

Lost in Transit?

Making Sense of CSRD Scope 3 Reporting in a Logistics Subsidiary

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This thesis examines how CSRD-driven Scope 3 emissions reporting demands become interpretable, actionable, and to varying degrees stable within a local subsidiary of a multinational logistics enterprise. While CSRD increases expectations for traceable, defensible, and auditable sustainability information, Scope 3 reporting remains difficult because relevant data, methods, responsibilities, and external relationships are distributed across organizational levels, functions, and value chain actors. The study addresses this challenge by asking how organizational actors within a local subsidiary make sense of and translate CSRD-driven Scope 3 requirements, how these processes shape the development, stabilization of governance and compliance routines. Empirically, the thesis is based on a qualitative single case study of a Nordic logistics subsidiary, drawing on 24 semi-structured interviews with subsidiary, headquarters, and central function actors, complemented by internal and customer-related material. Using sensemaking as the primary analytical lens, supported by translation, ownership alignment, and routinization, the analysis shows that reporting demands become locally salient through customer requests, regulatory pressure, unclear figures, and reporting problems. Actors assemble workable responses across interfaces, but responsibility for delivery is often distributed without corresponding methodological authority. The findings show that Scope 3 governance is assembled before it is settled: some practices become repeated and consequential, while others remain fragile, person-dependent, and only partly embedded. The thesis contributes by conceptualizing this condition as uneven stabilization under distributed control.

Keywords: CSRD, Scope 3 Emission Reporting, Sensemaking, Sustainability Reporting Governance, Uneven Stabilization

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Research Gap

When a customer asks a logistics provider for emissions data linked to their purchased transports, the request likely lands with a local commercial or support employee at a subsidiary. The employee now must find the right internal specialist, retrieve a number from the relevant system, understand how that number was produced, and decide whether it is credible enough to send back to the customer. When the figure is incomplete, inconsistent, or difficult to explain, the issue quickly stops being a technical query. Instead, it becomes a question of how the organization can organize a response that is both credible and workable.

This thesis starts from a simple but underexamined point: external emission reporting demands do not enter organizations as fully formulated organizational problems. A formal requirement may state that emissions information should be reported, but it does not by itself determine how local actors understand the request, who should respond to it, or what counts as a defensible answer.

That process has become more consequential under the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD). CSRD has moved sustainability reporting closer to formal organizational governance by increasing expectations of oversight, documentation, and accountability (Hao et al., 2023; Novicka, 2024). Through the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), it also broadens the reporting architecture and raises demands on firms' internal reporting processes (Borglund et al., 2025). The practical implication is that sustainability information is increasingly expected to be traceable, defensible, and suitable for assurance. Firms have also had to prepare for these expectations whilst the directive's rollout and thresholds have continued to shift (see Appendix A).

These demands become especially difficult in relation to Scope 3 emissions. Under the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, Scope 3 refers to indirect value chain emissions outside the company's direct operational control (Ranganathan et al., 2004). In practice, this means that firms are asked to report emissions that are often characterized by boundary incompleteness (Klaaßen & Stoll, 2021), and reliance on partial or secondary data (Stenzel & Waichman, 2023). Subsequently, numbers are hard to produce and must still be interpreted, defended,

and acted upon by people who may not control the underlying activities or the methods by which they were generated.

This makes the logistics sector a particularly revealing setting. Logistics providers are deeply embedded in their customers' emissions profiles while simultaneously depending on subcontractors, carriers, and other external partners for the data that those actors rest on (Stopford, 2009). For firms in this context, emissions information plays a central role in customer dialogue, internal coordination, and the credibility of broader sustainability reporting. The problem becomes more visible in multinational enterprises (MNEs). Subsidiaries might coordinate customer requests and Scope 3 reporting demands locally, while the required emissions information and methodologies remain dispersed across organizational units and defined elsewhere (Asam et al., 2025; Farkas & Matolay, 2024). They may therefore be expected to deliver reporting outcomes without fully controlling the assumptions or methods on which those outcomes depend. What appears from the outside as a single requirement may be encountered very differently across roles, and before coordinated action is possible, actors must work out what the demand is and who is expected to carry it.

Existing investigation explains important parts of this problem, but not the full picture. Research on CSRD clarifies why reporting pressure has intensified (Borglund et al., 2025) and why accountability structures have become more demanding (Novicka, 2024). Research on Scope 3 explains why emissions measurement and coordination are difficult across value chains (Klaaßen & Stoll, 2021; Stenzel & Waichman, 2023), and why closer collaboration across suppliers, functions, and organizations is often required (Jokinen et al., 2025). What these literatures explain less clearly is how Scope 3 emissions demand becomes a shared organizational issue in the first place, how it moves between roles and functions, and how repeated handling gradually hardens into recurring ways of working.

This gap becomes especially salient once attention moves beyond dedicated sustainability roles. Zaccone (2025) examines how sustainability professionals and consultants interpret CSRD, yet Scope 3 reporting also depends on actors in sales, customer support, product related roles, and subsidiary management. The unresolved question is therefore both who interprets CSRD driven Scope 3 demands and how these interpretations travel across organizational interfaces, distribute responsibility under unequal methodological authority, and harden, or fail to harden, into recurring practice. In line with calls to examine the role of

individuals in social and environmental challenges (Gond et al., 2017), this study addresses both levels: who interprets CSRD-driven Scope 3 demands, and how those interpretations become, or fail to become, stable organizational practice.

To address this issue, this study uses sensemaking as its primary analytical lens because it helps explain how actors interpret ambiguous demands and construct workable understandings (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005). To move beyond interpretation, the study also draws on translation, ownership alignment, and routinization. Together, these concepts make it possible to trace how local understandings are reformulated across organizational interfaces (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016), assigned to particular actors under uneven conditions of control (Grossi et al., 2007), and gradually stabilized through repeated action (Reay et al., 2013). The core argument of the thesis is therefore that CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting is assembled in practice, and what develops is uneven stabilization.

1.2 Purpose and Research Question

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to explain how CSRD driven Scope 3 emissions reporting demands are interpreted and organized within a local subsidiary of an MNE. More specifically, the study examines how organizational actors make sense of ambiguous reporting demands, how those demands are translated across roles and functions, and how these processes shape the stabilization Scope 3 reporting governance.

Empirically, the study is based on a qualitative case study of a Nordic logistics subsidiary. CSRD driven pressure is examined through the local channels by which it becomes visible to subsidiary actors. It draws on interviews with subsidiary, HQ, and central actors, as well as internal customer related material, to examine how CSRD driven Scope 3 demands are experienced and acted upon across organizational positions. Our research question is as follows:

How do organizational actors within a local subsidiary of a multinational enterprise make sense of and translate CSRD driven Scope 3 emissions reporting demands, and how do these processes shape the stabilization of Scope 3 reporting governance?

1.3 Expected Contributions

This thesis makes three theoretical contributions. Most centrally, it introduces uneven stabilization as a concept for understanding governance outcomes under distributed control. Prior accounts of institutionalization describe either ceremonial adoption (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) or gradual embedding (Contrafatto, 2014). This thesis identifies an intermediate condition where governance is repeated and consequential, yet still fragile, person-dependent, and unevenly distributed across the organization.

Second, the thesis contributes to emerging research on the micro processual dynamics of sustainability regulation by showing that CSRD driven Scope 3 demands become organizational issues only when actors in specific positions render them meaningful in relation to their own work. This study therefore shows how organizational position shapes whether reporting is treated as a commercial concern, or a peripheral sustainability issue, helping explain why the same regulatory pressure is enacted unevenly within one organization.

Third, the thesis extends sensemaking research in the CSRD context by showing how local interpretations move into organized practice. Once actors arrive at a plausible understanding of a reporting demand, that understanding must travel across roles, functions, and organizational interfaces. In that movement, responsibility for delivery may be assigned without a corresponding transfer of methodological authority.

1.4 Delimitations

This thesis is delimited in four main respects. It is based on a single qualitative case study of a Nordic subsidiary within a logistics MNE, with limited and selective insight into HQ and central functions. Its empirical focus is restricted to the implementation of CSRD related processes, with particular emphasis on Scope 3 emissions, while Scope 1 and Scope 2 remain contextual background. It does not evaluate emissions accuracy, disclosure quality, or formal compliance with CSRD requirements, nor does it aim to prescribe best practice. Instead, the thesis offers an empirical and theoretical explanation of how ambiguous Scope 3 reporting demands become interpretable, actionable, and to varying degrees stable within a subsidiary context.

2. Literature Review

This review frames CSRD and Scope 3 as a governance challenge, uses institutional theory to explain why these demands matter, and connects sensemaking to translation, ownership alignment, and routinization. The thesis offers a process account of how ambiguous reporting demands move from interpretation to recurring practice.

2.1 CSRD and Scope 3 as a Governance Challenge

2.1.1 CSRD and the Governance Integration of Sustainability Reporting

CSRD expands sustainability disclosure in the European Union by shifting sustainability reporting from more voluntary practice toward mandatory obligation (Mangiuc & Kagitci, 2025) and closer integration with internal reporting systems, rather than treating it as a separate communication exercise (Farkas & Matolay, 2024). Firms therefore need more robust systems and processes for collecting, sharing, and assuring traceable sustainability information across value chain relationships (Atanasov, 2025; Jokinen et al., 2025). CSRD thus increases not only what must be reported, but also the extent to which reporting must be coordinated and governed internally.

Assurance and verification also have implications. Sharma (2025) suggests that CSRD pushes firms to formalize reporting processes, strengthen general oversight. Sustainability data must therefore become auditable when challenged. At the same time, the literature shows that implementation is difficult. Early CSRD implementation is associated with recurring challenges around data availability and cross functional coordination (Fohrer et al., 2026; Novicka, 2024). These difficulties become especially pronounced when reporting obligations extend beyond activities directly controlled by the firm. In such cases, the challenge is not only disclosure volume but governance: firms must produce information that is consistent and explainable despite fragmented systems and dispersed responsibilities. This challenge becomes especially acute in relation to Scope 3 emissions.

2.1.2 Scope 3 Emissions Reporting Under Distributed Control

Scope 3 emissions are among the most demanding aspects of corporate carbon accounting since it becomes a measurement and governance challenge. Firms must account for emissions outside their direct control, including the activities and information flows through which those emissions become visible.

This challenge becomes particularly pronounced in relation to data quality and availability. Stenzel & Waichman (2023) show that firms often lack access to complete primary data and therefore rely on combinations of estimates and industry averages. They further note that organizations frequently use hierarchical calculation approaches that combine data sources with different levels of precision. While such approaches make reporting possible across complex value chains, they also limit comparability, consistency, and confidence in the resulting figures. In practice, organizations may be able to produce emissions data without being fully able to validate its accuracy or defend its precision.

CSRD related carbon accounting creates substantial internal coordination demands, since relevant sustainability and emissions information is dispersed across systems, functions, and organizational units rather than contained within a single reporting function (Asam et al., 2025; Farkas & Matolay, 2024). Novicka (2024) finds low ESRS/CSRD reporting readiness among some European organizations, largely driven by fragmented systems and siloed data. Scope 3 governance therefore depends on the firm's ability to coordinate data collection, validation, and reporting across multiple functions rather than through a single reporting unit.

The challenge also extends beyond the organization itself. Canal Vieira et al. (2025) describe Scope 3 management as a shared responsibility issue spanning upstream and downstream supply chain actors, while Jokinen et al. (2025) show that accurate Scope 3 reporting depends on collaboration and data exchange with suppliers and other external partners. Despite growing attention to Scope 3 reporting, significant inconsistencies in disclosure remain across some organizations (Di Vaio et al., 2026). Similar external pressures therefore do not automatically produce similar reporting practices.

These difficulties are amplified in MNEs, where subsidiaries are positioned between centrally defined expectations, local operating conditions, and customer-facing responsibilities. Birkinshaw and Hood (1998) show that subsidiary roles are shaped by the interaction of HQ assignment, subsidiary initiative, and the local environment, while Kostova and Roth (2002) show that subsidiaries operate under institutional duality, facing pressures from both the parent organization and the host country context. In Scope 3 reporting, methodologies may be designed centrally while customer interaction, supplier engagement, and local data gathering occur in subsidiary operations. This creates a structural asymmetry: subsidiaries may be expected to deliver reporting outcomes even when they do not fully control the systems, standards, or external relationships on which those outcomes depend.

Taken together, the CSRD and Scope 3 literatures point to a governance challenge marked by strong reporting expectations and distributed control. The problem is not simply how to calculate emissions, but how a subsidiary organizes reporting when responsibility to deliver credible information is separated from the methodological authority to define, validate, or control it.

2.2 Institutional Theory as Contextual Framing

Institutional theory provides a useful starting point for understanding why CSRD driven reporting demands are important organizationally. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that organizations within structured fields become more similar through coercive, mimetic, and normative isomorphic pressures. A core institutional insight is that organizations incorporate socially legitimated formal structures because conformity can enhance legitimacy and access to resources, even when those structures are only loosely coupled to everyday work (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). From this perspective, CSRD creates coercive expectations that firms cannot easily ignore. This helps explain why firms increasingly formalize sustainability reporting by embedding it within organizational control and governance structures.

However, institutional pressure is only a partial explanation. Meyer & Rowan (1977) argue that “organizations that reflect institutional rules tend to buffer their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled” (p. 341). This is highly relevant to CSRD because reporting roles and procedures may signal a response to external pressure, but do not explain how sustainability information is actually interpreted and made

workable in practice. This limitation becomes more pronounced in relation to Scope 3. Classical neo institutional arguments suggest that organizations in structured fields may become more alike over time through isomorphic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Yet this expectation is weaker where legitimate templates for action remain unsettled. Under CSRD and related Scope 3 standards, reporting is still marked by uncertainty around category boundaries and calculation methods (Asam et al., 2025; Fohrer et al., 2026). In such conditions, it is difficult to assume that firms are simply imitating settled best practice. Here, Scandinavian institutionalism becomes useful in a bounded way. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) and Sahlin-Andersson (1996) show that organizational ideas are reinterpreted as they move across settings, rather than copied intact. Røvik (2016) further specifies this process through translation rules such as “copying, addition, omission, and alteration” (p. 296). This is especially relevant where Scope 3 reporting demands move across multiple interfaces, from regulation to firm, and from HQ to subsidiaries.

Even so, institutional theory is not sufficient as the main lens for the present study. It explains why pressure exists and why formal arrangements are sought, but the theory is less suitable to explain how actors inside a subsidiary interpret underdetermined demands and decide what they mean in their own work. For that, a more explicitly micro-processual lens is required. Institutional theory therefore functions here as contextual framing: it explains why the issue matters, but not how it becomes actionable in everyday organizational life.

2.3 Micro Processual Foundations of Reporting Response

2.3.1 Sensemaking as the Primary Analytical Lens

To explain how ambiguous reporting demands become meaningful inside the organization, this study uses sensemaking as its primary analytical lens. We argue that sensemaking, as a microfoundation of institutions (Greenwood et al., 2020), helps explain how actors interpret ambiguous demands and construct plausible understandings that allow subsequent action (Weick et al., 2005). Although sensemaking lacks a single unified definition (see Maitlis & Christianson, 2014), this study draws on the perspective that “sensemaking refers to processes of meaning construction whereby people interpret events and issues within and outside of their organizations that are somehow surprising, complex, or confusing to them” (Cornelissen, 2012, p. 118). Sensemaking arises when organizational members encounter

ambiguity or disruption and attempt to understand what is happening by extracting and interpreting cues from their environment (Weick, 1995). In CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting, this lens provides the perspective that reporting demands do not arrive at the subsidiary as a fully settled routine. Instead, we argue that they first need to be interpreted and rendered meaningful in local practice.

In a CSRD context, the central issue is how actors determine what the reporting demand is, what it requires, and how it relates to their responsibilities. Formal requirements become actionable only once actors interpret what they mean for existing work, responsibility, and organizational priority. Sensemaking therefore shifts the attention from formal adoption to how actors construct workable understandings of new demands. For the present study, this process must be understood as socially situated and role dependent. Interruptions trigger sensemaking (Weick, 1995), while plausible accounts help actors handle ambiguity and act collectively (Maitlis, 2005). Sensemaking research therefore emphasizes that actors actively interpret cues, construct plausible accounts, and enact the environments they seek to understand (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). This is particularly important in Scope 3 reporting, which cuts across functions and hierarchical levels. Actors occupying different positions may interpret the same requirement differently and still need to coordinate around it. Balogun and Johnson (2005) show that change recipients often interpret change through lateral conversations and informal exchanges, especially when formal roles and responsibilities remain unresolved. In the context of Scope 3, this suggests that actors may rely on colleagues and prior cases to work out what reporting requires in practice.

Interpretive variation is also likely to be systematic rather than random. Actors encounter reporting demands from different organizational positions and with different forms of expertise and exposure. Preuss et al. (2024) show that actors positioned differently in global supply chains may develop systematically different understandings of sustainability issues and appropriate responses. Zaccone (2025) argues that CSRD can produce distinct sensemaking pathways depending on actors' professional roles and prior reporting experience, with some interpreting new requirements as opportunity or validation and others as disruption or organizational shock. Applied to Scope 3 reporting, this suggests that concepts such as responsibility and completeness may be understood differently by actors depending on position or roles. This is especially relevant in a subsidiary setting, where HQ methodologies, customer requests and local operating conditions intersect. The subsidiary can

therefore be seen as a site of execution, where multiple expectations must be interpreted and reconciled. Under such conditions, implementation of CSRD reporting requirements is more plausibly understood as an ongoing interpretive process than as a straightforward rollout.

To structure the analysis, this study uses Weick's enactment, selection, and retention vocabulary as an iterative process rather than a linear stage model. Sensemaking begins when ongoing organizational circumstances are experienced as disrupted or no longer intelligible. Such changes become organizationally consequential only through enactment, where actors notice disturbances, extract cues, and ask, "what's going on here?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). Selection then involves a retrospective effort to make those cues coherent by asking, "what's the story here?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 410) and choosing among competing interpretations that can guide organizational responses. Retention refers to the understandings and responses that are preserved as plausible and reusable, prompting the question, "what do I do next?" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). What is retained is shaped by organizational identity and, in turn, feeds back into later enactment and selection.

Used in this way, sensemaking does not imply that ambiguity disappears. Rather, it suggests that actors construct interpretations that are sufficiently plausible to move work forward, even if those interpretations remain provisional and open to revision. This makes sensemaking particularly suitable for studying CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting, where there are no clear institutionalized processes and organizational responses must be constructed based on complex demands.

2.3.2 From Interpretation to Organizational Practice: Translation, Ownership Alignment, and Routinization

If sensemaking explains how actors interpret ambiguity, a further question follows: how do those interpretations become organized and stabilized in practice? Sensemaking remains the primary lens in this thesis because it captures how actors notice equivocal demands, construct plausible responses, and orient action where meanings are unsettled (Weick et al., 2005). However, sensemaking alone does not explain how interpretations move across settings, how work becomes distributed, or how provisional responses endure. To address this, the thesis draws on three additional concepts that extend the sensemaking lens: translation, ownership alignment, and routinization. Together, they clarify how local understandings are

reformulated across contexts (Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016), distributed through uneven control (Grossi et al., 2007), and transformed in recurring practice (Reay et al., 2013).

Translation is useful to understand that Scope 3 reporting demands do not enter organizations as complete templates. Drawing on Scandinavian institutionalism, translation shifts attention from transmission of a demand to reformulation of the demand. Wæraas and Nielsen (2016) claim that “ideas and models are adapted to local contexts as they travel across time and space” (p. 246). This is analytically distinct from sensemaking: sensemaking explains how actors render equivocal demands intelligible in their immediate context, whereas translation explains how those situated interpretations are carried across organizational interfaces and made workable for others. This is particularly relevant in multinational settings, where reporting demands move not only from regulation to firm or from HQ to subsidiary, but also within the organization across various roles. Wæraas and Nielsen (2016) note that such intra-organizational translation, including the role of boundary spanning translators, remains comparatively underexplored in Scandinavian institutionalism. However, Gutierrez-Huerter O et al. (2020) extend this research on translation in MNEs by theorizing the micro-processes through which an HQ initiated CSRD reporting practice is translated in foreign subsidiaries. Their study shows that such practices may be introduced through HQ initiatives, yet subsidiary actors “are not passive adopters but rather active translators who can, intentionally or not, modify practices” (p. 391). Rather, they interpret, adapt and, in some cases, negotiate locally grounded arrangements with HQ. For the present study, this suggests that translation is less about downward adaptation, but rather how locally constructed understandings may be reformulated in ways that central actors can recognize and support. This matters for Scope 3 reporting because the demand does not arrive as a finished organizational script. Translation therefore helps explain why open questions around data and validation may produce uneven local arrangements rather than uniform implementation.

A second issue concerns how responsibility is distributed once Scope 3 demands enter the organization. Grossi et al. (2007) show that responsibility depends on task allocation and organizational structure, which is important since Scope 3 reporting work often spans functions and reporting lines. Local actors may therefore be expected to deliver reporting answers without controlling the methods or validation procedures behind them. In Scope 3 reporting, responsibility and authority should therefore not be assumed to coincide.

In multinational settings, this separation becomes more politically charged. Local units may carry delivery obligations, while stronger control over standards and formal methodologies remains elsewhere. Kovesnikov et al. (2017) show that HQ and subsidiary relations are shaped through struggles over control, autonomy, and legitimacy. This means that authority, in a broader organizational and political sense, is not only formally allocated, but also negotiated through whose interpretations and claims become recognized as legitimate. Power, understood as control over recognition, therefore helps explain why responsibility may be placed locally while authority remains partially centralized. This also has implications for accountability. Grossi et al. (2007) distinguish accountability from other forms of responsibility by showing that an actor can be “causally responsible for some failure without actually being accountable” (p. 228), particularly where tasks are delegated within an organization structure. However, responsibility, authority, and accountability may also align. This thesis defines such alignment as ownership: when an actor, role, or function is expected to deliver the output, has methodological authority to make or validate the decisions behind it, and can be held answerable for the result (Doebeli et al., 2011). Huising and Silbey (2021) show that accountability infrastructures distribute compliance work across the full organization, making compliance a pragmatic and interpretive process rather than a purely mechanical one. Pérezts & Picard (2015) similarly highlight that compliance cannot be understood as blind execution of a fixed script but must be enacted through situated interpretive work. Taken together, these studies suggest that Scope 3 governance cannot be understood through formal allocation alone. Responsibility may be assigned, yet the methodological authority to validate numbers, resolve uncertainty, or define acceptable methods may remain elsewhere.

Even when responsibility is provisionally established, governance remains fragile unless they become organizational routines. Retention explains how certain interpretations and response patterns are preserved (Weick et al., 2005) for future Scope 3 reporting episodes, but it does not by itself imply that these patterns have become routinized. Institutionalism research suggests a pattern on how to reach routinization where individual actions become habitualized into taken for granted collective meaning over time (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Reay et al. (2013) add to Berger & Luckmann’s (1967) description of the institutionalization process by explaining how ideas are transformed into new practices. They show that meanings of new practices first develop individually and are then refined when collective meanings are created. They also argue that managers can facilitate this process through

meetings and discussions. As repeated actions become more stabilized, they form routines, defined as “the patterns of thought and action which are habitually adopted by groups of individuals” (Burns & Scapens, 2000, p. 6). In this thesis, we describe this process of recurring activities as routinization to conceptualize the outcome of this pattern (Burns & Scapens, 2000). Routinization is used to explain the degree to which Scope 3 reporting practices have become embedded such that actors no longer reconstruct the process from scratch each time.

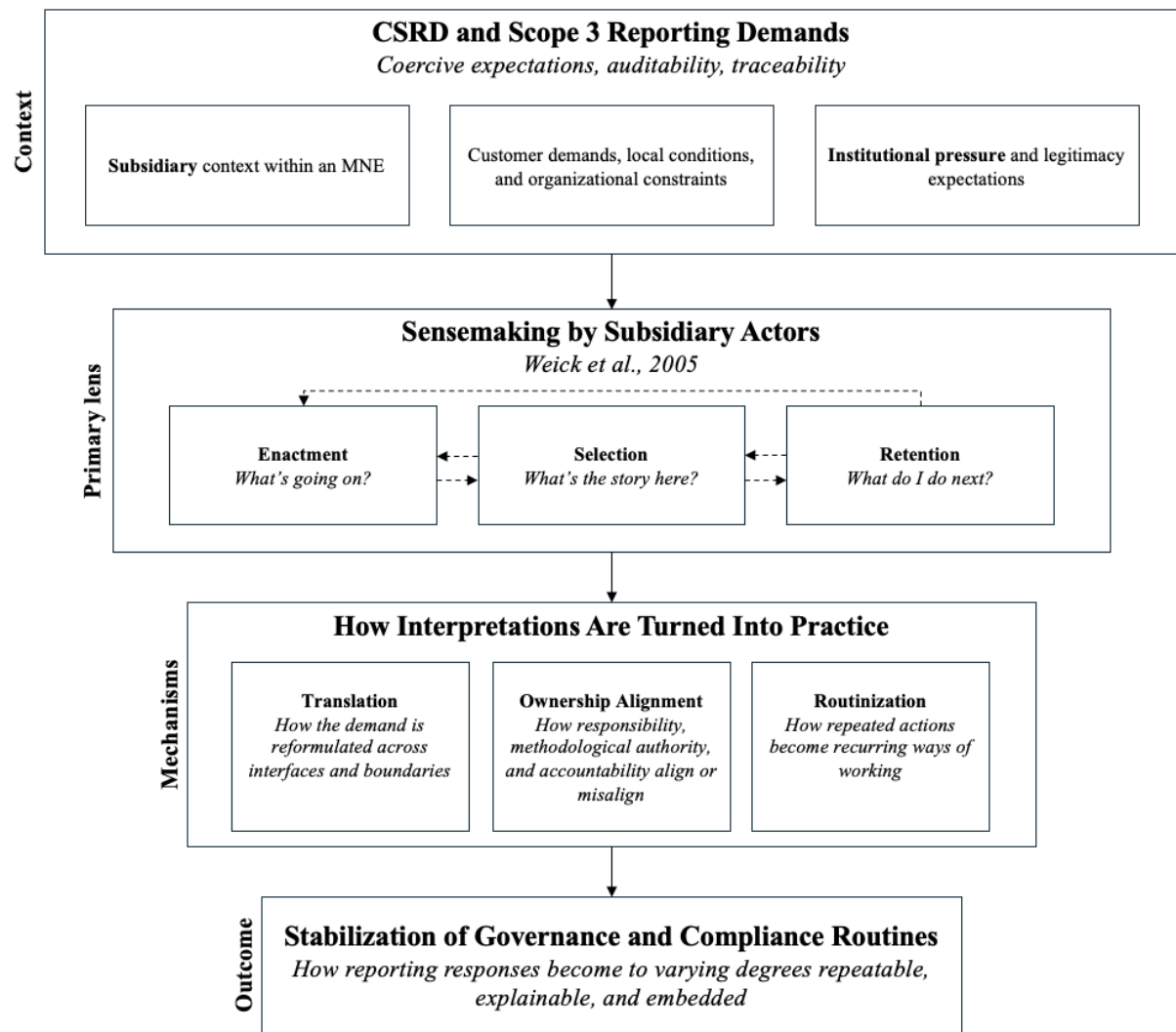
Research on sustainability reporting supports this view. Contrafatto (2014) shows how reporting becomes more institutionalized when shared meanings are developed, practices are made workable, and reinforcing structures are established. Tarquinio and Xhindole (2022) similarly highlight how sustainability reporting becomes institutionalized through sustained integration into management practice, while Wickert and Risi (2019) demonstrate that such embedding depends not only on formal structures, but also on the day-to-day work where actors interpret new expectations into actionable practices. Routinization therefore marks the point at which governance becomes less dependent on ad hoc improvisation and more anchored in recurring patterns.

At the same time, such stabilization of routines is unlikely to be uniform. When data, methods, and governance responsibilities remain fragmented, new reporting practices are likely to develop unevenly rather than uniformly (Fohrer et al., 2026; Moseley & Charnley, 2014). Stabilization is also gradual. Shared meanings, rules, routines, and reinforcing structures do not emerge at once, but develop over time. Contrafatto (2014) captures this by showing how reporting similar to CSRD, “from its first introduction, has modified and developed to become institutionalized” through “a recursive and progressive process” (p. 414). Translation, ownership alignment, and routinization help capture this uneven process without displacing sensemaking from the center of the analysis. Ambiguous demands are first made meaningful enough for action, then reformulated across organizational sites, distributed through structures where obligations and control may not align, and only gradually embedded through repeated use. CSRD driven Scope 3 governance is therefore best understood as an ongoing organizational accomplishment.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This thesis understands CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting as an external regulatory demand that creates ambiguity and makes distributed control visible within the subsidiary. Institutional pressure explains why the issue becomes important, while the main explanatory focus is on how actors inside the subsidiary make the demand actionable and subsequently, to varying degrees, stabilized. The framework in Figure 1 therefore places sensemaking at the center. Actors first interpret what Scope 3 reporting means for their own work, and these interpretations are then turned into organizational practice through three connected processes: translation, ownership alignment, and routinization. This conceptual framework helps us explain how actors construct plausible interpretations under ambiguity, how those interpretations travel across organizational interfaces, how responsibility is allocated under unequal authority, and why some responses become to varying degrees embedded. Translation, ownership alignment, and routinization are therefore not separate theoretical additions, but mechanisms that explain how sensemaking moves into organizational practice.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



3. Methodology

This chapter explains how the study was designed, how empirical material was generated and analyzed, and how the trustworthiness of the findings was assessed. The study focuses on sensemaking under ambiguity, and the methodological choices were therefore designed to capture how CSRD Scope 3 reporting demands are interpreted and how processes to varying degrees can shape stabilization.

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Research Approach and Methodological Fit

The study is grounded in a constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology (Bell et al., 2022). Organizational reality is therefore approached as socially produced through interaction and practical engagement rather than as a fixed set of objective facts. We take the stance that organizational meanings are fluid and dynamic (Camargo-Borges & Rasera, 2013), and participants' understandings of reality may differ from those of the researcher (Bell et al., 2022). This position aligns with the research question, since the study examines how different actors define what new CSRD reporting demands mean, how responsibility is allocated, and how these understandings become embedded in everyday work.

A qualitative design was appropriate because it enabled close engagement with participants' subjective meanings and situated experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Flick, 2009), which supported analysis of ambiguity and coordination in context. Existing research on CSRD and sustainability reporting has largely focused on reporting requirements, outcomes, and technical challenges (for example Atanasov, 2025; Fohrer et al., 2026; Jokinen et al., 2025). While valuable, it offers limited insight into how requirements are interpreted inside organizations. As an extension of Zaccone's (2025) research, this thesis is concerned with how meaning is formed and acted upon under conditions of uncertainty where qualitative inquiry with front-line employees offers the necessary depth.

Furthermore, an abductive approach was followed (Bell et al., 2022), because the study examined an emerging phenomenon where existing CSRD literature did not fully explain the local organizational processes observed in the case. While prior research clarifies the formal

requirements and broader governance implications of CSRD and Scope 3 reporting, the empirical material revealed tensions around uncertainty, ownership, and sufficient action at subsidiary level. The analysis moved iteratively between empirical observations and theory in order to refine and extend these existing explanations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) and to transform these surprising observations into plausible explanations (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013; Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021).

3.1.2 Single Case Study Design

The study adopts a holistic single case study design (Yin, 2003), which was suitable because CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting is experienced as an organizational process shaped by its broader implementation context. The phenomenon therefore needed to be examined within its organizational context, making a single case study suitable for analyzing interdependent tensions through depth and contextual sensitivity (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The purpose of the study is analytical generalization through careful interpretation of a context in which governance routines are still emerging under ambiguity.

The primary unit of analysis is a Nordic subsidiary of a MNE as the organizational setting within which responses to CSRD driven Scope 3 requirements are studied. More specifically, the focus is on the organizational actors within that subsidiary who interpret, coordinate, and operationalize those demands. Selected actors from HQ and central functions were also included where access allowed, but they were not treated as separate analytical units. Instead, they were approached as part of the wider organizational context to gain nuance to the subsidiary. Furthermore, direct customer access was not available. Customer demands were therefore incorporated through interviewees' accounts and customer related material, including tenders and emails. This was consistent with the analytical focus: how subsidiary actors perceived and responded to external pressure.

3.1.3 Case Selection

The case organization was selected from the logistics and supply chain sector, which is particularly exposed to Scope 3 reporting demands. A large logistics firm was chosen because it provided access to several organizational levels involved in sustainability reporting and related coordination processes. This made it possible to examine how reporting demands

were interpreted across hierarchical and functional positions, and how a subsidiary navigated expectations from HQ, customers, and regulation at the same time.

Access to the firm was facilitated through the authors' professional networks. After contact was established with the managing director (MD) of the local subsidiary, a pilot interview was conducted. That interview indicated that the organization was "feeling uncertain about the CSRD driven Scope 3 requirements and how they should handle the reporting". The firm was therefore selected because access was possible, it combined sector relevance, observable organizational change, and a multinational structure in which local actors had to translate global demands into practice. These features made it a strong case for examining how Scope 3 governance is interpreted and gradually stabilized. Prior observations from the author were not used as evidence but served as empirical prompts that motivated deeper inquiry (Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021).

3.1.4 Sampling and Interviewee Profile

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted (Bell et al., 2022) where the aim was analytical variation across roles involved in, or affected by, CSRD driven Scope 3 work. In total, 24 interviews were conducted, including the pilot interview with the MD, where 20 of the interviews were carried out with subsidiary level actors across functions linked to customer support, product specialists and sales. The remaining four were conducted with HQ and central function actors to clarify the expectations, standards, and support structures surrounding the subsidiary's work. The sample was approximately balanced in terms of gender, with a near equal distribution of male and female respondents. The purpose of the sampling strategy was to secure analytically relevant variation in how similar reporting demands were interpreted across roles and organizational levels, while avoiding a gender biased sample. In practice, the sampling process combined purposive and snowball elements (Bell et al., 2022). One author's prior organizational experience supported access to some interviewees, and some interviewees recommended other individuals that would fit the study. This created a partly inherent circularity in abductive sampling where prior theoretical understanding shaped inclusion criteria, while inclusion shaped theory. Although access developed gradually, inclusion remained guided by analytical criteria, especially role relevance and involvement in Scope 3 related work.

All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any time. Both the organization and individual participants were anonymized to support openness. While role position is analytically important for understanding variation in interpretations, roles are reported using standardized industry titles to reduce the risk of identifying the firm. Anonymization reduced the risk of formal or defensive responses and instead encouraged more reflective, experience-based accounts. Table 1 summarizes the interview sample, while Appendix B shows how each role is related.

Table 1. Overview of Interviewees by Position, Location, and Characteristics

#	ID	Position	Position description	Location	Years in company	Gender	Date	Interview length (min)
1	MD01	MD	Managing Director	Nordic subs.	22	F	11/02/2026	32
2	SM01	Senior mgmnt.	Commercial Director	Nordic subs.	11	F	16/3/2026	36
3	SM02	Senior mgmnt.	Customer Support Director	Nordic subs.	19	F	6/3/2026	35
4	SM03	Senior mgmnt.	Sustainability Product Owner	Headquarters	9	M	12/3/2026	32
5	SM04	Senior mgmnt.	Sustainability Product Owner	Central function	27	F	10/3/2026	45
6	MM01	Middle mgmnt.	Administrative Sales Manager	Nordic subs.	20	F	4/3/2026	44
7	MM02	Middle mgmnt.	Central Sustainability Manager	Headquarters	1	F	13/3/2026	60
8	MM03	Middle mgmnt.	Customer Support Manager	Nordic subs.	11	F	4/3/2026	39
9	MM04	Middle mgmnt.	Environment & Safety specialist	Nordic subs.	10	M	2/3/2026	41
10	MM05	Middle mgmnt.	Key Account Administrative Sales Manager	Nordic subs.	20	M	5/3/2026	52
11	MM06	Middle mgmnt.	Product Manager	Nordic subs.	5	M	2/3/2026	36
12	MM07	Middle mgmnt.	Product Operations Manager	Nordic subs.	4	M	3/3/2026	48
13	MM08	Middle mgmnt.	Product Sustainability Manager	Central function	5	M	10/3/2026	36
14	FE01	Frontline empl.	Account Manager	Nordic subs.	1	M	2/3/2026	39
15	FE02	Frontline empl.	Account Manager	Nordic subs.	20	M	4/3/2026	50
16	FE03	Frontline empl.	Account Manager	Nordic subs.	4	F	10/3/2026	34
17	FE04	Frontline empl.	Administrative Sales	Nordic subs.	8	M	3/3/2026	39
18	FE05	Frontline empl.	Administrative Sales	Nordic subs.	5	M	5/3/2026	39
19	FE06	Frontline empl.	Customer Support	Nordic subs.	2	F	5/3/2026	41
20	FE07	Frontline empl.	Global Account Manager	Nordic subs.	20	F	12/3/2026	30
21	FE08	Frontline empl.	Global Account Manager	Nordic subs.	8	M	4/3/2026	32
22	FE09	Frontline empl.	Global Key Account Manager	Nordic subs.	9	F	6/3/2026	51
23	FE10	Frontline empl.	Product Specialist	Nordic subs.	11	M	3/3/2026	43
24	FE11	Frontline empl.	Product Specialist	Nordic subs.	7	M	5/3/2026	49

3.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they let participants describe their understandings and experiences in their own words, while still allowing comparison across interviews (Bell et al., 2022). This fits a study of sensemaking and translation, where rigid standardization could have obscured how actors framed the issue themselves.

Several interview guides were developed to be adapted to interviewees' positions and preferred language, but the main themes and topics remained the same (see Appendix C). The

guides consisted mainly of open ended and probing questions and served as flexible support rather than fixed scripts and were refined iteratively as the abductive analysis progressed and the analytical focus became sharper.

Of the 24 interviews, 14 interviews with members of the Nordic subsidiary were conducted at the company's office, while the remaining 10 were conducted through Microsoft Teams.

Virtual interviewing improves access and makes it possible to include geographically dispersed participants with limited availability, and the issue of non-verbal cues (Bell et al., 2022) was mitigated by using cameras for every virtual interview. Before each interview, participants received information about the general topic of the study, but not a detailed list of themes or questions. The aim was to reduce priming and instead allow participants to define what they considered relevant or problematic in relation to CSRD Scope 3 requirements. Both authors attended all interviews and alternated between leading and note taking, which improved clarification, captured nuance, and reduced early interpretive bias (Bell et al., 2022). After each interview, notes were compared directly and used alongside the transcripts in the later analysis.

The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted in Swedish or English depending on participant preference. They were transcribed and first analyzed in the original language. Swedish quotations were translated only after analysis to preserve source language nuance for as long as possible (Abfalter et al., 2020). Interviews conducted through Teams were transcribed using the platform's transcription function, while interviews conducted at the office were transcribed using Klang.ai. All transcripts were reviewed for accuracy, and all recordings were stored securely on a password protected device accessible only to the authors.

Furthermore, interview transcripts constituted the primary analytical dataset. In addition, the study drew on emails and customer tender documents to contextualize interviewees' accounts of customer demands. The company's annual report, meetings with product specialists, and internal product demonstrations were used primarily for contextual familiarization and for strengthening the researchers' understanding of the firm's offerings and reporting environment (see Table 2). These materials supported interpretation, but they did not replace interviews as the main source of evidence. Non-interview material was not coded as an independent dataset equal to interviews, but it was used to triangulate the existence and

character of customer reporting demands, clarify process descriptions, and check whether interview accounts corresponded with documented request and response situations. Data collection ended when additional interviews elaborated existing themes rather than expanding the conceptual range relevant to the research question (Bell et al., 2022).

Table 2. Overview of Data Sources

Type of data	Description	Timeframe		Quantity	Use in the analysis
Interviews	23 semi-structured interviews + 1 pilot interview with MD; between 30 and 60 minutes each	11/2/2026	27/3/2026	299 pages	To capture the role of CSRD scope 3-related sensemaking in a subsidiary within an MNE
Emails	Internal discussions between subsidiary and emissions reporting team. External discussions between subsidiary and customers	3/1/2025	8/4/2026	Approx. 10 emails	Gather an understanding of communication flows and timeframes
Customer tender files	Customer demands of emissions data in early tender files	12/3/2026		1 excel document	Gather an understanding of a large customers integrated emissions reporting data requests before signed contract
Annual report	Annual & sustainability report published in 2026 of the case company	8/2/2026		185 pages	Explanatory document for current sustainability investments
Meetings	Product specific information	11/2/2026	12/2/2026		
Internal product demos	Demonstration of emissions visibility tool	12/3/2026			

3.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed an abductive logic, moving iteratively between surprising empirical observations (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013; Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021) and theoretical perspectives to develop a plausible and well-grounded explanation of the phenomenon (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This was appropriate because several empirical observations extended prior literature, especially the extent to which CSRD Scope 3 related regulatory work is shaped by ambiguity, uneven awareness, and distributed delivery responsibility.

The analysis began with repeated readings of the interview transcripts to build familiarity with the material and identify patterns, tensions, and anomalies (Sætre & Van De Ven, 2021). Particular attention was paid to statements that revealed unexpected organizational practices, since such observations guided subsequent rounds of interpretation. After initial familiarization, the data were coded using a Gioia inspired approach (Gioia et al., 2013). In the first step, first order codes were developed close to participants' language using emic categories (Van Maanen, 1979). This stage remained deliberately descriptive and aimed to preserve how interviewees themselves understood the reporting challenges they faced. Coding was supported by established theme identification techniques, including repetitions

and cross interview similarities and differences (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Our data coding was iterative, moving between codes and transcripts through several cycles of scrutiny, modification, and refinement.

In the second step, the first order codes were compared and clustered into broader second order themes. At this stage, the analysis became more interpretive. The aim was not only to summarize participants' accounts, but to develop a conceptual interpretation of the processes shaping them through abductive reasoning (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). We revisited the literature and iteratively compared emerging patterns with concepts such as sensemaking, translation, ownership alignment, and routinization to sharpen the conceptual labels while preserving their grounding in the empirical material. This helped us identify which themes were theoretically explained and which required further development, particularly why some Scope 3 reporting practices became reusable while others remained ad hoc.

In the third step, the second order themes were synthesized into five aggregate dimensions and tensions that captured the main empirical patterns in the case. These dimensions structured the findings in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, they were analytically recombined through the process logic of enactment, selection, retention, and from interpretation to uneven stabilization, which informed the development of four propositions.

Because the study is based primarily on interviews, routines are examined through participants' accounts of recurring organizational arrangements, supported by contextual documents rather than through direct observation of behavior. The analysis therefore does not claim to capture routines as fully settled facts, but as organizational patterns that actors perceive as increasingly repeated, expected, and taken for granted.

To strengthen procedural transparency, coding structures and analytical interpretations were discussed and revised jointly. Table 3 shows first order codes that are translated from representative statements, second order themes, and aggregate dimensions/tensions. Selected quotations are presented in Chapter 4, while further examples of representative quotes are provided in Appendix D.

Table 3. Data Structure

First Order Code	Second Order Code	Aggregate Dimensions (Tensions)
Contact with emissions reporting depends on role exposure and customer contact	Role dependent awareness and exposure to CSRD and Scope 3	Regulatory pressure demands precise meaning, but local actors still interpret what reporting is actually for
CSRD is recognized superficially or not at all		
Actors know reporting exists but do not know why, how, or for whom it is used	Unsettled purpose and weak interpretive resources	External demand advances faster than internal adaptation and preparedness
Actors seek basic guidance from managers or colleagues because there is no shared starting point		
Sustainability knowledge is insufficient to make reporting part of core work		Customer requests activate reporting before internal process maturity
Demand intensity varies across customers and teams		
Expected growth in demand has not yet triggered process planning	Customer requests activate reporting before internal process maturity	Reporting responses are reconstructed through social process knowledge
Key accounts and larger customers create more complex and frequent reporting demand		
Reporting work starts when the customer asks		Translation work bridges customer formats and internal templates
Actors find the process by asking around		
Handling is iterative and time consuming		Delivery responsibility is separated from methodological authority
Process knowledge is person dependent and lost through role changes		
Customer formats must be translated into internal templates	Internal templates	Handoffs weaken certainty and make responsibility negotiable
Intermediaries route requests between sales, support, customer, and reporting teams		
Customer facing actors stand behind numbers they cannot verify		Ownership is fragmented across customer, support, data, and roles
Felt responsibility increases when consequences become clearer		
Sales and customer facing roles deliver outputs but lack calculation expertise		Commercial consequences temporarily increase urgency
Actors administer delivery without owning the substance of the output		
Handoffs create a telephone game between customer, support, sales, and emissions teams		Formal ambition is not matched by local support and resourcing
Formal responsibility remains contested across functions		
No actor owns the full reporting chain		Sustainability is recognized but remains secondary to commercial and operational priorities
Regulation is expected to force action, but preparation is delayed until external pressure is clearer		
Reporting failures damage customer relationships and can threaten contracts		Centralization reduces burden but weakens local visibility
Dedicated sustainability support has been removed or remains uncertain		
Green agenda is communicated but not matched by execution capacity		Delegated confidence substitutes for local validation
HQ communication on expectations is thin or absent		
Training is limited and tool focused rather than governance focused		Differentiated HQ support selectively stabilizes routines
Internal attention remains low until requirements are forced		
Price and revenue trade offs limit sustainability uptake		Auditability is expected locally, but methodological authority and support remain differentiated
Sustainability is secondary unless it helps solve a customer or transport problem		
Central group reporting helps coordination but reduces subsidiary overview		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
Decentralized practices create reputational and data quality risk		
Actors trust teams, suppliers, and systems because formulas are opaque		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
Local actors can check completeness but not methodological correctness		
HQ led packages may stabilize routines while limiting frontline involvement and local visibility		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
HQ supported cases produce templates and blueprints that can travel		
Complex tenders can become reusable process templates when HQ is involved		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
Key accounts and major tenders receive clearer HQ escalation and priority		
Leadership consolidation is needed to turn scattered issues into systematic action		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
HQ responsibility is layered rather than clearly owned		
Less prioritized cases remain dependent on informal networks and local reconstruction		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
Estimates and approximate inputs limit defensibility		
Manual assembly and missing support create error risk		Fragmented systems and inconsistent methods undermine auditability
Reports, tools, and methods produce inconsistent emissions figures		
Tools help visibility but do not resolve data gathering and integration		

3.4 Research Trustworthiness

Study quality is assessed through Lincoln and Guba's framework (1985, 1994 as cited in Bell et al., 2022) of trustworthiness. Because the study does not assume one objective organizational reality, quality is assessed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.4.1 Credibility

Credibility concerns whether the study provides a convincing and well-grounded account of the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1994, as cited in Bell et al., 2022). In this study, credibility was strengthened by interviewing actors occupying different roles and organizational levels connected to Scope 3 related work. Including subsidiary, selected HQ, and central perspectives improved the study's capacity to capture how similar reporting demands were understood differently across the organization. These differences in role position were important for comparing how similar issues were framed from different organizational positions.

At the same time, most interviewees worked within the same organizational environment, which created a risk of shared narratives. This risk was addressed by framing interviews as open and exploratory, by avoiding normative question wording, and by emphasizing that there were no correct answers. Anonymization also reduced the likelihood that participants would feel compelled to defend the organization formally. Where similar narratives nevertheless recurred across roles, they were treated as a potential limitation and as evidence of how organizational reality was collectively constructed and stabilized. Furthermore, because customer pressure was interpreted through subsidiary actors rather than through direct customer interviews, the study cannot determine the extent to which each request was directly caused by CSRD rather than by broader commercial, reputational, or sustainability reporting expectations.

Credibility was further supported through informed consent. Participants were informed in advance about the purpose of the study and signed a GDPR/consent form confirming that they could revise, clarify, or withdraw statements (Appendix E). Only necessary personal data for the study were collected and deleted afterwards.

3.4.2 Transferability

Transferability concerns whether findings may be relevant beyond the case studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1994, as cited in Bell et al., 2022). The aim is not empirical generalization, but analytical generalization. To support this, the chapter outlines the organizational setting, case boundaries, sampling logic, data sources, and analytical process, allowing readers to judge the relevance of the findings to similar Scope 3 implementation challenges. Still, the findings remain context dependent and should be transferred analytically, not mechanically.

3.4.3 Dependability

Dependability concerns whether the research process has been systematic, transparent, and traceable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1994, cited in Bell et al., 2022). In this study, dependability was strengthened by maintaining a documented research process across all stages. Interview guides, transcripts, interview notes, and coding structures were retained throughout the project. Together, these materials created an audit trail showing how the empirical material was generated, handled, and interpreted. Dependability was also supported by regular discussions with peers and the supervisor, which required methodological and analytical choices to be justified continuously.

3.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the extent to which the findings are grounded in the empirical material rather than shaped primarily by researcher bias or preference (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, cited in Bell et al., 2022). Within our interpretive study, complete objectivity is neither attainable nor the aim. Confirmability instead requires explicit reflexivity about how interpretations are formed.

This was especially important because one of the authors had prior access to the MNE. That familiarity supported access and early contextual understanding, but it also risked role duality, confirmation bias, and the normalization of organizational assumptions. To address this, interviews were consistently framed as independent academic research rather than internal evaluation, confidentiality was emphasized throughout, and the separation between prior professional experience and the thesis project was made explicit. Both authors were present in all interviews, which reduced the risk that prior familiarity would shape questioning or interpretation.

Confirmability was also strengthened by seeking variation in functional responsibility and hierarchical position, by discussing and revising interpretations jointly, and by distinguishing carefully between claims strongly supported by the material and interpretations that remained more tentative. Finally, some interviewees may have shown tendencies towards social desirability bias (Bell et al., 2022), possibly answering questions in a manner that puts them or the firm in a positive light. This risk was mitigated through individual interviews, cross interview comparison, and continuous reflexive discussion during both data collection and analysis.

4. Empirical Findings

This chapter presents five empirical tensions in how CSRD related Scope 3 reporting is encountered in the subsidiary. The chapter first shows how the meaning and purpose of reporting remain unsettled, then traces how requests are handled, how delivery responsibility is distributed, how priority varies, and how data credibility is challenged by fragmented systems and differentiated prioritization.

4.1 Regulatory Pressure Demands Precise Meaning, But Local Actors Still Interpret What Reporting Is Actually For

The subsidiary is expected to respond to a demanding reporting regime under CSRD, but the meaning of that demand is not shared across roles. Some respondents have never heard about CSRD, while several respondents describe CSRD and emissions reporting as something they have heard about, but something they do not fully understand in practical terms. For some, the issue is linked to customer needs and operational tasks. For others, it remains distant, abstract, or only loosely connected to their own work.

The variation followed respondents' contact with the issue: some had little or no direct exposure to CSRD, some encountered emissions reporting through customer dialogue or sales work, and others treated it as a specialist or managerial issue handled elsewhere (see Appendix D, Section 4.1). These accounts reflect different degrees of exposure to emissions reporting-related work rather than a single shared understanding.

“Yes, I’ve heard about it, but I don’t think I understand the meaning of it.” (FE01)

“I’m not really that involved. When I was in sales, I was way more involved, since then I actually had to sell things related to emissions.” (MM05)

Across roles, the difference was not simply how much respondents knew, but how they encountered the issue or if they had no direct contact at all. The interviews also reveal uncertainty about the purpose of reporting itself. Several respondents know that reporting takes place, but remain unclear about why the information is needed, how it is used, and what consequences follow from it (see Appendix D, Section 4.1). The uncertainty concerns both

what should be reported and what counts as reporting in the first place. Some respondents lean toward compliance, others toward customer communication or external image building. The purpose of reporting therefore remains open to interpretation.

“I feel that I have very limited knowledge regarding emissions reporting in particular, both in terms of how we work with it and how the customer subsequently uses it. Is it for reporting to the authorities? Or is it for marketing? I honestly do not know.”
(FE01)

Overall, the subsidiary does not begin from a shared understanding of Scope 3 reporting. The same development is experienced as a strategic requirement, an occasional customer request, or a vague external trend, depending on role exposure and interpretive resources.

4.2 External Demand Advances Faster Than Internal Adaptation and Preparedness

The interviews show what happens when CSRD Scope 3 reporting demands become concrete. In practice, reporting work is often activated by an external request rather than by an already established internal process. The reported sequence was relatively consistent: a customer request arrives, the local actor searches for the right internal contact, a report is retrieved, the answer is checked internally, and the customer response is revised if the first answer is insufficient.

The empirical material shows that process knowledge is held socially rather than procedurally. People rely on managers, colleagues, or previous experience to understand what to do, who to contact, and how to move the request forward.

“In one instance, the colleague responsible for an account had switched position, without handing over information to the new colleague, this forces us to gather that knowledge all over again of where to turn, who to ask etc.” (MM03)

This highlights that the customer request activates a recognizable but still fragile response pattern, while revealing how dependent the process remains on people, memory, and prior cases. The request visualizes who needs to become involved, what information must be

retrieved, and where uncertainty appears in the process. Hence, preparedness becomes uneven because familiarity accumulates mainly among actors who repeatedly face such requests. This becomes clearer in descriptions of how requests are handled in practice. A Customer Support Manager explains the informal routines and how this unfolds over time, where requests can reactivate a temporary coordination chain that must be rebuilt under time pressure. The work therefore becomes a series of iterations rather than a fixed internal process.

“It’s often a new person each time in my team that has to coordinate the work. So we have to find the right person, get the report, preview ourselves and then send it to the customer. Often we have to do that iteration a couple of times before the customer is happy.” (MM03)

Across the material, some parts of the subsidiary repeatedly encounter the issue and are pushed to improvise solutions, while others experience it sporadically and therefore do not build the same degree of familiarity or urgency. Nevertheless, this pattern was not equally fragile everywhere. Respondents linked more predictable handling to repeated exposure, especially in key account settings where similar requests appeared more frequently.

“However, if one looks at, for example, the key account team, I would assume that every customer requires this type of reporting. In contrast, within my own team, it is perhaps closer to one in five customers who request it.” (MM01)

This shows that exposure to reporting demand is uneven across the organization. Some respondents describe only limited demand, while others report frequent customer requests, especially in key account and tender related settings (see Appendix D, Section 4.2). This variation means that the organization is not responding to one uniform level of pressure. Just as important, several respondents say action begins only when customers explicitly ask (see Appendix D, Section 4.2), and tenders reviewed for the study also contained requests for emissions information in commercial response work, which supports the interview pattern that reporting often becomes concrete through customer interaction (see Table 2).

4.3 Delivery Responsibility Is Distributed, But Ownership Remains Unsettled, Misaligned and Contested

Several interviews reveal how the organization arranges reporting work once it has to be carried out. The interviews show broad involvement across functions, but much weaker clarity around ownership. Many actors participate in the process, yet few describe themselves as having end-to-end ownership, including delivery responsibility, decisions rights, and control over the underlying data.

Sales and customer support appear closest to the customer request, while specialist or central data actors are closer to the calculations. Customer-facing roles are expected to ensure that requests are handled and delivered, but several respondents resist being treated as accountable for outputs they cannot validate. They are therefore positioned close to the customer response, but not as actors taking ownership of the underlying calculations or validation. The distinction between administering the process and holding end-to-end ownership of the process appears repeatedly in the interviews (see Appendix D, Section 4.3).

“The responsibility should not lie with sales. If it did, it would require a completely different role. Instead, issues need to be addressed at the root cause [the offshored emissions data team], with those who actually own the process and the data.” (SM01)

This lack of end-to-end ownership is reinforced by the number of handoffs involved. Requests can move between customer support, sales, internal sales, and dedicated offshored emissions data team, creating a chain in which no single actor fully controls the process from request to validated answer.

“We are not directly responsible for this work; rather, our role is to function as an intermediary. (...) It can resemble a ‘telephone game.’ As a result, it is difficult to be fully certain that the information remains accurate, unless the customer has direct contact with someone who is actually working with the data.” (FE06)

FE06’s quote limits the role of customer-facing actors by describing them as intermediaries rather than owners of the reporting work. Describing the process as a “telephone game” captures how each handoff can weaken certainty about what has been checked, who has

validated it, and who ultimately stands behind the answer. The interviews also show that exposure to blame and control do not align. Customer-facing actors often represent the firm externally even when they cannot verify the numbers they are sending. They stand behind answers they did not produce and cannot fully assess.

“It is also frustrating not to be able to be 100 percent certain that the figures I send to the customer are correct, since I am the one who has to stand behind them. Therefore, I find it very unfortunate that there are no established processes in place for this.”
(FE01)

This points to a recurring mismatch, where customer-facing roles answer externally for data methodology and validation that they cannot fully verify. The organization can move the work forward, but without a correspondingly clear allocation of methodological authority of the output. Hence, delivery responsibility and external accountability become broader than control where the process has an outward face, but no equally clear inward owner.

“In a way, we share the responsibility. There may be a grey area regarding who is actually responsible for it. However, the main point is simply to ensure that the information is submitted. (...) Whether the information itself is correct, however, is more difficult to place on me. (...) This means the responsibility becomes somewhat broader than what they [sales] can actually control.” (FE04)

This highlights that the work can appear coordinated externally while remaining unsettled internally. It captures the contested nature of responsibility by describing it as shared, while also stating that correctness is difficult to place on sales. Shared responsibility therefore does not necessarily produce ownership. Instead, it creates layered and only partly compatible responsibilities: one actor manages the customer relationship, another controls the data source, and another maintains the template, but no actor clearly combines delivery responsibility, methodological authority, and accountability for the full chain.

4.4 Sustainability Reporting Ambition Exist, But Does Not Consistently Become Everyday Organizational Priority

Additional observations concern the gap between sustainability ambition and day-to-day organizational priority. The interviews do not suggest that sustainability initiatives are absent. On the contrary, several respondents describe it as strategically important, commercially relevant, or increasingly unavoidable. At the same time, limited expertise and uneven exposure make reporting easier to treat as secondary until customer or commercial consequences make it visible.

This pattern appears in how respondents speak about prioritization. Limited sustainability literacy shapes whether the issue is treated as central or peripheral in everyday work. When actors lack the expertise or confidence to interpret what is being asked of them, reporting is more easily positioned outside the core job rather than within it.

“Oftentimes, sustainability is secondary. We are there to solve a transport demand problem, and if we see any open doors to talk about sustainability, we would take those. But the problem is that we lack this sort of expertise, and have a hard time figuring out the problem and the regulation in regards to sustainability.” (FE10)

Beyond the lack of expertise, there is a clear variation in how seriously the issue is taken internally. This is highlighted where some respondents describe it as something that will inevitably have to be addressed, while others speak more openly about weak engagement and low urgency unless the issue is directly pushed onto them (see Appendix D, Section 4.4).

“I do not think many companies, including ourselves, have really focused on this yet. (...) It may be something that is postponed until next year, when it becomes more established and begins to take shape as a requirement.” (FE09)

Urgency appears to be less tied to sustainability ambition in general. The strongest moments of urgency appear when weak reporting becomes externally visible, especially when customers question figures or when reporting affects commercial relationships (see Appendix D, Section 4.4). This helps explain why internal priority can remain partial even when sustainability is publicly framed as important.

“[When inaccurate figures were presented] The customer said ‘What is going on? How can the figures be this inaccurate?’ Needless to say, they were not particularly impressed.” (FE01)

Overall, CSRD Scope 3 reporting is recognized, but it does not consistently become a shared everyday priority before an external consequence makes it difficult to ignore. Priority therefore appears conditional: it strengthens when reporting failure becomes visible to customers or commercially consequential, not simply because CSRD exists in the background.

4.5 Auditability Is Expected Locally, But Methodological Authority and Support Remain Differentiated

These described reporting failures lead to the final tension concerning the need for auditability rather than simple data availability. Respondents describe situations where emissions figures can be produced and sent, but local actors trust and rely on specialists, systems, or HQ rather than direct visibility into calculations. The section shows that methodological authority remains centralized, while HQ support is activated for some customer cases and absent in others.

Several respondents explicitly acknowledge that the numbers can be wrong or inconsistent. The material includes examples where customer-facing data did not align, and where actors were unsure whether the figures sent out were correct (see Appendix D, Section 4.5).

“In my case, it turned out that the report we sent to the customer did not correspond with the report that the transport carrier had separately sent to the same customer. (...) It also felt somewhat concerning if this is something that will become a legal requirement, given that the discrepancy was so significant.” (FE01)

FE01 shows that actors have encountered concrete episodes in which internal credibility was challenged. Just as important is how respondents describe dealing with this uncertainty. Rather than pointing to clear validation mechanisms, several accounts rest on trust. People trust others because they themselves do not understand the formulas, cannot verify the data,

or lack visibility (see Appendix D, Section 4.5). Confidence therefore appears to rest more on trust in other actors, teams, or systems than on respondents' own visibility into the calculations.

“We don't really know how they calculate it, and since we don't know the formulas, we trust them.” (MM07)

This points to differentiated methodological authority, where local actors may be responsible for communicating emissions figures but do not control the methods behind them. However, the material also contains an important qualification. Six of the 24 respondents describe prioritized stable practices in recurring reporting cycles. This is especially visible around key accounts where HQ support, repeated exposure, and strategic customer visibility make escalation more predictable, and where the individual actor's own ability to validate the figures becomes less decisive because HQ can be mobilized as a methodological support function.

“At HQ they probably have a list of the most important customers, and if you have an issue with any of those customers, you get priority.” (MM05)

“That is where we see a significant difference when it comes to key accounts. So I forward it to my contact at HQ. (...) I then receive it back and forward it to the client.” (FE09)

This illustrates that key account requests follow a clearer escalation path than many other customer requests. Rather than searching for the right internal recipient, FE09 relies on a known HQ contact who is assumed to have access to the relevant systems, methods, and reporting competence. Even if there is no direct visibility into how the figures are produced or validated, HQ functions as a trusted coordination point for strategically important customers. The response becomes more stable and easier to defend, even if the local actor still does not fully see the calculation logic behind the reported figures.

The empirical material also points to a more structured collaboration between customers, the subsidiary, and HQ. Complex tenders become templates for broader process development, while local actors primarily execute centrally designed guidelines. This creates standardized

responses for strategic customers and reinforces local dependence on HQ for certain actors within the subsidiary.

“For the [key account customer] tender, we treated it as a blueprint for handling complexity. It was one of the most comprehensive cases, so we used it to align processes and methodologies across teams through workshops with HQ.” (MM05)

The key account cases therefore nuance a broader pattern of limited local auditability. Where customers are strategically important, HQ support and recurring reporting cycles make responses more standardized and defensible. Where customers are less prioritized, local actors remain more dependent on informal escalation and limited methodological visibility.

Taken together, this section shows that reporting routines are present but uneven. They are most stable where customer visibility, repeated exposure, and HQ support coincide. Elsewhere, reporting remains more dependent on local reconstruction, informal escalation, and trust in actors or systems that local respondents cannot fully inspect.

4.6 Summary of Empirical Findings

The empirical findings show that CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting is becoming more visible in the subsidiary, but remains unevenly understood, organized, and prioritized. Regulatory pressure demands clearer reporting meaning, yet local actors still interpret its purpose differently. Some connect reporting to commercial dialogues, while others see it as a more distant event. This is especially visible when external demand also appears to move faster than internal adaptation. Customer requests often activate the process before clear procedures and ownership alignment structures are in place, making responses dependent on colleagues, managers, prior cases, and specialist support.

The findings further show that delivery responsibility is widely distributed, while methodological authority and accountability remain insufficiently aligned in clear ownership. Customer-facing actors often communicate emissions figures externally, even though they do not fully control the reporting basis. At the same time, sustainability reporting ambition does not consistently become an everyday organizational priority unless customer pressure or commercial consequences make it urgent. Finally, auditability is increasingly expected, but fragmented systems and opaque calculations limit actors' ability to verify and explain reported figures. Overall, Scope 3 reporting procedures are emerging, but they remain partial, fragile, and unevenly supported across the subsidiary.

5. Analysis and Discussion

This chapter interprets the empirical findings through the theoretical framework developed in Section 2.4, and is structured around enactment, selection, and retention (Weick et al., 2005), while translation (e.g. Wæraas & Nielsen, 2016), ownership alignment (e.g. Grossi et al., 2007), and routinization are used to explain how interpretations and ideas begin to move into organizational practice over time (e.g. Reay et al., 2013). The chapter ends by refining the model in Section 2.4, synthesizing the chapter's central argument into an integrated analytical model of uneven stabilization.

5.1 Enactment: Rendering Scope 3 Reporting Locally Salient

The first section analyzes enactment (Weick et al., 2005), meaning how CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting first becomes recognizable as a local organizational issue that requires attention. In this case, **enactment is uneven**. Role exposure, CSRD literacy, and interpretive resources shape whether Scope 3 is recognized as part of actors' own work or remains peripheral to it.

This pattern supports the sensemaking literature's emphasis on ambiguity, cues, and role dependent interpretation (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) and aligns with Preuss et al. (2024) and Zaccone (2025), who show that actors' professional and organizational position shapes how sustainability issues are interpreted and which responses come to appear appropriate. The case sharpens this argument by showing that actors do not merely interpret the same issue differently. In many cases, they do not enact the same issue at all. Scope 3 is not interpreted uniformly but appears through different organizational framings across roles and functions. This is reinforced by uncertainty over why emissions data is needed, how it is used, and what follows from it (e.g. FE01, Section 4.1). When reporting is enacted primarily as a one-time customer request, reactive handling becomes plausible. When enacted as auditable governance, stronger implications follow for validation, documentation, and internal control (Sharma, 2025). The case therefore suggests that CSRD related sensemaking emerges unevenly because actors differ in whether they connect Scope 3 cues to their own responsibilities and consequences. Although CSRD creates industry wide pressure, it is not experienced as equally disruptive inside the subsidiary.

Proposition 1.

CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting is more likely to become locally actionable when actors encounter reporting cues through their role, customer contact, or reporting problems, and possess sufficient interpretive resources to connect those cues to their own work. Where these conditions are absent, Scope 3 remains fragmented and peripheral.

5.2 Selection: Assembling Plausible Responses Across Interfaces

The second section analyzes selection (Weick et al., 2005), meaning how actors assemble plausible responses to Scope 3 demands. The analysis shows that responses are assembled locally rather than through a coherent reporting architecture. Actors work across multiple interfaces, which separates delivery responsibility from methodological authority. What emerges is a practical way of assembling the request enough to produce an answer.

This partly supports research showing that actors develop responses through lateral interaction when formal guidance is incomplete (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Maitlis, 2005) but adds that selection is socially assembled through commercial triggers, where responses are mostly assembled reactively rather than proactively. At subsidiary level, the force of regulation is often experienced indirectly, through customer requests that make reporting failure visible and commercially consequential. The customer interface therefore becomes a mechanism through which regulatory pressure is funneled into local urgency, instead of just complicating the institutional framing of CSRD as a primarily coercive regulatory pressure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Here, translation (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Røvik, 2016; Sahlin-Andersson, 1996) becomes an important mechanism through which reporting demands are made workable. Customer requests rarely align with internal categories, and internally generated outputs do not automatically match customer expectations. Actors therefore recast requests into the terms and templates that the next organizational audience can work with. Gutierrez-Huerter O et al. (2020) explain how HQ initiated practices are actively reworked downstream within subsidiaries rather than simply implemented from above. The present case parallels that insight, but with a different directional logic. Rather than primarily translating HQ demands into local practice, subsidiary actors first translate customer originating Scope 3 demands internally, reformulating them across organizational functions into reporting specifications

that internal actors and central functions can process. The contribution is therefore not only that subsidiaries actively translate demands rather than passively receive them, but that translation of customer requirements helps coordinate work inside the organization. Through this process, varied customer demands become possible to act on internally before ownership is fully settled. Scope 3 governance therefore depends on receiving a demand and making that demand intelligible enough for the next actor to move it forward.

Furthermore, the case suggests that translation concerns not only meaning, but also the preservation of enough credibility and documentation for the output to remain usable under stronger assurance expectations (Sharma, 2025). The “*telephone game*” description (FE06’s, Section 4.3) captures how meaning, output, and accountability shift across organizational interfaces and establishes **local reconstruction** of credible Scope 3 reporting. Yet, the case also highlights an organizational cost of translation. Translation adapts a demand to local conditions whilst also appearing to separate the final output from the reasoning, assumptions, and validation work that made it credible. It appears that, as requests move between functions, the answer becomes easier to pass onward, but harder for any one local actor to fully explain. Consequently, the resulting ‘black-box-output’ may satisfy the immediate customer request, but its lack of traceability makes it more likely that the response remains a fragile, person-dependent workaround.

Selection also organizes participation and task distribution. Grossi et al. (2007) help to clarify that responsibility and accountability can come apart under different authority and delegation structures. In this case, delivery responsibility and methodological authority are separated: customer-facing actors ensure delivery, while control over methods, validation, and source systems sits elsewhere. Further, the different functions do not want to take responsibility for the full process while FE04 (Section 4.3) argues that they “*share the responsibility*.” This displays a lack of clear processes and creates **ownership contestation** of who collects the data, who is responsible for the delivery, and who is the face of the output. Hence, ownership remains contested and only loosely allocated, because delivery obligations are placed close to the customer while authority over methods and validation remains elsewhere. Ownership contestation therefore becomes a part of the selection process: before the organization can produce a coherent answer, actors must identify who is expected to deliver the response, who can validate the figures, and who can legitimately stand behind the output.

Furthermore, prior work shows compliance is formally structured through roles and procedures (Huising & Silbey, 2021), but following Pérezts and Picard (2015), compliance in practice relies on interpretive judgment rather than strict rules. The present case supports their insights but also suggests a drawback of this arrangement: distributed responsiveness keeps work moving, yet leaves customer-facing actors representing numbers they did not produce and cannot fully verify. This separation between delivery responsibility and methodological authority therefore enables continued action, while also preserving ambiguity over who gets to define correctness.

This ambiguity of ownership may also reflect a self-protective response. When customer-facing actors are expected to represent figures externally without access to the methods, assumptions, and validation work behind them, reluctance to claim ownership becomes understandable. FE01's (Section 4.3) concern about having to "*stand behind*" figures they cannot fully verify and FE04's (Section 4.3) description of responsibility as "*broader than what they [sales] can actually control*" both point to this dynamic. The issue is therefore not simply that actors avoid responsibility, but that delivery responsibility becomes difficult to accept when methodological authority remains elsewhere. This does not weaken the core argument but rather clarifies its actor level consequence: misalignment between responsibility, methodological authority, and accountability creates incentives for ownership to remain ambiguous.

The dispersion of responsibility makes it harder for actors to identify who to approach for reliable information, what qualifies as "correct data," and where accountability ultimately sits. When clarity is not achieved, the sensemaking process circles back (Weick et al., 2005), as actors either return to enactment to re-establish what the issue is, or to stay in selection to reconsider who should be involved and what response is plausible. Selection therefore does two things: it determines how a response is produced in the moment, but also whether that response becomes clear enough to be reusable beyond the immediate case.

Proposition 2.

When formal reporting architecture is incomplete, subsidiary actors assemble plausible Scope 3 responses through cross interface translation. This allows reports to be produced, but separates delivery responsibility from methodological authority and clear accountability for the output. As a result, ownership becomes contested around who should hold end-to-end

ownership of the process, who can validate the figures, and who can legitimately stand behind the output.

5.3 Retention: Preserving Workable Responses Under Opacity

The third section analyzes retention (Weick et al., 2005), meaning how some Scope 3 responses begin to endure and guide future action. The analysis highlights that the retention is provisional. What persists is shaped by two dynamics: rising expectations of auditability despite fragmented infrastructure, and uneven priority that strengthens where Scope 3 has visible commercial consequences. Rather than treating routines as directly observed settled behavioral patterns, the analysis identifies perceived movement toward routinization through participants' accounts of repeated, expected, and increasingly reusable response patterns.

A first retention dynamic concerns **auditability**. CSRD strengthens expectations of traceability, assurance (Sharma, 2025), and internal reporting systems (Farkas & Matolay, 2024). In that context, it is analytically plausible that organizations retain responses that make such demands manageable across reporting episodes. The case shows that this logic has entered the subsidiary, but the infrastructure needed to support it remains fragmented and opaque with inconsistent outputs, and reliance on trust in specialist competence or distant system outputs. This is consistent with prior research showing that CSRD readiness is hindered by siloed and weakly integrated systems (Novicka, 2024), while Scope 3 reporting often depends on estimates and mixed precision inputs that make figures possible to produce but harder to validate and defend (Stenzel & Waichman, 2023). The subsidiary therefore appears to retain a workable way of handling auditability demands before it develops the local capability to verify them. This creates a tension with the assurance logic (Sharma, 2025). For the case company, local auditability is partly handled through trust-based verification: actors rely on specialist teams, systems, or central functions because they lack direct visibility into formulas and validation procedures. The organization can therefore appear to move toward auditable reporting whilst local actors remain dependent on trust rather than the ability to verify the data.

A second retention dynamic concerns **commercially conditioned priority**. Sustainability reporting is not absent but unevenly retained as an everyday action because priority becomes more durable where Scope 3 requirements have visible consequences for customer

relationships or commercial exposure. The case supports broad routinization logic that practices become more durable when repeated action is coupled with shared meaning (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) but sharpens this logic by showing that routinization is partly consequence driven. Scope 3 emissions reporting is recognized as important, but not with equal operational weight across the subsidiary. What becomes recurrent, then, are the practices that become difficult to ignore in everyday work. This finding goes beyond a simple decoupling argument (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), highlighting that the subsidiary is doing real reporting work, but much of it rests on improvised practices rather than transparent validation mechanisms. What is retained is therefore a workable but vulnerable mode of operating under opacity. This suggests a middle condition between ceremonial adoption and fully embedded compliance: **provisional retention**, where response patterns are preserved and reused across reporting episodes, but remain insufficiently supported by routines, methodological transparency, or stable methodological authority structures.

Furthermore, improvisation underscores that sensemaking is recursively organized (Weick et al., 2005). When provisional responses fail to resolve ambiguity, actors may move back to selection by reconsidering who should be involved, or to enactment when the demand itself must be reconstructed. This loop appears to depend on available knowledge and routine: actors with prior exposure could re-enter at selection, while actors without such resources could return to renewed uncertainty. The problem is that provisional retention can work precisely because it is provisional. Ad hoc workarounds may satisfy individual customer requests and reduce the pressure to build more durable reporting arrangements. Repeated requests therefore remain manageable, but dependent on temporary fixes rather than stabilized routines, methodological access, or formal end-to-end process ownership.

Proposition 3.

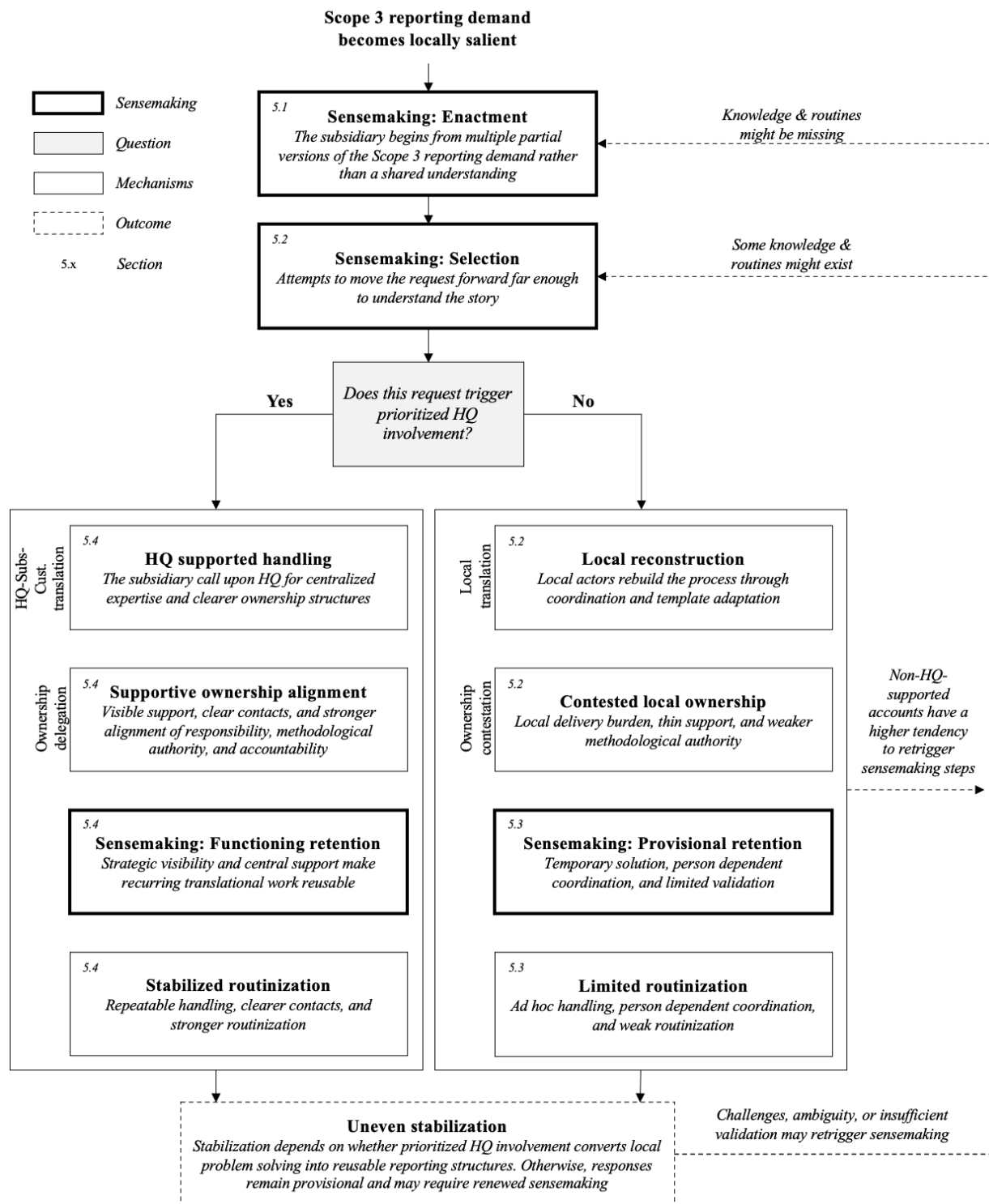
Where auditability expectations and commercial consequences increase faster than reporting infrastructure matures, Scope 3 responses are retained as provisional response patterns rather than routinized practices. Actors preserve workable responses by delegating confidence to systems, specialists, or central functions they cannot fully verify.

5.4 From Local Interpretation to Uneven Stabilization

This section synthesizes the prior analysis, while explaining why Scope 3 governance stabilizes unevenly rather than through a linear rollout. For the full subsidiary, Scope 3 reporting becomes locally salient when a customer request or reporting demand makes the issue consequential. At this point, enactment begins from multiple partial understandings rather than from a shared interpretation of what Scope 3 reporting requires, why it matters, or who should hold ownership of it. Through selection, actors then try to move the request forward far enough to understand the problem, identify relevant conditions, and determine whether the case requires **prioritized HQ involvement**. Here, Figure 2 visualizes two pathways. The preceding sections have primarily explained the most common right-sided pathway, where the actors move the request forward through cross interface translation, while delivery responsibility remains local and weakly aligned with methodological authority and authority. Responses are therefore retained provisionally and may loop back to enactment or selection when interpretations fail.

The following section explains the left-sided pathway, where prioritized HQ involvement changes the handling process. Here, strategic customer visibility triggers central involvement. HQ provides clearer escalation, reusable templates, stronger ownership alignment structures, and methodological guidance. Ambiguity remains, but more interpretive work is absorbed centrally, making responses more repeatable. This creates a more selective movement from retention toward routinization, where some responses become reusable in future reporting work while others remain locally reconstructed.

Figure 2. Analytical Model of Uneven Stabilization



The difference between the pathways is explained through four conditions: differentiated central support, micro processual translation, ownership alignment, and uneven stabilization.

The first condition is **differentiated central support**. HQ is not external to the process, but becomes part of how authority, coordination, and routinization unfold. Subsidiaries are positioned between HQ directives and local conditions (Birkinshaw & Hood, 1998; Kostova & Roth, 2002). The present case supports this point, while specifying how that position counts in practice: central support is activated when strategic customer exposure is high, when major tenders require defensible reporting pathways, and when reputational or commercial stakes justify central attention. As MM05 (Section 4.5) explains, issues involving important customers receive “*priority*”. For high visibility customers, HQ is called upon by the subsidiary to provide structure and methodological support in CSRD related Scope 3 work. For the non-prioritized customers, the individual actors must locally reconstruct the requirements (see Section 5.2). The subsidiary is therefore not only a passive receiver of HQ demands or a local mediator of centrally defined requirements, but it can also become the site from which central involvement is triggered.

Building on our argument based on Gutierrez-Huerter O et al. (2020) in Section 5.2, we see a further **upward micro processual translation** dynamic in prioritized CSRD reporting cases, which constitutes the second condition. This occurs in key account and major tender situations, where local actors and central specialists work back and forth around concrete customer demands. Through this interaction, local reporting problems are gradually reformulated and translated into more generalizable “*blueprints*” (MM05, Section 4.5). The subsidiary therefore helps make underdefined reporting demands actionable by bringing customer complexity into interaction with central expertise. In prioritized cases, local difficulties can thereby be structured into reusable organizational resources, while less prioritized cases remain dependent on ad hoc reconstruction.

The third condition concerns **ownership alignment**. The asymmetry identified in Section 5.2 becomes sharper once selective HQ support activation is brought into view. This misalignment is not merely accidental, but structurally intelligible in an MNE setting. Methodological authority tends to remain central because standardization across subsidiaries supports comparability and assurance while subsidiaries carry delivery obligations because customer relationships are often held locally. This creates a division in which HQ retains control over methodological standards, while the subsidiary absorbs the delivery burden. Under CSRD, however, this division becomes increasingly costly because assurance expectations require that those who deliver figures can also explain and defend them. In high

visibility settings, especially key accounts and major tenders, stronger HQ involvement partly moderates this asymmetry by providing “*blueprints*”, ownership alignment structures and methodological guidance. Visible in the right sided pathway in Figure 2, ownership remains contested because local actors continue to carry delivery obligations and external accountability without equivalent methodological authority. In the left sided pathway, prioritized HQ involvement reduces this contestation by delegating ownership, methodological guidance, and escalation support. In line with Huising and Silbey (2021), the case therefore shows that compliance work is distributed through accountability infrastructures, but that delivery responsibility is not always matched by the methodological authority needed to perform it (Grossi et al., 2007). This highlights how HQ subsidiary relations are shaped by struggles over control and legitimacy, including whose claims become recognized as legitimate (Koveshnikov et al., 2017). Where central support is activated, the process enables a **functioning retention** instead of provisional retention, since actors can reuse templates and escalation paths rather than reconstructing each response from scratch.

This leads into the fourth condition: **uneven stabilization**. The case supports Fohrer et al. (2026) and Moseley and Charnley’s (2014) view of stabilization as uneven and contingent, while specifying its conditions in subsidiary reporting. Stabilization requires more than repeated handling. Similar customer demands may return, but unless earlier responses are converted into reusable reporting resources, recurrence simply reproduces local reconstruction. This also nuances Wickert and Risi’s (2019) emphasis on the day-to-day work through which new demands are made actionable. In this case, informal coordination may make Scope 3 reporting demands temporarily manageable, but it does not necessarily stabilize them. What stabilizes is the conversion of local problem solving into shared organizational resources that make later responses repeatable. Reay et al. (2013) show that new practices do not become institutionalized simply through organizational acceptance. They must be made locally meaningful, tested in practice, and connected to collective meanings and structures. In this case, HQ support performs a similar role to managerial work, but the subsidiary setting sharpens the argument. For Scope 3 reporting, collective meaning making is not enough. Local actors also need methodological authority, validated data sources, and reusable procedures that make responses defensible and repeatable. Without such support, recurring demands may be handled repeatedly without stabilizing into routine.

The difference between the two pathways is therefore not only a difference in local competence or awareness. It is a difference in whether local problem solving becomes connected to central support and methodological authority. For key customers, HQ involvement is likely to be activated which leads to that escalation becomes clearer, and methodological support becomes more accessible. Where customer priority is absent, similar reporting demands are more likely to depend on local reconstruction and case specific coordination. Figure 2 should therefore be read as a recursive process in which actors are more likely to loop back to enactment or selection when prioritized central support is not activated.

An alternative interpretation is that the pattern of HQ involvement reflects more commercial prioritization than actual CSRD implementation. This interpretation has merit, since key account requests receive HQ support and clearer escalation. However, it does not weaken the argument, it rather clarifies how CSRD related reporting pressure becomes locally consequential. In this case, abstract regulatory expectations become organizationally actionable when they are mediated through customer requests and commercial exposure. The study therefore cannot isolate CSRD as the sole driver of reporting routines but shows how CSRD related expectations become consequential when commercial importance activates central support and clearer methodological authority.

This is why the pattern is best described as uneven stabilization. Unlike Meyer and Rowan's (1977) decoupling, reporting is not merely symbolically adopted while everyday work such as producing outputs and coordinating across interfaces remains unchanged. Yet the case also does not show uniform movement toward institutionalization in the sense described by Contrafatto (2014), where shared meanings, rules, routines, and formal reinforcement gradually align. Some reporting responses become reusable because central support converts local problem solving into templates and escalation paths. Others remain fragile because similar demands must be reconstructed case by case. Uneven stabilization therefore captures how routinization occurs selectively when control over methods, resources, and validation authority is distributed across the organization.

Proposition 4.

Scope 3 governance stabilizes unevenly when commercially visible cases trigger central involvement that converts local problem solving into reusable templates, escalation paths, and methodological guidance. Where such involvement is absent, similar demands remain locally reconstructed rather than routinized.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explain how CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting demands are interpreted and organized within a local subsidiary of an MNE. The study highlights how organizational actors make sense of ambiguous reporting demands, how those demands are translated across roles and functions, and how these processes shape the stabilization Scope 3 reporting governance. In line with this purpose, the study asked:

How do organizational actors within a local subsidiary of a multinational enterprise make sense of and translate CSRD driven Scope 3 emissions reporting demands, and how do these processes shape the stabilization of Scope 3 reporting governance?

The analysis shows that CSRD driven Scope 3 reporting becomes actionable through uneven sensemaking rather than through a uniform compliance rollout. Role specific exposure to customer requests and reporting problems shapes how actors define the issue. These demands are translated across roles and HQ interfaces, where ownership alignment remains unevenly, and responses are assembled under uneven conditions of support and methodological authority. Governance routines stabilize only selectively, mainly where HQ support and methodological guidance make responses reusable. Elsewhere, reporting remains dependent on provisional local reconstruction and trust in actors or systems that local employees cannot fully inspect.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

This thesis contributes to research on sustainability governance, sensemaking, and subsidiary implementation by explaining how CSRD driven Scope 3 demands become actionable and selectively stabilized inside an MNE subsidiary operating under distributed control. Prior research on CSRD and Scope 3 has largely emphasized issues such as data availability (Stenzel & Waichman, 2023), systems integration (Fohrer et al., 2026; Novicka, 2024), coordination (Jokinen et al., 2025), and assurance (Sharma, 2025), while adjacent work has shown that sustainability issues are interpreted differently depending on organizational position (Preuss et al., 2024; Zacccone, 2025). However, it says less about what happens before those pressures are addressed in practice, namely how a reporting demand becomes meaningful as a local organizational problem, how it moves across organizational interfaces,

and how repeated responses emerge despite continued ambiguity. Building on that gap, this thesis makes three related theoretical contributions.

First, the thesis contributes to subsidiary research (Birkinshaw & Hood, 1998; Kostova & Roth, 2002; Koveshnikov et al., 2017) and institutionalization research (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Reay et al., 2013) by conceptualizing the outcome of CSRD driven Scope 3 change as **uneven stabilization**. The concept captures a condition in which sustainability governance genuinely changes everyday work but does not become uniformly embedded within the subsidiary. This nuances both Meyer and Rowan's (1977) decoupling argument and Contrafatto's (2014) gradual alignment argument by showing that CSRD driven Scope 3 governance can become materially consequential without becoming uniformly embedded. The case does not show a simple movement from formal adoption to gradual embedding (Contrafatto, 2014). Instead, some reporting practices stabilize while others remain fragile, even under the same formal pressure. This thesis shows that, under distributed control, stabilization depends on whether local problem solving is converted into reusable organizational resources through central support, methodological authority, and escalation capacity. This extends institutional accounts by showing that sustainability governance may be neither merely symbolic nor steadily institutionalized but selectively stabilized across organizational interfaces within an MNE.

Second, the thesis contributes to emerging **micro-process research** on sustainability regulation by showing that CSRD driven Scope 3 requirements do not enter the subsidiary as a single, already defined organizational problem. They become actionable only when actors in specific organizational positions render them meaningful in relation to their own work. The thesis is in line with calls to give greater attention to the role of individuals in addressing social and environmental challenges (Gond et al., 2017), and with work showing how actors outside dedicated sustainability functions make sense of regulatory expectations into practice (Zaccone, 2025). The findings show that organizational position shapes how actors initially interpret the issue, including whether it is a customer driven requirement or a peripheral sustainability concern. The contribution is therefore not only that actors beyond dedicated sustainability functions matter, but that variations in enactment help explain why the same formal demand generates uneven responses within the same subsidiary.

Third, the thesis extends sensemaking research (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) in the CSRD context by specifying more clearly how local problem constructions become organizational responses. The empirical material shows that interpretation alone is insufficient. Once a demand has been rendered meaningful by local actors, it must be translated across organizational interfaces that include commercial, support, specialist, and customer-facing settings. Building on Gutierrez-Huerter O et al. (2020), the case shows two related but distinct translation dynamics: customer originating Scope 3 demands are first translated internally without HQ initiated practices, while prioritized cases can trigger an additional upward intra company translation, where local reporting issues could become reusable blueprints. When a demand without priority is translated across interfaces, responsibility for delivery may be assigned without a corresponding transfer of authority over methodology or validation procedures. This thesis contributes with an integrated process account of how ambiguous regulatory demands move from interpretation to recurring practice. Rather than treating translation, responsibility allocation, and routinization as adjacent extensions to sensemaking, the thesis shows how they form one connected mechanism. Interpretation defines the local problem, translation moves it across interfaces, authority asymmetry shapes adequate response criteria, and repeated handling makes some responses reusable. In this way, the thesis links enactment, selection, and retention more directly to the practical organization of governance and explains how ambiguous reporting demands are turned into response patterns under conditions where responsibility, methodological authority, and accountability remain distributed rather than aligned.

Taken together, these contributions show that CSRD driven Scope 3 implementation in a subsidiary is best understood as a process in which ambiguous demands are enacted as local problems, translated across interfaces marked by uneven methodological authority, and stabilized only selectively through repeated use. The central theoretical contribution of the thesis lies in explaining that, under distributed control, governance is assembled before it is settled and stabilizes unevenly, which hinder broad embedding.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings do not primarily raise questions about whether Scope 3 reporting is formally recognized as important. The more consequential managerial challenge lies in how organizations are designed for Scope 3 governance before meanings, ownership, and reporting infrastructures are fully settled. In the studied subsidiary, reporting became consequential under conditions of ambiguity, distributed methodological authority, and selective exposure. Three specific implications follow from the analysis.

The first concerns the structural asymmetry between delivery responsibility and methodological authority. The case shows that customer-facing actors are routinely expected to communicate emissions figures externally without access to the formulas and validation procedures that produced them. This is not primarily a motivation problem and cannot be resolved through training alone. It is rather a governance design problem where managers responsible for reporting architecture face a concrete choice: either equip the actors who deliver figures with enough methodological access to explain and defend them or redesign the reporting interface so that those capable of verification are directly involved in external communication. The current arrangement, in which actors stand behind figures they cannot fully verify, produces credibility and auditability risk, as well as organizational costs in the form of reluctance to accept ownership and fragile coordination. For both local management and central functions, resolving this asymmetry is more productive than simply clarifying who is formally responsible for delivery.

The second implication concerns how reporting capacity is built. The case shows that process knowledge is held socially rather than structurally, where actors rely on mainly colleagues and prior experience to reconstruct the request to response process. This makes every role transition or new account assignment a potential governance gap. The request to response interface is therefore where organizational investment is likely to yield the greatest practical return. Making escalation paths explicit, defining minimum viable response sequences, and ensuring that even actors with irregular exposure know where to go and what qualifies as sufficient does not remove interpretive judgment. Rather, it allows judgment to focus on genuinely difficult reporting problems instead of forcing actors to rebuild the routing network under time pressure.

The third implication concerns the scope of central support. The two-pathway model developed in Section 5.4 shows that HQ involvement stabilizes reporting selectively for commercially prioritized cases. This is organizationally rational, since key accounts and major tenders often carry higher reputational and commercial stakes. However, it also means that the governance infrastructure being built around prioritized cases, including templates, ownership alignment structures, and methodological guidance, may not automatically diffuse to less prioritized contexts. The managerial task is therefore not to extend key account treatment to all customers indiscriminately, but to convert the organizational resources generated in prioritized cases into broadly accessible infrastructure. Blueprints, validated escalation contacts, and documented response formats should be treated as transferable assets rather than account specific arrangements.

Uneven stabilization is therefore the outcome of distributing delivery obligations without equally distributing the conditions that make delivery credible. Addressing that gap is the central organizational task that CSRD driven Scope 3 governance now places on local and central management alike.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research

The contribution of this thesis should be understood considering its empirical scope. As a single qualitative case study of one Nordic subsidiary within one logistics MNE, the study supports analytical rather than statistical generalization. Its purpose has not been to show how firms in general respond to CSRD driven Scope 3 demands, but to explain how governance becomes actionable in a setting where ambiguity, distributed methodological authority, and process formation are especially visible. Future research could therefore examine whether the patterns identified here, including uneven methodological authority and stabilization, recur across other subsidiaries or firms in a new single or multi case setting.

The study is also shaped by the perspectives included. Although customer pressure emerged as an important trigger, customers were not interviewed directly, and HQ and central functions were included selectively rather than examined as separate analytical units. This limits the study's ability to determine whether selective stabilization was driven primarily by governance design, commercial prioritization, or the interaction between the two. The analysis suggests that these explanations are not mutually exclusive. Commercial visibility

may trigger central support, but the resources created through that support still become governance resources that reduce future interpretive burden. Future research should therefore study these interfaces more directly, including the relationships between subsidiaries, HQ, customers, suppliers, and auditors, and examine whether stabilization diffuses beyond commercially prioritized cases.

A further limitation concerns method and timing. Because the analysis is based primarily on interviews and documents rather than direct observation, the thesis is better able to explain how routines were understood, narrated, and made meaningful than to verify how they unfolded across situations over time. This matters because the study argues that stabilization remained partial and uneven. Longitudinal and observational research could therefore examine whether provisional arrangements are reinforced, revised, or abandoned over time, and whether the uneven stabilization develops into broader organizational embedding or remains dependent on local improvisation.

Finally, the thesis does not assess emissions accuracy, data completeness, disclosure quality, or formal CSRD compliance outcomes. Its contribution is interpretive and processual rather than evaluative. Future research could build on this by connecting the process dynamics identified here to reporting outcomes such as traceability, consistency, assurance credibility, and the ability of local actors to defend reported figures when challenged.

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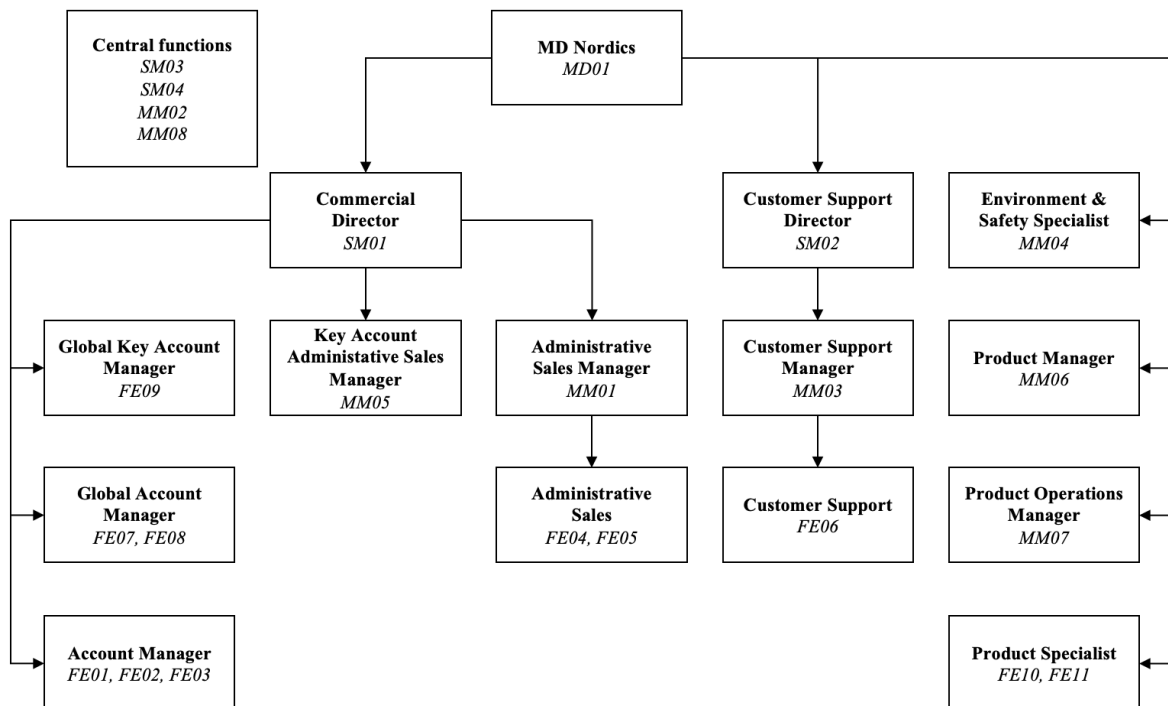
8. Appendices

Appendix A: CSRD rollout schedule before vs. after Omnibus

Cohort	Original Start Date	Omnibus new cohort	Omnibus new start date
Wave 1 (>500 employees, listed)	FY 2024 (Report 2025)	>1000 employees & €450M+turnover	FY 2024 (with 2-year “Quick-fix”)
Wave 2 (Large, non-listed)	FY 2025 (Report 2026)	>1000 employees & €450M+turnover	FY 2027 (Report 2028)
Wave 3 (Listed SMEs)	FY 2026 (Report 2027)	Out of mandatory scope	Out of mandatory scope
Non-EU (>€150M EU turnover & EU subsidiary/branch >€40M)	FY 2028 (Report 2029)	>€450M turnover & subsidiary/branches >€200M	No changes

Source: Podesta and Cortes, 2025; EU Directive 2022/2464, 2022

Appendix B: Interview Chart



MD - Managing Director

SM - Senior Manager

MM - Middle Manager

FE - Front-line Employee

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Themes	Examples of topics discussed
1. Introduction	Introduce ourselves Present our study Inform that everything will be anonymized (the organization, your name, etc.) Consent to participate in the study
2. Background and timeline	Can you describe your role and your main responsibilities? Can you walk us through what your work usually involves in practice? Have you heard about CSRD and Scope 3 reporting? Can you describe your understanding of CSRD and emissions reporting requirements? How would you explain what Scope 3 emissions reporting involves in relation to your work? In what ways, if any, has emissions reporting, and Scope 3, become relevant in your work? Can you walk us through how work related to Scope 3 emissions has developed over time from your perspective?
3. Making sense of CSRD and Scope 3	When you first encountered CSRD in relation to emissions reporting, how did you understand what it meant for the organization and for your own work? What kinds of information, people, or resources did you rely on to understand what was expected? Can you describe a situation where it was difficult to understand how a Scope 3 related requirement should be interpreted? How do you experience the relationship between the company's sustainability ambitions and the way Scope 3 reporting is handled in practice?

	Can you describe any situations where sustainability expectations felt clear, unclear, or difficult to understand in your daily work?
4. Implementing Scope 3 in practice	Can you describe whether and how Scope 3 reporting has affected your day-to-day work? What kinds of tasks, processes, or roles have emerged in relation to Scope 3 reporting? Can you describe how Scope 3 related work is usually handled in practice? Can you give an example of a situation where people had different views on how Scope 3 should be handled? How are uncertainties or disagreements around Scope 3 usually worked through?
5. Coordination and boundaries	How do you understand responsibility for Scope 3 reporting in practice? How do you see your own role in relation to emissions data and Scope 3 reporting? Can you describe situations where it is unclear who owns a specific data point, decision, or reporting step? When supplier data is incomplete or uncertain, how is it decided whether the data is good enough to use? Who do you usually interact with when working on questions related to Scope 3 emissions? How do expectations from HQ shape the way Scope 3 work is handled locally? How do customer expectations shape the way Scope 3 work is handled locally? Can you describe a situation where expectations from different actors did not fully align?

	Imagine that emissions data has been sent to a customer, the customer has reported it, and the board has signed off on the data. Later, an audit reveals that the data was incorrect. How do you think such a situation would be handled in the organization? What would such a situation reveal about responsibility, control, and accountability in Scope 3 reporting?
6. Stabilization and formalization	Are there guidelines, templates, or routines that currently exist for Scope 3 reporting? If so, can you describe them? How have these guidelines, templates, or routines developed over time? Can you describe areas of Scope 3 work that still depend on informal coordination or individual experience? How would you describe the organizational importance of Scope 3 reporting today? In what ways is Scope 3 reporting treated as part of ordinary business practice, and in what ways is it treated as a compliance matter? Can you describe what makes some Scope 3 related practices become more stable or repeated over time?
7. Reflection and outro	Looking back, what has been most challenging about working with Scope 3 within the CSRD framework? What have you learned from working with Scope 3 reporting so far? If a new colleague started tomorrow and had to work with Scope 3 reporting, what would you want them to understand early on? What aspects of Scope 3 reporting do you think are still difficult for the organization to handle? Is there anything important about this topic that we have not covered? Who else do you think could provide useful perspectives on how Scope 3 reporting is understood and handled in practice?

Appendix D: Abductive Qualitative Analysis with Original Quotes

Section	First Order Code	Respondent	Exact Quote	Theoretical Theme
4.1	Actors know reporting exists but do not know why, how, or for whom it is used	FE01	I feel that I have very limited knowledge regarding emissions reporting in particular—both in terms of how we work with it and how the customer subsequently uses it. In other words, what they actually use it for. Is it for reporting to the authorities? Or is it intended to demonstrate externally, perhaps as part of marketing, that we are doing our part to reduce our climate footprint? I honestly do not know.	Enactment
		FE05	There are a lot of question marks. I will be honest and say that I do not know much at all. I understand that you report emissions and similar, but I don't know if you have to report it more thoroughly or the level of reporting in general.	Enactment
		MM03	Sustainability reporting for me and the Customer Support team is something we are aware of, but we don't know where it comes from, how it's reported or any details within it for that matter	Enactment
		MM06	I believe that sustainability reporting and its' effects are still new, even to us at the company and my function	Enactment
4.1	CSRD is recognized superficially or not at all	FE01	Yes, I've heard about it, but I don't think I understand the meaning of it	Enactment
		FE03	I've heard nothing I believe	Enactment
		FE04	CSRD sounds somewhat like a type of management system.	Enactment
		MM02	I'm not sure how subsidiaries and entities and so on are actually interpreting CSRD	Enactment
		MM07	I've heard about CSRD, but really nothing more than that.	Enactment
		SM02	No, this is new to me. This requirement you told me.	Enactment
		SM03	For us it's a buzzword. Of course we have heard about it. But let's say in our usual work with our product, we don't touch it much. We talk about emissions, but not much about CSRD.	Enactment
		SM04	I know what it means, but when it comes to specific applications in geographies or so on, I don't know. I imagine I can always Google	Enactment

4.2	Demand intensity varies across customers and teams	MM01	However, if one looks at, for example, the key account team, I would assume that every customer requires this type of reporting. In contrast, within my own team, it is perhaps closer to one in five customers who request it.	Enactment
		MM01	Roughly one-fifth of the customers within my team demand emissions data. However, it has become apparent that some customers, whom I initially did not expect to request such reporting, do in fact do so occasionally.	Enactment
		MM07	I would say [the pressure to pull data] is the same as before, maybe a slight increase, but not much	Enactment
		MM07	Top of mind, it's roughly 10% of our customers that ask for this information, the other might not care, I don't know	Enactment
		MM08	This year has been crazy. Almost every week we receive five to ten requests from customers asking for emissions data or requiring it in RFQs.	Enactment
4.2	Key accounts and larger customers create more complex and frequent reporting demand	FE10	The bigger global organizations have systems and managers that report to the board or supply chain directors, so they are naturally in scope for the product. (...) For the smaller companies, it's mostly depending on their internal strategies and business model.	Selection
		MM01	However, if one looks at, for example, the key account team, I would assume that every customer requires this type of reporting. In contrast, within my own team, it is perhaps closer to one in five customers who request it.	Selection
		MM04	There are a number of customers who have their own sustainability appendices and specific requirements included in their contracts. In those cases, part of the review process is to assess whether the requested metrics are something we are able to measure or not.	Selection
		MM05	It [more companies in scope in 2028] is not a massive change for us [at key account], as we are already used to adapting to new requirements in tenders. Sustainability is simply another layer of complexity that is increasingly built into customer demands. Compared to before, we are better equipped to handle it, especially as tenders now span multiple products and require more advanced inputs, including emissions data.	Selection
		MM06	For many customers, it's important to have a sustainability "profile", which might be why many choose us	Selection

		MM08	This year has been crazy. Almost every week we receive five to ten requests from customers asking for emissions data or requiring it in RFQs.	Selection
4.2	Reporting work starts when the customer asks	FE01	If customers are required to report this information and can only obtain it from us, then I assume they would need to request it from us. In that sense, it would seem that the responsibility lies with the customers to ask for the information.	Selection
		FE01	The customer wants to track how much they emit. They therefore contact us, and we then reach out to our operational department, which generates a report on this.	Selection
		MM01	My immediate impression is that there are often internal uncertainties regarding responsibility for this. In many cases, the request originates from the customer and is directed to the salesperson, most commonly to the responsible account owner. The account owner then passes it on to their Administrative Sales. (...) As a result, such requests, often involving reporting in a customer-provided format distributed to all suppliers, frequently end up with the Administrative Sales. In the best-case scenario, it is clear to us who the request should be forwarded to. As an Administrative Sales, however, one does not have access to all the necessary data and cannot complete the task independently. We often function as intermediaries across various processes, including sustainability reporting. Consequently, we frequently rely on a dedicated team to whom we forward these requests. Previously, we had a local contact (internal sustainability contact) who could assist us. Currently, however, this responsibility lies with a team, which I believe is based in India. When it comes to numerical data, they do not simply complete the customer's reporting format. Instead, they expect us to translate the customer's format into a template that they use, a task that Administrative Sales are sometimes required to perform.	Selection
		MM03	From our end at CX, our responsibility starts when the customer asks for something, in this case the request for data, and it ends when we have delivered that data	Selection
		MM06	Especially from my time at sales, then I really noticed a demand, and we were often the first point of contact for these kinds of questions.	Selection
		SM02	The customer asks, then we go to the foundation and digg.	Selection

4.3	Actors administer delivery without owning the substance of the output	FE04	In a way, we share the responsibility. There may be a grey area regarding who is actually responsible for it. However, the main point is simply to ensure that the information is submitted. I am the one who administers the process, so the responsibility for ensuring that the information is provided rests with me. Whether the information itself is correct, however, is more difficult to place on me. In some ways, it may also be difficult to place that responsibility entirely on the sales team. At the same time, they do have overall responsibility for the customer. This means the responsibility becomes somewhat broader than what they can actually control, but that is often the case for our salespeople as well	Responsibility and authority
		MM03	From our end at CX, our responsibility starts when the customer asks for something, in this case the request for data, and it ends when we have delivered that data	Responsibility and authority
		MM03	Since we work at customer support, our responsibility is mainly to make sure the customer gets an answer to their question, whether it being through giving it straight to the customer, or connecting them with the right person internally	Responsibility and authority
		SM01	We should act as the customer-facing interface, communicating the data externally, but not as a control function.	Responsibility and authority
		SM04	We gather and consolidate the data across different sources. Whether we also assume full responsibility for the data is less clear to me, I am not certain of that.	Responsibility and authority
4.3	Felt responsibility increases when consequences become clearer	FE01	I still feel responsible, but the actual work is carried out by someone else. (...) I would definitely feel more responsibility if I knew the consequences of a bad report.	Responsibility and authority
		FE02	No, but I assume that somewhere it is, of course, stipulated in a contract what happens if this occurs. (...) However, the customer relationship becomes strained. It does not develop in a positive way	Responsibility and authority
		FE11	I believe that more significant consequences may be necessary for the issue to be taken seriously. If a major mistake were to occur, resulting in substantial penalties for a customer that are then claimed from us, it would likely lead to a greater sense of urgency and prioritization within the organization.	Responsibility and authority

		MM02	Because of that, it is difficult to assess whether the data that is being reported is sufficient or not. As I mentioned earlier, the expectations related to my specific function are also fairly limited.	Responsibility and authority
		SM02	No, but it could certainly have negative consequences, such as losing a contract. Quite simply. And that would have a significant impact.	Responsibility and authority
4.3	Handoffs creates information discrepancies between customer, support, sales, and emissions teams	FE01	I first contact the [administrative sales]... That person does not know either... We then contact our [customer support] department... They respond that they are not entirely sure either... During that time there are internal discussions about whether they should handle it or whether we should. Essentially, no one really knows.	Translation
		FE06	We are not directly responsible for this work; rather, our role is to function as an intermediary. At the same time, we are still the ones who receive and handle all incoming questions. However, when communication passes from the customer to someone in [Customer Support], then to the emissions team, and possibly further within that team, it can resemble a 'telephone game.' As a result, it is difficult to be fully certain that the information remains accurate, unless the customer has direct contact with someone who is actually working with the data. In that sense, I would not consider the current arrangement entirely reasonable.	Translation
		MM03	If the data request comes to the wrong person in the customer experience team, who might not have all the knowledge or time to complete it, we send it back to sales or internal sales who will have to figure it out themselves then.	Translation
		MM03	We become a middleman between the people gathering the data [Emissions reporting team] and the sales department, so we have to interpret the data in the right way, and obviously this exposes the customer to risks if we do this in the wrong way.	Translation
4.3	No actor owns the full reporting chain	FE01	No, I actually think something is missing. There are no established processes for how this should be handled or who one should contact. It is even somewhat unclear which department is responsible for it. We do have an emissions reporting team within the company, but whether the matter falls under their responsibility or whether it is actually our operational department that handles it, I am quite unsure. I also do not know who is responsible for what in the process. So there is really no clear structure for how we manage it.	Responsibility and authority

		FE03	It's really hard to gather all the data since it's in different places, with different people involved, no one is taking accountability and responsibility for it	Responsibility and authority
		MM02	Everything is handled centrally, the data collection and treatment. (...) Data collection is somewhat dispersed across different functions. In practice, each function tends to report the data that is closest to its own activities.	Responsibility and authority
		MM02	I also do not have full visibility into what is being reported by other functions. It may very well be the case that something I might wonder about—for example, why it is not being tracked—is in fact already being reported, but I simply do not have insight into it.	Responsibility and authority
		MM08	If you work in a more customer-facing role and receive those types of questions, but otherwise do not have much insight into how we manage the data, it can easily appear as though the process is driven primarily by customer demand. That perception arises because you do not necessarily have visibility into where the data is stored or how it is handled internally. I would probably be able to find out, but it is not a product we actively work with or an area for which many people have clear responsibility.	Responsibility and authority
4.4	HQ communication on expectations is thin or absent	FE01	Essentially, only from colleagues during informal conversations, such as by the coffee machine, and from customers. I have not heard anything internally; nothing has been communicated to me through company emails or similar channels.	Translation
		MM03	No, I haven't seen anything, and if something has been sent, I have to admit it's not the highest priority for Customer Support.	Translation
		MM06	[Q: Have you heard anything from HQ on what is expected from you in terms of emissions reporting?] A: No, nothing	Translation
		MM07	Very quiet on the sustainability topic from within the company (...) we at [the Case Company] needs to be better at communicating changes in regulation, because currently we are really missing that information	Translation

4.4	Internal attention remains low until requirements are forced	FE07	It could have come from HQ, but I really don't care until they push it down my throat	Retention
		FE09	I do not think many companies, including ourselves, have really focused on this yet, as there is so much else happening around this issue. It may be something that is postponed until next year, when it becomes more established and begins to take shape as a requirement. That is at least how I have reflected on it, as I had barely heard about it before I received your invitation. It also seemed, when I spoke with [internal sustainability contact at HQ], that he said they are of course discussing how to approach it, but no clients have yet come forward to request it. And they do, after all, interact with many clients.	Retention
		FE11	Everyone couldn't care less. [The Key Account Manager] saw the email, but then she didn't care - just thinking that, whatever, they will maybe not send the reminder. It is sad.	Retention
		MM03	No, I haven't seen anything, and if something has been sent, I have to admit it's not the highest priority for Customer Support.	Retention
		MM06	If I speculate, I only think people working with these issues daily are really concerned, I don't think it's anchored to the leadership group of our subsidiary yet	Retention
4.4	Reporting failures damage customer relationships and can threaten contracts	FE01	The customer becomes quite questioning. They expect us to know this information. Naturally, it is unfortunate when the figures differ by as much as 30 percent compared with another supplier. I had not worked with this particular customer before, but in this case I got the impression that the customer quickly suspected that our report was the incorrect one. It is possible that the customer had previously requested the same type of material and encountered similar issues, which I suspect might be the case	Retention
		FE01	The customer reacted as if to say, 'What is going on? How can the figures be this inaccurate?' Needless to say, they were not particularly impressed.	Retention
		FE02	No, but I assume that somewhere it is, of course, stipulated in a contract what happens if this occurs. (...) However, the customer relationship becomes strained. It does not develop in a positive way	Retention

		FE11	I believe that more significant consequences may be necessary for the issue to be taken seriously. If a major mistake were to occur, resulting in substantial penalties for a customer that are then claimed from us, it would likely lead to a greater sense of urgency and prioritization within the organization.	Retention
		SM02	No, but it could certainly have negative consequences, such as losing a contract. Quite simply. And that would have a significant impact.	Retention
4.5	Actors trust teams, suppliers, and systems because formulas are opaque	MM06	If I'm allowed to speculate, I believe the team just pulls the data from a system and they themselves trust that data, without actually knowing the downstream effects of what it might entail to provide wrongful data	Auditability
		MM06	The procurement team are responsible that everything is correct in the systems, and that translates to emissions as well	Auditability
		MM07	Usually, our suppliers state the emissions on each invoice (...) and we fully trust that these figures are valid, especially if they handle the customers operations overseas	Auditability
		MM07	We don't really know how they calculate it, and since we don't know the formulas, we trust them	Auditability
		SM04	We are not yet certified in the same way as out external data provider for emissions data, only ISO standards.	Auditability
4.5	Decentralized practices create reputational and data quality risk	MM02	Pushing stricter internal requirements has been challenging. We are aware that there are gaps and areas that need improvement, but implementing these changes across the organization is difficult.	Distributed control
		MM02	There is a clear reputational risk if different subsidiaries apply different methodologies, especially if customers compare data across entities and find inconsistencies with what is reported at group level. That would undermine compliance, as CSRD reporting is expected to reflect the organization as a whole, not fragmented practices.	Distributed control
		MM02	There is a risk that decentralized practices lead to inconsistencies we are not fully aware of, meaning we may be aggregating data that appears homogeneous but is in reality not, something we [at HQ] have suspected for a while now.	Distributed control

		SM01	We can flag issues, but the ultimate responsibility lies with the central function. If mistakes occur at the operational level, they often stem from the guidance provided centrally, which is where accountability ultimately sits.	Distributed control
		SM01	When we notice that something is wrong with the data, we shouldn't immediately blame the emissions data reporting team, because we [the subsidiary] might be the root cause if we gave them wrong direction, instructions or information. It's a shit in - shit out scenario	Distributed control
4.5	HQ responsibility is layered rather than clearly owned	MM02	It is clear that accountability should sit at HQ, but the question of which function and who is best suited to take that responsibility remains unresolved.	Responsibility and authority
		MM02	Responsibility ultimately sits at HQ, but governance around ESG reporting is complex and distributed. While a central team oversees the annual report and interprets CSRD at a group level, specific areas such as emissions are owned by dedicated category teams, creating a layered structure of responsibility across the organization.	Responsibility and authority
		MM02	There is still significant ambiguity around who at HQ should communicate and take ownership of these issues. Multiple functions share overlapping responsibilities, and while efforts are underway to clarify roles at the group level, this is still unresolved. As a result, the implications at the subsidiary level remain unclear, even as the associated risks continue to grow.	Responsibility and authority
		SM01	We can flag issues, but the ultimate responsibility lies with the central function. If mistakes occur at the operational level, they often stem from the guidance provided centrally, which is where accountability ultimately sits.	Responsibility and authority
4.5	HQ supported cases produce templates and blueprints that can travel	FE08	I would assume that my CPM [that I get as a Global Client Director with large customers] has that knowledge, as he is very process-driven. He is therefore likely to have a good understanding of it. (...) He does not have all processes documented, of course, but in this particular case I believe that he does. Since this is something we carry out on a quarterly basis, it is also important for him to ensure that it is performed consistently in the same way each time.	Translation

		MM05	For key accounts, The overall process is largely driven by HQ, where structures and guidelines for emissions are developed and then passed down to us to implement. We essentially wait for those instructions, apply them, and present them to customers. However, there is very limited insight into how these frameworks are actually developed at the HQ, and at the local level we mainly focus on execution rather than understanding the underlying processes.	Translation
		MM05	For the [key account customer] tender, we treated it as a blueprint for handling complexity. It was one of the most comprehensive cases, so we used it to align processes and methodologies across teams through workshops with HQ. The idea was that if we can manage this level of complexity, it sets a standard for how we approach future tenders with similar sustainability and reporting demands.	Translation
4.5	Key accounts and major tenders receive clearer HQ escalation and priority	FE08	I would assume that my CPM [that I get as a Global Client Director with large customers] has that knowledge, as he is very process-driven. He is therefore likely to have a good understanding of it. (...) He does not have all processes documented, of course, but in this particular case I believe that he does. Since this is something we carry out on a quarterly basis, it is also important for him to ensure that it is performed consistently in the same way each time.	Uneven stabilization
		MM02	So we don't do subsidiary-driven ESG ratings anymore. We just do it at a group and a central level. So that way we can actually incorporate some of the work that's happening in this integrated CSRD report and then bring those actions together, which maybe a subsidiary will not have an overview of (...) I think from a reporting burden, it's definitely easier and helpful, right, that they don't have to do that.	Uneven stabilization
		FE09	That is where we see a significant difference when it comes to key accounts. So I forward it to my contact at HQ. (...) I then receive it back and forward it to the client.	Uneven stabilization
		MM05	At HQ they probably have a list of the most important customers, and if you have an issue with anyone of those customers, you get priority	Uneven stabilization

		MM05	For key accounts, The overall process is largely driven by HQ, where structures and guidelines for emissions are developed and then passed down to us to implement. We essentially wait for those instructions, apply them, and present them to customers. However, there is very limited insight into how these frameworks are actually developed at the HQ, and at the local level we mainly focus on execution rather than understanding the underlying processes.	Uneven stabilization
4.5	Less prioritized cases remain dependent on informal networks and local reconstruction	FE01	Essentially, only from colleagues during informal conversations, such as by the coffee machine, and from customers. I have not heard anything internally; nothing has been communicated to me through company emails or similar channels.	Uneven stabilization
		FE08	We do have internal points of contact through which we receive fairly frequent updates on these matters. At the same time, it also involves the more traditional approach of building your own internal network within [the case company], so that you know who to reach out to when you require additional information.	Uneven stabilization
		MM03	In one instance, the colleague responsible for an account had switched position, without handing over information to the new colleague, this forces us to gather that knowledge all over again of where to turn, who to ask etc.	Uneven stabilization
		MM03	It takes a couple of days to get the report, at least. The times we have had to report from our function, it's often a new person each time in my team that has to coordinate the work. So we have to find the right person, get the report, preview ourselves and then send it to the customer. Often we have to do that iteration a couple of times before the customer is happy, so the last time it's taken more than a week.	Uneven stabilization
		MM03	The times we have had to report from our function, it's often a new person each time in my team that has to coordinate the work. So we have to find the right person, get the report, preview ourselves and then send it to the customer.	Uneven stabilization
4.5	Local actors can check completeness but not methodological correctness	FE01	I honestly do not know how I would ensure with complete certainty that the data is correct. I simply do not know. Those processes do not exist.	Auditability

		FE04	I cannot say that I am responsible for whether the data itself is correct, as I do not even know how it is produced—beyond a very general understanding. (...) I do not dare to have responsibility [of the output]. (...) I don't know anything about it.	Auditability
		FE06	As mentioned, I am not able to validate the figures themselves. However, I can ensure that the underlying data are consistent—for example, whether all shipments that I submitted are included, whether the same time period has been applied, and whether the volumes correspond. If I reported 100 shipments from Bangladesh and 80 from China, I can verify whether those figures are reflected accurately. This is important, as the total will not be accurate if any shipments are omitted.	Auditability
		FE06	Yes, I am responsible. However, it is not entirely comfortable, as I do not have formal training in environmental matters. I am not familiar with how the calculations are conducted, nor do I have a clear understanding of where the underlying data originate or which systems they are derived from. These are not the same systems that I work with, which means that I am not even able to access or verify the data myself. As a result, I do not feel fully confident in assessing whether the data are accurate. At the same time, I am required to rely on the internal teams responsible for producing them.	Auditability
		SM01	We should not need to double-check everything at the final stage. The focus should be on ensuring the process works correctly from the beginning. The fact that we feel the need to verify data before sending it indicates that the issue lies earlier in the process, not with the frontline.	Auditability
4.5	Manual assembly and missing support create error risk	FE04	The simplest solution would be for the information to simply be available. It could be provided per booking or in some similar format. As long as there is a clear method for calculating it, it does not seem particularly difficult to include it for each booking.	Auditability

		FE05	Yes, it is quite remarkable, really. There should ideally be a more centralized team here at the subsidiary that can produce emissions data, and the systems should also be able to provide more precise and unambiguous figures, especially if audits are to be conducted in the future. Additionally, the systems should retain information on how a shipment has actually been carried out. I am not sure how data is currently extracted, but I would assume that it is based roughly on what is specified in the contract.	Auditability
		FE06	For instance, it may be necessary to submit multiple port pairs, such as from origin to transshipment and from transshipment to Europe, and there may even be more transshipments involved than those typically observed in standard routes. As a result, these different legs need to be manually assembled. However, we do not have sufficient reporting support or underlying data to perform this task effectively. Consequently, we are required to compile these reports manually, which is where errors may arise from the [Customer Support] perspective. (...) The consequences may not be as significant as for FCL shipments, this remains an area where inaccuracies can occur and where [Customer Support] has some degree of influence.	Auditability
		MM07	System functions, like our biggest one, work separately from others and don't really collaborate. Some of our teams needs to manually check both main systems to make sure they are aligned, which is super important since we handle a lot of customs internally (...) you don't want to know how many hours a week we dedicate to check systems for errors	Auditability
4.5	Reports, tools, and methods produce inconsistent emissions figures	FE01	In my case, it turned out that the report we at the case company had sent to the customer did not correspond with the report that the transport carrier had separately sent to the same customer. This made it quite interesting to start investigating what had actually gone wrong. The matter did not ultimately fall on me, as our Customer Support department assisted in resolving it. However, it was very interesting to hear that the figures could differ to such a large extent, considering that they are, after all, numerical data. It also felt somewhat concerning if this is something that will become a legal requirement, given that the discrepancy was so significant	Auditability

		FE03	It is entirely possible that the customer received incorrect information from us (the case company), or that we (the case company) simply did not know whether the information we provided was correct or not.	Auditability
		FE06	The methodology was changed so that all cargo were assigned a standardized weight (...) meaning that all cargo essentially had the same weight.	Auditability
		FE06	We have also changed the internal system used to calculate emissions, as well as the methodology applied. This has resulted in significant discrepancies. For example, during my first year, at some point, perhaps last autumn, we transitioned to a new approach, whereby we were required to contact the emissions team instead. With this change, the calculation methodology was also altered, which led to noticeable differences in the reported figures. In one case, a customer reacted strongly to these discrepancies. However, it turned out that the variation was due to our change in calculation method, rather than any actual change in emissions.	Auditability
		FE10	Approximately two years ago we had a case where we noticed that a customer-facing system showed different calculations of emissions from another customer-facing system. We were sure that the customer had seen the difference. It turned out that one of the systems were outdated and displayed up to 5 different calculations. This was not good, so we started an internal query to fix this, and within a couple of weeks, which is fast for our company, we managed to make it display the correct figure. The moral of the story is that we [the company] was quite fast in fixing it	Auditability
		SM03	There are inconsistencies in methodologies across different products and tools, which creates a disconnect when customers compare emissions data. Aligning these approaches, or at least clearly communicating the differences, remains a key challenge.	Auditability

Appendix E: Consent Form

The form was sent before the interviews. Due to the abductive approach, the research question and purpose was slightly updated when working with the thesis.



Standard text and consent to participation student's survey / interview

The student's project. As an integral part of the educational program at the Stockholm School of Economics, enrolled students complete an individual thesis. This work is sometimes based upon surveys and interviews connected to the subject. Participation is naturally entirely voluntary, and this text is intended to provide you with necessary information about that may concern your participation in the study or interview. You can at any time withdraw your consent and your data will thereafter be permanently erased.

Confidentiality. Anything you say or state in the survey or to the interviewers will be held strictly confidential and will only be made available to supervisors, tutors and the course management team.

Secured storage of data. All data will be stored and processed safely by the SSE and will be permanently deleted when the project is completed.

No personal data will be published. The thesis written by the students will not contain any information that may identify you as participant to the survey or interview subject.

Your rights under GDPR. You are welcome to visit <https://www.hhs.se/en/about-us/contact/data-protection/> in order to read more and obtain information on your rights related to personal data.

Project title How do actors within a local subsidiary of an MNC interpret and translate CSRD-driven Scope 3 emission reporting?	Year and semester H1 2026
Aim of the study The aim of the study is to examine process and organizational change occurred by the new Corporate Social Responsibility Directive (CSRD) by the European Union, and how employees within the organization make sense of these changes	
Students responsible for the study or interview Teodor Andersson, Erik Nyström	
Supervisors and department at SSE Constantin Blome - Department of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology	Supervisor e-mail address constantin.blome@hhs.se
Type of personal data about you to be processed All information will be anonymized in the final output. That includes: Identification data (name, role and department), contact information, audio recordings and interview transcripts, professional opinions, interpretations and reflections related to CSRD Scope 3 implementation, contextual information that may indirectly identify participants or the organization Purpose of processing: Academic research on organizational sensemaking and governance translation Retention and handling: Encrypted storage, access limited to authors and SSE supervisors, anonymization in thesis and publications, deletion after project completion according to university policy	

I have taken part of the information provided above and consent to take part in this study:

Name	Place and date
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Appendix F: AI Usage Report

1. What AI tools have been used and how?

AI tools were used in a controlled and transparent manner, in line with the SSE AI Policy. The tools used were ChatGPT (GPT 5.4 & GPT 5.5), Claude (Opus 4.7), SciSpace, and Grammarly.

ChatGPT and Claude were used after the initial manual coding to support reflection on the empirical material. They helped us check whether relevant passages, themes, ambiguities, or alternative interpretations had been overlooked, for instance if we said essentially the same thing in two consecutive sections, the tools helped flag this, after which we manually revised the text. It did not conduct coding independently, and no codes, themes, or interpretations were accepted without manual review, discussion, and author led rewriting.

Example prompts for data analysis:

- Based on the codes I have written in the Excel [insert excel file], which ones are the most ambiguous, weakly grounded, or potentially overextended?
- Of all the quotes in this document [insert pdf file], show me who are discussing sustainability literacy
- Point to the similarities between the interview quotes from person X and person Y
- Are there any traces of the case company?

ChatGPT and Claude were also used for proofreading, language refinement, and feedback on structure, clarity, flow, repetition, and conceptual precision, for instance if certain words were bolded, or the generic language checks in Google Docs were wrong, it was highlighted for us to change ourselves. It was not used to generate new theoretical ideas, empirical findings, or conclusions.

Examples of prompts used:

- Based on this grading template [insert grading template], act as a strict examiner of our thesis of the text between 1. Introduction to 6.3 Limitations and future research.
- What key elements need to be included in an abstract of a qualitative master thesis? Suggest a structure that can be used as a structural template.

- We need help with a critical assessment of the theory usage within the analysis and discussion. I want you to focus on the usage of retention, habitualization, routines, routinization, and stabilization. Is it clear what we are doing?
- Check this section for grammatical errors. Highlight anything that is incorrect and suggest corrections. Please do not change the content, meaning, or structure. Only correct grammar: [insert sentence]
- Please provide me synonyms for: [insert word]

SciSpace was used to support the literature search by identifying potentially relevant academic articles and giving initial overviews of papers and concepts. It did not replace reading the original articles but only helped point us toward potentially relevant directions. Grammarly was used in the final stages for spelling, grammar, and minor stylistic polishing.

All ideas, arguments, methodological choices, empirical interpretations, findings, and conclusions are our own. We did not use AI outputs as independent evidence or academic sources. Any AI suggested wording was manually reviewed, rewritten where necessary, and accepted only when it reflected our own intended meaning.

2. In what ways have these tools contributed to increasing the quality of the thesis?

The tools contributed mainly to clarity, consistency, efficiency, and critical reflection. ChatGPT and Claude supported the analytical process by helping us reflect on coding consistency and identify unclear or ambiguous interpretations that required further discussion. They functioned as a quality control tool rather than as a substitute for our analysis.

ChatGPT and Claude also improved the writing process by identifying unclear formulations, repetition, long sentences, and grammatical issues. SciSpace made the literature search more efficient by helping us identify relevant academic discussions, while all sources were evaluated independently before use. Grammarly helped reduce spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, and minor inconsistencies in the final text.

3. What potential risks were found using AI and how did we mitigate these risks?

The first risk was meaning distortion, especially because small wording changes can alter theoretical distinctions such as sensemaking, translation, routinization, and stabilization. This was mitigated by never copying the output but rather comparing all suggested revisions against the original intended meaning and to understand what could be changed for clarity.

The second risk was analytical overreach. AI tools sometimes proposed sharper claims than the empirical material supported. These suggestions were rejected unless they could be justified through the interview material and the literature. To avoid over reliance, ChatGPT and Claude were used only after our initial manual coding and served as a secondary tool for reflection. Final coding decisions, themes, interpretations, and findings were completely made by us.

The third risk was confidentiality. This was mitigated by anonymizing or limiting empirical excerpts and by retaining all final interpretation, quote selection, and synthesis decisions with the authors. Empirical material was handled carefully and in accordance with the SSE AI Policy. We also retained control over the structure, argumentation, and writing throughout the process.

The fourth risk was loss of academic voice. AI tools sometimes produced phrasing that was clearer but also more generic, polished, or detached from the thesis' own analytical style. This was mitigated by using AI suggestions only as draft alternatives and not as final text. All revisions were manually reviewed to ensure that the wording remained consistent with our theoretical framing, empirical terminology, and authorial voice. Suggestions that made the text sound overly standardized, introduced unfamiliar phrasing, or weakened the thesis specific concepts were revised or rejected.

AI outputs were never treated as authoritative, and its output of literature, references, claims, and interpretations were always checked manually against original academic sources.

4. What are the insights gained from using AI tools in the thesis writing process?

The main insight is that AI tools can be valuable when used as support instruments rather than sources of academic reasoning. ChatGPT and Claude were useful for identifying unclear writing, suggesting alternative formulations, and challenging coding decisions, but its value depended on critical human judgement. SciSpace supported orientation in the literature but could not replace close reading or independent evaluation. Grammarly supported us greatly by identifying human writing mistakes that otherwise could have been looked upon.

The process confirmed that AI can improve efficiency and clarity in repetitive, linguistic, and reflective tasks, but cannot replace theoretical understanding, methodological rigor, or careful interpretation of empirical material. Overall, AI strengthened the process when used transparently, critically, and within clear boundaries, while responsibility for accuracy, originality, interpretation, and academic integrity remained entirely with us.