

**INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENT OVER TIME:
TENSIONS AND PARADOXES OF MAKING MEANING
WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ECOLOGICAL
SUSTAINABILITY**

By

Alastair Douglas Rylatt

Bachelor of Business and Graduate Diploma of Employment Relations

School of Management

University of Technology, Sydney

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DEDICATION

Thank you, Elaine, for your enduring love and encouragement. Without you it would have been impossible to undertake this journey.

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

Alastair Rylatt

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARC	Australian Research Council
ISF	Institute of Sustainable Futures
NVivo	Software program for qualitative analysis, a proprietary product by QSR International
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates individual change over time and provides vital clues to the difficulties and opportunities of sustaining commitment within social, business and political complexity. Critique of the deterministic accounts of the organisation and management literature has led to new pathways of understanding in how individuals make meaning. These areas of investigation advance theory of how individuals adapt and respond to technical and adaptive change. The study draws from literature on self-identity, sensemaking and commitment to build deeper understanding of synergies and disconnections as applied to the area of sustainability and change management. The research adopted a social constructionist approach where data was collected from 31 individuals in their commitment to environmentally friendly practices in small and medium businesses. Study of the influence of sensegiving on sensemaking of individuals was undertaken in the context of a government funded program designed to improve the level of ecological sustainability in industry. The primary source of data came from reflective glances that included memories of past events and experiences, and current and prospective accounts were analysed to build theory. The findings indicate that individual commitment over time is a highly temporal and ephemeral phenomenon that is heavily interconnected with personal desires for stability and becoming. These investigations provide important contributions to the field of sustainability, and new perspectives on how personal change manifests within ambiguity and why the morphing of language and relationships makes commitment difficult to sustain. The capacity to adapt quickly to complexity requires a skilful mix of personal desire in overcoming obstacles, being able to create compelling scripts for change, and finally being able to modify leadership and management strategies to secure lasting engagement and compliance. The central finding of this research is that individuals morph over time in relationship to multiple commitments and readings of what is occurring around them. Centrally important to these determinations are the perceived levels of power and authority to take action in the particular context.