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Translating Sustainability Ideas

A Case Study of a local Sustainable Sourcing Concept within the Food Industry

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Abstract

This paper investigates how individuals of an organisation are influenced by concepts and ideas in their daily work. In particular, this study examine how purchasing managers are dealing with, and in which ways they are influenced by, the local organisational sustainable sourcing concept. The paper uses a qualitative method based on an in-depth case study of a Swedish organisation within the food industry. Data has been collected by conducting 16 interviews, analysis of 10 documents and recurrent observations. By analysing using actor-network theory and the concept of translation also present in Scandinavian institutionalism, this study shows that the local sustainability concept has been interpreted and translated differently by different purchasing managers in various contexts. This paper also shows that when purchasing managers engage with the non-human actors of the sustainable sourcing concept, processes of punctualization and depunctualization are triggered. Consequently, purchasing managers experience ambiguity which is mitigated through the various acts of translations. The acts of translation was found to be mainly done in two ways, subsequently leading to four different main actions. This paper contributes to new insights on how sustainability is enacted in organisations, highlighting how organisational members can shape entire concepts and ideas as they encounter them in their daily work.

Keywords

Sustainability, Purchasing, Translation, Actor-Network Theory, Sourcing, Punctualization, Black box

Introduction

Coming across a firm which does not actively state or promote that they are working with sustainability is today very rare. Entering the website of almost any firm, you will with a small effort most likely find a page of the organisation's sustainability vision and targets. Sustainability concerns have increasingly become a topic in today's business environment (Egels-Zandén and Rosén, 2015). Moreover, scholars stress the need for companies to take action and integrate these concerns in their organisations (Galbreath, 2009).

Inevitably, sustainability has become a key managerial issue and opportunity which firms direct increasing attention towards by balancing the environmental, social and business needs (Clarke and Clegg, 2000). Supposed sustainable directions and actions are now incorporated into many firms' strategies as they strive to achieve outstanding triple bottom line results, going beyond the traditional measures of profits to also include the environmental and social dimensions (Elkington, 1997).

Some researchers argue that sustainable business practices are a source of competitive advantage (Markley and Davis, 2007; Flint and Golicic, 2009) whereas some propose that sustainability is the "defining business challenge of our time" (Sheth et al., 2011, p. 35). Many prominent businesses have been developing sustainability plans and programmes as an integral part of their corporate strategies. Jones et al. (2014) argue that this development can be derived from several sources. There is a growing volume of environmental and social legislation and regulations that companies need to comply to. Furthermore, growing concerns regarding the cost and scarcity of natural resources. A greater public and shareholder awareness of socially responsible investments. Last but not least, growing media coverage and general changes in social attitudes and values within modern societies. In addition, Siegel (2009) argue that global organisations view sustainability as an increasingly important strategic goal. Organisations have a growing belief that one can increase profits by adopting environmentally sustainable practices.

In addition, on the 25th of September 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly established the Sustainable Development Goals for year 2030 "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". In line with scholars mentioned above, the United Nations stress that the goals are indivisible and integrated, balancing the economic, social and environmental aspects. The agenda consists of 169 targets for the 17 general Sustainable Development Goals, intended to stimulate action in areas of importance for humanity and the planet. (United Nations, 2015). The goals are currently interpreted and concretised on national levels, inevitably affecting businesses (United Nations Global Compact, 2018). Simultaneously, critique has been raised towards the Sustainable Development Goals as they have been argued to be contradictory and too many, ignoring the various local contexts (The Economist, 2015). According to a report published by EY (2017) on more than 80 large Swedish companies, 96% of the Swedish companies agree that businesses have a responsibility for fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. Simultaneously, managers experience several challenges related to the goals. Both concerning follow-up and measurements but also gaining support from internal stakeholders and see the business benefits from engaging in the Sustainable Development Goals (EY, 2017).

Furthermore, in line with many researchers presented this paper argue that the concept of sustainability is particularly prominent and complex in the food industry (Emamisaleh and Rahmani, 2017) since in this context, the supply chain often consists of several global actors of various sizes and diverse businesses. From farming and food production, packaging and distribution, to retail and catering (Baldwin et al. 2011; Garnett, 2013; Food Standards Agency, 2017). Moreover, sustainability and environmental awareness in general (Gifford, 1997), and

in the food industry in particular have become increasingly important as the result of an increasing consumer pressure and regulations (Mattson and Sonesson 2003). Consequently, Wognum et al. (2011) and Vasileiou and Morris (2006) argue that food supply chains are at the forefront of the sustainability development with e.g. many sustainability standards and certifications systems (Manning et al. 2012), making it a suitable place for researchers.

Along with the direct impact retailers and caterers have on sustainability, sourcing sustainable products from manufacturers bear major impact (Baldwin, 2009). According to the Cambridge Business English Dictionary (2018), sourcing is "the act of getting something, especially products or materials, from a particular place". Moreover, in line with Nishiguchi (1994) and Payne and Dorn (2012), in this study the managers responsible for sourcing expands upon the traditional purchasing activities to include activities of e.g. negotiations, contracting and continuous improvement. Purchasing has been argued by several researchers to be a boundary-spanning function within the supply chain (Day and Wensley, 1983; Leenders and Fearon, 1993; Webster, 1992; Williams et al. 1994; Zhang et al. 2011), putting purchasing managers in an advantageous position to assess the interorganisational environment for changes in processes and/or products (Porter and Van der Linde, 1995).

Within sourcing and the purchasing function specifically, several business practices and sustainability efforts have been identified and investigated. For example, Carter et al. (2000) found that environmental purchasing activities, defined as involvement in supply chain management activities in order to facilitate recycling, reuse, and resource reduction (Carter and Carter, 1998), had a positive effect on economical firm performance. Indicating a win-win situation for the environment and the firm engaging in such purchasing activities. Moreover, Ehrigott et al. (2011) investigated socially sustainable supplier selection, demonstrating that sourcing decisions have a crucial role for the possible sustainable business practices of a firm and consequently for the upstream actors of the supply chain. Closs et al. (2011) further argues that the management of suppliers in a sustainable manner address not only the social but also the economic and environmental aspects of the firm performance. Furthermore, Carter and Jennings (2004) investigated the concept of Purchasing Social Responsibility, emphasising the purchasing managers' distinct and unique interaction with various actors; buyers, suppliers, contractors and various internal employees. Thus, the authors argues that managers for sourcing activities have a distinct and central role when a firm is seeking support for and coordinating sustainability efforts.

Altogether, scholars argue that there are various opportunities within sourcing to act sustainable. As previous research indicate, purchasing activities and concepts have the potential to facilitate all three main pillars for sustainability, the economic development, social development and the environmental protection. However, much of the previous research has also tended to investigate sustainability in organisations on a macro-level, through quantitative studies (e.g. Carter and Carter, 1998; Carter et al. 2000; Carter and Jennings, 2004; and Ehrigott et al. 2011) or by looking at annual reports, websites etc. of firms of several industries simultaneously (Closs et al. 2011). Hence, this paper in line with Egels-Zandén and Rosén

(2015) argue that much of existing sustainability research has focused too much on concepts rather than how sustainability is formed in organisations.

Thus, the sustainability concept of sourcing has been treated too objectivistic and static. Previous research has failed to take into consideration the varying organisational contexts but also and perhaps even more important, how various actors interpret and shapes ideas and information which they encounter in their daily work.

Consequently, inspired by Ählström and Egels-Zandén (2008), this paper argue that the concept of translation can assist us in the realms of sustainability in organisations. Latour (1996) and Czarniawska and Sevón (1996) suggests that of translation can assist us in gaining deeper understanding to the process in which new ideas or concepts are introduced and translated by local actors. The authors argues that there is no intrinsic ideal model of an idea or concept. Instead they can be better understood from a translation model. An idea or concept is translated into its local context where actors attribute meaning to it. Moreover, the concept may also change over time as ideas travel through new time and space, continuously producing new ideas and challenging the current interpretations.

Thus, this paper argues that although there is research providing evidence for several opportunities for sourcing processes and concepts to facilitate sustainability, it has disregarded the local contexts in which the ideas of sustainability are interpreted. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate and to understand in which ways individuals interpret and handle local sustainability concepts in their work. Thus, the research questions of this paper is: *How are purchasing managers dealing with, and in which ways are they influenced by, organisational sustainability ideas and concepts in their daily work?*

Theoretical framework

Given the purpose of the study where the aim is to investigate how concepts and ideas unfold in the daily work and how people deal with the latter in an organisational context. Actor-network theory was chosen as a suitable theoretical framework. Furthermore, building on actor-network theory the concept of translation will be elaborated on with works stemming from Scandinavian institutionalism.

Actor-network theory (ANT) emerged during the mid-1980s with the primary works of Bruno Latour, Michael Callon, and John Law. ANT stems from Science and Technologies studies (STS) and their interest for scientific and technical knowledge. This knowledge is packaged into text, people, machines etc. created in socio-material processes and fitted into social relations. ANT is a conceptual frame and approach to social theory for exploring the collective sociotechnical processes. Hence, ANT strives to understand relational networks that are simultaneously material (between things) and semiotic (between concepts) (Latour, 1986).

Heterogeneous networks lies at the heart of actor-network theory (Law, 1992). It suggests that society, organisations, agents and machines are all effects generated in networks of diverse

materials. Effects in society are simply generated by and in networks, and society reproduces itself because it is heterogeneous. The basis is that the social, the technical, the conceptual and the textual (meaning the social and everything it generates) are fitted together and translated into heterogeneous scientific products. It is argued that machines, objects and similar must be just as considered as people, as they are as much part of the heterogeneous networks as people are. The equal treatment of human and non-human actors i.e. generalized symmetry (Callon 1986), is a key concept of this study. Law (1992) emphasise the importance of the non-human actor and exemplifies it with the sociologist who needs his or her office, laptop, books and telephone in order to act as oneself and fulfil ones role as an actor.

The above reasoning emphasise that an actor is also always a network, since it is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations. The process where a network come to be seen like one single point in another network is called punctualization (Callon, 1991). The term of punctualization originates in the black box concept. A black box is an artifact that appears self-evident where one only think of the output and the input of the black box. Punctualization refers more specifically to the process in which actor-networks are being black boxed and linked with other actor-networks (Callon, 1991) Consequently, opening of the black box, or depunctulisation leads to an individual understanding of that everything is both an actor and a network of heterogeneous bits and pieces (Latour, 1991). Callon and Latour (1981) emphasise that all black boxes are “leaky”. Hence, there will always be competing ideas and initiatives seeking to open the black box that have been punctualized within a network.

Another prevalent and essential concept within ANT is translation. Latour (1986) explains it by contrasting translation with the diffusion model and the traveling of a token (e.g. an idea, concept) through time and space. The diffusion model argue that the token will move in the same direction as long as there is no obstacle, what needs to be explained is the slowing down or the acceleration of the token which results from the action or reaction of other people. If these obstacles are removed, the token will eventually be accepted.

In contrast, the translation model argue that the spread in time and space is in the hands of people, and each one of these people may act differently. People is not using force or transmitting it like they would in the diffusion model, rather they are doing something essential for the existence and maintenance of the token. This means that the chain is made of actors, since the token is in everyone’s hands and shapes it according to their preferences. In the translation model, the initial force is not intrinsically better than any of the other. Force is never transmitted in its entirety and no matter what happened earlier it can stop at any time depending on the action of the person next in the chain. As mentioned, the active members change the token as it is moved which means that instead of the transmission of the same token as in the diffusion model, the translation model focus on the continuous transformation of the token itself (Latour, 1986). This essentially means that concepts, actors and their roles are constantly negotiated and transformed (Callon, 1986)

Allen et al. (2018) used actor-network theory and the understanding of human-nonhuman interactions in order to investigate and understand organizational transformations for

sustainability. Furthermore, the authors found that there were ongoing translation processes associated with sustainability in different actor-networks that produced specialised expertise and functional differentiation. Ählström and Egels-Zandén (2008) used actor-network theory to understand the definition and redefinition processes of sustainability in Swedish garment retailers' responsibilities for workers' rights at suppliers' factories. It was shown that definition processes are characterized by battles for the right to interpretation between actors where traditionally non-dominant ones can temporarily win and dictate the development.

Drawing on the above insights within actor-network theory, translation is also argued to be a central construct within Scandinavian institutionalism (Van Grinsven et al. 2016). In addition, Waeraas and Nielsen (2016) argue that the Scandinavian institutionalist perspective on translation have the possibility to complement actor-network theory concerning recipient context issues, such as for specific individuals within a specific organisation. Hence, Scandinavian institutionalism could contribute to a more detailed understanding of translation and its outcomes.

Czarniawska and Joerges (1996) describe how concepts or ideas are disembedded from previous contexts, set free and embedded in new contexts. Thus, in line with Latour (1986), as the idea travels through time and space it becomes translated to fit its new context and according to Sahlin-Andersson (1996) subject to context specific modifications. Moreover, Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen (2009) argue that actors find strategic opportunities with different interpretations, recognising that actors can interpret and translate an idea or concept in several ways in a given organisational context.

In line with this, Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) and Morris and Lancaster (2006) emphasise that different actors translate ideas and concepts to fit their distinctive needs in particular situations. Moreover, Van Grinsven et al. 2016) emphasise that individuals' translations and interpretations can be bound or affected by the local context. From an organisational point of view it is argued by Czarniawska (2005) that organisations who bring in ideas or concepts, e.g. sustainability, have a tendency to put it together with other already existing ideas in order to understand and deal with them. Moreover, Czarniawska (2008) argue that each one translates ideas according to his or her own frame of reference (ideas in residence). In the encounters between ideas in residence and traveling ideas, friction occurs which leads to the transformation of both.

However, Waeraas and Sataøen (2014), drawing on Røvik (2007) investigated how hospitals intentionally remove from and add components to a management idea in very similar ways. Challenging Scandinavian translation theory on the assumption that every translation entails a new and unique local version.

This paper argue that by combining actor-network theory and Scandinavian institutionalism on translation, one can understand the interconnectedness between organisational human and non-human actors and the acts of punctualization and depunctualization. Simultaneously, as mentioned above, one has the possibility to gain a more detailed understanding of translation

and its outcomes in specific contexts by incorporating Scandinavian institutionalism (Waeraas and Nielsen, 2016). Thus, being able to answer the questions of both how purchasing managers are dealing with, and in which ways they are influenced by, local sustainability ideas and concepts.

Methodology

Research design

In order to answer the research question of this paper, data was collected by conducting a case study of a large company within the food industry. The case was chosen with the idea of being a critical case. The purpose of choosing a critical case is that it permits logical deductions, e.g. if this “something” is not valid for this particular case, then it applies to no cases (Flyvbjerg, 2006). To concretise, previous research on sustainability concepts and ideas within sourcing is sparsely problematising how the concepts unfold in the daily work, mainly treating them as simple generic models. Moreover, within the particular industry many companies have chosen to profile themselves as sustainable. Choosing the case of a large organisation within the food industry which is argued to be an industry at forefront of the sustainability development, could be argued to be what Flyvbjerg (2006) calls a “most likely” case. Thus, the most likely case to be able to acquire and utilise the sustainability concept with ease, which some of the previous research assumes.

Given the theoretical framework of this study and especially the problematisation of previous research on the topic which the translation model brings, made it suitable to choose a critical case. However, one should bear in mind that it is not possible in advance to determine whether a specific case is truly a critical case or any other type of case (Flyvbjerg, 2006). A case can be many things simultaneously and it is therefore important to leave any preconceptions behind. Nevertheless, initially selecting a case using a specific strategy is recommended by Flyvbjerg (2006) as random selection is neither necessary nor preferable (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Single case studies have often been misunderstood to lack generalisability, although they are indeed a suitable approach for it (Flyvbjerg, 2006). However, formal generalisation is argued to be overvalued and the case studies carry the advantages of closing in on real-life situations and phenomena in practice (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The case study is also an in-depth approach and suitable for falsification, meaning that if one observation does not fit with a preconceived notion, it must be considered not valid generally and must be revised or rejected. Thus, claiming that the case study is subjective and biased toward verification is a false statement, it is falsification and not verification of preconceived notions that characterises this approach (Flyvbjerg, 2006).

Moreover, given the purpose of this study, a single case study was chosen as it is suitable for gaining the understanding that this paper has searched. In order to understand how people perceive and interpret concepts and ideas in their daily work, we need to understand the various viewpoints and behavior of the concerned actors. According to Flyvbjerg (2006), this

type of in-depth understanding and knowledge can be achieved by conducting a case study as researchers place themselves within the context.

Data collection

Eisenhardt (1989) emphasises that case studies typically combine various data collection methods, e.g. archives, observations, interviews and questionnaires. Hence, the data for this study was collected by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews, document analysis and observations. This as the collected data will potentially variate depending on the different actors' current mood, backgrounds, life situations etc. and qualitative data can potentially give a deeper understanding and depth than for example a quantitative questionnaire would (Silverman, 2013). Furthermore, as the purpose of this study is to seek an understanding to in which ways individuals are interpreting and dealing with ideas in their daily work, a qualitative approach is preferable to gain that in-depth and more meaningful understanding of the research subject (Silverman, 2013). Moreover, by conducting qualitative interviews, one has the possibility to understand the world from the subjects' points of view (Kvale, 2006) which is another important key to fulfil the purpose of this study.

In total, 16 semi-structured interviews were conducted, 10 documents were analysed and recurrent participant observations conducted. 10 out of 16 interviews were conducted with purchasing managers. Upon approaching the organisation, the author of this paper got in contact with one of the senior managers responsible for a team of purchasing managers. After an initial meeting, this individual provided names and contact details of the purchasing managers of the organisation. This method of finding interviewees could have led to a biased paper as the senior manager was highly involved in the initial selection of interviewees. However, as all purchasing managers of the organisation was contacted and also interviewed, this possible risk of bias was avoided.

The snowball effect of the interviews with the purchasing managers led to 6 additional interviews with other individuals within the organisation who were argued to be involved in, or affected by the phenomenon of this study (Emerson, 2015). More data was collected until the study reached saturation, thus when new data no longer provided relevant or new information (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). All interviews were conducted in the premises of the organisation and held face-to-face. In order to be completely focused on the interviewee, interviews were recorded in agreement with the interviewed. This allowed a better focus on the respondents and possibilities for supplementary questions to the respondents. Moreover, the recorded material was then transcribed, this allowed a more thorough analysis of the answers as one has the possibility to go back to specific answers (Bryman and Bell, 2013).

The semi-structured interviews lasted between 20 and 80 minutes and was structured around open-ended questions connected to specific themes which was found to be of interest after the initial document analysis was conducted. All the themes were focused around the local sourcing concept for sustainability and individuals' feelings, thoughts and experiences concerning this in their daily work. Semi-structured interviews in combination with open-

ended questions was considered to be appropriate as it motivates the interviewees to interact with the interviewer and be more open (Silverman, 2013)

It is important to stress that although interviews can help give voice to the many and contribute to the empowerment of the oppressed, they are neither inherently ethical nor unethical (Kvale, 2006). Kvale (2006) stresses the importance of recognising the power asymmetry within an interview situation. Unlike an ordinary dialogue, the interviewer has a dominant position as both a participant in, and an observer of, the situation. Due to this, there might be a risk that one give the false impression of being a friend in the purpose of gaining information which is needed for the research. Moreover, qualitative studies often face a conflict between presenting detailed and accurate descriptions of the world and simultaneously protecting the identities of the individuals who are a part of it (Kaiser, 2009). Thus, this raises ethical and methodological concerns. One way in which this paper deals with this power asymmetry is by ensuring that it protects respondent confidentiality and anonymity and carefully consider the audience for this research (Kaiser, 2009; Silverman, 2013). Consequently, the quotes that are presented in the empirical section are only distinguishing whether it is an individual from the purchasing department or not. This paper argues that, given the purpose of this study where the main focus is on purchasing managers, the distinction between different specific individuals of this group concerning who said what is not necessary and is outweighed by the protection of respondent anonymity.

Another limitation with interviews according to Silverman (2013) is that it might be possible that people have multiple meanings of a situation or an activity which all of them are not emphasised during an interview. This raises the question whether interview responses are to be treated as direct experiences or as constructed narratives involving activities that requires analysis themselves. Silverman (2013) does not argue further whether what is right or wrong, however he stresses that either way as a researcher one has to address how one will deal with it.

Accordingly, if interview responses are fully or partially constructed narratives. One way of dealing with it is to introduce complementary ways of data collection, contrasting and contextualising data from various sources. According to Watson (2011) interviews can be considerably strengthened if other methods of collecting data are carried out alongside or simultaneously, hence document analysis and participants observations was conducted throughout the study. This manner of analysing social life in organisation and management studies is what Watson (2011) call ethnography, originating both in sciences and humanities. Watson (2011) emphasises that ethnography is to be regarded as the product and not a method of production. It is a style of social science writing which draws upon the close participant observation and involvement with people in a particular context, their words spoken and the practices of the organisation. The author of this research strived towards joining the group of this study as much as possible by spending extensive time at the facilities of the organisation. Hence, during a period of two months when most of the data was collected, the author spent full working days at the open office areas of the organisation. This allowed the possibility to listen to and take part of various spontaneous conversations and find further opportunities of

collecting data such as recurrently being invited to meetings at short notice. Thus, the researcher of this paper had an opportunity to engage with the people being studied and converse with them on their own terms (Gellner and Hirsch, 2001). In essence, this paper has been inspired by ethnographic work, spending extensive time at the organisation which enabled an understanding and appreciation of the norms, values and practices of the organisation (Watson, 2011).

As mentioned earlier, this study seeks an understanding of specific activities and how people think, act and interpret these. Watson (2011) argue that little can be said about organisations unless we get close to peoples' actions and social interaction. Therefore, this study investigated the realities of how things work in organisations by spending extensive time at the facilities. By doing this, this paper could contextualise the activities which the researcher observed and the words that were received from the interviewed. This demands focus from the researcher on the analysis of organisational patterns and processes while trying to understand and capture their subjective experiences (Watson, 2011). The researcher must remove themselves from their usual routines and social contexts such that the studied organisation site provide a social world (Van Maanen, 2011). Hence, as mentioned above the researcher spent extensive time at the case company during the process of this study. According to Van Maanen (2011) this is the whole point behind ethnography, to learn what it is like to be someone else so that one can get into the heads of the studied and view things through their eyes, what they are doing and why.

The close and recurrent observations in formal meetings, in informal conversations and daily work of the organisational members do raise ethical concerns. Hence, a couple of principles was set up within this study to ensure the integrity of individuals and the organisation. Initially, before collecting any data the organisation announced on their intranet the purpose of the researcher's visits. Furthermore, in order to not interrupt the employees daily work and opinions when simultaneously observing this, when something of interest was observed, the individuals were then asked afterwards whether they gave consent to use it in the study. Thus, ensuring the participant observations to reflect the truth as much as possible. When participated in formal meetings, the researcher informed about the purpose of the researcher's attendance to the participating individuals before the meeting started.

Concerning interviews, as mentioned above this study strives to ensure the protection of respondent confidentiality and anonymity. Moreover, all interviewees were before the start of the interview informed about how the interviews would be used in the study and asked to give consent or dissent to the recording of audio. Worth mentioning again is that all interviewees gave consent to the recording. In order to ensure anonymity of the organisation, the organisation will be named with the fictitious name Foodies. Consequently, no documents will be displayed in its original form. Instead this study aims at providing as detailed descriptions as possible.

Data analysis

In the analysis of the data from the case study, this paper has been inspired by the approach of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A grounded theorist approaches an inquiry with a

fairly open mind regarding as to which general theoretical framework will likely emerge from the data and study. Thus, although preconceptions can never wholly be abandoned they should and have been avoided. Instead, it is suggested that one should start a detailed description of the features of the data that has been collected before attempting to produce the more general theoretical statements (Martin and Turner, 1986). As suggested, the researcher started from the growing accumulation of data. From there, when a sufficient amount of accurate and careful descriptions of relevant social phenomena was compiled, one can start to hypothesise about possible relationships among these. By using the other sets of data, i.e. documents and notes from observations, the relationships could then be tested and enhanced (Martin and Turner, 1986) Altogether, the important process within grounded theory of providing detailed and crafted descriptions has pushed this study to be strict and thorough in the handling and the interpretation of data but also in terms of collecting data.

Within grounded theory, several crafts for ensuring the quality of the collection of data has been developed. One of them is the crucial process of taking and writing notes when doing observations as many events are experienced and conversations are heard during a short period of time (Martin and Turner, 1986). Thus, in line with Martin and Turner (1986) the researcher has taken notes of observations during the observations as many of the details and nuances will otherwise be forgotten. Moreover, striving to write notes with as much details as possible concerning explanations and descriptions of the context, avoiding generalisations and summary statements.

This paper analysed the data collected by concept discovery, moving data to abstract categories which allows the application of names to the various findings in the data. Furthermore, these concepts was then tagged with codes (Martin and Turner, 1986). Some examples of codes are *interpretation, ambiguity, sustainable*. The codes were then further grouped and structured into different categories (Martin and Turner, 1986). Some examples of categories that were used are *purchasing managers' struggles, use of documents, and purchasing managers' opportunities*. The analysis and categorisation of the gathered data was a continuous process during the entire phase of data collection. Thus, it included the transcribed interviews, handwritten notes from the observations and the reviewed documents. This in order to continuously gain an understanding in line with the purpose of this study, while collecting data. When the study started to reach saturation, the data was further analysed by identifying and specifying relationships from the data. In the final round of data analysis, the theoretical framework of actor-network theory and translation was incorporated. This in order to ensure that the analysis of data is based in theory, and consequently that the theory is grounded in data (Silverman, 2013).

Empirical findings

Introducing the setting

The organisation of this study, hereby named with the fictitious named Foodies, is a company with a history of over 100 years. From a small family owned company to a large prominent

company in northern Europe, Foodies is selling products to over 25 countries. The company is owned to 100% by a larger family-owned group holding several brands within the food industry. Foodies has several production sites internationally with their main office located in southern parts of Sweden. The main office has been the setting for this study.

As most of the large international organisations of today, Foodies face pressure from several actors to act sustainable. In year 2013, the group introduced its six ethical principles, aimed towards setting a standard for all of their employees in all units. The ethical principles emphasise the organisation's interest and care for the environment, respect of people and the fostering of a responsible way of purchasing.

In year 2015, extensive work was undertaken in order to find and analyse the most relevant sustainability topics for the group and its stakeholders. This resulted in the group's sustainability programme. The sustainability programme emphasise four key focus areas of the group's sustainability work. (1) Fostering social responsibility at the workplace and in the supply chain; human rights, labour conditions and the environment. (2) Caring for the environment in regards to climate and energy, resource efficiency and agriculture. (3) Supporting consumers' health and wellbeing. Finally, (4) acting as a constructive part of society in collaborating and participating in projects related to sustainability.

Based on the group-level programme, Foodies has then developed a local sustainability programme where the targets have been adjusted to the local context. The idea behind that is that the current local situation and local expectations can then be taken into consideration when setting targets and goals. The local sustainability programme at Foodies was initiated a few years ago with the background of the group-level programme and an adjustment to the local organisation.

To make it feasible, the local sustainability programme was divided into three main areas. First, we had purchasing. Second, our own operations and production with a direct impact on sustainability. Finally, everything that is related to products and concepts and connected to marketing and sales. (Nonpurchaser)

The three main areas were then further concretised into three large formal processes within the organisation in order to bring in sustainability within the entire organisation. The products and concept development were addressed in a product strategy which were to include sustainable targets and goals. The product strategy is to be considered at all times and especially early on when new products and/or concepts are developed. The company's own operations were set out to work towards an environmental management certification. Finally, the purchasing activities in relation to sustainability were to be addressed within a concept and framework called Responsible sourcing, the main focus of this study.

The Responsible Sourcing Concept

The Code of Conduct

The Responsible sourcing concept consists of specific activities that the purchasing managers are responsible for handling and driving with their suppliers but also with internal actors. One of the key documents in the purchasing managers' work is the group-level's Code of conduct for suppliers. The Code of conduct originates from the group's mission and values and consists of thirteen paragraphs which the supplier upon signature agrees to comply to. It concerns both the social, e.g. that the supplier shall not use any form of forced labor or child labor, the employees shall be respected without the fear of threats or harassment, employees should have a safe working environment etc. The economical, e.g. employees shall be timely paid at least the national legal minimum wages. Finally, the environmental in stressing the importance of compliance with the requirements of applicable environmental legislation and regulations. Moreover, the Code requires that the supplier should have knowledge of its environmental impacts which they shall strive to reduce.

Our Code of conduct is very important as we in a very concrete way set the expectations on our existing and potential suppliers.
(Nonpurchaser)

The Code of conduct is a document that both Foodies' potential and existing suppliers are obliged to sign before conducting any business with the organisation. The Code stipulates the minimum requirements that the group has on its suppliers, demanding the supplier to respect and meet the requirements within their own operations and their own supply chains. However, the document also emphasise that it is a dynamic process in which suppliers can continuously improve and where Foodies can support the suppliers to meet the standards through cooperation. Thus, the Code encourages suppliers that does not meet the requirements to be open about their deviations in order to find corrective actions together with Foodies.

The Questionnaire for Suppliers

All new and potential suppliers to Foodies goes through a mandatory self-assessment which is mainly focused around a questionnaire that the supplier has to fill in. The questionnaire is also a central document that any current supplier has to renew at least every third year. Moreover, the questionnaire explicitly highlights the organisaton's high expecations of product safety and quality but also the responsibility for sustainability.

The questionnaire itself is rather broad, asking questions about the business itself but also social, ethical, and environmental responsibility and food safety and quality. (Purchaser)

The purchasing manager elaborates on how the questionnaire gives a rather broad picture of the supplier. The questionnaire addresses various subjects that are important to Foodies when potentially starting to do business with another company; food safety, quality, food fraud,

hygiene etc. Moreover, in regards to sustainability the questionnaire asks the supplier to provide evidence of any certificates in relation to social, ethical, or environmental responsibility. Furthermore, explicitly requesting information concerning if the supplier is a member of any international sustainability initiatives. In an effort to share knowledge and information, the purchasing managers are responsible for gathering internal actors from the quality and sustainability department for a review of the signed and answered questionnaire.

Risk level assessment and sustainability audit

Upon review and evaluation of the questionnaire, a risk level assessment is conducted based on the information provided by the supplier. This is done by ticking one box of low, medium or high risk related to commercial, responsible sourcing, food safety, food fraud, and allergen risk. Based on this, a total risk level for the supplier is determined and if the supplier is approved or not approved to deliver goods to the entire group or has to be audited before any decision can be made.

In addition to the risk decided through the questionnaire. A risk assessment is also done based on country in regards to social and environmental responsibility. The country risk for social responsibility is either regarded as high or low risk. In high risk countries there are e.g. risks for violation of human rights, poor working conditions, corruption, child labour etc. The country risk for environmental topics are divided and specified into water stress and climate change in the area, this risk is either regarded as high, medium or low. In order for Foodies to assess this, social risks are based on the BSCI (Business Social Compliance Initiative) risk list for specific countries. The risk level for environmental risks are based on Aqueduct Water Risk Atlas and Global Climate Risk Index report. Moreover, a sustainability responsibility risk assessment based on commodity specific risks is conducted. This risk assessment is based on an external organisational priority list of commodities that is argued to have greatest impact.

Based on the risk assessments, it is then decided if on-site sustainability audits are needed. The point of the audits are to evaluate and determine the supplier's level of compliance with the group's Code of conduct for suppliers and critical areas for improvement. Depending on the initially determined risk and priority it is decided whether a full-scale or basic sustainability audit should be conducted. Furthermore, it is explicitly recommended within the organisation that for high risk suppliers, audits should be conducted every three years. However, re-audits are to be defined case by case considering the initial audit's findings and importance of the supplier.

If or when non-compliances to Foodies Code are found, the supplier or potential supplier is obliged to review root causes for the non-compliances and plan for corrective actions with a clear timeframe and responsible persons. It is then the lead auditor and purchasing manager who are responsible for the follow-up of the corrective action plan. Regardless if any non-compliances are identified or not, when a sustainability audit has been conducted the supplier is formally defined as a sustainably managed supplier within Foodies.

Challenges in the daily work

Below, the three main challenges in purchasing managers' daily work which was found in the collected data will be presented. Thereafter, this paper presents the main mitigating actions which purchasing managers take in order to deal with the perceived challenges.

What do we learn?

At one occasion in one of the open office areas of Foodies (observation 4), a discussion started concerning the Responsible sourcing work in general and the Supplier Questionnaire in particular. The group, consisting of three individuals, started discussing in front of the coffee machine as one of the individuals had just started to prepare for sending out the organisation's Supplier Questionnaire to a potential supplier. This individual implied to the others that it would take time from the rest of the work and that the possibility for new information through the questionnaire would be unlikely. The group moved to the coffee area and sat down around a table. The group continued sharing experiences on dealing with information they had received through the questionnaire.

During the observation, it was apparent that all the individuals believed the questionnaire to be rather general and sometimes superficial. Another individual in the group argued that since the questionnaire covers so many different topics, it does not give an adequate or sufficient understanding of the potential or current supplier which is being reviewed. Furthermore, this person argued that the provided information lacks depth as the questionnaire doesn't go into details. One of the others nodded and agreed, however also pointed out that it is still an important part of the supplier evaluation within Foodies.

When going through the questionnaire, I would say that we on a fairly large scale look at the certificates or standards that the suppliers are saying that they have or follow and attach with the email they send. Initially we put quite a lot of trust in those as we don't really know that much at this step of the process. (Purchaser)

This purchasing manager shared similar thoughts and experiences concerning the Supplier Questionnaire as the individuals of the above mentioned observation. In addition, this individual emphasises the initial importance of the third party certificates or standards that the supplier has or is a part of. The purchasing manager elaborates on this by arguing that when a potential supplier at least has some specific certificates or is certified against specific sustainability standards, one has to assume that some work has been undertaken within the supplier's own organisation that is positive in terms of sustainability. Thus, due to the lack of clear insights into the suppliers' business at this step, the supplier's evidence of certificates and standards becomes critical.

The questionnaire is more that I make a tick in the box rather than getting an understanding of their business. If a supplier answers yes or no to something or has a certificate it can be reassuring in a way but it is definitely not enough in my opinion. (Purchaser)

Above purchaser has similar experiences with working with the questionnaire as other colleagues. However, this individual elaborates on the reasoning by arguing that the questionnaire then becomes more of a tick in the box rather than being a meaningful source for knowledge and understanding of the supplier. It is argued that the main reason for this is due to the suppliers' business being more complex than can be understood through a questionnaire. Thus, certificates can be reassuring for the purchasing manager in the frames of Responsible sourcing. However, it does not necessarily become a helpful document for acquiring other useful information in the choice of, or continuous work with suppliers. Because of this, the questionnaire can also become a form of distraction for the individual in the rest of his or her daily work.

Reverting to the topic of certificates, in one meeting at Foodies concerning a current supplier (observation 3), opinions were expressed towards the specific answers and certificates that the supplier had provided in the questionnaire. It was argued by two individuals within the group that they had previous experience with meeting similar suppliers that claimed to have specific sustainability certificates, but clearly did not live up to the expectations that the certificates demand. Thus, although certificates can be reassuring for the purchasing managers, there is also sometimes a skepticism towards the actual credibility of these.

To sum up this part, the Supplier Questionnaire provides Foodies with a broad spectrum of information. However, as it aims to cover many different topics it also suffers from being perceived by individuals of Foodies as too broad and superficial. This sometimes means that the purchasing managers do not have an adequate or sufficient understanding of the potential or current supplier when the questionnaire is completed and will be reviewed. Moreover, the lack of an in-depth understanding retrieved from the questionnaire, forces individuals of Foodies to initially put extensive trust in third-party certificates in terms of sustainability. This was shown to be problematic for the organisation at times when mistrust is raised towards the certificates themselves.

What is sustainability worth?

Another theme that was apparent in the case study of Foodies was the internal ambiguity regarding what is truly prioritised within Foodies concerning sustainability in relation to other company values.

We send out the questionnaire and our Code of conduct and the supplier signs it and we do a review internally and go visit them. That is fine but I am unsure about the results. Sometimes I don't know really how

I should value or balance the answers that I receive from the suppliers against each other. (Purchaser)

The purchaser experiences an ambiguity related to the results of a supplier assessment. Although very clear results can be derived from an assessment, it becomes hard and vague for the purchasing manager to make a clear decision based on the assessment itself. For above quoted purchasing manager, it is most apparent when there are several suppliers to choose from for a specific product. In these situations there is nothing that determines which is the better option based upon any values or clear targets of the organisation. Thus, suppliers that are making larger efforts to act sustainable in any way are not favored or highlighted by the questionnaire and the following evaluation.

Although we have a supplier which is clearly working hard with their employees' rights or safety, local community or environment. If we have another supplier that is not as good concerning those topics but offers much better prices. Then it is actually unclear to me which one I should choose from an organisational point of view. (Purchaser)

Above individual argues that in critical situations where two or more suppliers are being weighed against each other, it is hard to determine whether it is economical value or sustainability that is the internal organisational main incentive for a supplier selection. This creates confusion for the purchasing managers as although sufficient information from suppliers might be available, the information does not concretely guide them in their decision-making due to internal organisational unclarity and ambiguity.

In the daily work for purchasing managers, supplier selection is mainly done based on the specific context and the specific situation, e.g. in a project where more internal actors from other departments are present. Furthermore, the presence of ambiguity was also found to be very much dependent on the product category. For example, for specific materials there are only a few supplier options available. Hence, it is argued by the purchasing managers that it becomes easier to determine how to proceed as choices are limited. Moreover, some individuals argued that for their product categories, sustainability topics was not as important or critical due to harder regulations and progressive innovations within their segments.

For my product categories and from my point of view it has not been any problem to be honest. The industry for these products have come very far in thinking sustainable. They are not I can choose suppliers which the overall cooperation goes well with and that we have set up good agreements with. (Purchaser)

This particular purchasing manager does not experience the same ambiguity as some of the colleagues, since as also mentioned above, the product categories are not perceived by the individual to be as exposed to sustainability problems. Because of this, the purchasing manager did not perceive the general evaluation or supplier decision as difficult since the decision could

then be based entirely from an economical point of view. Furthermore, it was argued that instead of working with what this individual regarded as basic requirements of sustainability, one had the opportunity to seek and find new sustainable solutions in cooperation with internal actors of Foodies and the current suppliers.

An example of how Foodies' internal actors work with new sustainable solutions is the ongoing improvement within packaging materials to replace conventional plastic materials with renewable plastic. This decision was based on the outspoken organisational ambition to seek alternatives to traditional plastics. In this case, Foodies has decided to take on the additional cost which the change to the renewable plastic material incur. Hence, the decision for the purchasing manager becomes easier as any conflict of interest is mitigated when a formal choice of priority has been taken within the organisation. Furthermore, according to above purchaser there are often win-win situations in terms of sustainability and economical value to be found for the particular segments that this individual is responsible for. For example when packaging is reduced in weight, it could also affect the costs positively. Thus, in these situations there is no perceived ambiguity.

To summarise, in various situations the purchasing managers experience ambiguity concerning the supplier evaluation and assessment, especially in more critical situations when a selection of a supplier is to be decided. This ambiguity relates to the organisational unclarity that the individuals experience and feel. For purchasing managers it is not always clear what is being prioritised within Foodies and the group both in terms of and within the sustainability topic itself, but also in relation to other values such as economical value. This creates confusion for purchasing managers when they deal with the information that is received from suppliers through the questionnaire. However, at times when a review and evaluation is done in a project with a clear and outspoken target, decision-making is facilitated as possible conflicts of interests have been mitigated.

What is our sustainability requirements?

I know very well that sustainability is a truly important subject for them, close to their hearts and something that they really care about.
(Purchaser)

Upon interviewing the employees of Foodies, many of the individuals emphasised how important sustainability was for the family of the family-owned group that Foodies is a part of. Some individuals who had heard it and expressed that they genuinely believed it themselves and others who had heard it by word of mouth within the organisation. As mentioned earlier, the group's Code of conduct should stress those values and the entire group's values. Hence, the Code aims to stipulate minimum requirements on the entire group's suppliers in relation to social, economic and environmental sustainability.

I think that the Code is good in pointing out our values to the general people, to the market, what we stand for. But a problem is that some parts of the Code is subject to exceptions allowed by the local national law and already then we have let loose of our values a bit. Same goes for the deviations basically, as there is almost always room for correcting these. (Purchaser)

It is argued by purchasing managers that the Code is a very good tool to use as a way of presenting the values of Foodies and the group to others, what the organisation stands for and what they believe in. Nevertheless, according to above quoted purchaser it does not become a powerful statement and requirement towards the suppliers. This individual believes that it has lost some of its strength and bearing towards the suppliers one is in contact with when exceptions of the Code are allowed by local national laws. It further argued by purchasing managers that since expectations of that kind are allowed, the supplier can always interpret it as good enough if they follow the specific country's legislations. Several interviewees expressed similar thoughts regarding the Code and its diminishing expectations and demands on the suppliers. Partly due to the Code being subject to the local national law and partly since deviations of the Code can be corrected rather than that they are completely impermissible.

We have our Code of conduct which we always aim to have the supplier sign and that is good. But when we are visiting suppliers' facilities and discover deviations it is not that we have ever stopped doing business with them because of this. (Purchaser)

This particular purchasing manager express similar thoughts concerning the Code as colleagues, but also discuss what occurs when deviations to the Code of conduct are found. According to this individual, Foodies have never decided to terminate a business relationship because of deviations to the Code. It is further argued that this troublesome in purchasing managers' daily work as what is communicated through the group's Code of conduct does not bear the same meaning when supplier non-compliances are found. On the other hand, it is of other interviewees' opinions that this is not plainly to be regarded as something negative.

In my opinion it is very complex. Should we simply choose suppliers that follow the Code of conduct and even much more already and ditch the others.. Or should we instead work with suppliers that might deviate from the Code today and instead support them to improve. I am not sure and I don't believe the organisation entirely is either. (Purchaser)

Above citation shows another approach on how to interpret the true purpose and way of working with the Code as a purchasing manager of Foodies. This individual recognise that one can interpret it as taking a responsibility as an organisation when choosing suppliers that in its present state does not live up to the Code of conduct. Taking this approach, the individual

argues that one can then instead work together with the supplier to identify sustainability improvements at the suppliers' facilities. It is of this individual's experience that this becomes very meaningful and also builds a good long term business relationship with suppliers. On the other hand, the individual is also ambiguous towards this approach as one also feel that it erodes some of the bearing of the Code of conduct.

To sum up this part, purchasing managers can become confused in their work with suppliers as they experience that the Code of conduct does not stand for the same strong values as they perceive that the group does. However, it is argued that the Code becomes useful as a way of presenting the values of Foodies and the group to others. Nevertheless, in the daily work with suppliers, purchasing managers feel that the Code is not as strong. This creates a challenging and ambiguous situation for the individuals of Foodies as they personally struggle to interpret and understand what is preferable. Whether to choose suppliers that might deviate today which in cooperation with Foodies have to work and improve, or if one should set a minimum level of tolerance.

Mitigating actions

Physical meetings

In addition to the three main challenges that was found in the collected data relating to individuals of Foodies experiences when working with the Responsible sourcing concept. It was also found that there were mitigation actions that purchasing manager take in order to assure the quality of their work and a subjective sustainable supplier base.

The individuals of Foodies several times stressed the importance of actually visiting the suppliers. Partly for the more self-explanatory business rationale, to build a good business relationship with current and potential suppliers. However, also in order to detect deviations from the self-assessment or Code of conduct in audits. One of the purchasing managers elaborates on the latter:

It has occurred a couple of times when we were visiting suppliers from specific countries who had acquired certain certificates in relation to food safety, risk or sustainability that one starts to really question how they have acquired them. In these cases there were no chance that they had acquired them genuinely and we could have only detected it by being there physically. (Purchaser)

In above quote, one individual argue, in line with the first presented theme of challenges, that certificates that should work as a guarantee for suppliers are themselves at times questioned by individuals of Foodies. To ensure a good supplier selection, purchasing managers argue that it then becomes crucial for them to visit the premises of the suppliers to be able to reveal this type of false information. Above purchaser also elaborate on the importance of being there

physically as it is argued that one can then see things that is impossible to understand or even detect otherwise.

It is surely a part of my so to say ordinary job description to visit suppliers. But in terms of sustainability, for me it is many different angles to take into account when looking at sustainability and the suppliers. Then being there physically is crucial. Going there and meeting ordinary employees and see as much as possible of their business, to understand how they work with sustainability in practice and get a sense of how aware they truly are. (Purchaser)

The experiences of above purchaser is similar to those of other colleagues of Foodies concerning the importance of visiting suppliers. This individual emphasise that it is solely in the physical meetings with suppliers that one can obtain a true insight of how the words in the suppliers questionnaire or other written communication looks like. Moreover, the purchasing manager elaborates on this reasoning by asking oneself if sustainability is something that the suppliers work with and are aware of or something that they simply recognise because some of their customers are asking for it. Several individuals of Foodies argued that things like these are fairly easily however exclusively detected by talking face to face with their current and potential suppliers and seeing their facilities. By visiting suppliers, purchasing managers can then identify differences between various suppliers that within the frames of the questionnaire are argued to be much harder to detect.

Many of the interviewees also talked about the importance of getting a “good feeling” of a supplier. A good feeling was according to the individuals of Foodies to be dependent on many different elements where one was the previously mentioned authenticity of suppliers’ claimed sustainability awareness and work. Furthermore, it was said to be dependent on more general topics such as how suppliers respond to questions, how well they are organised, how they act on inquiries etc. Hence, the overall and general feeling that purchasing managers have of a supplier is also dependent on the physical meetings with and visits of suppliers.

Taking personal initiatives and setting personal demands

As found in the previous sections, a majority of the purchasing managers of Foodies struggle with the perceived organisational ambiguity and unclearness concerning sustainability. Because of this, some individuals have taken more personal initiatives to work with what they regard as meaningful sustainability efforts.

Just recently I was in Asia. Together with one more from Foodies we are a part of a project with a human rights organisation to support children’s rights in a country. This country is a large exporter of some of the raw materials that we buy and it was found in a study on child rights that we did together with this human rights organisation, that

many children skip school to support their families in the cultivation.
(Purchaser)

The individual further describe that based on the findings, Foodies together with the human rights organization started to actively work with an ambition to make a positive difference in the supply chain in this country. This was further concretised into an aim of getting the affected children to complete elementary education. The work includes ensuring the quality of education and strengthening children's and parents' engagement in school. It is of this purchaser's opinion and experience that this is an initiative that works well because of the expertise from the human rights organisation and then the economic support from Foodies. Building on this reasoning, another purchaser talk about other personal work and experiences with one specific supplier:

I have one supplier which I recently visited who clearly did a lot for the local environment with water management but also in terms of social sustainability with the local farmers. And I mean.. Here we are not directly involved but in my selection of suppliers this is something I keep in mind. And also therefore have chosen to buy from them although they are not the cheapest one, to support this initiative.
(Purchaser)

The quote of above individual shows that it is the individual's personal demands on suppliers that has led to further cooperation with the specific supplier. Furthermore, the purchasing manager recognise that this is sustainability work that Foodies are not directly apart of and the individual continue by contemplating whether Foodies could be an active part in the initiatives that the supplier is driving. The above purchaser feel that there might be a lack of internal resources for that and end up in the conclusion that for now Foodies can at least actively support the initiative by choosing this supplier instead of other alternatives.

Another branch within the theme of personal initiatives was the constraints that some individuals felt that their product segments had. These individuals wished to work more with sustainability topics but felt that, given their portfolio of products, had a harder time to do so. Furthermore, there were also some who chose to mainly work in the frames of the Responsible sourcing actions and did not have any other expressed personal demands on their suppliers or particular experiences with working outside of those frames.

Discussion

Non-human actors at the organisational stage

A key understanding within actor-network theory is that also non-human objects can be actors (Law, 1992). This have serveral implications for the study of Foodies. In this case it becomes clear when analysing the empirical findings that the key documents of the Responsible sourcing concept are apparent actors within the organisation.

Moreover, as Law (1992) emphasise an actor is also a network in itself, since it is a patterned network of heterogeneous relations. Using this understanding on the case-study of Foodies one can quickly identify two key non-human actors. Namely, the Supplier Questionnaire and the group's Code of conduct. Both of these actors which in turn are made up of several bits and pieces. Starting with the Supplier Questionnaire, as described previously in the empirical findings, the Supplier Questionnaire consists of several sections which together become the questionnaire and in turn come to be seen by others as one single actor. In the questionnaire one finds that it is built up of sections concerning not only sustainability questions but also questions concerning food safety, quality, food fraud, hygiene etc. Thus, the Supplier Questionnaire balance many different interests simultaneously but come to be seen as one entity, one actor. The process where a network come to look like one single actor is the process of punctualization where all the pieces of the questionnaire are black boxed into one entity (Callon, 1991; Law, 1992).

This underlying understanding of punctualization makes another act apparent in the study of Foodies. In line with the reasoning of Callon and Latour (1981), all black boxes are "leaky", there will always be initiatives that seek to open black boxes. In the empirical findings of this paper it was found that some individuals believed the questionnaire to be too broad and sometimes superficial. This was argued to be because of the large spread of information that the Supplier Questionnaire tries to capture. Hence, one perceives the information received from suppliers on each topic as too shallow and concise.

Consequently, some purchasing managers decide to simply have the supplier complete the questionnaire without going into further details of the answers. More specifically, in terms of suppliers and sustainability, actors of Foodies initially instead rely to a large extent on the potential third-party certificates or standards that the suppliers holds. Although, it was found that at times a skepticism within Foodies towards the actual certificates was also apparent. In order for purchasing managers to avoid the endless ambiguous situation, the bits and pieces of the questionnaire yet again becomes punctualized and black boxed in an effort to avoid the endless complexity (Law, 1992).

Turning the attention to the group's Code of conduct, one finds that it is similar to the questionnaire made up of several pieces, more specifically out of thirteen paragraphs. Nevertheless, it come to be seen as one single black boxed non-human actor, the Code, by other actors (Law, 1992). The Code is aimed at setting demands on suppliers in social, economic and environmental aspects of sustainability. When analysing the empirical findings, one finds that purchasings managers has come to be aware of the collection of parts that the non-human actor, the Code, consists of when one have experienced problems or setbacks with the former. Thus, the black boxed Code of conduct come to be depunctualized, making all the elements inside the Code visible (Law, 1992).

When depunctualising the Code of conduct, the purchasing managers experience ambiguity. The ambiguity mainly relates to the perceived importance of sustainability which they find the group to have in general and which individuals argue that the Code is strong at presenting to others. However, when further depunctualizing the Code, individuals feel that the Code lacks clear demands on suppliers and also on their own work. Thus, at times individuals struggle with the thoughts of whether one should choose suppliers that might deviate from the Code today and support improvement or if one should set hard and concrete minimum requirements.

Nevertheless, the Code itself emphasise that living up to the Code is a dynamic process in which suppliers can improve. The Code further encourage suppliers that might deviate from it today to be open about this in order to find corrective actions. As shown in the next section, the ambiguity experienced when depunctualizing the non-human actors is further mitigated by translating the Responsible sourcing concept. Translation is then done in ways that become beneficial to actors in their daily work.

Translation in the daily work of purchasing managers

Actors	Translation	Actions
Group 1A	Responsible sourcing interpreted as a tick in the box mainly for giving a supplier internal legitimacy.	Instead stressing the importance of physical meetings. Take personal initiatives and/or set personal demands on suppliers.
Group 1B	”	Work with continuous sustainability improvements in projects.
Group 1C	”	No further actions. Perceived limitations of their possibilities due to their specific product portfolios.
Group 2A	Responsible sourcing interpreted as a complete concept for the sustainability work.	No additional actions than those within the frames of Responsible sourcing.

Table 1. Summary of translations and the following actions

According to Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) and Boxenbaum and Strandgaard Pedersen (2009), an actor can interpret and translate an idea in several ways within a given context. When analysing this recurrent situation within Foodies, it is found that since the Supplier Questionnaire is also a mandatory part of the Responsible sourcing activities, one simply go through with the questionnaire and conduct a risk level assessment based on the information provided by the supplier. Although one simultaneously might believe the information to be insufficient or can even be questioned itself at times. One explanation for this is that many purchasing managers decide to black box and translate it into what individuals of Foodies calls a “tick in the box”. Thus, that the questionnaire is interpreted as simply a step which one has to go through and finish with a current or potential supplier in order to be able to conduct

business and make purchases. This means that instead of being translated into a tool for a thorough evaluation of a supplier's work with sustainability, one translates it into a tool that enables a business relationship. This understanding is in line with Latour (1986) that emphasise the constant transformation of ideas and concepts by people's interaction with the former.

Furthermore, once the supplier has gone through the Supplier Questionnaire, signed the Code of conduct and possible audit has been conducted, one is also formally accepted as a supplier within the Responsible sourcing framework. Thus, the framework also gives formal legitimacy for a supplier. This is one of the main reasons to why it was found that purchasing managers' involvement in other sustainability initiatives within the organisation varies. Some individuals within Foodies that translated the Supplier Questionnaire and Code of conduct as activities of ticking boxes considered that to be sufficient for a supplier to be regarded as sustainable. They also found support for this reasoning by returning to the Responsible sourcing framework and the expressed definition of a sustainably managed supplier in this. Other individuals within Foodies considered the ticking of boxes to be insufficient and instead seek other ways of ensuring sustainable suppliers. As shown by the mitigating actions in the empirical findings, the purchasing managers then set personal demands in order to ensure what they regard as sustainable suppliers. Thus, an individual translation of what Responsible sourcing is and the following actions is made possible.

Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) and Morris and Lancaster (2006) argue that actors transform ideas by translating them for their own benefit or to fit their specific needs. Thus, the act of translation can be used by actors as a strategic move. In this case, the strategic act of translation was found to be mainly twofold. First, for those purchasing managers which have other personal demands on suppliers than one consider the Responsible sourcing idea to have. Second, for those purchasing managers which consider the work in the Responsible sourcing concept to be sufficient and therefore only engaged in those activities concerning sustainability (2A).

The first group of actors (1A) which generally translated the Responsible sourcing idea to be insufficient, instead put emphasis on meeting the suppliers physically in order to get a feeling for the suppliers' sincerity concerning sustainability. Furthermore, physical meetings were argued by these actors to be a much more efficient way to detect irregularities and differences between suppliers. As shown in the empirical findings, another thing that these actors do is taking personal initiatives with their suppliers on the topic of sustainability. In line with Czarniawska and Sevón (2005), this is made possible by translating the Responsible sourcing framework into a tick in the box, interpreting it as insufficient.

Within the first group it was found that some actors who perceived the Responsible sourcing to mainly be an act of ticking boxes, had or was engaged in other activities in Foodies that was sustainability driven (1B). For example, sustainability projects mentioned in the empirical findings. One way of interpreting this is that other ideas, such as a specific sustainability project, come to affect and in essence change how one translates the concept of Responsible

sourcing (Van Grinsven et al. 2016). Thus, as one finds a sustainability project meaningful, it can in turn affect the translation of the Responsible sourcing framework, perceiving the latter as superficial.

Finally, a couple of individuals of the first group of translators (1C) perceived their possibilities to engage in other or additional sustainability work with their suppliers as limited. The limitations of their possibilities to work with sustainability were argued to be related to the perceived limitations of their product portfolios. Thus, although the act of translation can be similar within a group, it can produce divergent outcomes depending on the different individual contexts (Czarniawska and Sevón, 1996).

Organisational translation of sustainability

As noted in the previous sections, the non-human actors i.e. the questionnaire for suppliers and the Code of conduct are key actors of the Responsible sourcing framework. Moreover, these actors are given legitimacy by the framework as they are mandatory steps and actions in the overall supplier evaluation. However, by acts of translations purchasing managers have the possibility to work more freely in ways that are beneficial to them.

In this section, this paper strives to understand and analyse on an organisational level the underlying reasons to these specific acts of translations. According to Czarniawska and Sevón (2005) organisations have a tendency to put together different ideas in order to understand them. In terms of sustainability and purchasing at Foodies, it was found that within the frames of Responsible sourcing several ideas are incorporated. Apart from the mentioning of sustainability work in documents, one mentions quality and product safety as important concepts for Foodies. Thus, the idea of sustainable sourcing activities have been incorporated and fitted into a context that fits the organisation and its already existing needs. Another way of interpreting this is that it is an example of how an organisation creates something new from ideas and concepts that already exist in the organisation (Czarniawska, 2005).

Nevertheless, when purchasing managers come in contact with and reflect on the Responsible sourcing concept of Foodies, the process of depunctualization and translation starts. As several ideas are incorporated into the concept, individuals have a hard time sorting the information and requirements on suppliers. As stressed in the empirical findings, individuals struggle with interpreting and understanding what the organisational priorities are concerning sustainability. One explanation for this is the organisational incorporation of sustainability in the already existing ideas and concepts of Foodies which in turn could create a vague situation for purchasing managers (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). Furthermore, this would explain why individuals argue that decision-making is facilitated when a clear target or goal of a supplier selection is set, e.g. in projects.

Although this can become a struggle for purchasing managers in their work, from an organisational point of view it might be a deliberate decision to keep it as is. This in order for internal actors to be able to translate more freely in each unique situation, not being as bound

by the context of the Responsible sourcing framework. Thus, trusting the professional expertise and individual judgements of organizational members. Moreover, by keeping the concept of sustainability and requirements and demands rather vague, the actors within the organisation has a greater opportunity to translate it to their own benefit and needs in specific situations (Morris and Lancaster, 2006).

Furthermore, reverting to the purchasing manager's point of view. In the previous section it was stressed that purchasing managers translate in order to deal with the feelings of ambiguity related to the Responsible sourcing concept. Drawing on the above mentioned reasoning one could argue that individuals in fact do not struggle with the ambiguity but rather appreciates and embrace it since it supports an individual translation of sustainability and freedom of actions for actors.

Conclusion

This paper has investigated in which ways purchasing managers are influenced by and deal with local sustainability concepts and ideas in their daily work. The paper shows how purchasing managers are influenced by the sustainability concept, i.e. Responsible sourcing, when engaging in the actions of punctualizing and depunctualizing the non-human actors of the local network. When individuals depunctualize and open the black box, they experience ambiguity in terms of organisational sustainability demands on suppliers. In an attempt to mitigate the perceived ambiguity, purchasing managers translate the Responsible sourcing concept in ways that are beneficial to them in their daily work.

Actions of translation was shown to mainly be done in two ways. First, those purchasing managers which have other personal demands on suppliers than one consider the Responsible sourcing concept to have. These individuals translated the Responsible sourcing concept into a process of ticking boxes for merely giving a supplier internal legitimacy. By doing this one could instead engage in and focus on the actions of physical meetings with suppliers and the various personal initiatives. Within the first group of translators it was also found that some individuals mainly strive to work with continuous sustainability improvements in projects. Moreover, a couple of individuals felt that the possibilities to engage in other or additional sustainability work with their suppliers was limited due to perceived limitations of their specific product portfolios. This shows that although the act of translation can be similar within a group, it can produce divergent outcomes depending on the different individual contexts. Furthermore, the second group of translators who consider the work in the Responsible sourcing concept to be sufficient has the possibility to continue accordingly as the framework gives formal legitimacy for a supplier.

On an organisational level it was found that Foodies has put together many different ideas in the Responsible sourcing concept. Thus the idea of sustainable sourcing activities have been incorporated and fitted into a context that fits the organisation and its already existing needs. When purchasing managers then face this idea in their daily work, they have a hard time

sorting the various information and requirements on suppliers. Although this can become a struggle for purchasing managers in their work, from an organisational point of view it might be a deliberate decision to keep it as is. This in order for internal actors, including purchasing managers, to be able to translate more freely in each unique situation, not being as bound by the context of the Responsible sourcing concept. By keeping the concept of sustainability and requirements and demands rather vague, the actors within the organisation have a greater opportunity to translate it to their own benefit and needs in specific situations. Thus, it was found that purchasing managers' perceived ambiguity might not be a true struggle but rather an opportunity as it enables individual translations and freedom of forthcoming actions.

This paper presents new insights on how sustainability is enacted in organisations, highlighting how organisational members can shape and form entire concepts and ideas as they encounter them in their daily work. Thus, contributing to the existing research on sustainability which has focused mainly on concepts themselves. Furthermore, organisations should become more aware of how their employees by acts of translation can individualise organisational concepts to benefit their work or preferences. However, the various interpretations of the responsible sourcing concept may also be seen as a result of organisational ambiguity concerning sustainability, something that many individuals of this study felt. Hence, clearer directions and requirements on what is expected of suppliers concerning sustainability might align, or at least assist organisational members in the act of translation.

Another implication is that organisations need to reflect on their openness and ability to notice other work within the organisation that serves a similar purpose. This study showed that individuals engage in others activities that are related to sustainability which was not captured within the frames of the responsible sourcing concept, e.g. the personal initiatives that some purchasing managers were involved in. There is a risk that activities of this kind go unnoticed within the organisation, as it is too focused around the developed concept for sustainability.

For policymakers, this study implicates that the embracement of Sustainable Development Goals in the daily work of organisations is complex and not to be taken for granted. Although a large majority of companies agree that businesses have a responsibility for fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. Inevitably, it comes down to the single actor in a business which is to perform the goals in his or her daily work. If organizational members translate a sustainability concept differently and the related actions vary depending on the individual, struggles might arise for organisations and in turn policymakers as there is a difference between what is communicated and what is actually done.

This paper, in line with Åhlström and Egels-Zandén (2008) contribute to the fairly unexplored empirical setting for actor-network theory. Moreover, by introducing actor-network theory and Scandinavian institutionalism on translation into the more specific research on purchasing and sourcing related to sustainability. This paper contributes to the previous research which has tended to investigate this phenomenon through quantitative studies (e.g. Carter and Carter,

1998; Carter et al. 2000; Carter and Jennings, 2004; and Ehr Gott et al. 2011) or by looking at annual reports, websites etc. of firms of several industries simultaneously (Closs et al. 2011). Finally, this paper contributes to the lack of cross-references between the different perspectives of translation (Waeraas and Nielsen, 2016).

A limitation of this study is that it has not adopted a longitudinal approach, not following the organisation for a longer period of time. However, individuals' acts of translations are occurring all the time and it is not the journey of the concept itself which was the focus of this study. Rather how individuals are affected by and deal with a current concept in their work. Nevertheless, future research on sustainability concepts and ideas within organisations could adopt a longitudinal approach where one would investigate how a concept or idea potentially transform over time. This since a concept might be interpreted differently depending on when it was introduced and when it is being researched. Moreover, it would be valuable to do a comparative study of several organisations implementing comparable sustainability frameworks, studying how they potentially are interpreted differently in the daily work depending on local organisational contexts. A comparative study of this type could be conducted on organisations active in the same industry since one would then get an understanding of how organisations with seemingly similar general conditions translates a concept. Another alternative is a comparative study on organisations active in different industries, investigating how the various industrial contexts might influence the translation of a similar sustainability concept.

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