

LOST IN TRANSLATION?

**EXPLORING THE INTRA-ORGANISATIONAL PROCESSES
BEHIND THE DOUBLE MATERIALITY ASSESSMENT**

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigates the intra-organisational processes underlying the widely debated double materiality assessment as mandated by the CSRD. By conducting an in-depth case study on a Nordic industrial group, this thesis draws on actor-network theory to broaden the limited literature on the social and collective construction of accounting figures. The findings reveal that the process from standard to double materiality assessment and subsequently reported figures unfolds through three distinct chains of translations. While instances of disruption were observed along these chains, the translation process was in its entirety still found to be performing, attributed to specific ways in which trust was generated for it. Accordingly, the study provides two notable contributions. First, it adds empirical nuance to the production of accounting processes and figures by showing how active and continuous translation efforts are inherent to sustainability reporting. Second, it provides a theoretical extension of enabling factors for translation performance in the context of adopting new accounting standards. Notably, it is contended that local adaptations and pragmatism can secure individual trust in processes beyond what can be achieved collectively.

Keywords:

Double materiality assessment, CSRD, actor-network theory, translation, trust

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1. Introduction

For long, the topic of financial reporting has been studied with particular emphasis on how standards are formed (Cooper & Robson, 2006; Pucci & Skærbæk, 2020) and what implications the subsequent reporting has for capital markets (Becker et al., 2021). However, for new reporting to achieve the standard-setters' intended objectives, it is equally important to understand how companies faced with reporting demands practically go about constructing reporting (Mennicken, 2008). This intermediate step of constructing the reporting requires considerable efforts from companies and is often a highly social and collective process spanning beyond the finance function (Robson et al., 2017). Given that many financial reporting areas exhibit complexity and uncertainty, which requires significant interpretation and judgement (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022), it becomes increasingly important to understand how such uncertainty is handled in the reporting production phase.

In this light, the field of sustainability reporting acts as a highly relevant setting due to its rapidly evolving nature. Its recent proliferation from being largely voluntary to becoming mandatory, as most evidently exemplified by the introduction of the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) in 2023 (European Commission, n.d.), has put significant pressure on companies. Most notably, it mandates companies to produce a so-called double materiality assessment (DMA), whereby an analysis must be carried out on how they impact and are financially impacted by the external environment and people, which in turn forms the basis of their subsequent disclosures (Hummel & Jobst, 2024).

Producing the DMA is however by no means an easy task, as highlighted in an emerging stream of literature on the concept of materiality (Jørgensen et al., 2022; Oll et al., 2025; Puroila & Mäkelä, 2019; Reimsbach et al., 2020). The concept is considered to be of an essentially contested nature, meaning that it is inherently difficult to reach a common understanding or definition (Oll et al., 2025). While materiality can be seen as a highlighter to reduce information overload and to ensure that the most critical information is disclosed (Jørgensen et al., 2022), “Determining whether something is material remains, in most instances, completely subjective – a matter of judgement. Thus, the question: Whose judgement?” Hicks (1964, p. 159). The difficulty of conducting a DMA is further amplified by the limited concrete guidance offered. Apart from providing a general guideline for suggested ways to undertake this evaluation, the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) under CSRD does not provide a specific process on how materiality assessments are to be performed (EFRAG, 2024). This grants companies with significant discretion in the process, which inadvertently may reduce comparability between firms, contrary to the regulation’s aim of increasing standardisation and enhancing transparency. Indeed, only when sufficiently consistent methodological assumptions behind reported numbers are ensured can a company’s

sustainability disclosures be meaningfully interpreted and trusted for their purpose (Adams & McNicholas, 2007).

With this as background, the construction of the double materiality assessment and its associated reporting thus serves as a particularly interesting context for which to further explore how accounting information can be trusted in its collective construction. As drawn attention to by Himick et al. (2022) and Robson et al. (2017), the qualitative financial accounting literature is remarkably limited in this regard. A few notable contributions exist that examine how trust is instilled in uncertain accounting areas like goodwill impairment testing (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017) and fair value measurements (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022). Within these uncertain reporting areas, the exercise of judgement is emphasised as prevalent and something that needs to be managed to nonetheless enable the processes and outcomes to be seen as trustworthy. As demonstrated by Chua (1995), trust is powerful in that it allows accounting processes to become accepted even if they are imperfect. As such, the identified gap in the literature revolves around how accounting numbers and processes are socially produced and subsequently trusted. Specifically, the construction of sustainability reporting marks a grey spot within this stream that is of relevance given its high reliance on judgement due to often immature processes (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). Although some contributions exist, (Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016; McNally et al., 2017; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), there needs to be more empirical observations of particular sustainability reporting settings, like that of the DMA. Thus, the present study aims to address the following research question:

How do companies conduct their double materiality assessment and subsequent reporting in practice, and how is trust established in both the process and its outcome?

In answering this question, a single case study was conducted on a large, listed industrial company from the Nordics to understand its internal processes as an early adopter of the DMA. Drawing on the well-established actor-network theory originally developed by Callon (1986), Law (1986) and Latour (1987) also referred to as the sociology of translation, the construction process is theorised as a series of translations driven by a network of human and non-human actors. The notion of “translation” emphasises how standards are not merely adopted, but made operable through actors, tools and processes shaped by social and organisational practices. Within the case context, it is found that the construction of a double materiality assessment and its subsequent reporting resembled three translation chains from standard to final reported numbers. Despite instances of disruption along these chains (Latour, 1999), the translation process was in its entirety still found to be performing. In turn, such performance was attributed to factors that generated collective and individual trust, stabilising the translation chains but also making them consistent enough to work with (Chua, 1995; Dambrin & Robson, 2011).

Accordingly, the study provides two key contributions. First, it empirically contributes with an understanding of the debated DMA process by examining how intra-organisational processes shape reporting outcomes. Facilitated by the illustrative perspective of the process as a series of translations in different directions, we broaden the emerging qualitative accounting literature on how reporting is socially produced. It is further contended that the field of sustainability reporting, given its rapidly evolving nature, requires more active and continuous translations than what has previously been observed in other contexts. Viewing the process as consisting of chains of disrupted translations additionally reveals how reporting accuracy for sustainability figures in practice still can be perceived to be comparatively low.

Second, by complementing already established factors found to enable translation performance in weak chains of references (Dambrin & Robson, 2011), this study provides a theoretical contribution in the context of generating trust in the adoption of novel reporting standards. Particularly, beyond the generation of trust at a collective level through a bricolage of inscriptions and an associated methodological opacity, this study recognises the importance of individual trust by defining two new factors: local adaptations and pragmatism. Respectively, these factors enable actors to personally manage instances of translation disruption, which is of particular importance in making said translations perform.

The remainder of this study is structured as follows. Chapter 2 begins by reviewing previous literature within the field of qualitative financial accounting and the social construct of reporting, to subsequently present the theoretical lens used to analyse the findings. Chapter 3 elaborates on the qualitative method of choice and the case study investigated, followed by an empirical analysis of the findings in chapter 4. In chapter 5, the findings are further analysed and discussed before the study is concluded in chapter 6 with focus on contributions, research limitations and propositions for areas of future research.

2. Literature Review

Fundamental to this study is an understanding of the processes behind the construction of sustainability reporting, and particularly the processes behind the double materiality assessment under CSRD. The first part of this chapter, 2.1, thus reviews the relevant literature, starting with a look at the limited research on the production of financial accounting information (2.1.1). Within this literature stream, the review covers studies on trusted financial figures as a relational construct (2.1.2), the presence of judgement and affect in valuation networks (2.1.3) and the exploration of these themes within the context of sustainability reporting (2.1.4), before presenting the addressable research gap (2.1.5). The second part of this chapter, 2.2, introduces the theoretical lens used to analyse the findings – the concept of translation under actor-network theory (ANT) – and explains how it is adapted to fit the research context.

2.1. Previous literature

2.1.1. Qualitative research in financial accounting

Traditionally, financial accounting has unsurprisingly been dominantly studied with quantitative methods, drawing extensively from the fields of economics and finance (Oler et al., 2010). However, as recently noted by Himick et al. (2022), “[...] there is an increasing recognition that some relevant research questions cannot be addressed properly by approaching them with quantitative methods [...]” (p. 373). While quantitative work for instance has helped explain the effects of financial reporting on capital markets (Becker et al., 2021), its dominance in financial accounting research has left other areas, like the construction of financial reporting as a social and organisational practice, relatively unexplored (Robson et al., 2017). In this light, there is a current academic call for more qualitative research to complement these “grey areas” within financial accounting (Robson et al., 2017; Himick et al., 2022). Since such research does not explicitly rely upon publicly available data sets, it allows for a broader set of organisations and actors to be studied (Himick et al., 2022). Although the literature on the production of accounting in practice is scant, there exists some notable contributions which are further elaborated on in the following subsections.

2.1.2. The relational construction of trusted financial figures

The interactive and relational aspects of producing externally reported financial numbers has recently been explored in the studies by Huikku et al. (2017) and Hartmann (2022). Both studies draw broadly on versions of ANT (Latour, 1986, 1987, 1999, 2005) to investigate the social process behind producing goodwill impairment tests – a conceptually ambiguous area of financial accounting. As pointed out by Hartmann (2022, p. 387): “Representing the expected synergies of a business combination, future

expectations about goodwill development bear high levels of measurement uncertainty”. As such, the current goodwill value only becomes reliable through its various relations to different actors (Hartmann, 2022).

Accordingly, Huikku et al. (2017) mention three mechanisms to increase the perceived reliability of the arrived at figure. First, the more traces there are, both from inside and outside the firm, that can draw on the past, industry averages or expectations, the better. For instance, assuming terminal growth in line with GDP growth when projecting future cash flows (Huikku et al., 2017). Second, there needs to be multiple “human allies”, like auditors and valuation experts that support and validate these traces. Third, traces that are not solely used for goodwill impairment but have multiple purposes (like using the same WACC as for capital budgeting purposes), are seen as less subjective (Huikku et al., 2017).

Hartmann (2022) extends the insights by Huikku et al. (2017) by defining three moments of “relational becoming” in the process of making a goodwill impairment test reliable. In the first moment, one needs to define the frame, or the “rules of the game”, from which the organisation translates required standards to actual reporting practice. Hartmann (2022) argues that translating a standard into practice is not as given as Huikku et al. (2017) suggests, but rather a process of debate. The second moment involves constructing a calculation tool that can gather information from many different sources and actors. This tool, often a spreadsheet, can then run independently and uncontested with only the inputs and outputs in focus, since the rules of the game have already been established (Hartmann, 2022). The final moment concerns persuading others about the input values and in this regard, Hartmann (2022) draws upon Dambrin's & Robson's (2011) framework on persuasion to identify enablers of convincing arguments. In brief, the arguments revolve around how to create trust in an accounting process although it may not be completely perfect.

In this regard, the study by Chua (1995) provides empirical evidence on how newly formed accounting processes and their outcomes can become supported simply because they are “consistent” and “factual enough”. Within the empirical context of three hospitals, Chua (1995) explained how the accounting processes implemented were acknowledged as flawed. However, a sense of collective trust for the processes was still found, indicating how a process with potential can be made to perform efficiently in the presence of trust. Ultimately this occurred when “giving ‘consent’ to the numbers finally created” (Chua, 1995, p. 113) which was facilitated by a belief in that they represented a closer approximation of reality than what previously could be established.

Overall, the studies by Huikku et al. (2017), Hartmann (2022) and Chua (1995) reveal that the preparer of financial accounts should be seen as a network of human and non-human actors that interact. While Huikku et al. (2017) and Hartmann (2022) emphasise that the recognisability of accumulated traces and the impersonality of calculations

implicitly encourage reporting outcomes to become “black boxes”, with only inputs and outputs left to question, the study by Chua (1995) shows that reporting outcomes can still become trusted even if flawed.

2.1.3. The role of judgement and affect in valuation networks

Another contribution to the qualitative financial accounting literature is made by Plante et al. (2022) who study how valuers produce value opinions, yet another conceptually ambiguous area within accounting. In contrast to the studies by Huikku et al. (2017) and Hartmann (2022), that examines how financial accounting numbers are produced internally, Plante et al. (2022) sheds light on the role of external valuers in providing perceived credibility, particularly in the context of art and real estate valuation. The authors explain how the valuer’s expertise is “enacted based on practical sense” meaning that significant judgement and sensemaking is involved in determining what represents a plausible value. Besides the obvious quantifiable attributes of art and real estate that are taken into consideration when constructing a valuation, Plante et al. (2022) highlight how valuers also have to commensurate substantive qualitative attributes – like the condition of the asset – which often involves relativising, comparing and trusting your “gut feeling”.

While judgement in the process of constructing financial numbers is exercised by both accountants and valuation experts, it is explained as operationalised with different rationales. Where impersonality and distance from the calculation ensures trust among accountants and for their estimates (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017), Plante et al. (2022) mentions that “valuers underscore proximity by immersing themselves in the valuation context as a means to carry out reliable judgements.” (p. 1618). Overall, the study reveals how producing accounting numbers also can be done strategically to navigate political risks and to please the receiver. Additionally, it reveals alternative ways to increase the trust in produced numbers, suggesting that complexity and proximity may sometimes be preferred over simplicity and audit defensibility (Plante et al., 2022).

The seemingly high degree of judgement and subjective factors at play in valuation is further elaborated on in a recent study by Huxley (2025). The author sheds light on the emotional investments and tensions that arise when producing accounting inscriptions, such as fair value measurements of intangibles. In particular, Huxley (2025) investigates the affective dimension of accounting networks and how that shapes accounting numbers, finding that stability of the produced fair value measurement depends on so-called “affective attachments”. Particularly, Huxley (2025) argues that clashes between the valuation experts and clients, due to the latter’s emotional attachments to the valued asset, first destabilises the valuation network but also creates frustration which fuels a subsequent re-stabilisation of the network through a perceived need to look elsewhere for seemingly objective assumptions. With other words, by reaching what Huxley (2025) refers to as “affective relief” – either by the drawing on external evidence or by aligning valuation assumptions with client expectations – valuation experts can feel at ease with

their valuation conclusion, and overall trust for the measurement can be achieved. With this perspective, the production of accounting numbers can be seen as less technical and rational, and more about social interaction and interpersonal dynamics.

Although Huxley (2025) declares it possible to reach final stability for accounting numbers, there is in general a lot of uncertainty involved before that stage as is further elaborated on by Barker & Schulte (2017). Their study on fair value measurements of non-financial assets reveals how preparers often feel anxious and uneasy when tasked with producing such accounts. These feelings are explained to originate from the absence of “institutional facts” which are required for organisations to be able to produce accounting numbers with some form of objectivity. Since non-financial assets in many cases lack active markets, it is up to the preparer to exercise judgement which Barker & Schulte (2017) argue make fair values “wishful and incoherent” and simply “unknowable”. As such, the authors are critical towards standard-setters who essentially demand organisations to create wished-for outcomes, which promotes unstable practices based on subjective assumptions.

Overall, the significant use of judgement when producing accounting numbers seems to be a widespread necessity across many different accounting contexts. This underscores the level of social interaction and interdisciplinary engagement that is required to arrive at trusted financial accounts. From this perspective, a subset of financial reporting – sustainability reporting – becomes especially interesting given its high dependence on interdisciplinary collaborations to overcome the inherent challenges of measuring how sustainable a company is. Indeed, the process of determining what is material for a company to report on and how to collect and consolidate that information into reported figures, share many of the same characteristics as those of goodwill impairment estimations (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017) and fair value measurements (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022). As such, the investigation of how sustainability accounting information is produced becomes an area of concern which can further and broaden the aforementioned limited qualitative financial accounting literature (Himick et al., 2022; Robson et al., 2017).

2.1.4. The production of sustainability accounting information

As the effects of climate change have become increasingly prevalent and noticed in recent years (Bebbington & Larrinaga, 2014), so has the accountability companies are expected to take for the interest of various stakeholders (Robertson et al., 2022). Given the ongoing transition of sustainability reporting from a largely voluntary practice to a regulatory requirement, research on how this information is produced has consequently become a growing concern (see e.g. Bebbington et al., 2012; Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016; T. Järvinen et al., 2022; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024).

A notable contribution in this regard is the study by Troshani & Rowbottom (2024). The authors underscore the social construction of accounting figures by examining

companies' information infrastructures as simultaneously enabling and constraining the production of trustworthy sustainability data. The concept of information infrastructures is described by the authors as the interplay of information systems, software and employees' social routines, which can be rephrased as the interplay between human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005). More practically, the study finds the production of sustainability figures to be made possible through technical artifacts such as dedicated measurement systems, spreadsheets and dashboards, while also following routines for data entry, aggregation, commensuration and assurance (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). These elements are interdependent, meaning that artifacts do not determine action on their own. Instead, their "action possibilities" depend on how human actors perceive and engage with them in specific contexts. As such, the same artifact can be perceived as enabling action for some actors and constraining action for others (Leonardi, 2011; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). The study by McNally et al. (2017) further this idea of enabling artifacts by showing how inadequate use of what actors perceive to be enabling artifacts can instead be constraining for its purpose. The authors show how a new integrated reporting framework is imposed on existing internal processes and reporting protocols, ultimately depriving the purpose of the new framework by limiting the development of supporting accounting infrastructure capable of capturing its additional aspects and nuances.

How the above-mentioned artifacts and routines should be organised to produce accurate environmental information is however far from well-defined. With several obstacles embedded in the process, such as data availability, standard interpretation, and inconsistent practices within and across companies, organisations must often resort to deriving, extrapolating or estimating sustainability figures, instead of relying on direct measurements (Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016). Thus, similar to what is found in the studies on fair value measurement production (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022), the exercise of judgement is equally present in the process of producing sustainability accounting information. However, in contrast to the mentioned studies, co-existence between judgement and trust is more problematic within sustainability reporting (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). The former's ability to reduce trust in accounting processes is attributed by researchers to weak definitions and poor regulatory guidance (Laine et al., 2017; McNally et al., 2017; Senn & Giordano-Spring, 2020), similar to what is argued by Barker & Schulte (2017) and their argument for an absence of institutional facts in many fair value measurements.

2.1.5. Formulation of the addressable research gap

As this literature review began by emphasising, the qualitative financial accounting literature on the collective and social construct of financial reports and figures is remarkably limited given its practical implications for reporting accuracy and comparability (Himick et al., 2022; Robson et al., 2017). Among the recent notable contributions, it is examined how trust can be instilled in uncertain accounting areas like

goodwill impairment testing (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017) and fair value measurements (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022). Furthermore, these studies shed light on the how processes underlying such ambiguous accounting areas often require significant judgement, and how such judgement can be operationalised differently to increase the trust for the output. Either it is done by impersonal calculations and distance (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025) or by proximity and complexity (Plante et al., 2022) depending on the professional roles involved but also the type of assets or accounting area for which figures are produced (Huxley, 2025). In some contexts, it has however proved to be considerably difficult to operationalise judgement in a way that nonetheless instils trust (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). Still, scholars have also found that trust in reporting can be established despite perceived imperfections (Chua, 1995).

The identified gap in the literature thus centre around how financial accounting numbers are socially produced and subsequently trusted. Given its high reliance on judgement as a consequence of immature processes and under-researched status, the production of sustainability reporting becomes especially interesting. How are the underlying processes structured in practice and how can trust be created for the resulting figures in a highly ambiguous and ever-evolving field? Although some contributions exist (Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016; McNally et al., 2017; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), there needs to be more empirical observations of particular sustainability reporting settings. The present study aims to address these questions and concerns using findings from a novel and empirically relevant accounting setting, namely the construction of double materiality assessments and its subsequent reporting under CSRD.

2.2. Theoretical lens

The process of conducting a double materiality assessment is both complex and ambiguous given the significant discretion companies are given in how it should be designed (EFRAG, 2024). It requires engaging many different actors across the organisation to produce an actionable result of what is material to report on. In essence, it is about translating the requirements from a novel accounting standard to something that is meaningful, comprehensible and workable for the organisation, thereby enabling subsequent reporting to be in accordance with the disclosure obligations.

To capture how this process is conducted through the multitude of actors involved, this study draws on actor-network theory (ANT) to better understand how a reporting standard is interpreted, internalised and acted on over time. Originally developed by Callon (1986), Law (1986) and Latour (1987), ANT is a social theory to analyse how ideas, knowledge and facts take form through their circulation and enactment in practice. As such, ANT provides a framework for understanding how, in this case, a concept or practice is not merely adopted but rather constructed through an interplay between human and non-human actors (Latour, 2005). Adding relevance to this study's use of ANT, the theory has recently been adopted in the field of qualitative accounting research (Christensen & Skærbæk, 2010; Dambrin & Robson, 2011; Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025; Mennicken, 2008; Pucci & Skærbæk, 2020; Robson, 1991; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). In particular, it has been described as useful when studying accounting change (Robson, 1991), and in understanding how networks are constructed to produce accounting “facts” (Latour, 2005) – both of which are central to the development of double materiality assessments and their subsequent reporting.

2.2.1. The sociology of translation: creating and stabilising networks

A central concept to how action is made possible in ANT is the one of translation, which will serve as a theoretical lens in this study. In contrast to a diffusion model, where ideas are spread linearly through a hierarchical approach, the notion of translations suggests that ideas and innovations instead are the result of continuous modification and negotiation as they pass through all active participants in a network, who interpret and adapt them to the local context (Latour, 1986). Therefore, understanding a process, such as the double materiality assessment, requires identifying the human and non-human actors involved and their respective roles and influence within the network.

To understand how a network is formed and stabilised under ANT, Callon (1986) describes a series of steps in which primary actors identify an existing problem and seek to persuade others to enrol in a network aimed at addressing it. When persuasion is successful and actors accept their roles within the network, they become mobilised and begin acting on its behalf, thereby reinforcing and spreading the translation (Callon, 1986). However, since translation is an ongoing and dynamic process, it continues to

evolve as enrolled actors interpret, adapt, and modify the translated substance (Latour, 1986). As the aim of this paper is to study how an organisation has established processes to comply with a new legislative requirement, the need to persuade actors to enrol in the network becomes irrelevant as neither the change nor the actors' role in it can be viably contested. As such, for the purposes of the present study, it rather becomes of interest to analyse how the actors are mobilised in a new network and how, through a process of recurring translations, they achieve a collective stabilisation of facts amid controversies (Latour, 1987).

There are two primary reasons why the concept of translation under ANT is useful for the present study. First, translation emphasises the efforts needed for the relevant standards to be mobilised and made operable through various actors, tools and processes. It is not merely a case of accepting and adopting the standards, but rather an active translation process. Second, the concept of translation draws attention to the inherently ambiguous and open nature of standards. The double materiality process and subsequent reporting is not to be seen as predetermined and fixed, but rather shaped by interpretations, negotiations, and broader institutional contexts. This becomes particularly relevant in the context of examining how first adopters of a standard engage in shaping and defining some sort of "best practice" by benchmarking their processes with others. While interpretations of how the process should be undertaken and reported on can become temporarily stabilised within specific networks, the application remains dynamic and contingent on social and organisational practices (Mennicken, 2008).

2.2.2. Circulating references: translation chain performance

To further understand the production and mobilisation of a double materiality assessment as a translation process from standard to reported outcome, it is crucial to examine how trust in such a process can be generated. With many actors involved, each interpreting and translating information differently, the process is inherently fragile. This makes the creation of internal belief essential to its stability and effectiveness.

In this light, the study by Latour (1999) helps clarify how translation processes can be viewed as "chains of translations" and how trust can be generated only if the actors involved are able to understand and clearly trace how knowledge is translated along such chains. Latour (1999) describes how the creation of perceived objective knowledge is always subject to a chain of translations of data between human and non-human actors, from "matter" to "form", traced all the way down to the original substance of the inquiry. Put differently, Latour (1999) emphasises how it is possible to achieve trustworthiness for a reported outcome of a scientific inquiry when it is presented although it is entirely dependent on underlying chains of translations which are inherently fragile. As translations are made between each actor along these chains, some parts are lost, renewed or held intact in what Latour (1999) calls a "circulating reference". However, for the reference to circulate and be considered trustworthy, its receiver should be able to trace

it back and forth through a transparent chain of translations, where each step in the process can be verified.

Latour (1987) further argues that if the chains are disrupted, distorted or experiences problems of traceability, “they cease to transport truth” and rather begins “to lie” (Latour, 1999). A translation process perceived as “lying” quickly puts into question whether the process and final output can be trusted which can destabilise the internal network of people involved. Lost trust in the process can in turn make it more difficult to mobilise the network to continue producing and translating knowledge (Callon, 1986).

The study by Dambrin & Robson (2011) furthers Latour’s (1999) reasoning on translations by demonstrating that disrupted chains of translations still in fact can perform. The authors highlight specific elements that enable accounting translation processes to become accepted within organisations, making actors commit to seemingly imperfect translation networks. First, a bricolage of inscriptions or traces from different information systems increase the legitimacy of processes by making the process or calculation span different times and locations. By allowing for triangulation of independent internal and external sources, a broad bricolage underpinning the accounting knowledge produced often makes processes seemingly more robust which may divert attention away from instances of disruption (Dambrin & Robson, 2011). Second, the authors emphasise so-called methodological opacity, meaning that actors may not completely understand the calculation or summarising steps of the translation. This may in turn deprive them the ability of questioning the disrupted translation chain. The present study acknowledges these elements Dambrin & Robson (2011) but extends the framework with other plausible explanations for translation performance.

In sum, the theoretical lens applied in this study centres around the actor-network theory concept of translation and takes departure and inspiration from the notion of circulating references along chains of translations, as formulated by Latour (1999). The concept allows for a more comprehensive understanding of steps and network-building activities involved in the process – from standard to reported outcome – in three linked chains. These chains are further analysed as disrupted (Latour, 1999), with an extended version of Dambrin's & Robson's (2011) framework as a guide for why they still manage to perform.¹ Importantly, the aim of this study is not to discredit the DMA’s usefulness in sustainability reporting overall by showing how it is not always based on objective facts. Instead, the aim is to shed light on the collective construction of actionable reporting through mobilised networks, and how trust for seemingly under-developed processes can nevertheless be generated in such networks.

¹ Dambrin & Robson (2011) identify two additional factors that may explain how weak references can circulate and perform without reversibility in the chain of translations – namely, “professional ambivalence” and “practical actions enabled by inscriptions”. These factors were excluded from the theoretical lens as they were considered inapplicable to the case context.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study. First, the overall research design is explained in section 3.1, alongside an introduction to the case study. This is then followed by a description of the data collection in section 3.2 and how data was analysed in section 3.3. The chapter concludes by examining the data quality and validity in section 3.4.

3.1. Research approach

3.1.1. Research design

The aim of this thesis was to conduct an in-depth study of the internal processes behind a company's double materiality assessments under CSRD. In particular, it sought to understand how organisational members interpret materiality, how they collect the required information and how they engage with each other to co-create the final assessment published in the annual report. To achieve these objectives, an interpretative research approach was used, gathering qualitative insights on the participants' experiences on the topic through interviews. Adopting an interpretative stance means viewing social reality as "[...] emergent, subjectively created, and objectified through human interaction" (Chua, 1986, p. 615). The nature of the research question and objectives is thus best captured with a qualitative interpretative stance that accentuates human interaction. This aligns well with the view that financial accounting should be studied using methods beyond quantitative analysis to address the existing "grey areas" (Himick et al., 2022; Robson et al., 2017). Furthermore, previous literature also sheds light on how sustainability reporting is a continuously changing field with legislation changing thick and fast (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), which solidifies the choice of an interpretative approach to understand how organisational actors navigate these changes. In fact, interpretivism tends to "[...] elicit participants' world views in relation to the topic of interest" (Bell et al., 2019, p. 33), which was highly promoted within this study to understand the intricacies of sustainability reporting.

3.1.2. The case study

To answer the research question and achieve the study's intended objectives, a case study was opted for. Case studies often offer rich descriptions of new phenomena and allow for "better understandings of complex accounting realities and processes" (Gendron, 2009, p. 123), deemed highly suitable for this research. The choice between a single case study and a multiple case study was, however, not evident from the start. As discussed by Dyer & Wilkins (1991), the choice mainly comes down to a trade-off between "the deep understanding of a particular social setting and the benefits of comparative insights" (p. 614). In one respect, a multiple case study would allow for potentially interesting insights

that could unveil differences or similarities in the underlying DMA processes, within or across industries. Nonetheless, such a study comes at the expense of analytical depth and would arguably be more relevant if one is to study and contrast the reporting outcome – i.e., what ends up being deemed to be material. Given that the present study rather explores the production of the materiality assessments and its subsequent reporting as a complex and highly interactive process, a single case study was preferred in the end. It allowed for a more detailed empirical base with nuanced perspectives from a broader set of organisational actors across different roles and hierarchical levels (Ahrens & Chapman, 2006). Such depth was considered key to fundamentally understand how these processes are constructed, not the least due to the uncertainty surrounding them as stressed in several previous studies (Jørgensen et al., 2022; Oll et al., 2025; Puroila & Mäkelä, 2019; Reimsbach et al., 2020).

The selection of a suitable case company was based on two distinguished criteria. First, the company had to be covered by the new regulatory framework for sustainability reporting, CSRD. In essence, this required the case company to be incorporated in an EU-member state that had transposed the requirements to national law. For the firm to be subject to the regulation in its first phase, it further had to be a large, listed firm with over 500 employees or a group meeting equal conditions (European Commission, n.d.). To enable easier access to interviews, the selection was restricted to Nordic firms. Second, the firm either had to have voluntarily published a DMA in its 2023 annual report or, explicitly mentioned that it had undergone a DMA process during the year and intended to publish the result in its upcoming 2024 annual report. Such proactivity was deemed necessary to ensure the process had been thoroughly completed, enabling the intended analysis to be carried out.

Once a list of conforming firms was compiled, the companies were prioritised by size with the rationale that larger firms would allocate more time and resources to conduct a more comprehensive DMA process, thus being as close to current “best practice” as possible. A further compelling argument to research a larger company was not only the vast potential consequences its sustainability reporting efforts could have for its stakeholders, but also the increased influence its reporting practices may have on peers, standard-setters and the co-creation of a shared norm.

The company that ended up being selected for this study was a large, listed Nordic industrial solutions company with a global reach. The company was intentionally approached at the group level, at which the DMA process mainly was conducted. In general, the group is very decentralised with its divisions being its highest operating entities. Thus, the group function works as a central part of the organisation but is generally not considered to be above the divisions. Instead, the focus is on supporting the divisions in certain areas and managing the work concerning the group as a whole, such as the consolidated financial and sustainability reporting. To facilitate this, the group organises cross-sectional collaboration through different councils to lineate and provide

structure to various processes. The case company and its internal processes will be further described and analysed in chapter 4 and will hereinafter be referred to as “InduCorp” to preserve anonymity.

3.2. Data collection

The empirical material for this study was primarily based on interviews with individuals responsible for the double materiality assessment and its subsequent reporting, at both group and business area levels within InduCorp (see Appendix A). The initial contact was initiated with the group sustainability manager responsible for the DMA process to achieve a better understanding of the relevant people involved in the process. Thus, the selection of interviews was initially a result from purposive sampling, with candidates chosen based on their relevance to the research question (Bell et al., 2019; Silverman, 2020). To further expand the set of relevant interviewees, a snowball sampling method was used, where actors of research interest were identified and contacted through referrals within the organisation from previously conducted interviews (Bell et al., 2019; Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, following an interview guide as a starting point (see Appendix B), but allowing for some degree of flexibility to adjust questions based on participants’ response and emerging topics (Bell et al., 2019). The guide was broadly tailored to the researcher’s prior knowledge of each interviewee’s connection to the double materiality assessment and the reporting process, and updated along the way once answers became repetitive. Prior to each interview, participants were asked to sign a consent form, providing written consent of participation, accepting the confidentiality and secure use of data. At the start of each session, permission to record the interviews for transcription purposes was also requested, and oral consent was obtained in all cases.

Apart from the initial meeting, interviews were conducted via an online meeting platform, with both researchers present throughout to facilitate follow-up questions and ensure a comprehensive understanding of each discussion. While an online setting has an advantage over physical meetings in that it has the possibility to remove some potential interviewer bias, it should be noted that some of the richness of the interaction may be lost (Bell et al., 2019). The decision to conduct all interviews online was partly inevitable due to the group’s international presence but also allowed for more flexibility to cater to the interviewees’ busy time schedules and remote work option.

In total, 17 interviews were held with the case company along with an introductory meeting. In addition, one context interview was also conducted to better understand the contested nature of materiality as a concept. Generally, the interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, with an average of 56 minutes. The number of interviews stemmed from the number of relevant people involved in the process along with the researchers’

perceived empirical saturation, meaning that “no new information was obtained” (Morse, 1995, p. 147) on the research question.

In addition to the interviews, the findings were complemented by document analysis of publicly available information published by the company such as the company’s annual reports and website. However, as publicly available information aims to promote a favourable view to the organisation’s outsiders (Bell et al., 2019), there is a risk of losing credibility in such documents and thus only served a complementary role. Moreover, a delivered consultancy report was also reviewed in which the methodology and result behind the organisation’s preliminary double materiality assessment were presented. The documents served two purposes in this study. First, they were used as stand-alone sources of information to understand the DMA process. Second, it helped guide segments of the interviews. By anchoring questions in concrete examples, interviewees were encouraged to provide more detailed insights into certain parts and results of the described process.

3.3. Data analysis

The data analysis followed an abductive research approach where the data was analysed by going back and forth between the collected data and theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). As the primary aim of this paper was to analyse how the DMA process was facilitated in the case company, a significant part of the initial data analysis revolved around mapping out the actors and steps involved. Consequently, the analysis began with a focus on structuring the empirical findings from interviews and supplementary documents along different steps in the process and other emerging themes. This ensured the coding to stay close to the data while having the ability to apply existing theories once a better understanding of the research phenomenon had been achieved (Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). Further, as the data collection and analysis were an iterative process, all interviews were transcribed, discussed and coded in close connection to the meetings to be able to build on emerging themes in subsequent interviews (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989).

When a better understanding of the process was achieved and common themes from the first set of interviews had been identified, it was continuously linked back and tested against existing theory to explore what theoretical frameworks could be utilised to understand and analyse the findings. While several theories were considered in an abductive process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Lukka & Modell, 2010), such as sense-making and framing theory, the primary understanding of the collected data was that it concerned a “translation process”, from an ambiguous and general standard to an output that was to be perceived as representative and accurate. Within this line of reasoning, actor-network theory (Callon, 1986; Law, 1986; Latour, 1987) and its related stream of research appeared as the most suitable theoretical lens to not only analyse how action was enabled, but also how a process of several translations unfolded. As the abductive process

progressed, viewing the DMA process as disrupted chains of translation (Latour, 1999) that still managed to perform (Dambrin & Robson, 2011) was also found to be valuable in providing a deeper and more structured understanding of the challenges and enablers within the process, and thus incorporated in the analysis (see a simplified version of the coding framework in Appendix C).

3.4. Data quality

As emphasised by Lukka & Modell (2010), the “crisis of validity” has for long been a central criticism towards interpretative research. In addressing this, the authors points out two central aspects of validation in interpretative research, authenticity and plausibility. Authenticity refers to preservation of the emic qualities of the research account by providing rich descriptions, while plausibility concerns the use of abductive reasoning in applying theory that advances profound emic understandings with explanations that “makes sense” (Lukka & Modell, 2010). In this paper, several measures have been taken to ensure its quality and validity throughout.

First, validation has been seen as an ongoing activity (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008) and has constantly been evaluated throughout the research process. Authenticity has been emphasised by reaching out to confirm statements from previous interviews to make sure that the data has been comprehensively understood and interpreted correctly in relation to the subjects’ experiences. In addition, the etic understanding of the DMA process has been validated by constructing illustrations of the consolidated interpretations and confirming it with relevant interviewees. To further preserve the authenticity of the collected data, direct quotations from interviewees have frequently been used when presenting empirical findings to better maintain its emic qualities.

Second, the choice of theoretical lens was the result of an abductive process where less plausible explanations were ruled out by iteratively trying the models against the empirical findings. While there is always a risk of settling prematurely on a theoretical explanation that may be overly narrow or specific in scope (Elharidy et al., 2008; Lukka & Modell, 2010), the choice of ANT was given careful consideration and also complemented with the additional related research by Latour (1999) and Dambrin & Robson (2011) during the later stages of the analysis of the empirical findings. It is recognised that the choice of theoretical lens was partly influenced by the theories used in related research and thus can be seen as a result of the existing belief systems in the research community (Lukka & Modell, 2010). However, as Lukka & Modell (2010) also mention, operating in a more “given” theoretical space is not necessarily problematic, but instead requires validity to be negotiated through rich emic accounts, which this paper aims to provide. Overall, by carefully considering the authenticity and plausibility of the data, its quality is perceived to be validated and ensured.

4. Empirical analysis

In the following chapter, the empirical findings within the outlined setting are presented and analysed according to the formulated research question. The chapter starts with an empirical analysis of the full translation process in section 4.1, from the standard, ESRS, to the final reported numbers according to the double materiality assessment. This is followed by an examination of when the chains of translation are disrupted in section 4.2, and an analysis of how the chains nonetheless continue to function efficiently in section 4.3.

4.1. The translation process

As explained in subsection 2.2.2, Latour's (1999) notion of translation chains and circulating references acts as a solid theoretical foundation upon which the findings from InduCorp can be analysed. The full process of constructing a double materiality assessment in InduCorp is considered to require three separate translations (see figure 1). First, the new CSRD requirements, as stipulated by the ESRS, are translated in a series of steps to a set double materiality assessment with decided material topics. Rather than being cascaded down linearly in the organisation through diffusion (Latour, 1986), such translation from standard to practice is a process of interpretation and debate (Hartmann, 2022). Second, the outcome of the assessment needs to be communicated down to the respective business areas, divisions and entities who are all responsible to act upon the new reporting demands. Third, the measured data points need to be consolidated and translated up to the group level to subsequently be reported on in the annual report.

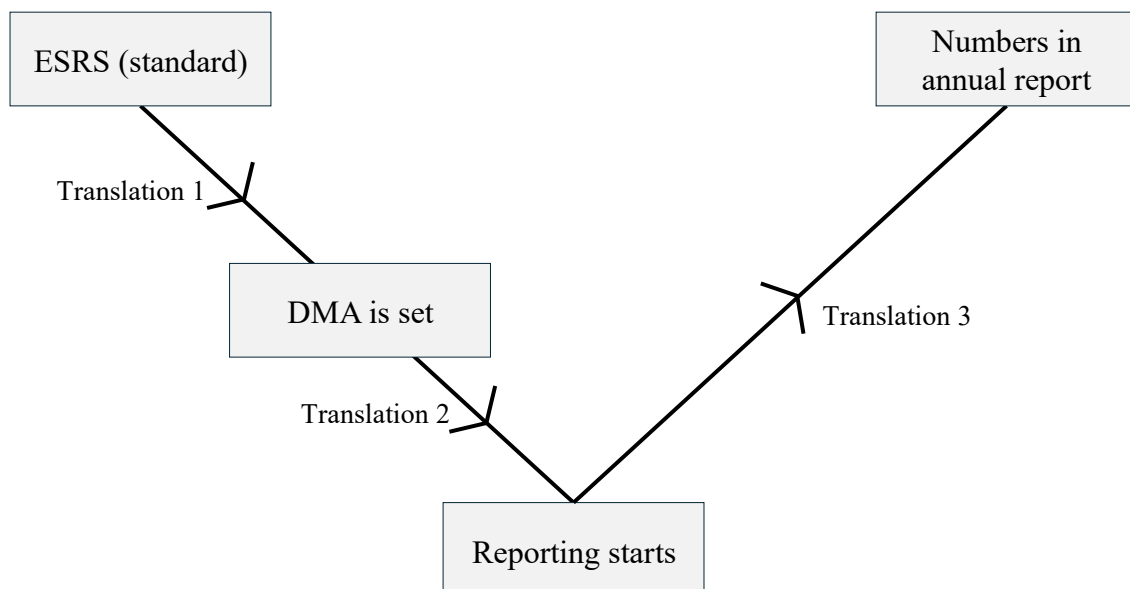


Figure 1: The three chains of translation within InduCorp

Each of these translations, along with the corresponding activities, actors, and challenges, are now further elaborated upon in the subsections below.

4.1.1. Translation 1: ESRS to DMA

When CSRD was first announced, InduCorp initially met it with cautious optimism. Given the firm's historic stability, profitability and track record of successfully navigating change, InduCorp was arguably better equipped than most other firms to adjust for these requirements. However, although existing non-financial reporting structures were in place, there was still a large gap within InduCorp to be able to comply with CSRD's more stringent requirements. In this, InduCorp needed to make an elaborate double materiality assessment in which they had to consider what would be material to report on, both from an impact and a financial perspective.

The first translation from a seemingly complex standard to a set DMA in InduCorp hence involved three main steps that were highlighted during the interviews: 1) forming a network of actors to carry out this translation, 2) creating a process and evaluation tool to facilitate the translation and 3) comparing the translation with peers to ensure a reasonable scope and a representative outcome.

Forming a network

As laid out in subsection 2.2.1, an important part of any translation process is that of creating a network capable of driving such translation (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987). Given the significant uncertainty of interpreting the ESRS and EFRAG guidelines, the first step in such network formation was to hire an external sustainability consultant tasked with clarifying the required actions and internal actors needed to be involved. To hire a "human ally" (Huikku et al., 2017), who brings about distance and impersonality to the DMA process, could be seen as an early attempt at creating trustworthiness for the process, both internally and externally, in line with what has previously been observed in the literature (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025).

Coinciding with this, a council for sustainability reporting was initiated by the Group Vice President Sustainability. The council sought to gather representatives from different parts of the organisation and facilitate cross-sectoral discussions, explained as especially important given InduCorp's highly decentralised structure and previous lacking sustainability governance. To facilitate this, different workstreams were created, each dedicated to some of the topics identified in the ESRS gross list of sustainability matters that were mandated for consideration, such as climate, circularity, own workforce and biodiversity (EFRAG, 2023). Each workstream thus had a particular mission and objective for an area identified as strategically important to InduCorp's operations. Following the notions of Callon (1986), this can be seen as a way to mobilise the network to enable the first translation – creating some structure and delegating responsibilities. While human actors like the external consultant and the council represented the most

visible actors at play in this translation process, Latour (1986, 1987, 2005) reminds us that networks often are wider than first perceived, also spanning significant non-human actors. Such non-human actors included the materiality evaluation file, internal data systems used for consolidation of reporting, and existing InduCorp processes like the Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) process, which all had significant influence on the DMA and will be further elaborated on below.

Constructing an evaluation method

To determine what would be material or not for InduCorp to report on, an evaluation method needed to be established. Given the number of new concepts that ESRS requires firms to consider in the evaluation, like the “scale”, “scope”, “severity”, “likelihood” and “remediable character” of risks, creating such a method was not straightforward.

Everything that is new and that you do for the first time is always a challenge. And even though I think it's good [the DMA], you still have to learn how it should be done. It's really been all about these different interpretations. What is a “scope”? What is a “scale”? How should an IRO [impact, risk and opportunity] be described? [...] The previous materiality analysis was two-dimensional; now it's more like three-dimensional plus two additional aspects. There's so much you have to consider at the same time. (Sustainability Manager – Group)

An additional concern and source of ambiguity when setting up the DMA was that of adequate materiality thresholds. It is something that the ESRS does not provide but rather left to the individual organisations to figure out and determine. To mitigate this uncertainty and once again instil trust in the process, InduCorp decided to utilise their existing Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) process to set such thresholds.

[...] We used the same grading [as in the ERM process], with four levels from “low”, “medium”, “high”, and “extreme” risk. And then, together with the external consultant who helped us with our first DMA, we settled on the scores for the different levels. We accordingly determined those assessed as “high” or “extreme” as material for us. So that's where we drew the line. If it's “low” or “medium”, then it's not considered material. (Sustainability Manager – Group)

As such, the ERM process and its seemingly proven methodology acted as a way to set the materiality scoring and in turn the evaluation method. Practically, a spreadsheet was created in which impacts, risks and opportunities were assessed through the mentioned new concepts and assigned a score between zero and five or with a percentage between zero and a hundred. The aggregated score then corresponded to a grade as outlined in the aforementioned quote. Using the ERM as a “trace” with multiple purposes (Huikku et al., 2017), made the process seemingly less subjective, at least from an outside perspective or at levels further from the group function. Nonetheless, at the group level of InduCorp, actors still recognised how the task at hand was inherently subjective, lacking the institutional facts which are required to produce a consistent and representative outcome (Barker & Schulte, 2017).

You want to create something that is comparable, objective. But the basis for a materiality analysis is still very subjective. It is people who set thresholds and who have opinions in the end. I don't know how one can imagine achieving objectivity through a subjective process. I have no suggestion for an alternative but just want to state that. (Vice President Sustainability – Group)

While the ERM process provided structure, it was still unclear what would constitute “high” or “medium” risk. Here the consultant’s preliminary assessment relied upon translating internally conducted interviews with so-called “Subject Matter Experts” (SMEs) to set scores on what was important across the group. Such interviews were for instance held with the Vice President Sustainability of each business area and Investor Relations representatives. With other words, rather than gathering insights from external stakeholders, as previously done within InduCorp, this approach focused on singling out internal actors with the right pre-requisite knowledge, expertise and overview of certain areas. However, besides these experts’ views, the basis for determining the materiality scoring for each IRO was predominantly extensive discussions and seldom any quantitative data. In practice, this meant that the group sustainability team, consisting of four employees with a detailed understanding of the requirements, discussed and tweaked the respective numbers for each IRO based on the consultant's general assessment, which in turn determined what was material or not.

[...] So ultimately, it's a lot of discussions with the business, with the subject matter experts, with the group sustainability team. And again, through these discussions, you hear different aspects, you hear different perspectives, and at the group, we can then conclude: “is this a two or a three?”. (Sustainability Specialist – Group)

The construction of the evaluation method and its subsequent usage, illustrates how the first translation can be considered a chain (Latour, 1999), as interpretations made by some actor, in this case either the consultant or SMEs, were picked up by other actors who further interpreted and modified the assessment – the materiality scoring.

Validating the DMA with peers

The complexity of discussing and setting materiality scores in InduCorp was amplified by the fact that it needed to represent the group as a whole. With a group of four business areas, more than 20 divisions and hundreds of entities across the world and within different industries, such a task was not straightforward. In this light, benchmarking between peers through both formal channels (e.g., external audits) and informal channels (e.g., industry networks) served as a complement to the standards by recognising how others had translated and acted upon the ESRS in the absence of sufficient institutional facts (Barker & Schulte, 2017). For InduCorp, it was described as equally important to understand how their peers conducted their DMAs to create trustworthiness for the process and outcome, as to only following and interpreting the ESRS. Nonetheless, interviewees also described how these comparisons revealed the wide-spread ambiguity surrounding these assessments.

Before we started benchmarking, we deemed almost everything material after our first- and third-party assessments. And then we started benchmarking and other companies were like, “What? We only have like five [material topics].” Then we went back to our chamber and started removing things. When we touched base the next time, it was the opposite - we had gone down, and others had suddenly gone up. It was this thing that everyone was somehow searching for, “What is material?” Because I mean, as a large global company, all issues are material. [...] But if all large global companies have the exact same material points, then what’s the point? (Project Manager Sustainability – Group)

To truly get to the bottom of what InduCorp should report on, one interviewee described it as important to be able to distinguish companies’ DMAs from each other by drawing upon a metaphor of recognising companies’ “costumes”.

But it's a bit like costumes [...] Are these our clothes? Is it reasonable that we wear this or that we do this? Especially also compared with other companies – that you can see that it seems reasonable for them to have it as material because they do X and Y. And then you can also contrast it with your operations. [...] And just that comparison has become very guiding in, okay, “but if they don't think it's material and they do X – we do less X – then it is clearly not material to us”. So, you can get this guidance that maybe didn't come in the standards per se. (Project Manager Sustainability – Group)

As found in previous research (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025), drawing upon averages and benchmarks increases the perceived trust in the reported output. Still, in the case of InduCorp, and as illustrated in the quote above, there was a need to balance adhering to an industry average as a global large company and simultaneously being unique enough to grant the DMA a purpose. This balancing act marked a key component of the translation from standard to DMA, indicating how it was far from a straightforward process.

Once the DMA was validated and accepted, the first translation chain could be considered completed. Overall, it centred around forming a network of human and non-human actors who together constructed an assessment that translated something inherently qualitative into something quantitative, that in turn seemingly represented the operations of InduCorp. While the method set in place utilised the existing ERM process to create trust, the result of the assessment still had to be validated with peers through benchmarking and a navigation of what should be material considering InduCorp’s industry and company specific characteristics.

4.1.2. Translation 2: From DMA to internal reporting codes

The second distinct translation primarily involved two steps. First, it concerned how to turn the DMA result into reporting codes that the respective business areas and their entities would follow when collecting and reporting the data. Second, to facilitate this, it was important to communicate why certain reporting was deemed material.

The first step – defining the reporting codes – was in itself explained to be a difficult task given the insufficient guidance ESRS under CSRD provided (Laine et al., 2017; McNally et al., 2017; Senn & Giordano-Spring, 2020). The group’s sustainability reporting team had to translate the ambiguous standards to actionable reporting codes including a definition and a description of how specific data points should be gathered, once again using their professional judgement in the absence of institutional facts (Barker & Schulte, 2017).

It can be a bit complicated to write these definitions. There's quite a lot to think about. The CSRD does not specify how certain situations should be addressed. For example, “what should we do if CSRD wants us to divide something into A and B, but something is both A and B”? [...] CSRD doesn't always have clear definitions for everything. They have a few lines which you have to relate to and try to interpret as best as you can to the reality you have. (HR & Sustainability Controller – Group (1))

Setting up these internal reporting codes can further be described as highly iterative (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), as the descriptions made on a group level often experienced several revisions after discussions with business areas, before seen as final. Given the variety in operations between these business areas, certain definitions sometimes had to be adapted to fit the local context.

As a group function, we are kind of the overarching umbrella. But for the business areas, they come with “this is how it works in real life”. It's very valuable to have that discussion and through that understand, okay, this is going to be the reporting code and then put it in the system. (Sustainability Specialist – Group)

To create some structure and consistency for the subsequent data collection, the reporting codes were compiled into InduCorp’s intranet and database, which served to streamline the sustainability reporting for its divisions and entities by providing detailed descriptions of what to do. Such manuals were further supplemented by an additional document outlining ten principles for sustainability reporting, inspired by both the CSRD and GRI, which served to translate these standards into a format that would ensure consistent handling of methodological assumptions within InduCorp’s context.

The second step of this translation concerned how to communicate these reporting codes to enable the data collection. This was practically done through quarterly calls, keeping all business areas updated on any new changes or revisions. Beyond such practicalities, it was equally important to provide explanations for why such reporting was needed and deemed material. As it was ultimately the respective divisions and entities who collected the data, gaining their trust and engagement for the DMA process was considered crucial to not impede the efforts made to ensure reporting accuracy. This proved to be the greatest challenge in this step of the translation, as explained throughout the interviews.

The challenge was to properly analyse the whole thing, to communicate it and inform what everybody's obligation is; why we need it and why is it important for us. So, the whole communication stream from point A to Z and including all parties in a proper way so that we were all on the same page. (Corporate Counsel Compliance – Group)

Overall, the second translation chain focused on translating the DMA results into actionable reporting codes for InduCorp's divisions and entities to act upon. To facilitate this, the group sustainability reporting team had to explain why certain topics were material and others not, which proved to be difficult and not always done in a completely transparent way.

4.1.3. Translation 3: From internal reporting codes to final reported numbers

The third and final translation concerned the reporting of the specific data points within the deemed material topics. Such reporting had to be consolidated up to the group level and documented in the annual report. As such, this translation primarily involved two steps. First, InduCorp's employees at the divisional and entity levels had to interpret the group sustainability team's reporting codes, to then go out and collect the data and report it to a system. Second, this data from all respective divisions and entities then had to be consolidated up to aggregated data points for the whole InduCorp group through internal reporting systems. In this, the data quality needed to be controlled for to minimise the risk for errors and ultimately maintain the trust and engagement in the translation process.

While the first step may seem relatively concrete, it was found to require significant judgement from many different actors, which was challenging. Notably, the reporting of for example emissions was often preceded by assumptions, estimations and unit conversions, suggesting a series of translation steps from the original “matter” (Latour, 1999). An additional concern was getting access to the required data in the first place, which sometimes was beyond the control of InduCorp, at the hands of their suppliers.

Some of the challenges we find in the different reporting is that we're being asked for things that actually only our suppliers can tell us. And you know, these things haven't been mandatory previously, so our suppliers don't know. So, we do find cases where we're being asked to say things about maybe 60% of our content that is purchased from somebody else rather than machined in our own factories. This entails a lot of guesswork or going to many thousands of suppliers to get information about tiny nuts and bolts that they supply us or whatever it might be. So the level of drilling back down through the supply chain to get the accurate data rather than providing guesses, which are to no use to anybody, is a big challenge. (Vice President Quality and Sustainability – BA 3)

Another challenge in the data collection process centred around the amount of manual work required. Given the immaturity of collecting several of the non-financial data points that CSRD and in turn the DMA demands, only a minority of the data collection was automated in InduCorp. This caused issues of storing the data and increased the risk of misreporting.

So now a lot of reporting is, for example, “how many litres of fuel did you use in your production?” Then someone goes to a meter, reads the figure from the meter, and that is what is reported. But you can never check it afterwards. So, that’s a bit of the difficulty with non-financial reporting - the evidence of what is reported is not always there. (Sustainability Manager – BA 2)

The findings from InduCorp thus indicate that as data is translated from “matter” to “form”, parts are lost, renewed or held intact (Latour, 1999). It is a process of both social interaction – as in the case of discussing back and forth with a supplier – and technical interaction with non-human actors, like manual meters.

The second step, ensuring that the data collected was consolidated up to group level in a manner that reflected reality as truthfully as possible, was also found to be challenging. Given the number of actors involved in this step, both human and non-human, who carried and modified each specific data point along the chain, the risk for errors and inconsistencies were seemingly high. Here, actors within InduCorp explained how they utilised internal controls to “check” the translations for apparent errors.

I do this quality check on what has been reported. How does that look versus the previous year? Are there any outliers? Are there any sort of weird movements? When the reporting is being done, entities are also able to provide a comment or provide additional explanation. So, it usually involves a bit of going back and forth with entities to understand their data and make sure that I can explain the sort of movements that Business Area 1 is making. If our energy has gone up by 20%, I need to make sure that I'm able to explain, okay, what's actually the driving factor behind this? (Sustainability Controller – BA 1)

To conclude, the third translation evidently required collaboration across the InduCorp group. The task of consolidating input from hundreds of entities to around 20 divisions, to four business areas and then to the group level, was evidently challenging. Notably, the risk of errors was large, which risked destabilising the translation network through lost trust and in turn impeded efforts. Still, measures were taken to create stability amidst the controversy (Latour, 1987), as exemplified by the various controls within InduCorp.

4.2. Disrupted chains of translation

Given the significant complexity involved in the three translation chains described, it was evident how the translation process in InduCorp, from standard to reported numbers, was fragile. While a broad network of both human and non-human actors was required to carry out these translations, it additionally helped illustrate the existence of instances when the translations could be considered disrupted (Latour, 1987, 1999). As explained in subsection 2.2.2, trust in a produced output and its underlying translation process can, according to Latour (1999), only be achieved if actors involved are able to clearly trace how knowledge is translated. Questioned trust in turn destabilises the translation network and may make its mobilisation far more difficult (Callon, 1986). Although several challenges in the process have already been brought to light, the following four subsections explore the occurrences where the chains could be considered particularly disrupted. Specifically, these related to inconsistent definitions, limited understanding of the DMA result, inadequate data systems and instances of unreliable data (see figure 2 below).

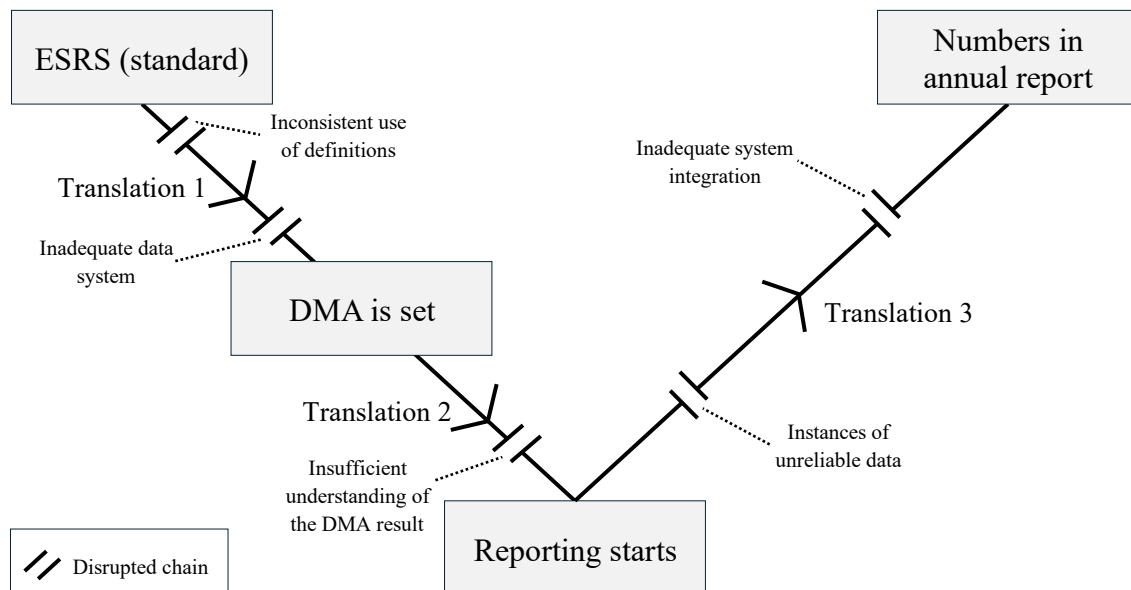


Figure 2. Instances of disrupted translation chains in InduCorp

4.2.1. Inconsistent use of definitions

Within the first translation chain, the inherent use of judgement and subjective interpretations was found to contribute to significant disruptions. When deciding on the material topics, there appeared to be recurring misconceptions as a result of inconsistent interpretations of certain definitions. In turn, these inconsistencies made it difficult for many of the interviewees to account for how parts of the assessment were performed. For instance, a seemingly fundamental understanding on the definition of risk seemed to be contested between the more sustainability and financially oriented actors.

It's about the definition sometimes. When you come from [the risk function], you make very different differentiations on what an exposure is and what the actual risk is, which is two completely different things based on vulnerabilities and controls and things like that. So, I think at the beginning, you started discussions and at some point, you realised we're not understanding each other that well. Then we had to go over the definitions, because not everyone understood risk in the same way. (Senior Risk Engineer and ERM – Group)

Although such divergences may seem natural when actors with different professional expertise collaborate, this was found to be a more general challenge within the network, caused by the ambiguous standards and limited guidance provided.

[...] We've had this discussion a lot in the DMA that people define it differently per team and per workstream. For instance, "What is the probability?". One school of thought says that if a case has happened, the probability is one, so 100%. That it can happen, it has happened. Other people intuitively want to say, "yes but it's not like it happens every day, so then we may set 25% instead". It is therefore difficult to understand what the standard-setters really mean. And we've talked about that a lot, that we must ensure that we really have the same definition in all workstreams, that everyone does it the same way. Because when we have discussed the DMA – and we have spent an enormous number of hours on it – this is where you realise that you are thinking differently. (Project Manager Sustainability – Group)

Despite working continuously with aligning actors within the network to ensure consistent action as the quote suggests, the first chain of translation appeared fragile. Several interviewed actors were not able to account for how decisions were made when the group were faced with uncertainties, and no internal guiding document was mentioned to ensure consistent methodological assumptions. This stood in contrast to the second translation chain, where several guiding documents served as enabling artifacts to combat such inconsistencies (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). While the performed double materiality assessment is a comparatively new and not as frequently occurring exercise compared to the subsequent reporting, the lack of conformity and inability to move back and forth along the translation chain, arguably caused its disruption and consequently decreased the internal trust in the outcome (Latour, 1999).

4.2.2. Limited understanding of the DMA result

Another disruption in the circulating reference was found in the second translation chain, when communicating the result of the DMA to the actors in the organisation affected by it. While it should not be expected, nor perhaps needed, that the average employee in a group the size of InduCorp's is fully informed of the outcome of the group's materiality assessment, several examples were raised where employees responsible for the reporting were unsure of why they did or did not report on certain topics. One such example was water. In InduCorp, the water consumption was highly material for one of the four business areas, but not for the others. Thus, it was concluded to not be material at a group

level but still decided that it should be voluntarily reported on. This decision caused confusion, both among those who firmly believed it should be material, and among actors in entities with no significant water use in their operations, who questioned why they still had to report on it.

If we do, for example, reporting on water, I had a discussion with one of the business controllers in the US recently that said, “why are we reporting on this? I mean, we just use it for our toilets and for washing our hands. It doesn't make sense for me to sort of track this and to report on this”. And of course, he’s right – it is quite small for most business areas of InduCorp. So, you could say, why are we tracking this? When we still have to track these lines that are less relevant to us, it sometimes just feels like a burden. (Sustainability Controller – BA 1)

A translation process perceived as “lying” due to the lack of communication, as the above-mentioned quote demonstrates, evidently destabilised the network (Latour, 1987, 1999). As previously mentioned, the mandatory nature of the reporting makes the notion of actor buy-in less important, as the obligations set on a group level are difficult to contest for the individual entity. However, the lost trust from entities in such instances can still be argued to impede the efforts made to ensure reporting accuracy and consequently affect the reliability of the output. Thus, the quote illustrates the importance of being able to cascade the outcome of both the materiality assessment as well as any other voluntary reporting efforts to the business areas and its respective entities, to ensure the engagement needed to mobilise the network efficiently (Callon, 1986).

4.2.3. Inadequate data systems and integration

The occurrence of inadequate data systems and insufficient integration along some parts of the translation process further disrupted the traceability of the translation chains in InduCorp (Latour, 1999). In this, the rigidity and immaturity of the DMA evaluation tool – the spreadsheet with materiality scores – was an apparent problem for the first translation chain to circulate. As was explained in subsection 4.1.1, the group sustainability team manually adjusted the scoring of each IRO along the dimensions of scale, scope, likelihood, severity and remediability after internal discussions and debates, with limited ability to go back and trace underlying rationales to such decisions. Given that the actors directly involved in this assessment themselves had difficulties tracking changes and associated rationales, it was clear how this became even further challenging for actors distant from the group.

But that's what we're looking into now. I've had many meetings with different suppliers about their digital solutions to move away from this Excel file. With a digital solution, the version management should be better, and you can note when you make a change or a comment why it has been changed, so that you remember more easily the changes you have done. In some cases, we have done that, but not everywhere, because it became so incredibly much for every cell. “Why is this a two [2/5 score]”?

We wouldn't be finished today if we would have done that in the existing system. (Sustainability Manager – Group)

The way inadequate data systems appeared as a problem was also found in the third translation chain, but more through an integration perspective. InduCorp's acquisition heavy strategy, that for long has been successful, namely made it difficult to standardise and conform data systems. As illustrated by an interviewee: "Only in [Business Area 3], you probably have more than 20 ERP systems" (HR & Sustainability Controller – Group (2)). It was described as simply not feasible to coordinate all entities brought into the group to use the same reporting systems.

One of the things that InduCorp is very good at in terms of its growth is acquisitions of businesses that provide synergy. So, you know, we're always taking on new businesses and clearly everyone that comes in has got a completely different system and you can't disrupt their business. Often, the cost is prohibitive so you can't say, "right, you're going to adopt a completely new suite of systems". So over time, harmonising and rationalising to common systems is of course a good thing for things like this, but sometimes it's just not practical. (Vice President Quality and Sustainability – BA 3)

With seemingly incompatible systems at play, tracing evidence from each entity became a complex request, demonstrating once again how the third translation, from matter to form, did not completely circulate (Latour, 1999). As such, it was apparent how non-human artifacts, like these data systems and tools, were indirectly given discretion over the process in a constraining way (Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016; McNally et al., 2017; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), as they disrupted the chain of translation.

4.2.4. Instances of unreliable data

The last identified occurrence of translation disruption concerned instances of unreliable data and its consequences for the third translation chain. As evidently shown, the business areas and divisions in InduCorp simply had to trust that the data they received from the entities had been collected according to the defined reporting codes. However, as mentioned in subsection 4.1.3, concerns about data availability in many cases disrupted such trust. In these situations, the interviewees explained how judgement and manual adjustments were involuntarily introduced to the process. An example of such disruption concerned estimating the effects of all company transport, which the following quote illustrates:

[...] Reporting on transport emissions is something that you either receive from the companies that you work with, and then that's ideal because they do the calculation. But if not, we must calculate manually for each machine that we transport. "What's the weight?" "What's the transport mode?" "How far does it have to go?" So that's a huge manual work. We tried to create a tool for it, but I mean, it's an Excel. It's not something that does all the calculation for you. You just still have to provide the input manually. [...] I think if you really start digging into the figures and question the

entities a bit about it, I think there's still a lot of misreporting that goes into it. (Sustainability Controller – BA 1)

Even in the cases where suppliers could provide the data, there were often a degree of uncertainty as to whether the data could be trusted or not, as illustrated in the quote below on the use of smelters:

If you go back to a supplier and say: “I don't like this smelter that you've quoted here, you know that they're a non-compliant smelter.” Then they may come back to you with a new version of the list that doesn't have that smelter on, and you've got no way of knowing. Did they just delete that row, or did they really change the supply chain? (Sustainability Controller – BA 3)

With the exercise of judgement and a lack of trust for the data quality from suppliers being consequences of limited data availability, it is noted how the third chain of translation was even further disrupted, beyond what the inadequate data systems and limited integration caused.

In sum, this section has shown how the translation chains in InduCorp experienced significant instances of disruption. In particular, inconsistent use of definitions, limited understanding of the DMA result, inadequate data systems and integration, and instances of unreliable data were the most apparent examples of such disruptions. Disrupted translation chains were further argued to be problematic given their tendency to impede the internal trust for the process and in turn made the mobilisation of the translation network far more difficult (Callon, 1986).

4.3. Chains of translation made to perform

Although the translation process within InduCorp evidently was subject to significant disruptions that put the trustworthiness of the reported figures and the process into question, it still managed to perform. In some way, actors within the translation network seemingly coped with these weak traces and disrupted chains, finding ways to still trust the process. Ultimately, the resulting DMA was viewed as representative and its associated reporting as accurate enough given the circumstances. Therefore, in contrast to the belief that circulating references only perform once completely traceable and stable (Latour, 1999), findings from InduCorp indicate how disrupted chains may still perform (Dambrin & Robson, 2011). In particular, through various ways of generating trust, the instances where the translation chains were disrupted were both stabilised and made consistent enough to work with (Chua, 1995). The remainder of this section elaborates on the identified factors that enabled such translation performance. The first two, adopted from the framework by Dambrin & Robson (2011) – a bricolage of inscriptions and methodological opacity – are complemented with the own-defined factors of local adaptation and pragmatism (see figure 3 below).

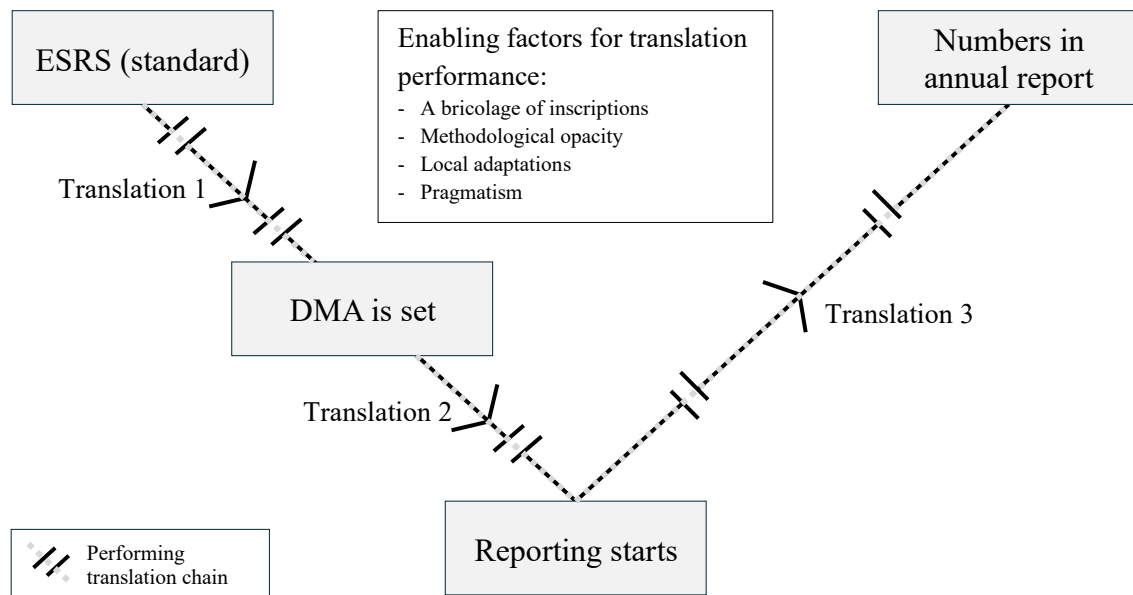


Figure 3. Translation chains made to perform in InduCorp

4.3.1. A bricolage of inscriptions

As mentioned in subsection 4.2.1, inconsistent definitions and interpretations of key concepts in the DMA were largely caused by the breadth of actors involved in the translation network. However, while this plurality caused divergences and a disrupted first translation chain, it also served as a mechanism to increase the trust for the translation process and its output. A bricolage of inscriptions or traces from different actors and information systems can in fact have such effects on the perceived legitimacy, by making the process span different ideas, experts, times and locations (Dambrin & Robson, 2011). An evident example of how such bricolage emerged in InduCorp was found in the first translation chain, where the expertise of multiple “human allies“ were drawn upon (Huikku et al., 2017). For instance, the external consultant brought about expertise, distance and impersonality to the process, while the internal subject matter experts (SMEs) could provide valuable aggregated perspectives for very specific topics across the InduCorp group. Further traces were drawn upon in the benchmarking efforts made with peers, where both formal and informal channels of communication served as a support for the DMA process. As laid out in subsection 4.1.1, the joint efforts across companies to understand how to best conduct the DMA served as an extremely valuable complement to the standards themselves. These examples of human allies involved, evidently showed how InduCorp’s DMA was formed by traces across different times and locations, both internally and externally. In turn, such a bricolage created internal trust for the output and stabilised the translation network (Dambrin & Robson, 2011).

Not only did the utilisation of multiple human allies contribute to this bricolage of inscriptions, but traces with multiple purposes were also drawn upon to create perceived

process-reliability (Huikku et al., 2017). An apparent example of this was the decision to use the ERM process to set up materiality thresholds in the DMA evaluation tool. Given its status as a proven methodology within risk management, it served as another trace in the bricolage of inscriptions, indicating how non-human actors also instilled trust (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). The below quote indicates how the ERM process contributed with such comfort:

[...] But what hasn't been decided [by the standard-setters] is which threshold values to apply. We saw it as an opportunity to really join forces and integrate it with our ERM process that identifies risks in the organisation. So that has been very successful. (Sustainability Manager – Group)

Overall, the bricolage of inscriptions and traces from various actors, created within InduCorp, served as a mechanism that strengthened the first translation chain, even though it exhibited signs of being disrupted (Dambrin & Robson, 2011). It infused trust in the process and was as such a key translation performance enabler.

4.3.2. Methodological opacity

Another factor that made the actors in InduCorp accept the translation chains, was paradoxically the inability to grasp the whole picture of how the DMA had been formed and determined. Given the amount of work needed to get acquainted with all CSRD concepts and definitions, it was natural that only a few actors within InduCorp had such an umbrella perspective. Beyond the group sustainability team of four, who were directly involved in tweaking the results in the DMA evaluation tool (the spreadsheet), very few InduCorp employees had sufficient detailed insights into how the material topics had been decided, although they were familiar with the process and not actively excluded from it. This phenomenon could thus be referred to as methodological opacity (Dambrin & Robson, 2011), meaning that actors were deprived the ability to even question the disrupted translation chains, as they may not have completely understood them as disrupted in the first place. Instead, similar to what is found by Dambrin & Robson (2011) and supported by the theorisations of Chua (1995), a sense of genuine trust for the process and the sustainability team was observed in the interviews as a consequence of such methodological opacity and perceived complexity associated with the DMA assessment.

Generally speaking, I think our Sustainability department is very skilled, based on what I hear. And then, considering that it's not law in the way that a [Nordic] lawyer is used to, it's not so clear what you should and shouldn't do in this directive. I feel that they're handling it really well. I have complete trust in them. (Corporate Counsel Compliance – Group)

As just mentioned in the previous subsection (4.3.1), the bricolage of traces from a broad range of sources could be seen to have amplified the identified occurrence of methodological opacity. Although actors may have understood how the materiality scoring had been conducted, the number of traces from different human and non-human actors, in terms of inputs and assisting discussions, were simply too many and dispersed,

across time and space, to fully comprehend (Dambrin & Robson, 2011; Hartmann, 2022; Latour, 1999). Not being fully aware of the materiality assessment process was therefore not seen as a problem but rather a relief and reasonable division of labour, as the following quote illustrates:

I do know that the effort [to produce the DMA] on my side and the people in our business area, was relatively limited. So, I'm happy with that. There's enough to focus on already. So I'm quite happy with the approach that was taken by group and the external consultant, because for us it was pretty straightforward, and also the reports we got from the internal interviews afterwards, it all made sense in terms of translating the outcome of these interviews into the DMA. (Vice President Sustainability – BA 1)

Overall, the trust in the responsible colleagues within InduCorp suggests that the occurrence of methodological opacity enabled the vast majority of the translation network to accept seemingly disrupted first and second translation chains.

4.3.3. Local adaptations

As was drawn attention to in 4.2.3, InduCorp's decentralised structure posed significant challenges when setting up an adequate, traceable information infrastructure, as the sheer number of different systems among the entities made the process more difficult to streamline and automate. However, instances were brought up where local adaptations in the consolidation process rather could be seen as a reason why the third translation chain could perform anyway. A tangible example of such adaptations concerned locally created unit conversion files.

The reporting is not always clear. For instance, if we report diesel in litres, the ones in the US would report it in gallons, so conversions are always wrong. So, together with [another business area] we made an excel, a guidance, to make the reporting easier. So, for example, if they are asking for data in kilograms per hour, we are providing a link to a converter from whatever units they have to kilogram per hour as well as a link to the topic in the intranet, where they can find the background of that reporting line. After we made this excel, it was approved by the group and got published on the intranet, so it became an official excel to improve the data quality in the group (Sustainability Manager – BA 2)

The quote illustrates an example of how an enabling artifact (Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), built as a remedy to the disrupted chain of translation due to incompatible systems and measurements on a local level, was brought up in the organisation and institutionalised as a new tool to facilitate the translation process. Similar instances were seen in the reporting process, as new systems were built to capture any evident errors and thus ensure the data quality.

So, what we did on a business area level is that we have made dashboards. We see the data in the dashboard and can immediately spot if there is some data that is not in line with previous reporting,

for example. So, we are doing some high-level checks on both the business area level, and within the respective divisions. And then we also contact entities, customers and product companies and question them about what they reported. (Sustainability Manager – BA 2)

While the traceability from matter to form sometimes was found to be affected by the immaturity and incompatibility of the reporting systems in place, this was instead found to be mitigated by individually created solutions on several levels in the organisation. Despite knowingly experiencing issues with, for instance, the storage of manually compiled data not possible to check in arrears, comfort and trust in the last translation process could instead be built (Chua, 1995), by sufficiently controlling where the chain possibly was “lying”, thus ensuring the reference to circulate (Latour, 1999).

4.3.4. Pragmatism

A recurring theme throughout all three translation processes was the network’s pragmatic approach to the DMA process and the subsequent reporting. The individual adoption of a certain mindset among several actors in the group arguably made it possible to accept all three translation chains notwithstanding their flaws. Through this mindset, actors simultaneously focused on being practical and realistic about their efforts while still opportunistically seeing InduCorp as a forerunner in sustainability reporting. While actors in InduCorp always took the appropriate actions to stay in line with not only the regulations but also the expectations of them as a leading industrial group, there was an inherent awareness that the CSRD still was immature and potentially subject to change. Thus, the mentioned wide-spread mindset within InduCorp instilled trust in that the company and all actors always acted to the best of their abilities, given what the externally imposed complexity allowed.

I mean, you can do a lot of DMAs and have a lot of wish lists, but if you do not measure upon it or you cannot measure it, it's garbage. Well, it's not garbage, but it's a lot of energy put into something that just remains on paper. So, I always like to take the pragmatic approach. Can you actually do something with it or build something to measure it? Because otherwise it's just a nice wish list. (Group Sustainability Reporting and Controlling Manager)

Knowing that the outcome of the DMA should be a result of what is deemed material for the group and not what the group already was capable of reporting on, the responsible actors tried their best to practically solve these issues while being as transparent as possible and never understate any reported figures.

[...] If you really look at what CSRD is asking and if you try to word by word have that kind of reporting in real life, that doesn't really work, at least from the beginning. So we're taking a pragmatic approach there and trying to see what the first step is, “what is the step with least resistance?”. So, we discuss with the business areas, we see, “okay, well, we can't report, for example, recycled content - how many percent of the material that comes in is recycled”. “We can't get it from suppliers like the actual data”. “Okay, can we take a pragmatic approach and apply global averages or something?” And

then, of course, being very transparent with the methodology and explaining what it is that we're calculating (Sustainability Specialist – Group)

As mentioned by the group's sustainability specialist, pragmatism and instances of applying averages are efforts recognised as mitigating potential disbelief in the process. The efforts mentioned in the quotes also show resemblance with previous research (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025), in which global averages and distance to the calculation serves to increase the trust of the output. Nevertheless, many of the most directly involved actors at the group level still seemed to be aware of the disruptions in the current processes, notwithstanding those who were subject to the methodological opacity, as previously mentioned.

But I think that's a learning curve for many companies the first years when we do it. And I hope that in the future, when the whole process needs to be more auditable and there needs to be more of a red thread that goes through it, that we can document all of this better and be more kind of structured in terms of weighing different aspects. (Sustainability Specialist – Group)

The focus was as such directed towards finding ways to manage the disruptions as effectively as possible, while acknowledging the ongoing work required to continuously improve the process. This prudent yet actionable approach is to be viewed as an instrumental reason why the actors knowingly could commit to an imperfect translation network and make it perform anyway. It also resonates well with what has been found in previous literature (Chua, 1995); that processes deemed “consistent” and “factual enough” can be made to perform through collective faith although they in fact have flaws.

In sum, this section has demonstrated how the aforementioned instances of disruptions along the translation chains in InduCorp were stabilised and perceived as consistent enough to be worked with among actors in the translation network. In particular, four main enabling factors were explained to infuse trust in the process in various ways. These included a bricolage of inscriptions, methodological opacity, local adaptations and pragmatism. Together, they allowed the respective translation chains to perform and the references to circulate despite disruptions.

5. Discussion

As has been established throughout the case study of InduCorp, the process of conducting a double materiality assessment and its associated reporting is highly complex, requiring several steps and a large network of actors. The following chapter will cover the three main insights of this study and contrast them with the previous literature. First, it is discussed how the construction of accounting processes and figures are not merely to be seen as an implementation exercise but rather constitute active translations. Second, it is addressed how these translations and their instances of significant disruptions emphasise the current issues in sustainability reporting and how one in turn still can accept and work with these disruptions. Third, while translation disruptions may create internal problems related to engagement and reporting quality, it is explored how individual and collective mobilisations of trust still can make imperfect processes perform sufficiently.

5.1. Sustainability reporting as a continuous translation exercise

The aim of this study has been to complement the currently scant qualitative financial accounting research (Himick et al., 2022; Robson et al., 2017), particularly on the topic of producing accounting figures as a social process and the associated underlying processes behind such construction. Through an examination of the seemingly difficult task of conducting and reporting upon a double materiality assessment, this study contends that the construction of sustainability reporting is not merely to be seen as an implementation process, but rather an active translation effort.

As the findings from InduCorp have shown, actors must actively and collectively translate standards into a process that makes sense in the local context (Latour, 1986). In this light, the idea of a translation network – in which ideas are spread through negotiation and interpretation and subsequently translated into action – have provided a theoretical illustration and understanding of the process' complexity in a series of translations. Importantly, this study demonstrates how the field of sustainability reporting, with its associated challenges and characteristics, requires slightly different and more extensive translations than what has previously been observed in other contexts.

An apparent example of such differences regards the continuous nature of the translations found in this study. Previous scholars have described how a translation process, if seen as impersonal and based on traces from many different sources, ultimately can become a “black box”, completely detached from the preparer network (Huikku et al., 2017). Once the rules of the game have been established, translation processes have been seen as transcending into “self-running machines”, with only inputs and outputs left to question (Hartmann, 2022; Latour, 1999). In InduCorp however, human actors were still evidently involved and tied to the DMA process, having significant influence over the outcome.

Additionally, the interviewees emphasised how the process was not completely uncontested, indicating that the rules of the game were still under development. As mentioned by the group sustainability manager during the interviews, the DMA would likely have ended up differently if conducted by a differently composed network of actors within InduCorp. Thus, in contrast to previous studies, the DMA should not be seen as a black box since the process had not yet been closed nor completely detached from the preparer network. Instead, the case of InduCorp indicates how the novelty of these sustainability assessments requires constant human interaction, beyond just the preparation phase of the translation process. Without a clear start and finish to the process, the translations in InduCorp can thus be seen as continuous. More broadly, given the significant time it took for financial reporting to become as established as it is today, sustainability reporting practices will likely continue requiring such continuous translations for years to come, especially considering the way standards in the field still rapidly change.²

Another way in which the translations in InduCorp are seen as more extensive than what previously has been observed in the literature, relates to the present study's theorisation of translation chains moving in different directions. In contrast to the original idea that such chains are constructed from bottom up, from “matter” to “form” (Latour, 1999), this study also theorises about translation chains moving from top to bottom in a reverse fashion. In the case of InduCorp, the first and second translation chains represented such top to bottom movements, where the original “form” was the ESRS which subsequently needed to be translated down to “matter” – what was truly material to report on. In turn, this matter was then translated into form again through reported, published figures, in the third translation. Viewing the process as consisting of three chains of translations in different directions theoretically illustrates the complexity involved in this process, and within the field of sustainability reporting generally, drawing attention to the multiple levels at which translations need to occur.

Overall, it is contended that the theorisation of the DMA process in InduCorp as a continuous and active translation exercise, furthers the addressed literature on the social production of reporting. When contrasted against previous literature (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017), it sheds light on how different empirical contexts demand various levels of translation activity, furthering the understanding of reporting as a social process. More practically within sustainability reporting, the theorisation of the DMA process and reporting as a series of translation chains reveals its complexity and surrounding challenges, which can be of relevance for all companies within the CSRD scope. As such the study contributes with a novel structuring and practical understanding of an empirically relevant and practically debated process.

² The recent deregulatory Omnibus package, that changed the scope and timeline for CSRD compliance, is an example of surrounding uncertainties that may require further translation efforts moving forward (European Commission, 2025).

5.2. Trusting seemingly disrupted translation processes

Having established that the process of conducting and reporting upon a DMA is a translation exercise, the findings from InduCorp further indicates how such translation chains can exhibit instances of disruption, as explained in section 4.2.

For one, inadequate data systems and integration were, similar to previous research found to be a restricting factor when examining traceability of the chains (Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016; McNally et al., 2017; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). For instance, despite having implemented a new materiality evaluation method to more systematically quantify the DMA, the capacity to track the underlying rationales and methodological assumptions behind how qualitative information had been quantified in said system was found to be insufficient to ensure a consistent and replicable result. Contrasting this with the findings by McNally et al. (2017) who conclude that aspects and nuances of a new sustainability reporting standard could be lost if it is imposed on existing accounting systems and processes, this study also shows how the same phenomena applies to new dedicated systems and processes that are underdeveloped to capture and trace the additional aspects from the start.

Moreover, the instances of unreliable data observed in InduCorp largely confirms the challenge found in previous research. In line with Troshani & Rowbottom (2024) and Kaspersen & Johansen (2016), direct measurement challenges, data derivations and manual data handling were found to disrupt the third chain of translation. While internal controls were set up to capture some of the most prominent deviations, the recurring use of judgement and inability to automate large parts of the data gathering process should still be noted as a flaw in the relatively immature field of sustainability reporting. In turn, despite an emphasised high trust in the reported figures from the interviewed sustainability controllers, such issues could to some extent still be deemed to impair the data quality and in extension the intended comparability of sustainability reports (Laine et al., 2017; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024)

Beyond the more technical challenges related to sustainability reporting, the case of InduCorp also showed how actors' different understandings of the same phenomenon disrupted the process in several parts of the translation chain. First, the inconsistent use of definitions due to divergent understandings of certain concepts evidently impeded the first translation, as there was no externally given or internally set guidance to ensure consistent practices in the double materiality assessment. For instance, to what extent something was seen as a risk in the assessment would largely depend on the actors' previous relation to the word and the own judgement involved in interpreting it. While the second translation from DMA to internal reporting codes was found to provide more thorough definitions and descriptions of how things should be interpreted and performed, this translation was instead partly disrupted by a limited understanding of the underlying rationale for why certain topics should be reported on. As such, this study not only

reinforces the need for regulators to provide clearer definitions and guidance to ensure consistency in sustainability accounting processes (Laine et al., 2017; McNally et al., 2017; Senn & Giordano-Spring, 2020), but additionally emphasises the importance for practitioners to strengthen the internal understanding of materiality assessments to more effectively mobilise the network of actors responsible for reporting on it.

Viewed more holistically, the present study extends the understanding of underlying problems in the field of sustainability reporting (Kaspersen & Johansen, 2016; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024). In particular, it illustrates how the exercise of judgement is equally prevalent in the area of sustainability reporting, broadening previous research on its use in financial accounting (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022). While this study finds evidence that the use of judgement and immature information infrastructures impedes the quality of the reported outcome, which is what several previous sustainability reporting studies have insinuated (Laine et al., 2017; McNally et al., 2017; Senn & Giordano-Spring, 2020; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), the findings from InduCorp simultaneously indicate that seemingly disrupted processes, at least internally, can be sufficiently trusted and deemed as performing (Dambrin & Robson, 2011). In this light, the findings of this study are more similar to what is found by Huxley (2025), Plante et al. (2022) and Chua (1995) – where “affective relief” and trust for the reporting is described as possible. Hence, this study provides a more nuanced perspective on the production of sustainability figures, demonstrating how it is possible for companies to instil trust in immature processes even in an ever-evolving and highly uncertain field, which will be elaborated on in the last section of this discussion.

5.3. Enabling factors for translation performance

One of the key theoretical contributions of this study concerns how seemingly complex and disrupted reporting processes can still function sufficiently when they are driven by collective and individual trust. In turn, one can wonder why this is important to understand. Why this focus on generating trust in processes when the outputs still do not represent a complete accurate picture of reality? It is contended that this is of relevance since common belief enables companies to continuously improve the work surrounding important reporting practices, even in highly uncertain and developing fields. Indeed, without the mobilised trust, it becomes inherently difficult to drive developments within the sphere of sustainability reporting beyond minimum compliance. Therefore, the way in which the present study explores how internal trust can be generated in seemingly disrupted processes thus acts as an important intermediary step towards a future of improved reporting accuracy.

In section 4.3, four enabling factors for translation performance were raised, each recognised as important for the DMA process in InduCorp. These are summarised in the table below.

Enabling factor	Brief description of the factor being materialised in InduCorp
<i>A bricolage of inscriptions*</i>	Traces from different actors and information systems increased the trust for the DMA and the subsequent reporting in InduCorp, by making the process span different ideas, experts, times and locations.
<i>Methodological opacity*</i>	Not completely understanding in detail how the DMA was set deprived actors in InduCorp the ability to question its result, while also infusing a sense of genuine trust in those responsible for it.
<i>Local adaptations</i>	An ability to adapt locally and find creative ways to utilise artifacts in the data collection process created a sense of personal discretion over the process and increased trust in the reported output by allowing actors to manage instances where the chains were “lying”.
<i>Pragmatism</i>	The collective acknowledgement within InduCorp that the DMA process was still under development, and that everyone as such were prudent and pragmatic, enabled actors to commit to a seemingly imperfect translation network and trust its outcome.

Note: * Factors originally documented by Dambrin & Robson (2011).

Table 1. Factors enabling translation performance

The first two factors, a bricolage of inscriptions and methodological opacity, are adoptions from what was observed in the study by Dambrin & Robson (2011), and later confirmed by Hartmann (2022), illustrating these factors’ generalisability. Within the setting of InduCorp, the common theme identified for these factors were their ability to infuse a sense of collective trust in the translation process. The bricolage of inscriptions created a degree of internal credibility for the DMA process since it had passed through a plethora of human and non-human actors within and outside of InduCorp. Having drawn upon several human allies and traces with multiple purposes Huikku et al. (2017), the process was internally seen as extensively conducted and thus as trustworthy (Chua, 1995). Similarly, the methodological opacity – partly introduced by the difficulty of comprehending the mentioned bricolage of traces – deprived many actors in InduCorp the ability to question how the DMA process was carried out. In turn, such opacity was also seen to be redirected towards a sense of genuine and complete trust in the sustainability team at InduCorp’s group level, who were responsible for the assessment.

The way these two factors materialised themselves in InduCorp further provides nuance on the topic of how trust can be instilled in accounting processes and figures. While previous studies theorise about how trust can be created either through elements of impersonality and distance (Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025) or through proximity and complexity (Plante et al., 2022), the present study finds evidence that both rationales can be at play simultaneously. The mentioned bricolage of traces in InduCorp brought about distance and impersonality, whereas the apparent need for human discretion and judgement in a continuous way suggested that immersing oneself in the

DMA context through proximity was equally important to capture all the detailed nuances of sustainability reporting. Additionally, the perceived complexity involved in the DMA construction also indirectly increased the perceived trustworthiness of the DMA in InduCorp, through the methodological opacity it created. As such, it is noted how actors within a sustainability reporting translation network collectively must navigate between seemingly opposing elements to facilitate trust in the process. This contrasts the previous mentioned views on the topic and addresses the call for further research by Huxley (2025) on the implications of specific expertise required in different accounting estimation contexts. Moreover, it demonstrates how this study has provided further relevance to the enabling factors of translation performance documented by Dambrin & Robson (2011).

However, although the infused trust from these two factors served to stabilise the disrupted translation chains in InduCorp, they were still not enough to make the references completely circulate (Latour, 1999). While the process on an overall level was made seemingly trustworthy, individual actors could still recognise and question instances where disruptions occurred. Therefore, it was equally important for the actors within InduCorp to be able to manage the instances where the chains were “lying” (Latour, 1999).

In this light, the latter two own-defined factors identified in this study – local adaptations and pragmatism (see table 1) – highlights just that; an individual ability for actors to manage instances of translation chain disruption. First, local adaptations created a sense of personal discretion over the DMA process, as the example of locally created dashboards and conversion files demonstrated. While actors at the divisional and entity levels in InduCorp sometimes felt disconnected from the decisions taken at the group level, they were still able to come up with innovative ways to create stability. Moreover, the widespread adoption of a pragmatic mindset within InduCorp, whereby actors were simultaneously opportunistic and realistic about their efforts, illustrates yet another way in which individual conviction enabled actors to commit to a seemingly imperfect translation network. Acknowledging that the DMA process was still under development, focus was directed towards finding ways to manage disruptions as effectively as possible, by for instance applying averages and preferring worst case scenarios over uncertain estimations. Such individual decisions, enabled by this pragmatic mindset, thus mitigated the instances where actors did not feel completely confident in the DMA process.

A common theme across the two additional factors identified is thus the role of individual discretion in reinforcing commitment and trust in the process – trust that is initially fostered by the bricolage of inscriptions and methodological opacity. Unlike previously documented factors that emphasise how trustworthiness emerges collectively and beyond individual control, these new findings suggest that personal effort can help stabilise translation chains by “controlling them” and in turn complement the trust already established. Within the context of novel standard adoption, such an ability to manage disruptions is considered crucial to enable translation processes to perform.

Consequently, these factors are to be seen as applicable and generalisable to understand how weak chains of translations can still be made to perform within the context of adopting new, uncertain reporting directives and standards, complementing the ones more generally defined by Dambrin & Robson (2011).

6. Conclusion

The recent emergence of the mandatory double materiality assessment, with relatively limited implementational guidance, has caused a lively academic debate due to its highly interpretative nature (Jørgensen et al., 2022; Oll et al., 2025; Puroila & Mäkelä, 2019; Reimsbach et al., 2020). This study took departure in this debated topic as a relevant context for which to further explore how companies practically and collectively construct financial accounting figures and reporting. Indeed, an emerging stream of literature has examined such construction of financial accounting as a social process (Barker & Schulte, 2017; Hartmann, 2022; Huikku et al., 2017; Huxley, 2025; Plante et al., 2022; Troshani & Rowbottom, 2024), but it currently lacks empirical broadness in general, and within sustainability reporting specifically. This led to the formulation of the following research question:

How do companies conduct their double materiality assessment and subsequent reporting in practice, and how is trust established in both the process and its output?

By conducting an in-depth case study on a large, listed industrial company from the Nordics – InduCorp – the process of conducting and reporting upon a DMA have been understood as highly challenging, primarily due to the novelty of the standards and their surrounding uncertainties. Using the lens of actor-network theory and applications of it, the process has been understood as requiring three chains of translations to facilitate the CSRD demands in practice: 1) from standard to DMA, 2) from DMA to internal reporting codes and 3) from data collection to final reporting. Given the many actors involved in carrying these translations, both human and non-human, it was evident how these translation chains were subject to some disruption, particularly related to inconsistent use of definitions, limited understanding of the DMA result, inadequate data systems and integration, and instances of unreliable data. Nonetheless, while the result of the translation process could be contested due to its disruptions, the translation was in its entirety still found to be performing. This was attributed to factors that generated collective and individual trust, stabilising the chains of translation and making them consistent enough to work with. Particularly, a bricolage of inscriptions, methodological opacity, local adaptations and pragmatism were found as enabling factors.

Consequently, the findings provide two notable contributions of both empirical and theoretical nature. First, this study has provided a better understanding of an empirically relevant and debated process by explaining how intra-organisational practices shape sustainability reporting outcomes. As such, we broaden the emerging qualitative accounting literature on how reporting is socially produced and present an illustrative way in which one can view such processes: namely through translations in various directions. Particularly, it is demonstrated how the field of sustainability reporting, with its

associated challenges and characteristics, requires slightly different and more extensive translations than what has previously been observed in other contexts. Given the field's rapidly evolving nature, the DMA and its reporting is contended to be an active and continuous translation process, which is deemed relevant to consider for all companies covered by the CSRD scope, especially since it reveals the significant complexities involved. As such, the study also sheds light on the frequent disruptions in these translation processes, underscoring how there is still a long way to go until true reporting accuracy can be achieved in practice within sustainability reporting.

Second, despite significant complexities and disruptions, this study shows how reporting processes still function sufficiently, even within the uncertain sustainability reporting sphere, when they are driven by collective and individual trust. The theoretical contribution of this study accordingly concerns how trust in said processes can and needs to be generated in various ways, identified as an important intermediary step towards improved reporting accuracy in the future. At the collective level, actors must ensure a balance between seemingly opposing elements to facilitate shared trust – balancing the previously separately identified elements of impersonality and distance with complexity and proximity. The study further provides nuance on the facilitation of translation performance in the context of adopting novel reporting standards. It is demonstrated how an individual ability to manage instances of translation disruption, through factors of local adaptations and pragmatism, importantly complements any trust already established collectively.

Beyond its empirical and theoretical contributions, this study also has several practical implications. As far as the authors are concerned, it is the first study to detail how a double materiality assessment and its subsequent reporting has unfolded in practice. With a growing field of practitioners affected by the new reporting directive, the insights gained from InduCorp offers concrete examples and lessons for those tasked with implementing similar processes in their own organisations. It draws attention to the challenges organisations can expect to face, and the factors deemed as crucial to fulfil both internal and regulatory expectations. Accordingly, the study also has implications for regulators and standard-setters. As ambiguous definitions and too general regulatory guidance is found to contribute to inconsistent use of methodological assumptions, regulators must find ways to reduce the number of translations needed from standards to actionable and consistent accounting processes. One way to better understand current complexities would be to engage in the formal and informal benchmarking channels that were found to serve as a crucial part of the DMA process for practitioners. Participating in these discussion forums, alongside efforts to develop more practical methodological guidance with clear definitions and thresholds, would greatly support practitioners and mitigate an emerging practice that may diverge from the standards' intended objectives.

While the study provides several implications, it is acknowledged that the findings are subject to limitations. First, as a single case study has been conducted, some of the

findings may only be applicable to the case company or companies with similar characteristics and organisational structure. Despite being new to the DMA as such, the case company already had established processes for much of the data collection and reporting required to comply with CSRD. The studied transition can thus be assumed to be less extensive than for the average company and further eased by its strong economic position. Second, limitations related to the interview sample could potentially have reduced the full understanding of the process. For instance, since the consultant who played a key role in establishing the initial DMA structure was no longer under contract, this perspective could not be obtained apart from through the delivered report. In addition, as all the interviewed subjects worked in the group function or at the business area level of the organisation, the understanding and challenges faced by employees at the divisional- and entity level was only conveyed indirectly and not through direct accounts.

As a result of the findings and its limitations, several avenues of future research are identified. For one, this thesis calls for research to broaden the practical understanding of the processes behind the CSRD reporting and the double materiality assessment as such. In this, a comparative or multiple case study could be of value to achieve a more holistic understanding of the direction in which the field is evolving. Alternatively, it could be of equal interest to contrast how a smaller company, new to sustainability reporting, adapts to CSRD, as the substantial reporting demands may be perceived as even more overwhelming. Relatedly, future research could also focus more on how companies navigate the ongoing complexity of adapting to changing requirements when constructing internal processes, as illustrated by the recent deregulatory Omnibus initiative. These are some concrete examples of how the construction of sustainability reporting as a social process can be better understood, which would further the emerging stream of qualitative accounting research that this study has aimed to address.

7. References

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8. Appendices

8.1. Appendix A. List of interviewees

Table 2. Interview details from the case company

#	Role	Date	Duration	Format
1	Sustainability Manager – Group	2025-03-05	60min	Online
2	Vice President Sustainability – Group	2025-03-11	60min	Online
3	Group Sustainability Reporting and Controlling Manager	2025-03-12	60min	Online
4	Vice President Sustainability – BA 1	2025-03-13	60min	Online
5	Project Manager Sustainability – Group	2025-03-17	60min	Online
6	Sustainability Specialist – Group	2025-03-20	60min	Online
7	HR & Sustainability Controller – Group (1)	2025-03-26	60min	Online
8	Sustainability Manager – BA 2	2025-03-28	55min	Online
9	Sustainability Controller – BA 1	2025-03-31	50min	Online
10	Vice President Quality and Sustainability – BA 3	2025-04-03	60min	Online
11	Sustainability Controller – BA 3	2025-04-03	60min	Online
12	Corporate Counsel Compliance – Group	2025-04-03	30min	Online
13	HR & Sustainability Controller – Group (2)	2025-04-03	50min	Online
14	*Sustainability Manager – Group	2025-04-04	90min	Online
15	Group Executive and International Remuneration	2025-04-09	60min	Online
16	Senior Risk Engineer and ERM – Group	2025-04-10	60min	Online
17	Group Internal Auditor	2025-04-28	40min	Online

Notes: * Follow up interview; BA = Business Area (of which InduCorp has four); Brackets with numbering, e.g., “(2)”, separate employees with the same formal job description

Table 3. Context interview details

#	Name	Role	Date	Duration	Format
1	Jenny Puroila	PhD Candidate at the Mistra Center for Sustainable Markets (Misum) and the Department of Management and Organisation (DMO) at Stockholm School of Economics (SSE)	2025-02-25	30min	Online

Notes: Jenny Puroila is co-author of the paper: “*Matter of opinion: Exploring the socio-political nature of materiality disclosures in sustainability reporting*”, deemed contextually relevant for the research subject.

8.2. Appendix B. Interview guide

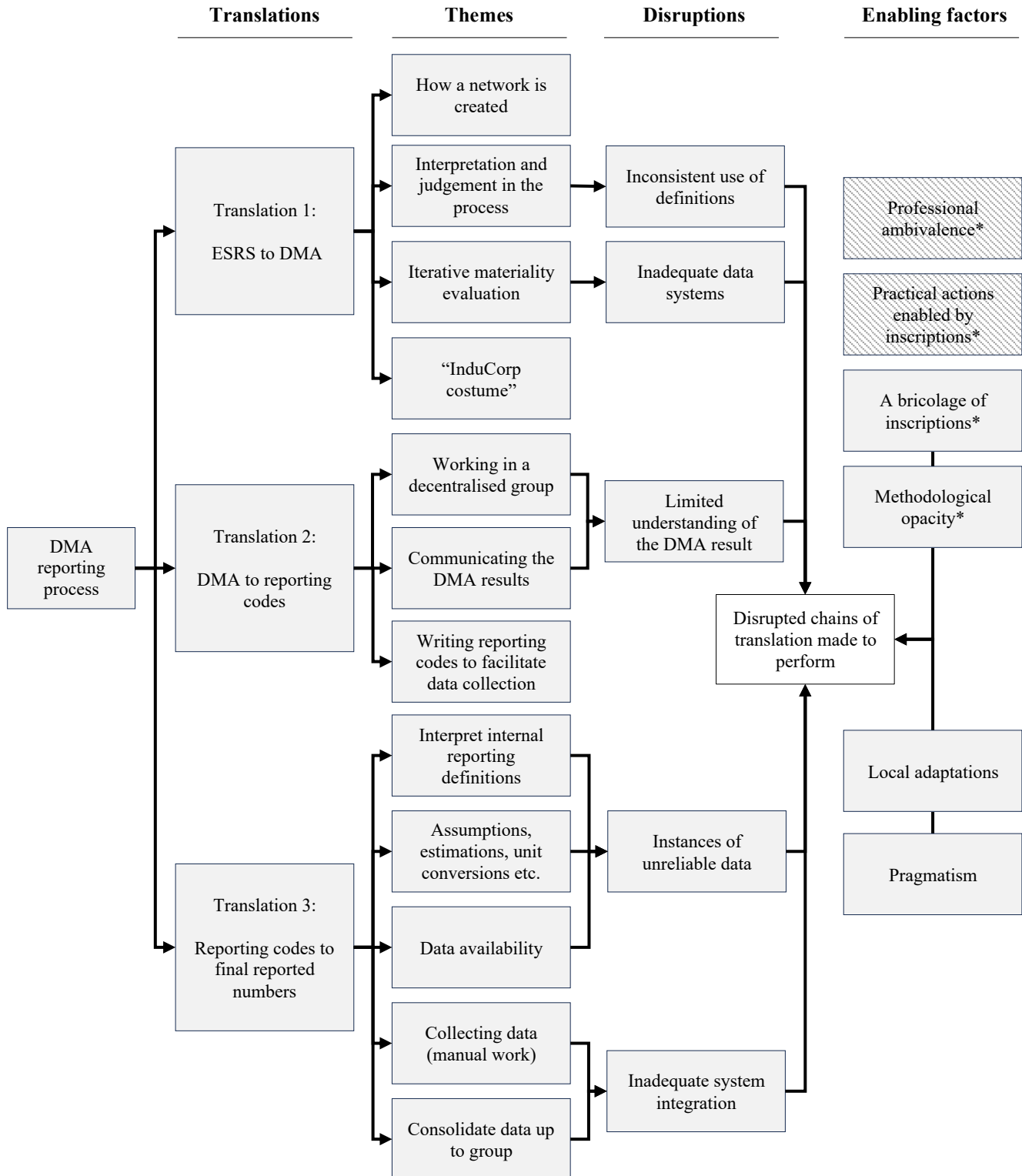
Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, following the below interview guide as a starting point, but allowing for some degree of flexibility to adjust questions based on participants' responses and their involvement in the process.

Table 4. Interview guide

Theme	Example questions / topics covered
Introduction / Formalities	- Brief summary of the thesis project and researchers - GDPR rights, anonymity, consent to record
Professional background	- Years of experience? In total at the firm? - What does your role entail in short?
CSRD	- What is your overall attitude towards CSRD and the requirements it imposes? - How far along are you in your CSRD work in terms of compliance? - What guidance have you used to ensure that your processes are in line with the new directive?
DMA	- How do you define materiality within InduCorp? - How is your role linked to the double materiality analysis? Are you involved in assessing what is essential or do you work more with reporting on what has already been set by the DMA? - How do you set your thresholds for the criteria of "severity" and "likelihood"? Are they primarily qualitative or quantitative? - Can you walk us through some concrete examples of what the work with the DMA has looked like? - How did you internally initiate a structure that gathered relevant actors to take part in the assessment? - Who did you consider as key stakeholders for the assessment. Were they part of providing input for the DMA? - Have you encountered any problems in the preparation and/or subsequent execution of the DMA? - How do you communicate the results of the DMA analysis within the organisation?
Data collection (post DMA)	- What technical tools/systems do you use for data gathering and consolidation? Are these new or adaptations to existing systems? - How do you verify data and ensure that the information published is as accurate as possible? Any internal controls? - Are there times when you must use your own judgement? What could such an example be?

8.3. Appendix C. Coding framework

Figure 4: A simplified illustration of the abductive research approach



Note: *Factors originally documented by Dambrin & Robson (2011).

Factors deemed inapplicable for the case context

8.4. Appendix D. Glossary

Table 5. Glossary of abbreviations and terms

Abbreviation/term	Name
ANT	Actor-network theory
CSRD	Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive
DMA	Double materiality assessment
EFRAG	European Financial Reporting Advisory Group
ERM	Enterprise risk management
ERP	Enterprise resource planning
ESRS	European Sustainability Reporting Standards
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
InduCorp	The case company
IRO	Impact, risk and opportunity
SME	Subject matter expert

8.5. Appendix E. AI use statement

AI tools have been used for two main purposes in this study: 1) to transcribe interviews and 2) to facilitate minor language assistance.

The transcriptions have been made through two different software. First, the interviews held via Microsoft Teams were live transcribed with the use of Microsoft Copilot after having been granted permission to do so by the interviewees. Second, as the quality of the transcriptions from this software were found to be of rather shifting quality, the free service provided by Klang.ai was also used as it proved to produce more accurate, although not flawless, transcriptions. In cases where errors in the transcriptions were suspected, the original recorded audio was used to avoid any misinterpretations or misquoting. As Klang.ai is a Swedish company operating under EU law, the company clearly states that the data storage is GDPR compliant, encrypted with TLS 1.2 or newer, and not used to train their models. Further, as the Stockholm School of Economics is an affiliate customer of Klang.ai's services, it was deemed as trustworthy to use as an assisting tool for this thesis.

In terms of language assistance, two additional AI-language models were used, ChatGPT and Perplexity. These services have not been used to analyse any findings nor to write any full sentences for the final report. They have however been used to correct spelling and grammar errors and to make minor improvements to sentence structures and word choices. To protect the confidentiality of the gathered data, no sensitive information has been used as inputs in the language models.

Altogether, the use of AI tools in this thesis have saved time on tedious tasks, allowing more focus to be directed towards the analytical aspects of the research. While the tools also contributed to an improved language use, their use was carefully limited to avoid compromising data confidentiality and academic integrity.