including an emphasis on humility, harmony, and valuing diversity" (Mangaliso, 2001, p. 32).

As global EDI scholars and professionals reassess tolerance as a practical lens, some advocate for the lens of civility (Munteau, 2021; Porath, 2016). Munteau (2021) describes civility as going beyond mutual tolerance to the respect of pluralism, and Porath (2016) emphasizes civility's tenets of kindness and respect as endurance and acceptance fall out of focus. These scholars argue that civility provides an inclusive lens and space for varying norms and values to coexist within an MNE.

Nevertheless, the lens of civility is not free from critique. Hawn (2020) contends that civility is problematic, as it is a term that has been used in oppression and racism. Hawn elaborates that despite the good intention of the approach, the term is entrenched in a history of those whose behavior was proper and those whose behavior was labeled as barbaric or uncivilized. Hawn (2020), however, does not offer an alternative approach. A history of racism and oppression indeed mars the word civility, however, the tenets presented by scholars that advocate for the lens of civility within global diversity management are compelling. Avoiding the domination of one cultural understanding within an MNE aligns with the concepts of EDI. Von Bergen & Collier, (2016) articulate this eloquently in their article, asserting, "We believe that it is extremely important to preserve a notion of tolerance that is neither 'putting up with' which demands too little of us, nor 'acceptance' which demands too much" (p. 91).

Stream Summary

This stream, on Global EDI Management, commenced with an examination of a global shift towards ensuring MNEs are diverse and practice inclusion through localized interventions crafted for international teams. The review also highlighted the importance of studying motivation perspectives to inform relevant local interventions and centered on the lens of civility as a practical approach to global EDI management.

Stream Three: The Individual Experience With Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Diversity scholars examine how we differ and offer insights into how individuals perceive others and themselves. They convey narratives about such experiences and explore messages that individuals internalize about themselves and others (Harper, 2021). These narratives depict a worldview shaped by the political, economic, and sociocultural constraints of the cultural groups they engage with (Fitzpatrick, 2019). To further understand the study of these

narratives concerning EDI, this stream reviewed research on lived experience and voice, Social Identity Theory, including the individual's relationship with ingroups and outgroups, experiences of EDI through transformative learning, and the experience of language within MNEs.

Understanding Lived Experience and Voice

Lived experience refers to the "intersection of occurrences and events individuals live through with their recollections, derived meanings, gained knowledge, choices, and the context in which these encounters rest" (Umeh et al., 2022, p. 3). Gadamer (2004) elaborates that the concept of lived experience can be better understood by examining the German word for experience, *erlebin*, which means to be alive when something is grasped and the experienced, or *erlebte* which refers to what lasts once the experience is complete. These two terms come together to form *erlebnis*, or lived experience which provides a unique impression that gives that experience lasting significance (Gadamer, 2024).

Researchers who study lived experience strive to move beyond description to uncover the interpretation, significance, and meaning of these experiences (Frechettte et al., 2004). Examining such experiences can bring depth to the understanding of a phenomenon. Shipp and Jansen (2021) assert that focusing on such experiences offers insight into the thoughts, actions, and decisions that individuals face in real-life situations and in describing their past, present, and future experiences within the current moment. It is through such narratives that we can better understand constructed reality.

To explore lived experience, a review of context and materiality is necessary, which can provide insight into the significance of the participants' voice. Context encompasses the structures, occurrences, and surroundings including a phenomenon's temporal, situational and structural complexities of a phenomenon (Umah et al., 2022). Materiality presents the

phenomenon's contextual boundaries including the situatedness, configuration, and the enactment. The situatedness addresses the political, economic, and social structures that influence identity understanding, while configuration and enactment cover the boundedness and ethnicized representations (Umah et al., 2022). Materiality enables the recounting and forming impressions (Frechette et al., 2020). The three elements - lived experience, context, and voice - come together to form the participants' voice, or the narratives that include the experiences and context that allows participants to deconstruct and construct their own lives (Chadwick, 2017). It is through this collective co-authored voice of participants who have experienced the phenomenon that we can move beyond the descriptive to find shared themes of interpretation within the phenomenon.

These shared themes are reviewed in two studies within higher education. Lezotte (2021) discovered that conceptualizations of EDI among engineering students were rooted not only in their own personal and professional experiences but also in the experiences with those they interacted with. The study examined three constructs of EDI: constructs which they defined as the superficial differences among colleagues; market-based, wherein diversity and inclusion provide value for the organization; and diversity and inclusion as an umbrella to subdue conflict/resistance avoidance (Lezotte, 2021). Through the phenomenological method of one-on-one interviews, the study concluded that while personal experiences were crucial in forming an understanding of EDI, institutional context was also influential (Lezotte, 2021). The research revealed that normative conceptualizations are disseminated even by those tasked with transformative EDI change. The study proposed that such individual experiences can help us understand how interventions facilitate the learning of skills, attitudes, and beliefs regarding

EDI. Moreover, there remains a significant amount of work in understanding such conceptualizations of EDI by the institutions themselves.

The second higher education study examined the concept of inclusiveness among Latina science, technology, education, and math students, highlighting the importance of identity-based organizations within higher learning institutions as a way to form an understanding of inclusiveness and shared identity (Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021). Through interviews, the phenomenological study revealed the interrelated factors of self, experience, and the institution impacted understanding of EDI. Exploring the role of such institutions in building positive experiences for the individual can inform HRD practitioners seeking to enhance EDI in their organizations.

Social Identity Theory

Within the comprehension of self is a correlation of that self as part of a larger group. Henri Tajfel (1974) considered this in his Social Identity Theory (SIT), which explains intergroup behavior based on an individual's self-concept derived from such perceived memberships. According to the theory, the self is reflective as it categorizes and aligns itself to larger social categories or classifications (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social categorization is the process in which individuals identify themselves with a group, based on social information, with the primary categories being sex, race, and age (Stoller & Freeman, 2016). It is important to note that Stoller & Freeman (2016) recognize additional categories such as social status, occupation, or sexual identity. Considering this, SIT posits that within the need for belonging, the individual regards group membership as a fundamental aspect of their identity (Bernal et al., 1991). The study of SIT enables researchers to understand the influence of groups over an individual's identity and thus their behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes, as the group guides action and behavior

in everyday life (Taylor, 2002).

Ingroup Favoritism

Social Identity Theory also delves into the implications of identifying with a group, with SIT's central hypothesis being that group members seek negative aspects of an outgroup to enhance their own self-image. Such derogation of an outgroup to elevate the image of the ingroup is predated and eloquently summarized by William Sumner (1906);

> Loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, war likeness without,—all grow together, common products of the same situation. ... Men of an others-group are outsiders with whose ancestors the ancestors of the we-group waged war. ... Each group nourishes its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its own divinities, and looks with contempt on outsiders. Each group thinks its own folkways are the only right ones, and if it observes that other groups have other folkways, these excite its scorn" (p. 13).

In accordance with this understanding, and as individuals define themselves based on group membership, they incorporate positive elements into their own group's identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), dividing the world into us and them. When such categorizations are salient, attributes stereotypical of the ingroup are ascribed to the self within a process called self-stereotyping. This process depersonalizes the self, and other group members are seen as interchangeable in their relationship to outgroup members, furthering the divide (Abrams, 2001).

Tajfel & Turner (1979) identify three consecutive mental processes in conforming to the ingroup and transitioning from me to we; categorization, social identification, and social comparison. Within the process of categorization, individuals transform from "me" to "we" through self-stereotyping or stereotyping. During social identification, the individual embraces

the group's identity, and through social comparison, the ingroup is held in a higher esteem, resulting in ingroup favoritism and outgroup derogation. As group-identity is intertwined with self-identity, a considerable portion of an individual's self-esteem is sourced from collective esteem (Ashmore et al., 2004). To enhance self-esteem, the ingroup should be compared favorably to the outgroup. Consequently, through social comparison, the ingroup is regarded as superior to the outgroup.

Outgroup Favoritism

While SIT explains the phenomenon of ingroup favoritism in conjunction with System Justification Theory, it also provides insight into outgroup favoritism. Outgroup favoritism is a phenomenon wherein individuals exhibit a preference for a group other than their own. Tajfel & Turner (1979) posit that this may occur for various reasons, including the pursuit of social status or the reduction of intergroup conflict. Jost (2017) discovered that such favoritism can have implications on intergroup relations including on conflict, discrimination, and inequality. Jost et al., (2004) discover that outgroup favoritism is observed among non-dominant groups, and studies substantiating this finding have also been conducted within intercultural relations research (Ji, 2022; Rudman et at., 2002).

Research on outgroup favoritism covers two distinct forces that contribute to understanding the phenomenon: Social Identity Theory and System Justification Theory. Jost & Banaji (1994) characterize System Justification Theory as a social psychological process that explains why people endorse or rationalize the status quo, even when it is of disadvantage to them. The theory contends that individuals prefer groups that are valued according to the status quo in order to conform to sociopolitical order. Jost et al. (2004) note, "members of disadvantaged groups often had ambivalent, conflicted attitudes about their own group

membership and surprisingly favorable attitude towards members of more advantaged groups" (p. 884). A recent study by Ji (2022), who examined the experiences of Chinese international students' with peer performance evaluations, echoed these findings by surfacing outgroup favoritism, resulting in negative ingroup stereotyping and ingroup distancing.

Experiencing EDI Through Transformative Learning

To understand the individual's experience with EDI, there is merit in exploring transformative learning, or how knowledge is filtered through new experience (Mezirow, 1990). In HRD, transformative learning is a viable approach to developing employees as it offers a change in conscious awareness, such as learning to be a member of a diverse workforce (Brooks, 2004). Transformative learning is a self-reflective process in which one challenges the status quo following a disorienting dilemma that challenges assumptions and beliefs, allowing the individual to see truth in a new light (Argyris, 1993; Brooksfield, 1987; Dirkx, 1997; Kasl & Yorks, 2002; Marsick, 1990; Mezirow, 2000).

Transformative learning challenges habits of mind, which are the thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by beliefs, values, and assumptions (Mezirow, 1990). A disorienting dilemma triggers transformative learning as one examines, questions, and revises their perspective based on experience. As learning is a social process, participation in social action and lived experience are effective means of experiencing transformative learning (Cranton, 2006; Mezirow, 1990; Papastamatis & Panitsides, 2014). As the root of transitional learning is experience, this is seen as the essence of adult learning (Mezirow, 1990).

As the medium of change, this experience can be triggered by a single event or gradually occur over time, and can even begin as unnoticed (Cranton, 2006; Nohl, 2015). To further explore such experiences, Nohl (2015) empirically studied the phases of transformative learning

through a comparative analysis of social groups. The study concluded that both subtle experiences, such as a new practice to an old habit, and highly active and emotional experiences could provide for a disorienting dilemma. In a narrative study of cultural competence development by reviewing texts in online discussions, Hutchins & Goldstein Hode (2021) found that the transformation of ideas, perspectives, and frames that increased competence evolved through interventions in promoting competence, and in everyday discursive interactions. This corroborated research by McDermott-Levy (2011) through a phenomenological study of Arab-Muslim female students living and studying in the United States as they found new freedoms and shifting paradigms through such experiences, such as adapting to cultural and educational expectations. Understanding the experience with EDI can present opportunities to understand how the transformative learning process occurs and the discovery of patterns can be helpful to HRD professionals when developing interventions that encourage such transformation.

Experiencing Language Barriers in Multinational Enterprises

Investigating the lived experiences of employees who speak a non-native language within MNEs is of merit, as most global companies enforce a lingua franca. A lingua franca is a language adopted by an enterprise that serves as a common means of communication for speakers of different native languages (Crystal, 2019). Most MNEs utilize English as a lingua franca to foster collaboration between their global teams (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013; Neeley, 2017). However, the use of a lingua franca also introduces several challenges for the organizations, including language power dynamics between employees based on their level of proficiency, which stem from language barrier and language anxiety. A language barrier is defined as an obstacle to communication that occurs when non-native speakers, with varying levels of proficiency in the lingua franca struggle to express ideas and thoughts effectively or to

understand their colleagues (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013). Language anxiety can be defined as feelings of unease, nervousness, or apprehension that non-native language speakers may experience when speaking or exposed to a foreign language (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Through field studies with global companies, Neeley et al. (2012) demonstrated that a common language resulted in disrupted collaboration and productivity loss within the MNE. One issue pertained to the varying levels of English proficiency among non-native English speakers, which could lead to miscommunication or misunderstanding. Such unevenness in the work environment among employees favors native speakers and those with higher English proficiency (Harzing & Pudelko, 2013, Neeley, 2012). For instance, global studies of employees have discovered that non-native speakers of the company's lingua franca may avoid interactions in the language in order to circumvent stress (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017; Hinds et al., 2014; Neeley et al., 2012; Neeley, 2013). Foreign language anxiety is a challenge for MNEs, with considerable impact to the business' bottom line and company culture (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Through an inductive study at an MNE, Aichhorn & Puck (2017) surfaced the negative impact of foreign language anxiety on interpersonal communication through mechanisms such as communication avoidance and withdrawal. This phenomenon also surfaced in Hinds et al. (2014) through an ethnographic study of 96 MNEs from six software development teams. In this study, asymmetries in language proficiency engendered an us vs. them dynamic leading to interpersonal communication issues. The study found that non-native language anxiety prompted mitigation strategies including; avoiding English native speakers and reverting to their language.

Nurmi & Koroma (2020) corroborated the findings that non-native English speakers are more likely to experience stress in English-speaking companies through an ethnographic study involving semi-structured interviews with 92 non-native speaking employees in two Finland-

based MNEs. This study also concluded that non-native English speakers encountered difficulties in creating mutual understanding within their diverse teams due to language asymmetry and, as a response, created their own psychologically safe language climate (Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). This collective climate was facilitated through the three mechanisms of inclusivity, empathy, and acceptance. Inclusivity was described as engaging colleagues with varied linguistic backgrounds, while empathy and acceptance referred to embracing different levels of English fluency (Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). Understanding the role of language proficiency in looking at experiences of EDI within an MNE can help HRD professionals build environments that minimize the negative impact of such disparities, such as nurturing a psychologically safe language climate (Nurmi & Koron, 2020).

Stream Summary

This stream examined the lived experience and participants' voice by exploring the role of context and materiality (Umah et al., 2022), which is crucial in gaining insight into the understanding of such experience. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1974) brought to light ingroup and outgroup dynamics, based on the tendency to form groups with similar others, as well as Social Justification Theory in understanding outgroup favoritism. The stream then reviewed these individual experiences through the transformative learning lens (Mezirow, 1990) to discern how these experiences contribute to an evolving truth within the individual. Lastly, the stream addressed the language challenges that arise in MNEs among global employees and the effects these barriers have on corporate culture (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Through this review, the study recognized the merit of exploring lived experience to understand the phenomenon of Armenian employees working in MNEs.

Chapter Summary

The advantages of valuing EDI in business are well documented; however, scholars have discovered that interventions promoting EDI can be irrelevant in diverse global settings. A literature review of Intercultural Competence, Global EDI Management, and the Individual Experience of EDI revealed that future research on the perspectives on EDI for homogenous employees within MNEs could contribute to the scholarly discourse surrounding adequate understanding and implementation needed for effective global EDI interventions.

Most literature and interventions on EDI are Western-oriented but globally implemented. Few international studies have focused on the efficacy of global EDI experiences and even less focus on ethnically homogenous populations. The literature review focused on Intercultural Competence and Global Management of EDI, to identify and analyze existing knowledge and gaps in the perspectives around EDI and relevant theories and concepts for the population. Finally, the third stream on the Individual Experience of EDI focused on research around lived experience. In the next Chapter, the study's methodology will be presented.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion among multinational enterprise employees residing in the homogeneous Republic of Armenia. The overarching question of this study asked how employees describe their overall experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion? The sub-questions included:

1. How has the lived experience of the employee with equity, diversity, and inclusion prior to joining an MNE shaped their understanding of EDI?
2. How has the lived experience of the employee working with a multicultural team changed their understanding of EDI?

The phenomenon, specifically the lived experience of employees of an MNE residing in a homogenous nation, warrants greater academic attention (Mehng, 2019). Gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experience of employees from Armenia can offer valuable insight to HRD professionals, enabling them to design interventions that effectively nurture EDI within this population. This Chapter provides an overview of the research methodology, encompassing the research design and rationale, the population, sample, and site as well as an overview of data collection and analysis methods. Additionally, an overview of research limitations are presented and ethical considerations are examined.

Research Design and Rationale

A phenomenological approach was employed to explore shared essence regarding the lived experiences of employees in the Republic of Armenia, focusing on their encounters with EDI. The phenomenological method, which seeks to establish co-consensus, requires that research revolve around a singular phenomenon or concept and examin the experiences

of multiple individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The description, or essence of understanding the phenomenon, encompasses both what and how the participants experience it (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, a phenomenological study explores the significance of the experience for those who have undergone it, and subsequently derives general or universal meaning from those experiences. The outcome of the phenomenological study should provide information on the collective essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994), and in this case, bring forth collective perceptions.

A phenomenological study was an appropriate methodology to illuminate the collective essence of employees who experience EDI in a multinational organization in Armenia. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), phenomenology is the study of essence, allowing the discovery of meaning from lived experience rather than universal principle. The application of phenomenology can also contribute to a holistic understanding of EDI management, as qualitative research in the broader field of HRD remains limited (Mhatre & Mehta, 2022), with phenomenology as an even rarer application (Bonache, 2021).

To explore the phenomenon, the study combined qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, member-checking interviews, and a researcher's journal. In qualitative research, in-depth interviews allow for discussions that are centered around the research questions (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, interviews enable the execution of member-checking, to confirm the accuracy of the collected narratives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I implemented the practice of epoche, approaching the phenomenon with a fresh perspective (Vagle, 2018). Throughout the research period, I utilized a researcher's journal to bracket, to the best of my ability, my own experiences in order to better arrive at the essence of the participant's experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Population and Sample Description

The population in this study was employees from the Republic of Armenia, a homogenous nation, that work in an MNE. Within the IT sector alone, there are more than 20,000 employees in the field, with half working for international firms (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2022). The sample's ethnic make-up mirrors Armenia's population statistics of 98.1% ethnic Armenians (Central Intelligence Agency, 2021) and is drawn from an information technology MNE situated in Yerevan. The sample was composed of seven participants based on Morse's (2000) understanding that phenomenological research, due to its in-depth nature, permits a smaller sample size ranging from six to ten participants.

The sample was drawn via purposive sampling, a nonprobability sampling method that is useful for when a study is limited in time and resources (Battaglia, 2008). Purposive sampling is the most prevalent sampling method in phenomenology, as it provides an opportunity to select participants that have rich knowledge about the phenomenon (Polit & Beck, 2012). The method allows for the exploration of complex social phenomena and insights into the participant perspective (Guest et al., 2013) by those who possess experience with the phenomenon, enabling the collection of in-depth and meaningful data (Palinkas et al., 2015).

The sample from the population were native to the Republic of Armenia, employed in an MNE at the time of the study, and worked with diverse colleagues within their teams. The selection criteria included participants that received their education in local and internationally unaffiliated institutions and those that had not participated in cultural exchange programs. Furthermore, the sample only included participants who had not resided outside of Armenia for a period of three months or longer, as literature indicates that staying abroad for at least three months significantly increases intercultural competence levels (Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018). I

selected the participants based on their English proficiency, as based on earlier conversations with them. I also selected participants I had a trusted relationship with. From a pool of over 800 Armenia-based employees in the MNE, I selected participants that represented different departments in the company and had differed in years of work experience.

The participants all identified as cisgender and heterosexual with a composition of four females and three males. Participants varied in years of experience from five to 15 years in the professional environment. The participants worked within four major departments in the MNE: two within the General & Administration Team, two in the Product Team, two in the Engineering Team, and one in the Artificial Intelligence team. Relevant participant demographics are illustrated as Table 1, with their identities protected through the use of pseudonyms, based on the names of historical Armenian kings and queens.

Table 1

Participant Summary

Name	**Gender**	**Department**	**Professional Experience in years**	**Age of first non-Armenian encounter**	**Languages in order learned**
Anahit	Female	General & Administration	5-10	Adolescence	Armenian, Russian, English
Aram	Female	Product	10-15	Adult	Armenian, Russian, English
Arshak	Male	Artificial Intelligence	5-10	Adolescence	Armenian, Russian, English
Tamara	Female	General & Administration	5-10	Adolescence	Armenian, Russian, English
Tigran	Female	Engineering	10-15	Adult	Armenian, Russian, English
Varazdat	Male	Engineering	10-15	Child	Armenian, Russian, English

Yervand	Male	Product	5-10	Adult	Armenian, Russian, English

At the time of the study, Anahit, a female, worked in the MNE's General & Administration Team, and had been in the workforce between five to ten years. She had met a non-Armenian for the first time as an adolescent. Aram, a female, worked in the Product Team and had been in the workforce for 10-15 years. She had her first encounter with a non-Armenian as an adult. Arshak, a male, worked within the MNE's Artificial Intelligence Team and had been in the workforce for 5-10 years. He met a non-Armenian for the first time as an adolescent. Tamara, a female, worked within the General & Administration team and had been in the workforce for 5-10 years. Her first time meeting a non-Armenian was when she was an adolescent. Tigran, a female, worked in the Engineering Team and had been in the workforce for 10-15 years. She met her first non-Armenian as an adult. Varazdat, a male, had also been in the workforce for 10-15 years, also within the Engineering Department. The first time he met a non-Armenian was when he was a child. Also, all participants spoke Armenian as their primary and native language, learned Russian fluently as a second language, and learned English as a third language.

The participants all expressed interest in the topic and participated in both the interviews and member-checking interviews. After the data collection process, and as a token of appreciation, participants were provided a $50.00 Amazon gift card for their participation in the study.

Site Description

The research site was an MNE information technologies company operating in the Republic of Armenia with an office in the capital city of Yerevan. At the time of the study, the

corporation employed over 1,000 individuals globally across more than eight nations, with roughly 700 of the employees based in the Republic of Armenia. Although the corporation maintained a physical office, the research was conducted using Drexel's Zoom Software and away from the office, in a comfortable site and private location.

Site Access

The MNE agreed to the research and provided site access. The Senior Vice-President of People agreed to act as a gatekeeper for the research and provided site permission. The site permission letter was sent to Drexel's IRB along with the application. Creswell (2015) posits that a researcher benefits from having a gatekeeper, an individual within the organization that can grant access as well as identify individuals interested in participating.

Research Methods

As phenomenological research focuses on uncovering a rich and layered understanding of a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), the study examined the research questions through interviews and member-checking interviews, while a researcher's journal facilitated the bracketing of my own perceptions, experiences, and meaning. The study involved seven participants, each participating in one semi-structured interview from January to February of 2023, and one member-checking interview in February of 2023. The initial interviews spanned from 60 to 90 minutes, while the member checking interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. The study also included a researcher's journal in which my observations and my own perceptions and experiences were logged throughout the data collection and analysis period spanning from January to April of 2023. The use of multiple sources of data was to triangulate and augment the trustworthiness of the findings concerning the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Semi-structured Interviews

To understand the participants' experiences, the study included semi-structured interviews on lived experience with EDI. Semi-structured interviews foster discovery by avoiding questions that could pre-frame the "categorical structure of the phenomena before the interviewer even speaks" (Morley, 2019, p. 165). Moustakas (1994) asserts that phenomenological methods should be informal and interactive, using open-ended questions and prompts. As such, the interviews provided a platform for participants to share their unconstrained experiences. Consequently, interview questions and prompts were designed to bring forth an understanding of the phenomenon (Lewis-Beck et al., 2003).

Member-Checking Interviews

The use of a member-checking interviews allowed for the clarification and confirmation of the collected data. As a researcher, I employed this additional interview as a commitment to honor the participants' voice. In member-checking, the researcher returns to the participants to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the data gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2016) through a process that Lincoln & Guba (1985) deem as crucial in establishing credibility. Lincoln & Guba (1985) recommend member checking to enhance the rigor of the study, ensuring that the participants' voice is authentic and not distorted during interpretation by the researcher (Tong et al., 2007).

Researcher's Journal

The use of a researcher's journal in phenomenological research is a valuable tool to enhance credibility and the depth of findings, and allows for a more accurate representation of the participants' voice (Moustakas, 1994). The secondary data from the journal contributed to the

richness of the data, offering insight that may not have been evident from the transcripts (Roulston, 2010).

Data Collection

Individual Interviews

Participants were sent formal invitations, listed as Appendix A, to participate in the study. The invitation sent to the selected participants that met the inclusion criteria included information about the study, consent instructions, and information about any risk or benefit to the participants. Upon reviewing the information for the study, all seven participants confirmed their participation. I then sent them formal invitations to participate in the initial interview (Appendix B). The invitation detailed the interview process, time commitment, and the timeframe during which the research would be conducted. It also addressed the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. Finally, the invitation included information on the anonymity of the research and measures taken to store and protect interview recordings and transcripts. Participants were asked to send their written consent to participate in the discussion and to permit session recording. Subsequently, I scheduled the interviews between January 31st and February 7th, of 2023.

Before I began data collection, I conducted pilot interviews with two volunteers from the population, so that I may review and refine the interview instrument. Based on these interviews, I made adjustments to the initial interview protocol, such as including probes under certain questions in order to gain more insight where needed. The interview protocol is included as Appendix C. This protocol guided the study and included a list of ten open-ended and probing questions about the phenomenon that referenced the research questions. The protocol nurtured an informal and interactive environment while maintaining focus on revealing lived experience.

All of the interviews took place within the scheduled timeframe and were conducted in the English language. However, participants were informed that they may switch to Armenian to clarify or expand on any thoughts if necessary, as it was important to ensure a space where the participant feels comfortable expressing, and this includes the language used for non-native English speakers. The interviews were conducted and recorded with Drexel's Zoom Software Platform and initial transcripts were also generated by Zoom. I then reviewed and and revised each of the seven transcripts by playing the recorded video and checking the transcripts verbatim to ensure accuracy. All recordings, transcripts, and notes were securely stored on my Drexel University password-protected Microsoft's 365 OneDrive.

Member-Checking Interviews

After the transcripts were revised, I sent each participant their transcripts for review, along with an invitation to the Member-Checking Interview (Appendix D). Each participant was given 10 days to review the transcripts. Through this process, the participants were provided the opportunity to read and respond to the accuracy of the transcripts to ensure their voice was correctly captured. I then scheduled a follow-up interview and followed the Member-Checking Protocol (Appendix E), which prompted participants to share any clarifications or additions to the transcripts and allowed me the opportunity to follow up with any additional information needed. The member-checking interviews were conducted between February 9th to the 16th, of 2023. Once again, all recordings, finalized transcripts, and notes were securely stored on my Drexel University password-protected Microsoft's 365 OneDrive

Researcher's Journal

During the research collection and analysis period, I used a handwritten researcher's journal to bracket my own experiences and perceptions with the phenomenon to allow for a more

accurate representation of the participants' voice (Moustakas, 1994). I made entries into the journal during and after interviews, and on Sunday evenings to ensure that I had stable data over the research period on my own thoughts, feelings, and observations. I also documented non-verbal cues of the participants during interviews, such as facial expressions, or tone of voice. This additional data contributed to the richness of the findings, offering insight that may not be evident from the transcripts (Roulston, 2010).

Research Timeline

The timeline in which the research was conducted is presented as Table 2. The process, from the Proposal Defense to the study's submission to Proquest occurred from December of 2022 and up to June of 2023. The proposal was defended in December of 2022, and I shortly thereafter applied to Drexel University's IRB. In January, of 2023, I obtained IRB approval with no revisions to the original application. I then began the data collection process which concluded in March of 2023. I began the data analysis and reporting period in March, and concluded with a draft of the dissertation in April of 2023. The study's defense was conducted in May of 2023, and the dissertation was submitted to Drexel University's ProQuest in June of 2023.

Table 2

Research Timeline

Pilot Proposal Defense	December 2022
IRB Approval	January 2023
Participant Recruitment and Consent	February 2023
Individual Interviews, Member-Checking Interviews, Researcher's Journal contributions	January- March 2023
Data Analysis and Reporting.	March- April 2023
Dissertation Defense	May 2023
Final Submission, celebration	June 2023

Data Analysis and Procedures for Each Method

Upon completion of the member-checking interviews and once I had finalized transcripts, I commenced the coding process, utilizing hand coding. Miles et al, (2020) describe hand coding as an appropriate approach for inductive analysis, as it allows the researcher to engage more deeply with the data that may not be as apparent through automated coding, and without the constraint of preexisting frameworks. To initiate the coding process, I utilized two first-cycle inductive coding methods; In Vivo and Descriptive, and for the second-cycle, I utilized Pattern Coding.

My initial runthrough of coding the transcripts began with the In Vivo method. I began by coding for In Vivo across all seven transcripts. According to Saldaña (2021), In Vivo is "a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (p. 105). This type of coding best honors the participants' voice, which is central to phenomenological research. Examples of the In Vivo codes included: "a lot to learn," "extra effort," "they are ordinary people," "difficulty presenting," and "comfort zone." After the transcripts were coded with In-Vivo, I repeated the same process with the Descriptive method, coding across all seven transcripts. The Descriptive method leads to categorized inventory, or an index of the data's content (Saldaña, 2021). Saldaña (2021) defines Descriptive coding as summarizing, in a word or short phrase, the topic of a passage of qualitative data. Examples of Descriptive codes included: non-Armenian smiles, virtual communication is challenging, English natives speak fast, meetings effective in Armenian. The first-cycle sequence produced 1,052 codes, all stored in the secured Drexel One-Drive, in an Excel document.

I then deductively categorized the 1,052 codes under the initial interview protocol questions, placing each code under the question the data was derived from. Once each code was

categorized, I put the transcripts aside and used Pattern coding as a second cycle method. Pattern coding is an appropriate second cycle coding in phenomenological research, as Saldaña (2021) describes Pattern coding as an effective method to identify higher level concepts and overarching patterns that are common across first cycle codes. Saldaña (2021) concurs that coding is initiated by a precise transcription of the verbal exchange of the participant and the researcher, including non-verbal cues, and pauses, and so Pattern coding can be particularly useful for identifying social patterns and themes. Similarly, Miles et al., (2020) describes Pattern coding as a meta code, and a path to surfacing themes. According to Stenner (2014), qualitative researchers seek patterns as stable indicators of the way that humans render the world, thus making it more "comprehensible, predictable and tractable" (p. 143).

A codebook emerged as a result of the Pattern coding. Examples of pattern codes included: experiencing commonalities, desire to learn, similar worldview, regular people, common people like us, humor does not translate, understanding market needs, expanding horizons. From over 100 pattern codes, four themes, and 11 subthemes emerged. I then returned to the transcripts to extract exemplar quotes relevant to the themes and subthemes. The codebook included the In-Vivo, Descriptive, and Pattern Codes as well as exemplar quotes. An example of the codebook is included as Appendix F and was used for Theme Three: Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language and the Professional Setting.

To illustrate the example of the codebook, 82 In-Vivo codes such as; "talking fast," "fast pace," and "not fully living in the language," and 57 Descriptive codes such as; natives speak fast, understanding natives needs extra focus, and native slang needs extra focus resulted in 7 pattern codes. Exemplary quotes depicting these pattern codes were also included in the codebook. Further access to the codebooks and transcripts can be made available upon request.

Once the codebooks for each theme were complete, they were used to form narratives and were presented as findings in Chapters Four.

Methodological Limitations

A limitation for this study could be principled resignation, or social desirability bias, when participants provide responses that they perceive as socially acceptable, instead of providing authentic thoughts or feelings (Nederhof, 1985). In the study, participants may have expressed what I or the company would like to hear based on perceived company strategy around EDI. This bias could potentially impact the data's authenticity and consequently the accuracy of the findings (Nederhof, 1985). To mitigate participant bias as much as possible, special consideration was given during the recruiting stage, using purposive sampling to identify those I had a trusted relationship with. Additionally, communication to the participants emphasized the anonymity secured and explained the data usage as confined to the study. Finally, I emphasized my role as a doctoral student, and that the research was outside the scope of the MNE.

Another limitation could have been my unintended subjective input into the collection or analysis process, which can impact responses to the dialogue between the participants and myself. Credibility bias, a type of trustworthiness limitation, could have occured as I have my own biases and perceptions around EDI (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To reduce this, as much as possible, phenomenology calls for the practice of epoche (Vagle, 2018). To practice epoche, I kept a researcher's journal to track and bracket such biases and perceptions. Tracking my own actions and reactions throughout the study helped me monitor and correct any behaviors that may cause such a bias to surface.

Finally, although participants fit the criteria for the population studied, a study of this scale may not represent all employees from the Republic of Armenia working in an MNE. In

qualitative research, the concept of transferability refers to the application of the findings to other context or settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the limited sample size and purposive sampling method, the findings may not have fully captured the diverse experiences of employees within the population.

Ethical Considerations

To mitigate ethical concerns, I completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative's (CITI Program) Research Ethics and Compliance Training and attained IRB approval before interacting with participants and conducting the research. Since the topic of EDI may be sensitive, participants knew of the study topic beforehand and every participant was informed that they may leave the study at any time. As I am a leader employed in the MNE and a colleague of the participants, I reiterated that participation in the study was voluntary and that employees should feel comfortable declining for any reason, as when researching within an institution, an ethical challenge is ensuring the voluntariness of the research participation (Gujar et al., 2021).

Chapter Summary

Through the study of lived EDI experiences of employees in an MNE in Armenia, we stand to gain better understanding that can contribute to more relevant interventions in promoting EDI for the population studied. Through a phenomenological approach, I sought to learn about the lived experiences of a sample from this population through one-on one-interviews with participants and by confirming their voice by conducting member-checking interviews. Simultaneously, a researcher's journal helped me bracket my own perceptions.

This Chapter articulated the use of phenomenology as the research methodology, described the design of the study, explained the rationale behind the selection of the

methodology, and provided an overview of the research methods used in the study. As part of the research design, the Chapter included the population and sample description, the site description and access, and the data collection procedures. The Chapter concluded with a discussion of the limitations and ethical concerns with the research. In Chapter Four, I will present the study's themes followed by the findings in Chapter Five.

Chapter Four: Results and Interpretations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion of multinational enterprise employees from the homogenous Republic of Armenia. Insights gleaned from this research aree meant to provide valuable information for HRD professionals, enabling them to enhance employee EDI outcomes. The overarching question of this study was: How do MNE employees in Armenia describe their overall experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion? The sub-questions included:

1. How has the lived experience of the employee with equity, diversity, and inclusion prior to joining an MNE shaped their understanding of EDI?
2. How has the lived experience of the employee working with a multicultural team changed their understanding of EDI?

In order to understand the lived experience of participants, I employed interviews as the principal research method, supplemented by member-checking interviews and a researcher's journal, both to ensure the narratives remained authentic to the voice of the participants. As a social constructivist conducting phenomenological research, I regarded the participants' voice as paramount, since I believe that knowledge is constructed individually through one's social interactions (Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1989).

Four themes emerged from the data. Each theme and their subthemes aree elaborated throughout the Chapter and presented as Table 3. The first theme was Early Interpersonal Perceptions of & Experiences With Non-Armenians, which included the subthemes; Preconceptions & Serendipitous Encounters; Common Ground: Discovering Similitude; and Transcending Boundaries: A Journey of Discoveries. The second theme, A Multilayered World: Cultural Insights and Human Connection included the subthemes: A Character-Centric

Worldview; Bridging Cultural Divides: Humor, Distance, & Connections; and The Talent Paradox: Deconstructing Biased Perception of Inequity. The third theme to emerge from the data was Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language and the Professional Setting with the two subthemes: Lingua Franca Limitations: Addressing Language Pitfalls and The Language Imperative: Professional Growth. The last theme was titled; Beyond Borders: The Road to Globalization and included the subthemes: Building a Global Brand: Harnessing the Power of Diversity, Expanding Horizons: The Benefits of Global Connections, and Personal Transformation & the Power of Diversity.

Table 3

Study Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Early Interpersonal Perceptions of & Experiences With non-Armenians	Preconceptions & Serendipitous Encounters
	Common Ground: Discovering Similitude
	Transcending Boundaries: A Journey of Discoveries
A Multilayered World: Cultural Insights & Human Connections	A Character-Centric Worldview
	Bridging Cultural Divides: Humor, Distance, & Connections
	The Talent Paradox: Deconstructing Biased Perception of Inequity
Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language and the Professional Setting	Lingua Franca Limitations: Addressing Language Pitfalls
	The Language Imperative: Professional Growth
Beyond Borders: The Road to Globalization	Building a Global Brand: Harnessing the Power of Diversity
	Expanding Horizons: The Benefits of Global Connections

Findings and Discussion

Theme One: Early Interpersonal Perceptions of & Experiences With Non-Armenians

The first theme, Early Interpersonal Perceptions of & Experiences With Non-Armenians, captured participants' initial beliefs and interactions with non-Armenians before their employment in an MNE. The theme highlighted the role of various influences, such as family, multimedia, school, and their communities in shaping participants' early perceptions of non-Armenians. This theme also illustrated the participants' early memories of meeting non-Armenians, and the experiences they had with EDI before they began working at an MNE. Within this theme, three subthemes surfaced: Preconceptions & Serendipitous Encounters, which encompassed early perceptions and narratives of their first meetings with non-Armenians; Common Ground; Discovering Similitude, which outlined narratives of perceived sameness between non-Armenians and the participants; and Transcending Boundaries; A Journey of Discoveries, which illustrated the desire participants' expressed to learn more about diverse cultures.

Preconceptions & Serendipitous Encounters

The first subtheme to emerge from the data, Perceptions & Serendipitous Encounters, involved varied perceptions that participants noted when sharing their early impressions of non-Armenians that they had gained from family, multimedia, school, and their communities. When recounting early childhood impressions, participants' narratives varied. Tigran, a female from the MNE's Engineering department, recalled a positive impression:

> My parents told me how much non-Armenians helped us during the Gyumri Earthquake. They shared that foreigners did everything they could for us at that time. My impression

> was that they were very pleasant and had a different culture to Armenians. I wanted to know them and learn from them.

Tigran demonstrated the role of family and community experiences in shaping early impressions of non-Armenians, in this case a positive perception influenced by the role foreigners played in assisting with the Gyumri Earthquake of 1988. Similar to Tigran, Tamara, a female from the MNE's General and Administration team, shared a positive early impressions "I heard that they were more developed than we were and that they were living in better democracies." Tamara's statement reflected a belief in the progress and development of non-Armenians societies.

Participant impressions were different in regards to what they had learned about non-Armenians from family, multimedia, school, and their communities. Arshak, a male working in the MNE's Artificial Intelligence team noted, "Actually, I was thinking that they are ordinary people as we are. I was not focusing on their differences. I was not thinking they are aliens. We were not taught this way." Arshak's perspective highlighted an emphasis on humanity and the similarities between people, a prevalent sentiment throughout the data.

Not all early impressions were positive about non-Armenians, before their first meetings with them. Tamara shared stories about Western approaches to familial relationship, stating:

> I heard that foreigners do not have the family spirit and the warmth that Armenians have within our families and our extended families. I remember hearing that in some countries they would kick their children out of the house as soon as they turned 17 or 18, and I remember thinking how unfair that was, how ungodly it was to do that to your child.

She had also heard stereotypes that Armenians were smarter than non-Armenians and more advanced in the sciences. Tamara's description of Western family dynamics and the belief in Armenian superiority of intelligence demonstrate how misconceptions can create early impressions of differences between cultures. Similarly, Yervand, a male from the Product team, also shared negative early impressions:

> We associated other nationalities through movies and cartoons rather than through people or places. The older generation had the impression that American content was more fantastical, dangerous, and nervous than Soviet content, which they shared was more educational and calming.

Aram, a female from the Product team, also shared negative impressions passed down from family members who had left to work in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Aram said "They (family members) shared that Russians were racist, chauvinistic, and did not take care of other national people." Both Yervand and Aram's highlighted the complexity of these cultural perception.

First Encounters

Although early impressions shared by the participants about what they had heard about non-Armenians or knew about them prior to their first meetings varied, they unanimously expressed positive impressions about their first encounters when meeting non-Armenians. Notably, aside from Varazdat, a male from the Engineering team, who frequently met non-Armenians as a child due to his mother's work in an international organization, the majority of participants did not meet non-Armenians until later in their adolescent or adult years. Tamara, Arshak, and Anahit were teenagers, while Aram, Tigran, and Yervand were adults when they had their first interaction. From his early childhood, Varazdat described his mother's American colleague:

> He was always positive and smiled all the time. I really enjoyed interacting with him as I always left the exchange with good emotions. So the first thing that I can say is that they smile much more than Armenians.

In this passage, Varazdat's positive experience with his mother's American colleague, who was consistently upbeat, highlighted the role that early personal interactions had in shaping impressions. Smiling was a common impression relayed by the participants when narrating their first experiences meeting non-Armenians. Tigran similarly shared, "They impressed me with

their smiles. They always smiled and talked in a pleasant manner, and that is not common for Armenians." Aram, who had heard negative stereotypes about Russians from her family, shared of her first encounter with Russians, "Although I was told negative stories about them, I liked them. They were cool. They were nice. They smiled a lot." Beyond the impressionable smiles, Yervand also expressed that he was taken by the communication style of Western clients he met during his time freelancing and prior to joining the MNE, stating, "I noticed that they were really good at communicating ideas and sharing what they wanted." Although early impressions about non-Armenians varied before they had their first interactions, all participants expressed that their first interactions with non-Armenians were positive experiences. Through these narratives, thet participants emphasize the role of non-Armenians' positive demeanor and effective communication in shaping their early impressions and in breaking down preconceived notions.

Common Ground: Discovering Similitude

The subtheme Common Ground: Discovering Similitude illustrated the participants' realization that despite cultural or physical differences, there is commonality and shared experiences with non-Armenians, emphasizing the universality of human connection. Commonality refers to the sharing of features, characteristics, or experiences between individuals or groups, with an emphasis on similarities (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Commonality emerged as a powerful recurring theme throughout the data and unanimously among the participants. Varazdat expressed this directly, when asked about the differences in early interactions, sharing "Oh, to be honest, I didn't notice any big difference between us and them. I never thought of them as foreigners. For me, they were people who didn't speak Armenian." This sentiment was reiterated by Arshak, Tamara, and Tigran, and Anahit, a female from the General & Administration Team, as they also shared that non-Armenians were regular people. Aram

expressed, "I think the expectation or model I created in my mind was different from reality. I was imagining them being different and specific, but they were common people just like us." These perceptions, in conveying a sense of commonality, highlighted the human experience as transcending cultural differences. Through this passage, the personal experiences of Arshak, Tamara, Tigran, Anahit, and Aram revealed a growing realization that non-Armenians are ordinary people, emphasizing the universality of the human experience that transcends national differences.

Although the majority of the participants discussed commonality, Aram described physical differences she noted in her first interaction with Russian guests at her home. "The one thing that I remember for sure was the color of their skin. They were very, very white and I also remember the color of their hair. My grandmother was calling their hair the color of the sun." In contrast to the theme of commonality, Aram's narrative about her first encounter with Russian guests underscored the physical differences she observed, highlighting as visible example of national difference.

Other than Aram's description of physical diversity, a perception of commonality remained prevalent throughout the data and resurfaced when participants discussed their professional relationship with non-Armenians. Through these early interactions, the participants echoed an understanding that non-Armenians were regular people, just like them, further emphasizing the significance of common ground when fostering cross-cultural relationships.

Transcending Boundaries: A Journey of Discovery

Transcending Boundaries: A Journey of Discovering explored participants' desires to learn more about other cultures and go beyond their knowledge of Armenian reality, and not depend on their initial preconceptions. In this subtheme, participants expressed a curiosity to

broaden their understanding of the world and recognize the commonality among people. For instance, Anahit shared her early impressions and curiosity about people of different nationalities, stating:

> I have a cousin living in the United States. Though I had never been there, she would share her school photos with me where there were multinational people and I was always wondering what it is like to be with them, to study with different people that have different nationalities.

Inspired by her cousin's photos, Anahit's curiosity demonstrated a desire to learn about different cultures. Aram articulated a comparable testament, "Unfortunately, I didn't have contact with other nationalities during my childhood. I think I really lost an opportunity to meet people from different cultures and learn a lot of things from them." Tamara similarly described a gap in awareness about the rest of the world, explaining that for her, "the world for me was Armenia and not Armenia," and consequently also sought to understand what was in the non-Armenia world:

> I grew up as a very shy and very closed person. I would never talk to a stranger. If I got lost, maybe I would not even ask for directions because I was too shy. But when I learned English, and when I started meeting non-Armenian people and figuring out there is a lot of stuff I don't know, because I don't have access to that information, I forgot I was shy. I even started talking to strangers just to get to know more about something I hadn't had the chance to learn about.

Aram's and Tamara's experiences highlighted the gap in their understanding of the world outside of Armenia as early interactions with non-Armenians inspired them to seek broader worldviews.

Early interactions with non-Armenians further intensified participants' curiosity, leading some participants to experience shifts in perspectives. Yervand recounted, "In Armenia we have a limited worldview, one path that is right. You need to go to school, then university, then you need to marry etc. etc." He described that when he began seeing alternative paths, taken by non-Armenians he met, he questioned the one path he had been provided. Tamara likewise shared a

parallel experience when recounting her early experiences. “If everything was black and white for me, this experience (interacting with non-Armenians) gave me the idea that there are a lot more colors to see.” Yervand’s and Tamara’s experiences, in which they began to question their preconceived notions illustrated the power of such early experiences in transformative understanding and how important this was to their growth.

Tamara eloquently captured such transformation, when describing her first encounter with a non-Armenian educator. She described her perception of an educator as wearing fancy clothes and jewelry to convey a high level of stature. “I had this stigma in my mind that important people should dress accordingly, with clothing and jewelry to impress.” Upon observing the non-Armenian educator dressed in what she called “bare basic clothes with little or no jewelry, ” she was “caught off guard.” She disclosed:

> When looking at how she lived and comparing it to what I learned about lifestyle, I would think that she lived like a poor person. Armenia is a fancy and show off country. But we had a very poor understanding about enjoying life, thinking it meant having a rich household and lifestyle. This gave me an opportunity to think about the way that I grew up and what I am choosing.

Tamara’s eagerness to actively pursue information and experiences with new cultures was salient in the narratives and expressed by four other participants. Anahit, for instance, stated, “It’s very interesting for me to observe and discover new cultures, and not only be limited to mine. She characterized her early interactions with non-Armenians as “trial or demo versions” in getting to know a country and its people. Arshak, conversely, maintained that his cultural interests were primarily fueled by mediums such as film rather than the individuals he met.

The majority of participants, however, shared a mutual experience of their interactions with non-Armenians in sparking curiosity about diverse cultures, with two recounting shifts in

perspectives due to these early interactions. As articulated by Tamara, such encounters provided a welcomed "broader view of the world."

Participants also recounted instances of challenging stereotypes as they began interacting with non-Armenians and experiencing contradictions between what they had been led to believe and their actual experiences. Just as Tamara realized that not all distinguished people wear impressive clothing or jewels, so too did our participants learn that stereotypes were not always true. Anahit shared this lesson candidly:

> I had heard stereotypes and because of them, I had certain approaches to other countries and nationalities before. For example, when I was interested in going to South Asia, someone asked me why I wanted to go there and explained to me it is a dirty place.

Anahit did travel to South Asia and the stereotype was broken for her. Although she acknowledged that a large city could have everything including clean and dirty areas, she asserted that the generalizations she had heard about the entirety of South Asia were inaccurate. "I realized what I heard was not true. Whenever you do not have a background and you hear some things, you believe them. I wanted to understand the background and figure it out for myself." This quote highlighted the importance of firsthand knowledge in debunking stereotypes, as Anahit recognized the limitations of relying on others perceptions and emphasized the value of independent inquiry in forming a more nuanced understanding. Anahit drew an Armenian parallel to emphasize her point, sharing that there is a stereotype that Armenians are always late. She then argued that she knows several Armenians that are, in fact, always punctual. "Not having expectations," she shared, is one of the things she learned, continuing, "get to know the person." Here, Anahit reiterated that she was focused on the person, and not common perceptions.

This sentiment resonated with a majority of the participants. Tamara's approach closely mirrored Anahit's. During her travels as a teenager and into adulthood, she realized that the

stereotypes she had heard such as “Asians are this way” or “Westerners are that way” were unfounded. “I figured out that Europe was an asset of different countries and that the US is a different place. This gave me the idea that it is impossible to group countries into larger categories.” This quote demonstrated an understanding that breaking down stereotypes required understanding the complexity and nuance of cultures. Tamara’s realization about the importance of clothes and jewelry, or lack thereof, and Anahit’s debunking of generalizations about South Asia, indicated the power of personal experiences in breaking down preconceived ideas and thus fostering a more nuanced understanding of the world.

Theme Summary

The overarching theme of Interpersonal Perceptions of & Experiences With Non-Armenians detailed a multitude of participant perceptions, experiences, and narratives of interaction with non-Armenians prior to their involvement with an MNE. The three subthemes: Preconceptions & Serendipitous Encounters, which highlighted positive first encounters with non-Armenians; Common Ground: Discovering Similitude, wherein participants focused on commonalities rather than differences; and Transcending Boundaries: A Journey of Discovery, where participants pursued new cultural perspectives, instead of depending on preconceived notions- collectively provided insights into participants’ early experiences with EDI.

Theme Two: A Multilayered World: Cultural & Human Connections

In examining perceptions and experiences while working within the MNE, the theme A Multilayered World: Cultural & Human Connections illuminated participant experiences and perceptions while working at the MNE, focusing on the challenges and opportunities working at the MNE and collaborating with non-Armenians. This theme encompassed the three subthemes: A Character-Centric Worldview, which reiterated commonality among individuals; Bridging

Cultural Divides: Humor, Distance, and Connections, which emphasized obstacles in cross-cultural communication; and The Talent Paradox: Deconstructing Biased Perception of Inequity, which reviewed narratives surrounding a perceived positive bias towards non-Armenian professionals. Within these subthemes, participants shared their perceptions and experiences to shed light on navigating a diverse workforce's complexities.

A Character-Centric Worldview

Consistent with findings from before participants began working at an MNE, all seven participants continued to minimize cultural differences, and instead focus on an individual's character and personality, or their worldview when acknowledging differences. When forming professional relationship, this subtheme revolved around participants' emphasis on an individual's character, personality, or worldview rather than their nationality. All study participants consistently conveyed that nationality was second to personality, the character of the person, or the worldview they held. Tigran shared, "I understood that nationality doesn't matter. Everyone has the same problems, challenges, and we can help one another." Varazdat echoed this belief, when he expressed, "Personally for me, there is no difference where my colleagues are from." Anahit furthered this argument by noting that she had many Armenian colleagues whose work approach differed from hers and non-Armenian colleagues with a similar work approach, which served as the basis for connection. She continued:

> I believe there is no difference between nationalities, but it is about personalities. I have had a chance to meet lots of international people and I concluded that culture and nationality do not have as much impact on the person as their personality. I can find the same character in very different cultures.

These quotes illustrated the participants' recognition that nationality is not a determinant in forming professional relationships. Rather, personalities play an essential role. Tigran, Varazdat,

and Anahit all emphasized the importance of focusing on commonality regarding national differences.

Although the interview questions prompted participants to reflect on differences between professional relationships with Armenian and non-Armenians, they repeatedly reiterated that they did not focus on cultural factors when interacting with others. Varazdat summarized this sentiment:

> Once, I explained to one of our colleagues that there is no racism in Armenia because we have never had races here. We cannot say that one race is better than another, and so on. Everyone here is equal for us.

Tamara passionately echoed the same idea, explaining that since there were no nationalities to base differences on, she had always focused on distinct personalities or characters instead, stating:

> If you are talking about the years that define a person, for me it is before the teenage years, and I did not have a global experience. But now having worked in a multinational enterprise, I am taught with training that I should treat my colleagues the same. But I never actually thought of treating someone differently just because they were not like I am, be it color or age. The way that I grew up (in a homogenous environment) forced me, in a good way, to accept everyone as a person. So when I am being taught to accept someone for who they are and treating them equally it is disturbing to me, because I have never thought to treat someone in a way that they do not deserve.

Varazdat and Tamara's perspectives emphasized the importance of recognizing individuals based on their distinct personalities rather than their nationality, reflecting their upbringing in a homogenous environment that inadvertently fostered an inclusive mindset, making the concept of unequal treatment seem unsettling. Upon further reflection, Tamara realized that she had, in fact, grown up in a diverse environment, as the village she lived in as a child had a population of Yezidis, a minority group in Armenia. She shared that she did not think of her experience as diverse as she never considered Yezidis as non-Armenians. She shared, "We didn't understand their language, because it was quite different, but I was never taught and never shown that I

could treat them differently because of their language or religion." She concluded " I never differentiated them from being Armenian," denoting they were very much a part of the community. Tamara's experience further highlighted the importance of treating others equally regardless of language or religious differences. She reiterated her focus on seeing the person, and not the nationality. These quotes by Varazdat and Tamara illustrated experiences growing up in a homogenous environment, where the homogenous environment itself led to behavior that did not treat people of different nationalities unequally. Varazdat and Tamara also shared that they carried this perspective to their work at the MNE, further fortifying the emphasis on personality.

Bridging Cultural Divides: Humor, Distance, Connections

The Bridging Cultural Divides: Humor, Distance, Connections subtheme explored participants' experiences developing bonds and navigating cultural nuances, with narratives about humor and comfort, while working with non-Armenian colleagues. The subtheme also explored the impact that physical distance had on relationship building. As participants recounted interactions with non-Armenian colleagues, recurring stories emerged about the challenges of developing bonds through humor. Acknowledging humor as a crucial component of Armenian workplace culture, participants explained that it served as a unifying and connecting experience. However, they observed that sharing humor with non-Armenian colleagues was complicated. Aram illustrated, "The first thing that comes to mind is that our jokes are very specific Armenian jokes that won't make sense in mixed meetings." Varazdat concurred, "It's harder to tell jokes in English, so when the meeting is with Armenians only, there are more jokes and it is more fun." Yervand agreed that translating humor beyond cultures is challenging, and shared, "It is not only language, but understanding humor and the approach. Armenians are more dramatic in terms of that, we understand one another." Aram, Varazdat, and Yervand's

experiences revealed the complexity of translating humor across cultures, as participants often found it challenging to share jokes and create a fun atmosphere in mixed meetings.

Nevertheless, Yervand acknowledged the possibility of bonding over humor, having experienced such a connection with non-Armenian colleagues. He shared, “When we started working with colleagues from Scotland, I learned both our people can be ironic with our humor, or appreciate dark humor. It felt similar and easy to communicate because of this.” Yervand’s experience with Scottish colleagues demonstrated that finding shared humor is possible and can facilitate communication and foster a more comfortable working relationship. As participants reiterated the importance of humor, Varazdat revealed that he continued to try and employ humor as a way to further communicate and bond with non-Armenian colleagues ``I try to be humorous. It is really hard, but thankfully I haven’t had an awkward situations so far.” He recognized however that “humor has its own language, and so translating it sometimes ruins it.”

Another significant factor impacting bonding, according to participants’ narratives, was the level of comfort or openness to engage in open or accessible discourse. Tigran expressed the difference in striking up non-professional topics with non-Armenians early in her career, as she was uncertain whether it was appropriate to ask about family members or colleagues’ weekend activities. Anahit shared similar concerns, stating:

> It is easier when you have a mutual cultural connection. You feel comfortable to talk about non-work topics, to speak openly. So, whenever I join or leave a meeting I am a bit stressed. I am not sure if I should speak about everything or share whatever I think. Should I be honest enough or should I think more rather than expressing my opinion?

Both Tigran and Anahit’s experiences highlighted the importance of comfort and openness in non-work related conversations and the uncertainty that arises with non-Armenian colleagues which may bring forth challenges in building connections. Arshak echoed a similar sentiment, “Sometimes, when talking to a non-Armenian person, I feel more safe not to ask several

questions which I can ask Armenians. Sometimes this feeling is present, but not very strong." Arshak's quote emphasized the subtle yet significant impact of cultural familiarity on interpersonal communications and comfort levels when engaging in non-work related conversation.

While discussing humor, openness, and comfort during small talk, Tamara expressed that she never sensed a difference, as she maintained a professional demeanor with both Armenian and non-Armenian colleagues. Should an uncomfortable situation arise, she would feel at ease addressing it, explaining to her colleague that she might not have been culturally appropriate due to a lack of context. Varazdat, like Tamara, shared that he generally avoided personal or sensitive topics at the workplace and expressed:

> I usually do not speak about politics or personal things and that helps me avoid weird situations. Because in some countries, people don't like to talk about politics. In other countries, people do not like to talk about their families or children. So I always try to avoid those conversations, if I am not asked first.

Both Tamara and Varazdat underscored the importance of maintaining professionalism and avoiding sensitive topics, while also recognizing the potential for deeper relationships that can be based on bonding over shared interests that transcend cultural differences. When asked if not discussing personal topics constrains the development of a deeper relationship, Varazdat emphasized that there are enough common topics to discuss in order to establish a connection, "We can talk about sports, movies, the weather, about interesting places that you can visit and so on," he illustrated. Varazdat's response underscored the belief that shared interests and common topics can effectively foster connections between individuals, demonstrating that deeper relationships can be cultivated even without covering personal topics.

Despite the challenges in integrating humor into their relationships with non-Armenians and the varying degrees of openness in making small talk, all participants noted that they could

build equally profound professional relationships with their non-Armenian colleagues as with their Armenian counterparts. However, Aram clarified that additional effort might be required with a non-Armenian to form a deep relationship, sharing, “I think I would be able to develop as deep a professional relationship, but maybe it would require a longer period of time. Maybe some more context would be required, some more interaction would be required.” Aram’s insight suggested that while forming deep relationships with non-Armenian colleagues, more time and additional effort may be necessary in the absence of shared context.

While all participants agreed that nationality was not a barrier in forming deep professional relationships, Aram explained that forming these bonds with Armenians was more seamless, sharing, “at the end of the day, I understand and feel my Armenian colleagues better just because we are Armenian. I know the whole context behind any words they say, behind any questions they ask.” Through this passage Anahit highlighted that familiarity with cultural context and shared communication styles that facilitate a more fluid connection among individuals with a shared background. However, Anahit reflected that her comfort level in such interactions had increased over the years and that she no longer felt the barriers so strongly as when she first joined the MNE.

Many participants identified that the primary barrier they felt in their relationship with non-Armenian colleagues was being in different physical locations. As their interactions with their Armenian colleagues was live and in person, and their interactions with their non-Armenian colleagues was mostly remote and virtual, they concluded that the absence of live interaction had a more substantial impact on the relationship than national differences. Varazdat captured this by sharing, “The main problem here is the distance. For example, when your colleague is at another location, you cannot get a beer after work. So you usually end up talking about work during

work hours, and you wouldn't call them remotely after work to be social virtually." Tamara also attributes physical distance as the most significant barrier, sharing,

> Most of my Armenian colleagues are situated in the same office, meaning that I see them almost every day. Because we are in the same room, we become personally attached to the people we spend time with. And I am completely sure that if I worked in the same room with my foreign colleagues, it would be the same. Every time we have a business trip, it takes only a day to have a coffee break or to grab drinks after work.

Tamara's perspective highlighted the significant role that physical proximity plays in building relationships. Many participants emphasized that physical distance played a more significant role in limiting their relationship with non-Armenians, rather than national differences, suggesting that proximity and live interactions can foster deeper connections, regardless of the person's national background.

The Talent Paradox: Deconstructing Biased Perceptions of Inequity

The final subtheme that emerged from the Navigating Professional Cross-Cultural Interactions theme was titled The Talent Paradox: Deconstructing Biased Perceptions of Inequity, and centered on participants' experiences in MNEs, regarding perceptions of competence based on nationality. Six out of seven participants acknowledged a perception bias favoring non-Armenian professionals' competence within their current or previous MNEs. Yervand captured this during the interview, sharing:

> If your name is Sam Smith, you are better off than if you have an Armenian name. If you are Yervand from Armenia, that means it is not guaranteed that you are a top professional. There is skepticism. The first impression and expectation for those from foreign countries is higher than someone from here (Armenia).

Yervand's statement highlighted the perception bias within a subset of the MNE population, where professionals with non-Armenian names are often assumed to be more competent and are afforded higher expectations. In contrast, those with Armenian names face skepticism and must work harder to establish professional credibility. Five other participants discussed this perception

bias. Although participants acknowledged that this was not the company's stance and that not all colleagues held this view, they noted it was prevalent enough to warrant mention. Varazdat shared, "I have noticed that some of our colleagues think that if a person is from Europe, for example, that means the person is a better quality developer (better skilled) than someone from Armenia." Participants indicated that this positive bias towards non-Armenians was more prevalent among Armenians but also surfaced across the nationalities and was evident in work interactions. Tamara recounted an incident, "When an Armenian colleague suggested a process change, it wasn't accepted. But when a non-Armenian suggested the same change, it was immediately accepted. I don't know the reason, maybe it is a positive bias towards non-Armenians, but I feel this inequity." Varazdat and Tamara's experiences underlined the existence of a positive bias towards non-Armenians in the workplace, where individuals from other countries are perceived as more skilled or knowledgeable, leading to unequal treatment of ideas and suggestions based on the nationality of the contributor rather than the value of the idea itself.

Participants also proposed explanations for the existence of such a perception. Varazdat posited that this was due to a broader branding issue surrounding global quality. He shared:

> It comes from everyday life. When you buy something European, you think it is better quality. When you work with a European, it gets in your mindset that if they are European and also better quality. But it is not always that way.

Varazdat suggested that the bias in favor of non-Armenians may stem from a broader belief in the superior quality of European products, which may extend to European professionals, even if this assumption may not necessarily be valid. Arshak, who also recognized this bias, attributed it to personal branding, as he observed that Westerners excel in branding themselves, calling them "masters of making an impression." He also noted that Armenians might tend to underestimate their knowledge and ability. Through these narratives, Varazdat and Arshak revealed that the

bias of favoring non-Armenians may originate from a perceived superiority of European products and professionals, with personal branding also playing a role in reinforcing this perception. Arshak also highlighted the tendency of Armenians to undervalue their own knowledge and abilities.

Furthermore, many participants noted that non-Armenians might also be coming from larger MNEs, as they had increased access to work opportunities at such organizations. For example, Yervand stated:

> We have a couple of colleagues, employees, and managers that think that if you're from a foreign country, or if you're from Shazam or Netflix, you are more experienced and know more things than the one who started their journey from here (the MNE under study).

Varazdat concurred that such a bias exists towards those with experience from such companies and explained why this may be the case. He believed that Westerners had an advantage over Armenians if they had worked at MNEs with good working culture, with said culture having a good impact on the employees. He shared,

> I have done lots of interviews for our company with candidates from Armenia and Europe, and I can say that the quality of developers is not much different. The problem here is that the person working in Europe has worked in companies with better culture than those who have worked in Armenia. Not all Armenian companies pay attention to company culture, and that's a serious problem for us.

The participants highlighted that perception bias may be influenced by non-Armenian having prior experience with larger MNEs, which could give them an advantage over local professionals whose opportunities to work at larger MNEs were limited. Varazdat added that the main difference between Armenian and European developers was not based on their skill set, but on the cultural differences attributed to the companies that they had worked for, as he shared that not all Armenian companies prioritize a healthy working culture.

As participants articulated their perceptions regarding this perception bias, they also shared that their personal experiences allowed them to discover that it was unfounded. Tigran asserted:

> Before the non-Armenians joined, I thought we should only learn from them, as they are more experienced. My perception was that they would raise the bar. They were like Gods for us. After we hired them, it was interesting that after some collaboration we saw that our experience is not worse than theirs. I understood that I am not inferior to them professionally. That I can learn from them, but they should learn from me too.

Tigran revealed a shift in her own perception, as personal experiences with non-Armenians led to the realization that the previously held bias was unfounded, ultimately highlighting the importance of mutual learning and equal professional competence. Arshak echoed this sentiment, explaining that interacting with multinational colleagues instilled confidence in his team members that the bias was false and assisted his colleagues in recognizing that they were also a qualified part of the global workforce.

Theme Summary

The theme, A Multilayered World: Insights and Human Connections, highlighted the challenges and opportunities participants encountered while working alongside their non-Armenian colleagues in an MNE. The theme was divided into three subthemes: A Character-Centric Worldview, which reviewed the salient perception that participants felt about the common thread of sameness with non-Armenian colleagues; Bridging Cultural Divides: Humor, Distance, and Connections, which reviewed obstacles in communicating across cultures; and The Talent Paradox: Deconstructing Biased Perceptions of Inequity, which illustrated the positive bias the participant felt that their colleagues had towards non-Armenian professionals. The rich narratives shared by the participants revealed their experiences with EDI and provided valuable insights into the phenomenon.

Theme Three: Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language & the Professional Setting

The theme Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language & the Professional Setting explored the challenges and implications of using English as a lingua franca in an MNE, specifically focusing on the experiences of non-native English speakers. These narratives coalesced into the subthemes of: Lingua Franca Limitations: Addressing Language Pitfalls, which shared the challenges faced by non-native English speakers and the consequent impact on work; and The Language Imperative & Professional Growth, which investigated the role of English language proficiency in terms of both competence and perceived competence by others. The theme highlighted the linguistic journey of each participant, emphasizing the role of English as their third language after their native Armenian and Russian, the latter being considered a second language in Armenia.

Lingua Franca Limitations: Addressing Language Pitfalls

The subtheme Lingua Franca Limitations: Addressing Language Pitfalls examined the challenges faced by non-native English speakers in comprehending and communicating with native English speakers, especially when it came to the use of slang or fast speech. It also explored the various strategies participants used to overcome such barriers such as seeking clarification or learning through practice. Additionally, the participants highlighted the impact of language on participant confidence during presentations, informal interactions, and work efficiency.

When discussing limitations, a significant number of participants mentioned difficulties in comprehending native English speakers. For instance, Varazdat shared, “I mainly face a language barrier when native English speakers use slang or speak too fast, as it is hard for me to understand.” Tamara and Anahit concurred, with Tamara noting that native speakers often speak

too quickly for someone who is still learning English. She recalled an incident where she had just begun learning English, and a native English speaking camp counselor approached her and conveyed something rapidly in English, which seemed urgent. She remembered not understanding what her counselor had said and how frustrated she felt and she was uncomfortable in recalling the story. The use of slang or metaphors was also a factor that was brought up by a few participants as further complicating comprehension. Varazdat, Tamara, and Anahit expressed that language barriers, such as native English speakers using slang or speaking fast, created difficulties in comprehension and led to feelings of discomfort or frustration, especially for new English language learners.

However, many participants shared that they were confident seeking clarification when they did not understand. Varazdat, when describing the barrier he faces when English native colleagues speak, stated, “Usually in this case, I share that I am a non-native speaker and so I ask them to speak slower.” Anahit also stated that she requests clarification when needed:

> I learned that it is OK to ask them to repeat, or just say that I didn't get the sentence or the idea and ask them to clarify. Because that's normal. You're from different backgrounds and there is no shame in asking them to repeat.

Despite the language barriers, both Varazdat and Anahit demonstrated resilience by proactively seeking clarification and in recognizing the difference in language backgrounds as a natural part of working in an MNE.

A language barrier was not confined to comprehension but also affected participants’ ability to speak English. Varazdat highlighted the difficulty of finding the precise words to communicate. He shared:

> As an example, in English, you can say the same thing two different ways, one polite and one not. You have to know those nuances, and this is very hard. Let's put it this way, you have to know lots of scenarios for English words and you have to know how to use them to avoid bad situations.

He recounted a misunderstanding when he used a word incorrectly, which led his teammates to believe he did not have faith in the project they were working on. He was distressed that this situation caused them to doubt his commitment to the project. Participants also mentioned that language anxiety impacted their ability to present at meetings and engage informally with colleagues. Aram shared:

> There were several big meetings where I had to present and deliver content and I was nervous and even afraid that I would forget some words or make some remarkable mistakes while speaking. I try to overcome this nervousness because it can make my English poorer. That is why I am trying to be calm and let myself make a couple of mistakes.

Although Varazdat and Aram faced challenges in accurately conveying their thoughts in English, they adopted strategies to overcome language anxiety and improve their communication skills.

The language barrier and language anxiety also extended to non-formal conversations outside of the work scope. Arshak and Yervand both expressed that it was easier to speak about work as they were more familiar with technical terms in English. Arshak shared, “When communicating about our daily work, everything is fine. But when we have some random conversations or share jokes, it becomes more difficult.” Varazdat also noticed “Some of my colleagues are shy and avoid speaking English. But I think the problem lies in them, because we learn by talking.” Tamara echoed that she had witnessed her colleagues holding back in communicating beyond the work scope. She stated:

> I know that those who are not fully fluent in English answer what they are asked, reply when they are addressed, but may not speak up as much if they were fully free in the language. This is a very profound problem.

Arshak expanded on this issue, which he expressed as frustrating:

> I realize that language barrier stops me. It is an obstacle to have a good conversation, to talk more than is just needed for work. I want to have discussions with people, to interact and so I try to overcome these difficulties. Because it is awkward when you are waiting

> for someone else to join the meeting and you have nothing to discuss. They are good people. And you really want to just have a conversation as you would with your Armenian colleagues.

Both Tamara and Arshak highlighted the impact of language barriers on communication and relationship building, revealing how limited language proficiency may cause individuals to be shyer in their interactions, and also revealed a desire to overcome these barriers to connect with diverse colleagues.

The participants shared experiences that outlined how this presents challenges to effective collaboration. Tigran elaborated, “They (Armenian colleagues) are struggling (to communicate) and it is obvious during meetings. If there are non-Armenian colleagues, the outcome is not the best it could be if the meeting was in Armenian initially.” She explained that the team conducts a debrief after such meetings to discuss the action points that would not have been necessary if the meeting were conducted in Armenian initially. Anahit also shared that some of her colleagues prefer to hold meetings in Armenian to express themselves freely. Arshak concurred that specific meetings are more effective in Armenian, sharing:

> While brainstorming, it is difficult to express yourself in English when your ideas and thoughts are not yet formulated. I can express my English ideas when they are formulated, but I can express them in Armenian when they are not yet formulated. This is the same for many of my Armenian colleagues. Thus, brainstorms are more effective in Armenian.

Arshak’s perspective emphasized the role of language in effective communication, particularly during brainstorming sessions, where the ability to express unformulated ideas is paramount to efficient idea generation. Varazdat similarly shared that meeting efficiency goes down when the working language is in English. He shared, “Meetings are more effective in Armenian, with a higher chance of coming to an agreement or solution.” Arshak further remarked that meetings in Armenian are “Easy to understand on an intuitive level when you are speaking in your native

language." Language barriers and anxiety not only impacted formal work communication but also informal conversations, with some participants finding it difficult to engage beyond work topics, hindering relationship building and effective collaboration.

The Language Imperative & Professional Development

The subtheme, The Language Imperative & Professional Development, revolved around the importance of English proficiency in accessing information and its role as a barrier to professional growth when proficiency is low. Notably, six of the seven participants emphasized that their English proficiency did not impact the way the MNE evaluated their professional status. Most participants believed that the company prioritized their technical expertise over their language ability. Conversely, Tigran shared, "Everyone mentions that if you know English better, you are a better professional."

Although most participants did not believe their standing within the company was affected by their English proficiency, they believed that English was essential to their personal and professional development. Tamara expressed, "Information is in English, it is not in Armenian. Our country is also Russian speaking, but we were told growing up and I also learned on my own that Russian information is not reliable." Yervand expressed a similar stance "You need English if you want to communicate or learn something." All participants noted an improvement in their English skills as a result of working in the MNE, with Aram summarizing her English journey by sharing:

> After joining the company, I was forced to improve my English. I am happy with my growth, but I still see that there is a lot to learn, improve, and polish. I really understand the benefit of learning and improving on a very well spread and powerful language. I realize that not knowing English will limit you, especially nowadays.

Tamara, Yervand, and Aram acknowledged the significance of English proficiency for personal and professional development, as it enables access to reliable information and effective communication at the MNE.

Participants did express that language limitations hindered professional growth for both themselves and for their colleagues. Aram shared, “I have a teammate who always exceeds expectations but because of his language barrier, he has difficulties presenting what he has done or what he would like to do.” Tigran also shared her observations about the limitations to her colleagues, by stating, “A lack of English is holding them back from being better specialists, from being higher in the ranks, just because they cannot express what they want to do.” She also experienced this frustration firsthand during an exchange with a colleague while clarifying a discrepancy. During the exchange, she was compelled to bring up this barrier directly to her colleague, sharing:

> I started to explain the discrepancy, using my level of English knowledge, and he stopped me and started to quickly answer and bring forth his point of view. I stopped him and told him that the fact that he knows English natively and that he can find beautiful words, and I can't, doesn't mean that he is right and I am wrong. Sorry, but let me finish my sentence.

In this exchange, Tigran felt professionally disadvantaged as she could not communicate the intricacies needed to clarify the situation fluently. Participants highlighted the negative impact of language limitations on their professional growth, as it can lead to professional disadvantage during crucial interactions.

The participants acknowledged various forms of support by the MNE. They all recognized that the MNE provided free English classes to non-native English speakers, and discussed instances of support by colleagues who reiterated points when necessary, translated during meetings, and exhibited patience towards non-native speakers. Varazdat spoke of this support, saying, “During meetings, if someone does not speak English or does not speak it well,

a colleague will help them translate." Varazdat emphasized the value of this support, coming from his colleagues.

Theme Summary

The findings, outlined in the Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language and the Professional Setting theme, underscored the significance of English in participants' daily interactions and collaboration with their non-Armenian colleagues. The challenges encountered by non-native English speakers were outlined in the Lingua Franca Limitations: Language and the Professional Setting subtheme, while the Language Imperative & Professional Development illustrated the critical role of English proficiency in professional development. These findings offered valuable insight into the complexities of linguistic navigation within the MNE for individuals whose native language differs from that of the lingua franca.

Theme Four: Beyond Borders: The Road to Globalization

The Building Borders: The Road to Globalization theme defined the increased understanding participants felt toward the value of globalization through their non-Armenian colleagues' input into the MNE, their expanded global connections attained at the MNE, and the personal transformation participants experienced while at the MNE. From this theme, three subthemes emerged: Building a Global Brand: Harnessing the Power of Diversity, which illustrated the value that non-Armenian colleagues had brought to the overall MNE; Expanding Horizons: The Benefits of Global Connections, which outlined the expanded global opportunities the participants had gained; and Personal Transformation & the Power of Diversity, which highlighted changes in mindset and worldview that the participants experienced in interacting with their non-Armenian colleagues. Through these subthemes, participant narratives of multinational synergy working at an MNE were explored.

Building a Global Brand: Harnessing the Power of Diversity

The Building a Global Brand: Harnessing the Power of Diversity subtheme explored the perceived value that participants believed non-Armenians contributed to the business and product. A majority of the participants articulated that non-Armenian colleagues significantly contributed to the MNEs' understanding of market needs. Varazdat shared, "we need diversity to understand our users, to learn how we can maximize our monetization, and provide maximum value to users in any area." Anahit, Yervand, and Aram all underscored the value of understanding the user, and that non-Armenian colleagues offered valuable insight into user needs. While Anahit spoke of individuals from the same demographic creating products for that demographic, Yervand highlighted the know-how Americans provided for the US market, sharing, "If you need to move your product forward in some market, no one will do it better than a native." Varazdat summarized this value, by sharing:

> The product goes beyond Armenia. They (non-Armenian colleagues) can understand the needs of our biggest markets better than we can. They are living and working in the context. We live in our Armenian reality which is very different from let's say American reality. So our foreign colleagues bring different worldviews and I am sure this brings a lot of value to our product and company."

Varazdat emphasized the importance of diversity in understanding user needs and maximizing product value across different markets, while Anahit, Yervand, and Aram also highlight the valuable insights that non-Armenian colleagues bring to the table. Anahit pointed out the advantages of having colleagues from the same demographic create products for that demographic, and Yervand stressed the importance of native know-how in successfully navigating a specific market. Varazdat echoed that the worldviews and firsthand experiences of his non-Armenian colleagues had brought value to the company.

Expanding Horizons: The Benefits of Global Connection

The subtheme Expanding Horizons: The Benefits of Global Connection focused on the personal and professional growth experienced by participants through their interactions with non-Armenian colleagues and working in a MNE, gaining access to a broader world, developing global networks, and exploring new opportunities beyond Armenia. Participants expressed that, through their non-Armenian colleagues and by working in an MNE, the world had become more accessible to them. For instance, Yervand shared, "you can explore more opportunities and understand more about life outside of Armenia. You learn more about the world, travel the world, and understand better how everything works." He also mentioned the value of building his network and making contacts globally with the possibility of visiting his non-Armenian colleagues one day. He continued, "I mean the rest of your life is not just being here (in Armenia) and dying. You can go and explore and experience other parts of the world." Yerevand's experience illustrated how working in an MNE and interacting with non-Armenians had broadened his horizons, allowing him to learn about life outside of Armenia, travel the world, and better understand global dynamics. Varazdat expressed that after the MNE, he felt more comfortable when traveling and in considering international opportunities sharing, "I started to feel more comfortable outside of Armenia. I'm not as shy. I am more self confident and know I can work in any international company without any problems." Varadzat shared how the experience with the MNE increased his self-confidence and comfort while traveling or considering international opportunities, demonstrating that he is better equipped to work in any MNE, without reservation. These quotes underscored the transformative power of global connections and the personal and professional benefits of working at an MNE.

Personal Transformation and the Power of Diversity

The Personal Transformation and the Power of Diversity subtheme highlighted the profound impact of working with non-Armenian colleagues on participants' personal and professional growth as they broadened their perspectives, challenged preconceptions, and developed new skills. Participants spoke about the opportunity to get to know other worldviews and expand their mindset by working with their non-Armenian colleagues. Aram summarized the experience as having "lots of opportunity to learn, explore, grow, challenge your thoughts, mindset, and your hidden fears." Through this quote, Aram highlighted new ways in which her mindset was challenged. Tamara further explained that working with non-Armenians taught her that "The way you solve a problem is not the only way to solve that problem. There are different perspectives, and we have something to learn." Yervand shared a similar thought, "You have a chance to expand the mindset that everything does not revolve around your little world." Anahit furthered Yervand's perception by adding that non-Armenians bring a "fresh opinion and mood. They make us leave our comfort zone, take us out of our box so we can see other worldviews." Aram, Tamara, Yervand, and Anahit all expressed the discovery of new perspectives when working with non-Armenian colleagues on their mindset, ways of thinking, or problem-solving approaches. Aram highlighted personal growth and challenging one's mindset, while Tamara emphasized the value of learning from diverse perspectives. Yervand and Anahit both discussed the broadening of their worldviews as a result of interacting with non-Armenian colleagues, with Anahit specifically noting how these interactions pushed her out of her comfort zone and encouraged exposure to new perspectives.

Tamara also discussed this change in perspective, detailing the importance of learning about different perspectives:

> Growing up in a homogenous atmosphere, I knew exactly one way of doing things, including one way to make a career, one way to make a family, and one way to make a

> good life. So a perfect way existed, and we were all given good examples that were identical. This meant that if you wanted to make it, you had a good example or role model right in front of your eyes. But when you get to see different examples, the perfect one that I am copying vanishes.

She continued, "it's good to get astonished at things you didn't know." Tamara's quote illustrated the transformative power of exposure to diverse perspectives, as she reflected on her upbringing in a homogenous environment that included a single way of achieving success. By encountering different examples and worldviews through interactions with non-Armenian colleagues, she experienced a shift in perspective that challenged her previously held beliefs and opened her mind to new possibilities and in appreciating the astonishment that comes with the unknown.

Another commonality participants expressed was the influence that non-Armenians had on their workstyle. Varazdat shared that non-Armenian colleagues brought better work culture to the organization, for example, their protection of work-life balance, or direct communication which he expressed that Armenians needed to adopt further. Tigran shared that non-Armenians brought some strong processes to the company, and Aram believed that they brought better management, honoring her previous managers who she compared favorably over previous Armenian managers.

Learning from one another also emerged as a significant finding among all participants. When discussing a professional relationship with a former manager, Aram remarked "I loved each meeting with him, because I learned something new. Each time he introduced me to something interesting." Aram also shared the opportunity to expand and grow as a result of interacting with different cultures, noting "it is an opportunity to become a part of something that is totally unknown to you." Yervand echoed this unique experience that many in Armenia do not have access to, he shared; "When you speak with someone from another country, you learn much more than when you watch a documentary because you are directly interacting with that person."

Varazdat conveyed this notion in more tangible terms, by stating “We surfaced problems that we never knew we had, and found solutions in places we never thought to look.” Aram, Yervand, and Varazdat all emphasized the value of direct interactions with non-Armenian colleagues, highlighting unique learning experiences and personal growth. Aram appreciated the introduction to new and interesting ideas, while Yervand emphasized the learning opportunities from direct conversations. Varazdat, on the other hand, underscored the practical benefits of such interactions, as they helped identify issues and innovative solutions.

Participants noted the value of interacting with non-Armenian colleagues in terms of the changes in their colleagues and their own eagerness or necessity to learn English, which ultimately benefited the Armenia team. Yervand observed that team members acquired English language skills to communicate with their non-Armenian counterparts. Consequently, they gained access to a wealth of information, with Yervand noting that English is the predominant language for the world’s knowledge. Tigran revealed that sustained interaction with non-Armenian colleagues not only diminished the language barrier, but also alleviated the language anxiety that she initially noticed, sharing, “Speaking English was very challenging for the team at first. They were silent during meetings because even if they knew how to express themselves, they did not do that because of some complexes they had. But after a year, everyone was talking more at meetings.” The participants highlighted the positive impact of engaging with non-Armenian colleagues on both their individual and team development, particularly in terms of English language proficiency. Yervand noted that these interactions had led to improved English skills, granting the Armenia team access to a broader range of information and knowledge. Tigran added that over time, the interaction had reduced language barriers and anxieties, leading to more active participation and communication during meetings.

Nonetheless, participants reported varying experiences in the role that non-Armenian colleagues had in their development. When inquired about any changes before and after working at an MNE, Arshak did not perceive a significant change in his perceptions, sharing, “It is not a drastic change for sure, everything went smoothly and I didn’t feel any problems besides the language barrier.” Despite the generally positive impact reported by the other participants, Arshak’s perspective illustrates that individual experiences can vary when working at an MNE. In his case, he did not perceive any significant personal change in his perceptions, suggesting instead that the impact of interacting with non-Armenian colleagues might not be equally transformative for everyone. Anahit also described this sentiment, stressing that she did not place differences between individuals before and thus did not feel a transformation. Conversely, Aram acknowledged substantial progress, elaborating:

> I did realize though, that in order to protect your views and present your views, you don’t have to judge others. There are no right and wrong views, life approaches or choices, There are just different ones. This is just a choice. You don't have to deal with this choice. You just need to accept it and go on working, connecting, and communicating with your colleague. You are not always supposed to make judgements or some conclusions. You just need to live your life as all healthy and grown up people. They just live, they just grow.

Aram’s profound reflection serves as a powerful closing statement, emphasizing the transformative nature of working with non-Armenian colleagues in fostering a broader worldview. Her realization underscores the importance of embracing diverse perspectives, refraining from judgement, and focusing on collaboration and personal growth.

Theme Summary

The theme, Beyond Borders: The Road to Globalization recounted the participants’ personal and professional interactions with non-Armenian colleagues, highlighted the impact these experiences had on the MNE, to their increased access to global resources, and to their

personal and professional growth. The subthemes Building a Global Brand: Harnessing the Power of Diversity, Expanding Horizons: The Benefits of Global Connections, and Personal Transformation and the Power of Diversity delineated these perceptions.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presented findings that illustrated insights from the data, spotlighting exemplary quotes from participants across four themes; Early Interpersonal Perceptions of & Experiences With Non-Armenians, A Multilayered World: Cultural Insights and Human Connections, Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language and the Professional Setting, and Beyond Borders: The Road Through Globalization. Through these themes, participants' narratives revealed their experiences with EDI before and during their work in a multinational enterprise. Chapter Five addresses findings, implications, and the recommendations derived from the study.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion of multinational enterprise employees from the homogenous Republic of Armenia. Through such narratives, the study aimed to provide valuable insights for diversity scholars and HRD professionals, with the ultimate goal of improving EDI outcomes for Armenian nationals that work in a multinational enterprise. This Chapter discusses the findings and implications of the study, followed by practical and research recommendations.

Conclusions

Overarching Research Question: How do MNE employees in Armenia describe their overall experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion?

Finding One: Intercultural Competence Development: Informal Transformative Learning Drives Personal and Professional Growth Within the MNE Context

The majority of participants shared that they had experienced both personal and professional growth through direct interactions with their non-Armenian colleagues within the MNE context. These participants attributed their enhanced global connectedness and increased understanding of diverse worldviews to their experiences working at the MNE. Stories from five of the seven participants underscored the value of direct interactions with non-Armenian colleagues during work related visits by non-Armenian colleagues to Yerevan, highlighting the importance of information and face-to-face interactions.

In contrast, one participant shared an anomalous narrative, asserting that he did not experience personal or professional growth as a result of working within an MNE. This participant downplayed the significance of cultural differences and emphasized commonalities.

Although he acknowledged an improvement in language proficiency, he did not recognize any shift towards increased cultural competence.

Considering the lived experience of the participants, it becomes evident that these experiences align with the development of intercultural competence through the process of transformative learning. Mezirow (1990) posits that experience serves as the foundation for transformative learning, a process that fosters personal and professional growth through disorienting dilemmas that challenge assumptions (Mezirow, 2000) that occur through one transformative experience or over time, often going unnoticed (Cranton, 2006; Nohl, 2015).

The data was replete with instances of participants engaging in self-reflective processes, challenging the status-quo, and embracing new perspectives (Marsick, 1990). While these narratives existed to a lesser extent before participants joined the MNE, they increased in frequency after the participants' joined the MNE and increased the frequency and depth of their interactions with non-Armenians. Narratives from the participants reflected continuous disorienting dilemmas that contributed to their transformational personal and professional growth.

It is important to acknowledge that not all employees working in MNEs may undergo transformative learning to the same degree and at the same pace. Nonetheless, six of the seven participants in this study reported a connection between working with the MNE and experiencing growth through such lived experience. This finding further supports the literature that transformative learning is an effective approach to developing employees' intercultural competence (Brooks, 2004) and that employees benefit from an integrate d approach to interventions including informal learning experiences (Berzukova et al., 2016). The importance

of live, or in-person, experiences in fostering transformative learning is also emphasized (Brooks, 2004).

Finding Two: The Double-Edged Sword of Commonality: The Subduing of Cultural Differences

All seven participants in the study identified commonalities between themselves and their non-Armenian colleagues, focusing on the individual and their worldviews, personalities, and character traits rather than national or cultural differences. This perspective was shared both in their early narratives detailing their first encounters with non-Armenians and throughout their experiences at the MNE. Participants consistently downplayed the role of nationalities and culture, opting to focus on different personas that can be found in any culture. Two participants justified this view, attributing it to their homogenous lens, arguing that they had never had a chance to develop national perceptions as a consequence of living in a homogenous environment.

These narratives closely aligned with the Minimization phase as defined by Bennett & Bennett (2004) in which other cultures are seen as similar to the individuals, with surface differences. In this stage, cultural differences are subdued or downplayed, and instead cultural commonality and universal absolutes are highlighted (Anderson et al., 2006). Within this phase, an emphasis on commonality can bring a sense of comfort and unity (Hammer, 2012); however, it may also lead to the underappreciation of different cultures and the complexities involved in intercultural communication (Bennett, 1993; Hammer et al., 2003). This finding echoes research conducted in the neighboring Democratic Republic of Georgia, which examined students' placement on the DMIS model and found the sample also predominantly aligned with the Minimization phase (Tabatdze & Gorgadze, 2018).

The majority of the study participants expressed that their first encounters instilled in them a feeling of commonality, and this perception remained dominant throughout the data. Like a double-edged sword, the approach potentially opened the path towards communion with non-Armenian colleagues while puncturing the added value that diversity may bring forth.

Finding Three: The Uneven Landscape of a Lingua Franca: A Common Language Constrains Non-Native Speakers and Diminishes Productivity

All participants in the study either personally experienced or witnessed their Armenian counterparts struggling with language barriers and/or language anxiety, which negatively impacted their ability to effectively engage at the workplace. They observed that differences in English proficiency and/or language anxiety hindered the formation of deeper relationships with non-Armenian colleagues, led to communication misunderstandings, and resulted in less efficient work processes. The participants' rich lived experiences also highlighted the immense effort, energy, and extra attention required to operate in a non-native language environment.

A noteworthy anomaly shared by one participant related to the converse experience, wherein non-Armenians attended a meeting with a predominantly Armenian team that resorted to speaking Armenian. This participant believed that the experience made their non-Armenian colleague feel excluded and expressed regret about the occurrence. While a deviation, the incident, in addition to the majority of findings, emphasized the importance of addressing language barriers and fostering an inclusive environment for all employees, regardless of their linguistic background.

These findings are consistent with studies on lingua franca conducted in MNEs (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017; Harzing &Pudelko, 2013; Hinds et al., 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Neeley et al., 2012; Neeley, 2017; Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). The inequity described by the

participants echoed Neeley (2012) and Harzing & Pudelko (2013), who both concurred that a lingua franca favors native speakers and those who possess higher proficiencies in the lingua franca. Neeley (2012) also revealed similar experiences with non-native English speakers regarding the effort and energy needed to speak and comprehend in English, resulting in increased time spent communicating and less efficient meetings and exchanges. Neeley et al. (2012) refer to the phenomenon as code switching, which can also diminish the collaborative spirit within a team.

The study revealed the challenges faced by non-native English speakers in an MNE context due to language barriers and language anxiety, highlighting the importance of addressing these issues to foster an inclusive environment and improve workplace productivity. The study's findings disclose that non-native English speakers reported inequity in their daily work due to varying proficiency with the lingua franca.

Finding Four: Perception Bias Breeds Inequity; Non-Armenians are Viewed as Superior Professionals Within the MNE Environment

A majority of the participants in the study elaborated on their experiences with equity, delineating a perception bias among Armenians in which non-Armenian colleagues were esteemed as superior professionals compared to their Armenian counterparts. Although six of the seven colleagues shared such perceptions, it was two participants that emphasized the disparity this caused, recounting instances where recommendations from themselves or other Armenian colleagues were dismissed, while identical suggestions from non-Armenians were embraced.

Interestingly, none of the participants claimed to hold this perception themselves at the time of the study. Two of the participants recalled having this perception in the past; however, after interacting with both Armenian and non-Armenian colleagues, they realized that there was

no inherent difference in professionalism between their Armenian and non-Armenian colleagues. While they recognized variations in personal branding and the different experiences non-Armenian colleagues brought from other MNEs, a majority of the participants agreed that the bias was unfounded in terms of expertise.

The perception bias that the participants observed within the Armenian population aligns with the System Justification Theory, which reveals outgroup favoritism among non-dominant groups, predominantly manifesting implicitly (Osborne et al., 2019). With Social Justification Theory, individuals may participate in outgroup favoritism, a phenomenon wherein individuals exhibit a preference for a group other than their own. Tajfel & Turner (1979) posit that this may occur for various reasons, including the pursuit of social status or the reduction of intergroup conflict. Social Identity Theory, which typically leads to ingroup favoritism, may cause the influence of Social Justification Theory to be more implicit, as non-dominant groups reject certain stereotypes explicitly while accepting them implicitly (Jost et al., 2004). This creates a conflicting dynamic within the non-dominant group that might explicitly reject such stereotypes, but implicitly accept them.

Although the participants agreed that this bias was not a part of the MNEs strategy, the study uncovered the presence of the perception within the MNE environment, where non-Armenians were viewed by some as superior professionals to their Armenian counterparts, revealing the need to address such biases to foster equity and inclusiveness in the workplace.

Finding Five: The Power of Diversity; Multicultural Perspectives Enrich Common Goals

A majority of the participants in the study emphasized the value that non-Armenians brought to the MNE's product and brand, recognizing that diverse perspectives contributed to a deeper understanding of the market and strategies for diverse markets. The participants explicitly

acknowledged the contribution that diverse colleagues provided and the unique insights from various markets they contributed, ultimately expanding the enterprise's global reach. Almost all of the participants shared that without the input from their non-Armenian colleagues, the enterprise would not have reached the same success.

The findings resonate with the integration-and-learning perspective, which Thomas and Ely (1996) characterize as the appreciation of insights, skills, and experiences that employees acquire through their various intersectional and cultural identities. The participants particularly appreciated the role of diversity in shaping market, product, strategy, and business practices within the MNE (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Notably, Ely and Thomas found that employees that value the integration-and-learning perspective are more empowered to express themselves through their intersectional identities and feel valued for doing so.

This conclusion contrasts with a study conducted in homogenous South Korea (Mehng et al., 2019), which highlighted the discrimination-and-fairness perspective, characterized by a moral imperative to ensure justice through a diverse employee base (Ely & Thomas, 2001) as the dominant perspective. This brings forth the need to study various populations, as there can be significant variations between cultures, despite sharing certain characteristics such as homogeneity.

The study highlighted the perceived power of diversity within an MNE environment by the employees, demonstrating that they believe a multicultural perspective enriches common goals and contributes to the success of the organization by providing valuable insights, skills, and experiences. Nurturing such a perspective and providing an opportunity to explore the value of such a perspective can foster increased value placed toward EDI.

Implications and Recommendations

This study offered valuable insights into the impact of various factors, such as transformative learning, the lack of significance placed on cultural differences, the challenges of a lingua franca, and the value of a multinational experience on Armenian employees in the MNE environment. In light of these findings, I present a narrative of the implications and recommendations for practice and future research.

This study highlighted the positive influence of informal transformative learning on the development of intercultural competence among Armenia based employees from MNEs. To foster this growth, organizations should consider implementing interventions that focus on such information opportunities in transformative learning such as international work assignments or targeted interventions such as team building activities that focus on intercultural understanding. In line with Berzukova et al, (2016), a multipronged approach to diversity management is needed including both formal and informal interventions. Multinational enterprises can also benefit by monitoring employee intercultural competence growth and development through self and peer assessments, and managerial reviews. This process can aid in identifying further gaps and opportunities for further development. In addition, future research should examine the role of individual factors and organizational culture on transformative learning and the cultivation of intercultural competence.

The double-edged sword of commonality highlights the importance of promoting cultural awareness to empower MNEs and their employees to appreciate and benefit from diversity. As participant narratives in this study closely aligned with the Minimization phase of the DMIS model as described by Bennett & Bennett (2004), those in this ethnocentric stage minimize cultural differences. While offering some value such as comfort in similarity, those in this phase

can also be limited in the value derived from national differences. To progress beyond this phase, Bennett & Bennett (2004) advocate that organizations actively promote cultural awareness, so that employees gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Such cultural understanding and the value of difference can be gained through open dialogues in formal team-building interventions, where participants can share and exchange information about their diverse identities and backgrounds (Nishii, 20013). Since research endeavors, such as this one, capture a snapshot in time and, consequently, do not offer a comprehensive understanding of how employees' experiences change over time, longitudinal research can provide further valuable insights.

The uneven landscape of a lingua franca presents challenges for non-native speakers of an MNE, potentially diminishing productivity. To mitigate these negative effects, prior research has demonstrated the importance and value of creating a safe language climate (Nurmi & Koroma, 2020). Such a climate can be achieved through interventions such as encouraging written communication, promoting empathy among native English speakers, and enforcing a company policy on language that fosters a psychologically safe language climate. Finally, MNEs can provide English courses for non-native speakers to improve proficiency. Future research could focus on assessing the efficacy of various interventions in creating a safe language climate in MNEs.

Perception bias towards the superiority of non-Armenians in the workplace breeds inequity within the MNE environment. To address this issue, HRD professionals should implement ongoing bias interventions, such as the creation of safe spaces so that employees can participate in dialogue and share experiences (Gill et al., 2018). Research on cross-cultural comparisons investigating perception biases in other non-dominant groups and examining the

impact these biases have on career progression or employee engagement can help inform targeted interventions to improve the workplace dynamic for affected employees.

Lastly, as the integration and learning perspective fosters more belonging and inclusion, it essential for organizations to capitalize on the benefits of this perspective. Thomas & Ely (1996) advocate that enterprises should bring together multicultural teams to leverage diverse perspectives in decision making, which can enhance the benefit to the enterprise. Such cross-functional collaboration taps into collective market knowledge and the insights of employees, fostering synergy among team members. Furthermore, companies can promote employee resource groups to provide networking and support for employees that share a common background, encouraging engagement and a sense of belonging (Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013). These groups can also nurture a space for employees to discuss value and contribution to enterprise goals. Further research on surfacing diversity perspectives globally through a variety of study methods can further inform interventions that promote EDI.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to delve into the lived experience of MNE employees from homogenous Armenia with equity, diversity, and inclusion. The findings reveal significant insights into various dimensions of EDI, including intercultural competence development, ethnocentric views, the implications of a lingua franca, perception bias, and the perceived benefits of a multicultural team that employees of an MNE in Armenia hold.

To develop truly equitable, diverse, and inclusive teams, MNEs must proactively implement relevant interventions that resonate with the population they intend to serve. In the case of Armenia based MNE employees, interventions should focus on furthering intercultural competence, addressing language barriers, reducing inequitable perception biases, and

continuing to harness the power of multicultural perspectives within the enterprises. The findings of this study have practical implications for HRD professionals in designing targeted strategies and interventions that address the unique challenges and opportunities presented in the Armenia MNE environment. Continued exploration of this population's needs towards EDI development is warranted, and expressed by the study's participant Aram, "I still differentiate between Armenians and non-Armenians; not in my treatment, but in my communication. I just discovered that I am still in this transition phase."

As the world continues to become more interconnected, understanding global experiences with EDI becomes increasingly critical to MNE success. This dissertation served as an important step to further research and study in this area, with the potential to inform more tailored and effective approaches for EDI. Ultimately, by attentively listening to global voices and embracing unique stories from around the world, we move beyond a myopic Western lens on diversity management and towards a more embraced understanding of EDI, thereby fostering innovation, creativity, and success in the global market.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Study

Hello,

As you may know I am a doctoral student at Drexel University in the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Management Program, with a concentration on Human Resources Development. With this letter, I invite you to participate in a qualitative study I am conducting on lived experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion of multinational enterprise employees that reside in the Republic of Armenia. The research is under the Supervision of Dr. Peggy A Kong, Principal Investigator and Dissertation Supervising Professor. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience with equity, diversity, and inclusion among multinational enterprise employees that reside in Armenia.

If you agree to support the study and participate, I will conduct a one-on-one, semi structured interview with you over Zoom that will last 60 to 90 minutes in length. The process will also include you reading the narrative of that interview and meeting with me in a follow-up interview of 30 to 60 minutes to clarify, revise, and add additional information to the narrative. Before the first interview, you will be asked to provide your formal consent to participate in the process. Please note that the interview will be conducted in English, however if needed Armenian can be used to clarify or expand on any thought.

For the purposes of data collection, I ask that I be permitted to audiotape the interview and take handwritten notes as well. The recordings and interview transcripts will be stored on a secure Drexel University 365 password protected server that only I will have access to. You will be able to pick a pseudonym to protect your privacy, and will be known only by your pseudonym in the study. The transcripts, including your pseudonym, will be used to extract themes, findings, and results about the phenomenon.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and all participant information will remain confidential. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If you have any questions, I am available to speak with you in more detail. I can be reached by phone or email. Please reply to this email to confirm your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,

Madlene Minassian
Drexel University, Doctoral Candidate, Ed.D.
mam996@drexel.edu

Appendix B: Interview Invitation Email

Dear (name),

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in the study titled: A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences with equity, diversity, and inclusion of multinational enterprise employees residing in homogenous Armenia. As a reminder, this study is being conducted at Drexel University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) and is under the supervision of Dr. Peggy A. Kong.

This email includes the purpose of the study, as stated above, the interview description, consent information, benefits and risks, confidentiality information, and a description of how the findings will be used.

This is a formal invitation to participate in two confidential semi-structured interviews that will both take place on Zoom. The first interview will last up to 90 minutes at a time convenient for you. The second interview will take place within a month of the first interview and will also be conducted in accordance with your schedule. For the purpose of data collection, I ask that I be permitted to record and audiotape the interview and take handwritten notes through the process. The recordings and interview transcripts will only be reviewed by myself and will be stored in a secured, password-protected, Drexel Office 365 server.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary, the identities of all participants will be anonymous and participants will only be identified by pseudonyms.

Please find additional information about the study and your possible participation in the attached document. This outlines details of the research for your consent.

Should you agree to participate, please respond to this email with your formal acceptance.

Thank you in advance for your effort and support.

Sincerely,

Madlene Minassian, Doctoral Candidate

Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Study Title: A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia

Location: Drexel Zoom

Interviewer: Madlene Minassian

Script:

Good Morning/Day/Evening and welcome. Thank you for accepting my invitation and taking the time to participate in my study. As you know, I am a doctoral student at Drexel University. Housekeeping: You were invited because I deemed your experiences crucial to this topic.

Before we begin our exchange, let's do some housekeeping:

- It is important that you know that whether or not you take part in this study is entirely up to you and you can choose not to take part at any time and I would never hold that against you. As your participation is voluntary, you may choose to not answer any question.
- Your name and other identifying information will remain confidential. Please think of an Armenian king/queen's name that you would like to be called. Please feel free to rename your Zoom information to this new pseudonym now. In order to further protect your identity, please turn off your camera.
- Please note that I am looking for your personal experiences. In this interview I am not looking for you to be a representative of the company or share the company stance
- I will record the interview and I will be storing the recording in my password-protected, secured Drexel University Office 365 Drive. Dr. Kong and I will be the only people that have access to this recording
- The interview will be conducted in English, but please feel free to use Armenian to clarify or expand on any thought if necessary.
- There are no right or wrong answers, but rather different views. I welcome any and all insight
- Action Item: Before we begin, are there any questions? (Pause for Q&A)
- Action Item: As mentioned in the invite, I am recording the session, so if this is OK, I will begin to do so now.

There are two parts to the interview. I will ask you about your experiences with diversity, equity, and inclusion before you joined an MNE and the second part will focus on experiences after you joined an MNE. The interview should take between one to one and a half hours.
Finally, before we begin I would like to ask for your oral consent. Do you agree to participate in this research?

We can now begin.

Guiding Interview Questions

Section A: Lived Experience with EDI before working at the MNE

1. Do you remember the opinions and experiences your family and friends shared about non-Armenians during your childhood?
2. Can you describe your earliest memory meeting/interacting with a non-Armenian?
3. Before you joined a multinational enterprise, can you describe a significant connection you had with a non-Armenian?

Section B: Lived Experience with EDI after working with an MNE

4. Can you describe the role that language plays in your interactions with non-Armenian colleagues?
5. Based on your experiences, do you feel that your relationship with your Armenian colleagues differs from your relationship with non-Armenians?
6. Let's agree that Equity means that everyone has equal opportunity (without discrimination based on cultural differences). Please describe examples where you felt that equity was promoted or where it could have been better addressed.
7. What kind of value does a diverse workforce bring to the MNE, both from a business perspective and to the team?
8. Can you describe any personal or professional growth that has occurred due to your experience working with a diverse team?
    a. If you could choose to work with an all Armenian team or a mixed team today, which would you choose?
9. Of all the things we talked about today, what do you think was the most significant thing that we covered?
10. Is there anything at the end that I did not ask you about that you would like to share?

Conclusion: Thank you so much for your thoughts. Today, we explored your experiences with equity, diversity, and inclusion. This is a phenomenological study, so I was particularly interested to know about your stories and experiences as they will help me study and uncover the shared experiences of our Armenian colleagues. Thank you for participating in this important conversation.

If you are interested, I would love to share my findings with you. My dissertation will hopefully be published in the coming year and I look forward to sending it to you then.
Please know that this will eventually contribute to more understanding on global diversity management that will help companies like us grow and teams like ours work together more effectively.

Appendix D: Member-Checking Interview Invitation

Dear (individualized name),

I am writing to follow-up with the interview we had as a part of my research titled: A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia. As you may remember, the purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences with equity, diversity, and inclusion of multinational enterprise employees residing in homogenous Armenia. This study is being conducted at Drexel University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), and is under the supervision of Dr. Peggy A. Kong.

This email includes the narrative I have developed based on our interview. I am attaching this and asking that you carefully read it before we meet. While reading the narrative, I would like to ask you to make any notes on revisions, clarification, or additions to the document as we will discuss these during the interviews.

This is a formal invitation to participate in a member-checking interview. Through this interview, I hope to review, clarify, and expand on the data with you and also hear any new experiences that you would like to share. For the purpose of data collection, I ask that I once again be permitted to record and audiotape the interview and take handwritten notes through the process. The recordings and interview transcripts will only be reviewed by myself and will be stored in a secured, password protected, Drexel Office 365 server.

As before. your participation in this study is completely voluntary, the identities of all participants will be anonymous and participants will only be identified by their pseudonyms.

I will schedule an interview time that is convenient for you.

Thank you,

Madlene Minassian, Doctoral Candidate

Study Title: A Phenomenological Study on Lived Experience with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion of Multinational Enterprise Employees Residing in the Homogenous Republic of Armenia

Time and Date of Interview: TBD

Place: Zoom

Interviewer: Madlene Minassian

Participant: TBD

Script:

Good Morning/Day/Evening and welcome. Thank you for meeting me once again as a part of my research exploring lived experiences of MNE employees that reside in the Republic of Armenia.

Before we begin our exchange, let's do some housekeeping:

- All of the points that I emailed you and shared with you during the first interview are still valid. You are still a voluntary participant to this research, and any data you have shared has been anonymized.
- We are conducting this interview to ensure that the data I have gathered reflects your own personal experiences. During the next 30 minutes or so, you will have a chance to clarify or expand on any of the points from the briefing that I have sent you.
- Similar to the last time we met, I will record the interview and I will be storing the recording in my password-protected, secured Drexel University Office 365 Drive. I will be the only person with access to this recording.
- There are no right or wrong answers, but rather different views. I welcome any and all insight.
- The interview will be conducted in English, but please feel free to use Armenian to clarify or expand on any thought if necessary.
- Action Item: Before we begin, are there any questions? (Pause for Q&A)
- Action Item: As mentioned in the invite, I am recording the session, so if this is OK, I will begin to do so now.

Member-Checking Interview Questions

With housekeeping resolved, I would like to begin. I hope you had time to review the narratives that I sent you. As you know, this is my summary of the experiences and thoughts that you shared during the interview. There are two parts to the interview and this should take roughly half an hour. First, I will ask you to clarify or expand on any part of the data that I sent over..

Section A: Data Clarification and Expansion

1. Did you review the narratives that I sent?
2. Are there any areas that need to be revised or clarified?
3. Would you like to expand on any of the points you made?

Section B: Additions to the Data

4. Since the interview, have you thought about the topic or any of your experiences further, is there anything you would like to add?

Conclusion: Thank you so much for your thoughts and for helping in this important research. Today, I set out to provide you an opportunity to confirm that your thoughts and experiences with equity, diversity, and inclusion are aligned to your voice. Thank you for taking the time to review the data and for sharing additional information important to the research. Thank you for participating in this important conversation.

If you are interested, I would love to share my findings with you. My dissertation will hopefully be published in the coming year and I look forward to sending it with you then.
Please know that this will eventually contribute to more understanding on global diversity management that will help companies like us grow and teams like ours prosper.

Appendix F: Codebook

Subtheme One: **Lingua Franca Limitations: Addressing Language Pitfalls** from Theme Three: Lingua Franca Hurdles: Language & the Professional Setting

Pattern Code	Exemplary Quotes	In-Vivo Codes	Descriptive Quotes
Challenges With Native English (pace & slang)	• "I mainly face a language barrier when native English speakers use slang or speak too fast, as it is hard for me to understand." Varazdat • "Usually in this case, I share that I am a non-native speaker and so I ask them to speak slower." Varazdat	"Challenge understanding accents" (Anahit, 136),"Talking fast" (Anahit, 138), "Very fast in US English" (Tamara, 258), "Slowly repeat" (Tamara, 262), "Very, very fast" (Tamara, 264), "Fast Pace" (Arshak, 80), "Speed/Pace" (Anahit, 147), "With Native Speakers" (Anahit, 146),),"Understand slang" (Aram, 493), "Very native language" (Aram, 494), "I need to concentrate to understand Native Speakers" (Anahit, 536), "It's fast" (Anahit, 538), "Im not a native speaker" (Arshak, 115), "They should be more understanding" (Arshak, 117), "Native English speakers speak with slang" (Varazdat, 129), "Too fast" (Varazdat, 130), "Hard for me to understand" (Varazdat, 130), "I share that I am not a native English speaker" (Varazdat, 131).	Natives are fast (Anahit, 538), Understanding accent/non-native speaker (Anahit, 135), Speaking fast/native speakers (Anahit, 138), Native speakers harder to understand (Anahit, 148), Focus on non-native accent to understand (Tigran, 444), Native slang is difficult, (Aram, 493), Non natives has similar struggle, easier to understand them (Aram, 496, Natives speak fast (Arshak, 145), Native fast pace (Tamara, 253), Native slang is difficult, (Varazdat, 129)), Native fast pace (Varazdat, 129),

Communication Challenges (English Barrier)	• "As an example, in English, you can say the same thing two different ways, one polite and one not. You have to know those nuances, and this is very hard. Let's put it this way, you have to know lots of scenarios for English words, and you have to know how to use them to avoid bad situations." Varazdat • "I know that those who are not fully fluent in English answer what they are asked, reply when they are addressed, but may not speak up as much if they were fully free in the language. This is a very profound problem." Tamara • "Miscommunication comes with language barrier" Yervand. • "Easy to understand on an intuitive level when you are speaking in your native language." Arshak	"Missing out on" (Tamara, 271), "Difficulty understanding terms" (Aram, 152), "A lot to learn" (Aram, 167), "If I knew English earlier" (Tamara, 266), "Information in English" (Tamara, 268),"Russian sources are not reliable" (Tamara, 270),"Do little but tell big stories" (Aram, 196),"Felt comfortable with Russian" (Arshak, 75),"Accents" (Arshak, 80), "You need precise words" (Varazdat, 64), "Know those nuances" (Varazdat, 67), "Most current and latest information is in English" (Yervand, 64), "English if you want to communicate or learn something" (Yervand, 68), "Talk English wrong" (Varazdat, 106), Some members struggle with English (Tigran, 153),	Extra effort in communicating (Arshak, 172), Armenians are struggling" (Tigran, 153), Miscommunication comes with language barrier (Yervand, 105), Help my colleague" (Aram, 310), Language barrier in interaction, not nationality (Anahit, 521), Leads to misunderstanding (Anahit, 245), Big stories, big heroes for those who can speak (Aram, 196),
Communication	• "There were several big	"Benefit of learning" (Aram, 168),"Powerful	Nervous and afraid to present at meeting

Challenges (English Anxiety)	meetings where I had to present and deliver content and I was nervous and even afraid that I would forget some words or make some remarkable mistakes while speaking. I try to overcome this nervousness because it can make my English poorer. That is why I am trying to be calm and let myself make a couple of mistakes." Aram • "Some of my colleagues are shy and avoid speaking English. But I think the problem lies in them because we learn by talking." Varazdat	language" (Aram, 169), "Not knowing English will limit you" (Aram, 172 "Difficult to express ideas not yet formulated" (Arshak, 218), "Turning point in my life" (Tamara), "Feel free" (Anahit, 523), "Nervous" (Aram, 178), "Afraid" (Aram, 178), "Overcome nervousness" (Aram, 179), "Be calm" (Aram, 180), "Difficulty presenting" (Aram, 189),"Not be afraid of speaking" (Aram, 191), "Overcome your fears" (Aram, 193), "Just express yourself" (Arshak, 111 "Not a problem you need to worry about" (Tamara, 251), "Language they are fully free in (Tamara, 303), "Some colleagues avoid speaking English" (Varazdat, 122), "They are shy" (Varazdat, 122), "Problem lies within them" (Varazdat, 123), "We learn from talking" (Varazdat, 123), "No one has blamed me for speaking English incorrectly" (Varazdat, 108),	(Aram, 178), Prevents work being displayed (Aram, 189), Challenging their comfort zone (Anahit, 196), No only the barrier but could be person (Yervand, 129), Tense up in high profile English meetings (Yervand, 167), Felt more comfortable with Russian (Arshak, 76), No shame in speaking English with mistakes (Varazdat, 106), Too shy to speak (Varazdat, 125), Anxiety prevents learning of language (Aram, 192), Overcome fear to learn English (Aram, 193), Humor doesn't translate (Varazdat, 76), Insecure about English, don't open up (Tamara, 303), Native should and do understand that we make mistakes (Arshak, 124)
Communication Challenges (beyond technical English)	"When communicating about our daily work, everything is fine. But when we have some random conversations or share jokes, it becomes more difficult." Arshak	"Random conversations are difficult" (Arshak, 82),	Communicating about work is fine (Arshak, 82), Barrier to having good conversations (Arshak, 94),

			Technical terms are strong (Tigran, 76),
Increased Effort to Speak English, Seeking Clarification	“I learned that it is OK to ask them to repeat it, or just to say that you didn't get the sentence or the idea and ask them to clarify. Because that's normal. You're from different backgrounds and there is no shame in asking them to repeat. This was one of the biggest challenges.” Anahit	"It's really hard" (Varazdat, 77), "Asking them to repeat" (Anahit, 141), “Extra effort to communicate” (Arshak, 172),	No shame in clarifying (Anahit, 140), English is more effort (Anahit, 199), Extra effort and time to speak English (Arshak, 85), Natives need extra focus (Anahit, 538), Being conversant is harder (Yervand, 110), Eloquence/precision difficult in non-native language, English is more effort (Yervand, 394), English needs more focus (Yervand, 394),
Importance of Language on Relationship Building	“I realize that language barrier stops me. It is an obstacle to have a good conversation, to talk more than is just needed for work. I want to have discussions with people, to interact and so I try to overcome these difficulties. Because it is awkward when you are waiting for someone else to join the meeting and you have nothing to discuss. They are good people. And you really want to just have a conversation as you would with your Armenian colleagues.” Arshak	"Extra effort" (Arshak, 85),"Extra energy" (Arshak, 85), "Extra time" (Arshak, 86), "Stops me" (Arshak, 94), "Obstacle to have a good conversation" (Arshak, 94), "To talk more than needed" (Arshak, 95), "It is awkward" (Arshak, 97), “Obstacle to talk more than what is needed to get work done” (Arshak, 95), "Very closed person" (Tamara, 282), "Little less difficult" (Aram, 497) "Have another mindset" (Anahit, 526) "It's challenging" (Varazdat, 63), "Not ruin the relationship" (Varazdat, 65), "Avoid bad situations" (Varazdat, 68), "Tried to be humorous"	Leads to misunderstanding (Varazdat, 67), Extra effort (Arshak, 85), Extra energy (Arshak, 85)

		(Varazdat, 77), "I haven't had an awkward situation" (Varazdat, 80), “Answer what they are asked” (Tamara 301), “Reply when they are addressed” (Tamara, 302), “Not fully living in the language” (Tamara, 307), “Never get what they want” (Tamara, 313), “Not speaking on the top of their mind” (Tamara, 315), “Holding them back” (Tamara, 316), "Just talking work, no deep conversations" (Anahit, 504),	
Meetings as More Efficient in Armenian	• “They (Armenian colleagues) are struggling (to communicate), and it is obvious during meetings. If there are non-Armenian colleagues, the outcome is not the best it could be if the meeting was in Armenian initially.” Tigran • “While brainstorming, it is difficult to express yourself in English when your ideas and thoughts are not yet formulated. I can express my English ideas when they are formulated, but I can express them in Armenian when they are not	"Brainstorms more effective in Armenian" (Arshak), "Meetings different because of language" (Anahit, 521), "Armenian meetings they talk more" (Varazdat, 188), "Only after meetings they reach out to me" (Varazdat, 189), "Armenian held meetings are more effective" (Varazdat, 193), "Higher chance we come to a solution in Armenian" (Varazdat, 194),	Meeting more effective in Armenian (Tigran, 155), Post-meeting meeting in Armenain (Tigran, 155), Brainstorms more effective in Armenian (Arshak, 222), More comfortable in native language, no effort (Arshak, 449), Don’t worry about English mistakes (Tamara, 251), Poor English don't participate or participate fully (Tamara, 306), Meeting more effective in Armenian (Varazdat, 188) Meetings are broken down afterwards in Armenian (Varazdat, 190), Armenians

	yet formulated. This is the same for many of my Armenian colleagues. Thus, brainstorms are more effective in Armenian," Arshak • "Meetings are more effective in Armenian, with a higher chance of coming to an agreement or solution." Varazdat		meet after the meeting" (Tigran, 156), Brainstorming is less efficient in English (Arshak, 218), Hard to express unformulated ideas in English Default is Armenian, (Anahit, 113),