

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

**By**

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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.

Sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Rudi Weber who sadly passed away during the writing of this thesis. It was you most of all that inspired me to undertake this academic pursuit. Your confidence and faith in me was a treasured and lasting gift.

## **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.

## **CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION: CURIOSITY ABOUT COMMITMENT AND MEANING MAKING**

The aim of this doctoral study is to increase awareness of how and why commitment occurs as individuals seek to make meaning of the various contexts in their lives. To gain awareness of how and why commitment occurs, a wide range of theories and empirical studies were examined. The research is primarily inductive (Swanson & Holton 2005), where viewpoints, abstractions and concepts emerge as a result of the close inspection of empirical observations in line with understandings of the literature. The empirical study examined 31 business people and their commitment to environmentally friendly practices within industry. Most attention was paid to micro-processes in the making of meaning for individuals, and some conclusions were also drawn regarding organisation and cluster commitments.

What differentiates this research from earlier literature is that the individual stakeholders are placed ‘centre stage’ rather than being addressed through the overarching concerns of firms, organisations and industries. The thesis argues that research in organisation and management studies has neglected to explore the making of meaning as it unfolds within the interplay between commitment, sensemaking and self-identity over time, and has also avoided investigation of the complex effects of specific situations and contexts on the individual. Interest in the individual has enabled a deeper exploration of the dilemmas and paradoxes that people address when considering action. These include a wide range of considerations, including levels of motivation, perceived personal authority, current workload and interest in shifting commitments over time.

In selecting the context of individual commitment to ecological sustainability, it was recognised that many of the challenges faced by individuals in implementing environmentally friendly practices were common to other situations involving issues that are complex and difficult to resolve. Exploration enabled investigation of individual commitment without diverting attention to organisation-wide commitment or organisational change, which are well covered in the change management literature.

The research is centred more on social construction and less concerned with factual accounts of experiences, more interested in observing individuals' perceptions of change over time. In accepting a social construction as a means to develop understanding, scholars argue that as people interact, they do so with the understanding that their respective perceptions of reality are related, and as they act upon this understanding their common knowledge of reality becomes reinforced. According to the social constructionist perspective, knowledge, including the most basic, taken-for-granted commonsense knowledge of everyday reality, is derived from and maintained by social interactions (Berger & Luckmann 1967). Individuals' perspectives on life depend on how they approach it, and how they approach it depends on the social relationships of which they are a part (Gergen 2009a).

In recent years, sustainability has emerged as a major area of discussion in organisation and management studies, and this study provides an ideal context to build understanding as to what influences individuals' choices to support or resist actions for improving the quality and health of ecological systems on our planet and its biosphere. Leading academics, experts and commentators have argued that a global response is needed to reduce the impact of business and industrial development on the planet (Benn 2008). Fluctuations in economic and political cycles have affected the degree of interest in pro-environmental behaviours in some countries and communities. The patchy response and variable levels of commitment are also fuelled by the debate between climate change believers and sceptics, who argue for or against whether humankind is the cause of global warming.

These pressures have created a fragmented and disjointed response and ongoing difficulty in gaining universal agreement on global action, as evidenced by the Kyoto agreement (McCright & Dunlap 2003), the protocols of the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Talks (Bluhdorn 2011; Dubash 2009), and cautiously claimed success of the December 2010 United Nations Climate Change Talks in Cancun, Mexico. There is, however, an undeniable body of evidence that the world's biodiversity and ecosystems are under increasing strain due to the unprecedented growth of human activity. According to the *Living Planet Report 2010* (Pollard et al. 2010) there is an urgent need for governments, businesses and communities to take collective action.

Scholars have highlighted the need to improve the capacity of science to communicate climate change data to the general public (Overpeck et al. 2011). The study within this thesis assists in meeting this global challenge by advancing understanding of how individuals commit and make sense in an ephemeral, and uncertain paradigm (Bosshard 2000) of sustainability. The research interest also provides an opportunity to explore how individuals make meaning of their commitment with a challenge shared by people around the globe.

### ***1.1 How the study originated***

My interest in individual commitment began a year before being accepted to undertake doctoral study at the University of Technology, Sydney. In 2004, a study tour to the United Kingdom sparked curiosity as to why individuals become committed to socially responsible causes. One of the highlights of this tour was a meeting in London with Business in the Community (B.I.T.C.), a not-for-profit organisation representing over 700 members of UK companies. These members worked on involving businesses in the community for the greater good of society, with such undertakings as corporate members helping disadvantaged children to read, providing forklift driver training for young offenders, and assisting the homeless to find permanent accommodation and work. From 2004 my initial curiosity evolved into a concern with development, leadership and research in the social and environmental impact of businesses on society and the planet. Apart from being impressed by the intentions of B.I.T.C. I was interested in the capability of organisations and individuals to develop solutions to complex challenges such as community renewal and climate change. Australian examples included the successful collaboration at Noumea Public School in Mt. Druitt, Sydney, which achieved dramatic improvements in educational achievements over a 10-year period due to its outstanding knowledge management and community engagement strategies. Noumea Public School had changed from one of the worst performing schools in Australia to one of the best. Elsewhere, on an international level, study of the Alexander River Project in the Middle East clearly demonstrated how serious public health and environmental problems could be resolved by building trust and social capital among groups and individuals, even in a war zone.

These discoveries led to me enrol in the PhD program. The opportunity to undertake an empirical study arose in August 2006. At that time discussions were held with Professor Suzanne Benn of the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) regarding the possibility of undertaking research through an Australian Research Commission (ARC) grant. The ARC grant addressed the theme ‘governance for environmental sustainability: the case of public-private partnerships’, and led to the generation of a research report by Benn and Martin (2008). The grant had been established between an Australian State Government Environment Department,<sup>1</sup> the University of Technology, and the Institute of Sustainable Futures based in Sydney.

All 31 individuals included within this study were active participants within a funded program designed and conducted by an Australian State Government Environment Department responsible for matters relating to ecological sustainability and climate change. Its aim was to enhance the level and performance of environmentally friendly practices in business. The initial research involved conducting interviews and submitting transcripts to Professor Suzanne Benn’s research team for separate analysis. It was agreed that these transcripts and digital records could be kept for my PhD research. As part of my acceptance to undertake the research, steps were undertaken early in the process to ensure research independence from the ARC study. I had no involvement with the preparation or writing of the report produced, and the report findings were not considered or critiqued as part of this thesis.

The opportunity afforded provided me with a number of additional advantages. First, the grant approval ensured faster access to interviewees. Second, it provided access to individuals separate from any existing clients in my profession as a practising management consultant. This ensured clear separation of the roles between management consultant and student researcher. Third, the research opportunity enabled me to accelerate and deepen understanding of the social constructionist approach using an empirical case study context. Finally, the ARC grant had human ethics approval, thus bypassing the need to achieve this independently. UTS was supportive of the extended use of the data for doctoral research.

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<sup>1</sup> The identity of the department has been protected as part of the confidentiality agreement and human ethics approval. It should be noted that during the study the name and identity and structure of the department changed several times.

After formal agreement to undertake the study and with ethics approval given, research interviews started in March 2007. My contribution to the research was submitted to the ARC research project in 2007. I was then able to combine this data set with additional interviews conducted in 2008 to allow the development of a longitudinal lens to explore individual commitment over time. All interviews were completed in June 2008, after which attention turned to completing the content analysis and the eventual drafting of the thesis. A briefing seminar of initial findings of the study was presented to the Department of Environment in August 2010. Reflections and observations from this seminar further enhanced my analysis and in turn helped to refine the implications for practice and theory.

### ***1.2 The author as researcher***

The choice of a study of commitment over time was closely associated with an ongoing curiosity about how people grow and develop. It provided an opportunity to stimulate insight about self and others, and it generated learning opportunities, the discovery of new ideas and concepts, and consolidation of self-development. My personal preferences for auditory and kinaesthetic learning activities led to the examination of personal accounts and narrative as a means to confront assumptions. Primary sources of analysis came from critique and exploration of discursive elements (Grant et al. 2004; Tracy 2002) consistent with a social constructionist approach (Gergen 2009a; Shotter 2008). Recording and listening to past academic supervisory discussions and research interviews, as well as re-examining memos, journal entries and recordings of individual cases, stimulated the ability to be reflexive and to advance theory over time, as well as to understand and socially construct insights emerging from the data and literature.

The study confirmed a view that I already held, that vulnerability and disturbance are natural and important parts of personal growth. The ontology of individuals that I employ is that they are constantly undergoing transitions in their life that leads to experiences of 'becoming'. The ultimate focus of a becoming self is not so much on existence per se, but on changing over time. In my case, a regular ritual of early morning walks and evening meditations has built a deepening awareness of how the making of meaning is never static. These habits of daily contemplation have been

acquired over the past 30 years as I have worked as a trainer, consultant and facilitator, where social constructionist ontology has become a primary avenue for my investigation and discovery. One of the personal benefits of this research is that it opened my eyes to the possibility that the ‘becoming self’ does not act alone but co-exists with the ‘stable self’, which operates under a different orientation involving the quest for routine, predictability and order in one’s life.

An important process for the early stages of this thesis was the selection of a suitable methodology. I was particularly influenced by ground breaking work in the social sciences on developing theory from empirical case studies (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007; Flyvbjerg 2006) which cemented my focus on individual commitment informed by the social, political and cultural context within which people work. Importantly, exploration of the ways in which individuals take action was undertaken by examining personal change over time using a ‘processual approach’ (Dawson 2003; Pettigrew 1997). These examinations led to a deepening of understanding of how change unfolds at the levels of the individual, organisation and society.

Greatly influenced by the processual perspective of change, I developed this thesis to investigate the longitudinal influences of change through the analysis of individuals, their meaning making and their relationship to sustainability and organisations. Given this approach, there was a decision to use a social construction as a methodology to aid understanding of individual meaning making as an important feature of knowledge production in the research process. In other words, the data collected and produced was a co-construction and reconstruction of self and other. These methodological developments were initially informed by my theoretical readings of commitment (Meyer et al. 2002; Roe, Solinger & Van Olffen 2009), self-identity (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas 2008; Holstein & Gubrium 2000), and sensemaking (Weick 2008) within the context of organisations, change and sustainability (Dunphy, Griffiths & Benn 2007; Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010). Diverse organisation and management literatures helped to build a conceptual and practical understanding of how individuals ‘make meaning’ of their commitments. The primary focus was designed to benefit organisation and management studies. It is important to acknowledge that a range of other disciplines, psychology and sociology, were used to

strengthen analysis of individual commitment. As Sitkin asserts, ‘A single theoretical lens is inadequate for understanding how individuals and organizations make sense of an uncertain, complex, and changing world’ (2010:415).

Acknowledging and interpreting my role as a researcher through the whole process has been important for advancing the contribution made in this thesis. With a commitment to developing theory from the empirical study, I have positioned myself as a translator and interpreter of theory for management practice generally and change management specifically. As such, the study makes a practical contribution by providing a deeper understanding of the tensions and paradoxes associated with meaning making, leading to examination of individual commitment in a variety of contexts. The study also has deepened my understanding of how personal reflexivity (D’Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez 2007; Humphreys 2005) informs learning within a research process.

In undertaking this study I have enjoyed bridging theory and practice; integrating contemporary thinking into classic studies; incorporating new ways of reading the social world into studies of self-identity; weaving contributions from different disciplines to cross boundaries; and building fresh perspectives and insights for myself and those others with whom I share my thinking in practice. Throughout the thesis, I have not only investigated agents of change but become a change agent myself, translating theory for practice while questioning theoretical norms for management practice. I have been driven by the desire to make a difference in both worlds – a difference for change agents who have a moral desire and commitment to bring positive change for the benefit for society. As it unfolds, this thesis highlights the complexities of individual commitment and how it shapes, drives and informs personal change and resistance – including my own. Throughout this journey I have morphed into a researcher of life, one who is more tolerant of the world views of others and one who is able to effect change by being more questioning of the processes of knowledge generation within contexts of change. I hope that my journey of discovery will engender less frustration and more compassion over time as a practitioner and academic. Only time will tell if this becomes reality.

### ***1.3 Research aim and questions***

Empirical research suggested that to develop a deeper understanding of commitment over time three main areas of analysis were required. These areas of inquiry were successful not only in informing the nature of commitment in ecological sustainability; they also informed the broader aim of increasing awareness of the changing patterns of commitment that occur as individuals make meaning within the various contexts in their lives. Three separate investigations of the empirical data were undertaken. They were:

- What influences did context have on commitment to ecologically friendly practices over time?
- How did individuals make sense in regard to their commitment?
- How did different elements of sensemaking and sensegiving within clusters influence their commitment?

Beneficiaries of this research are anticipated to be primarily within the field of organisation and management studies, but scholars in psychology, sociology and sustainability may also find this study helpful. Research relevant to this study revealed a number of theoretical interests. Most relevant were the empirical studies of Angus-Leppan (2009) and Maitlis and Lawrence (2007). Both studies captured and analysed personal accounts from interview data to develop understandings of processes of sensemaking and sensegiving. Although not addressing individual commitment over time, those two studies encouraged me to consider a similar data gathering approach within this study. In addition to these empirical studies, two publications had a large bearing on the emergence of my theoretical exploration and investigation. These were the insights of Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn (2007) into ecological sustainability and change, and the observations of Roe, Solinger and Van Olffen (2009) on the weaknesses of study of organisational commitment over time.

### ***1.4 How the thesis is structured***

To assist these investigations the thesis is organised into four parts: literature review, methodology, analysis and conclusions. Chapter Two reviews the literature which informed the analysis undertaken in the thesis. Chapter Three details the

methodological approach of the researcher and the rationale for applying a social constructionist approach to build theory through the analysis of multiple cases of individuals over time. The context of the research, data selection, content analysis and views on reflexivity are also explained.

Thereafter, three analytical chapters address the three research questions of the thesis. Here empirical investigations of individual commitment are undertaken. Each chapter tells a story describing, comparing and contrasting key issues identified as gaps in the literature. Individual cases are brought alive by revealing paradoxes, complexities and ambiguities that emerge. Vignettes are used to focus discussion and exploration. New theory is also introduced to enhance development of the literature. Opening remarks and conclusion pieces assist understanding and interpretation.

The analysis begins with Chapter Four, exploring the ‘push towards and away from sustainability’ from an individual perspective. Aspects pertaining to business pressures, power and resistance are investigated to provide a vivid picture of the complexities and paradoxes of the challenge over time. ‘Push towards’ refers to drivers or influences that encourage and entice people to take action, while ‘away’ relates to influences and drivers which discourage commitment.

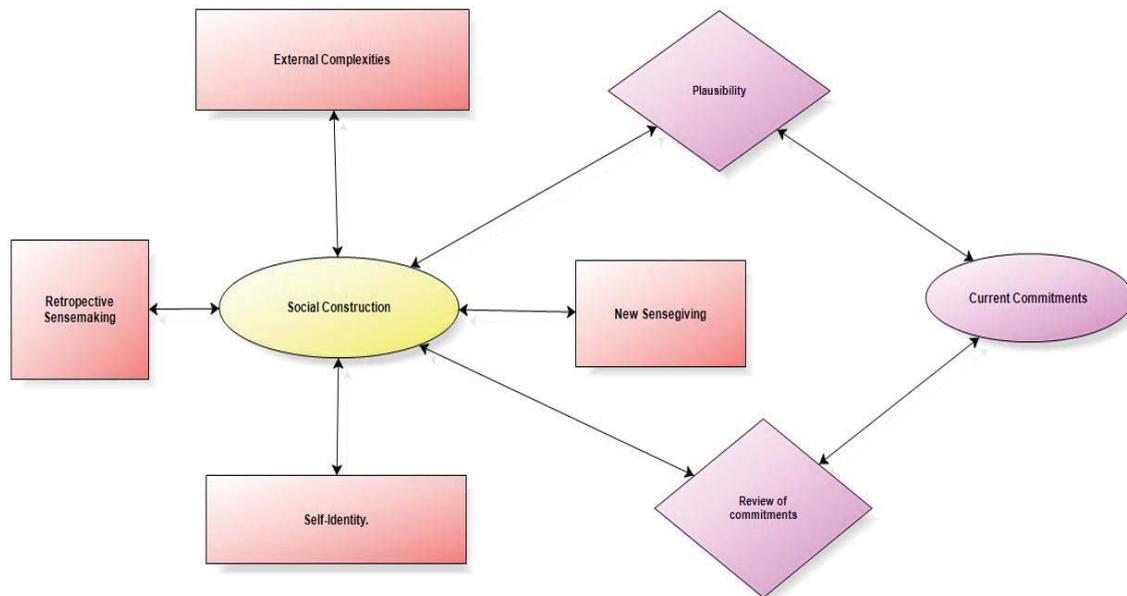
Chapter Five then examines the nature of commitment and explores how individuals make sense in regard to their commitment. Analysis informs a better understanding of interrelations between iterative exchanges and emergence which unfolds between self-identity and commitment. The analysis concludes in Chapter Six, where individual commitment is explored within the context of cluster-based activity. In this thesis, a working definition of a cluster is a ‘formally established collaboration arrangement between businesses to assist the levels of performance, governance and innovation over time’. These examinations focus on processes of sensegiving contained within clusters established by an Australian State Government Department, designed to improve the level and quality of environmentally friendly practices in industry. Specific attention is given to sensemaking and sensegiving their roles in either enabling or souring commitment.

The thesis draws to a close with Chapter Seven where advice is given on theoretical enhancement, the use of the methodology, and how practitioners could consider the findings in organisation and management activities. This includes asking the questions: What could be done differently next time? What worked or did not work? Embodied in this review is a plan of how the field of organisation management studies could undertake further research in this field. Personal thoughts and feelings are expressed on how my social construction was supported, tested and confronted during the process. Questions are examined regarding how my personal views changed and how I was affected by the research. Reflexive comments come from a variety of sources such as transcripts, academic supervision and independent discoveries. The legacy of all these inquiries is that the research not only advances understanding of individual commitment over time within the context of ecological sustainability but it also provides an excellent foundation for further research into personal change and how people make sense of social and political complexity within modern society.

### ***1.5 How people make meaning***

To set the foundation for the explorations contained within the thesis a conceptual model of ‘making meaning’ in the context of individual commitment over time is outlined in *Figure 1.1*. This model provides an overview of the areas of investigation to be examined within this research. It also presents an overview of potential influences of the making of meaning on individual commitment over time. These propositions are provided without any deterministic intent but with the aim of guiding understanding of the diverse areas of investigation explored throughout the research.

Figure 1.1 - Conceptual model: Making meaning



On first impression the model of making meaning may appear simple and linear but this is not the case; it is iterative, unpredictable and dynamic. The research indicates that at any point of time an individual is most likely juggling and reconciling many commitments in a variety of changing contexts and situations. In totality, these interconnections create a view that commitment is a complex process of social construction, plausibility and review. The process of commitment over time is a continuous process of noticing (data collection), interpretation and action. It is argued in this thesis that individual commitment is a consequence of social construction and is influenced by the ecological, institutional, and social relational contexts in which they are constructed (Jeong & Brower 2008), and that the process of meaning making is influential in how and why people may contemplate possibility, plausibility and action.

Study of ecological sustainability presents a view that in the modern age of social, political and business complexity individuals adapt in relation to their readings and assessments of multiple and often conflicting commitments. The tensions and paradoxes of individual commitment are also fuelled by quandaries as to what is possible at any point of time, and by both thought and emotion.

A useful starting point in explaining the model is the role and function of social construction. Here individuals are seen as making meaning of a wide range of data in order to interpret what action is required. Action does not necessarily mean active support for a change; it can equally manifest as resistance or disinterest. The multiple sources of data can come from making meaning of the past, exploring what may be emerging in the moment, and making predictions of plausible future scenarios. These diverse and sometimes conflicting assessments can produce clarity but often the social construction results in heightened ambiguity, uncertainty and confusion.

Depending on the nature of social construction, a number of propositions and questions may arise in an individual's mind in the attempt to contemplate action pertaining to commitment. These areas of exploration could include:

- Retrospective sensemaking: What memories of past events and discoveries inform the current challenges? In what ways does the past help provide guidance as to how an individual can best proceed?
- External complexities: What interpretations can be made of the changes being observed or experienced? What can be said about change and its associated emergence of new structures, processes, power relationships and business pressures?
- Self-identity: How does one reconcile the tensions of staying safe and stable with the possibility or potential of redefining oneself in order to adapt and cope with change? How does an individual feel in regard to these tensions?
- New sensegiving: What fresh perspectives and learning, if any, inform the individual about what is occurring? What learning has the most impact? What jolts or shifts awareness?

Depending on the nature of social construction, individuals can move to other explorations of making meaning. These include questions regarding plausibility, current commitments and review. Areas of exploration can include:

- Plausibility: What is possible and desirable at this point of time? What permission or authority exists to take action?

- Current commitments: What current obligations and commitments exist? What is the workload? What may need to be re-prioritized if a fresh commitment is undertaken? What needs to be pushed aside?
- Review of commitments: Given the nature of current commitments and social construction, what needs to stop, continue and start?

Then, depending on what arises, an individual can begin a new cycle of noticing, interpretation and action. It is evident during this study that the process of meaning making associated with commitment never stops. These iterations of social construction, plausibility and action continue to change and evolve over time. All of these observations are explained in greater depth throughout the thesis.

## ***1.6 Chapter conclusion***

The aim of this doctoral study is to increase awareness of how and why commitment occurs as individuals seek to make meaning of the various contexts in their lives. Thirty-one individuals were studied within the context of implementing ecological sustainability with a view to understanding individual commitment over time.

A conceptual model of ‘making meaning’ within the process of commitment over time informs the upcoming discussions and explorations. It is argued that to better understand commitment over time it is important to recognise the role of data, interpretation and action within the micro-processes of individuals making meaning.

The model introduces a number of elements, which are discussed in the thesis. The elements include the interconnections associated with sensemaking, self-identity and commitment. Upcoming explorations will provide academics and practitioners with new insights on what sustains and erodes commitment over time, not only in the context of ecological sustainability but for other complex and adaptive challenges facing business, society and humanity.

## CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides the conceptual frame for the empirical research into individual commitment over time to the contemporary challenge of making improvements in the level and quality of environmentally friendly practices in small and medium sized businesses. Major contributions to this exploration are the examination of theories of self-identity and sensemaking, commentary on managerial practices to reduce carbon emissions, the complexities of making commitments to multiple targets, and the role of emotion in meaning making over time. In reviewing the broad literature this chapter enables exploration of the paradoxes and tensions of making meaning within personal change. In this examination the external and personal complexities that shape commitment over time are presented, enhancing understanding of how individuals may consider their commitment over time.

In the study of commitment in the management and organisational studies literature there is little consensus on terminology, conceptualisation and measurement (Cooper-Hakim & Viswesvaran 2005). To introduce the field, a widely used definition of commitment is used, summarised as ‘a force that binds an individual to a target (social or non-social) and to a course of action of relevance to that target’ (Meyer, Becker & Van Dick 2006:666). However, there are limitations to this working definition. For example, Klein, Molloy and Brinsfield (2012:138) argue that commitment is a malleable and a temporal concept, resulting from the consideration of choices of multiple targets over time. These authors propose that commitment is a psychological state involving processes of awareness and choice-making, where ‘commitment is dynamic and entirely socially constructed within the person (i.e. it emanates from one’s unique perception and interpretation of one’s situation)’.

This thesis argues that the study of individual commitment requires openness to a multiplicity of interests, concerns and targets, which influence levels of action over time. The term ‘target’ is used as addressing much more than the needs and priorities of workplace groupings such as senior managers, customers, shareholders and suppliers. It also includes addressing the concerns of society on climate change, as well as meeting personal targets involving the wishes of family and friends and achieving goals associated with personal hobbies and leisure. Simply put, a better

understanding of individual commitment requires greater understanding of the demands and expectations placed on individuals. Change is not an isolated event; it is cumulative, comprising many interconnections and conflicting priorities. These observations are supported in *Applied Psychology* (Herold, Fedor & Calwell 2007) where individuals are seen as needing to consider their commitments among many contexts and situations.

As stated in Chapter One, to deeply understand commitment it was important to explore the complexities of the individual process of making meaning over time. 'Meaning' can reasonably be defined as a 'mental representation of possible relationships among things, events and relationships. Thus, meaning *connects* things' (Baumeister 1991:15). For this researcher it became apparent that individuals do not act in isolation from their environment; people are constantly making meaning in relation to the complexities of their perception of their external world. Making meaning presents itself in the empirical data as both a cognitive process represented by moments of high rationality and reasoning to others charged with emotion and feeling. Watson (2009) argues that the making of meaning is much more than just an internal exploration of what is emerging within a person. Meaning making also involves exploring the life story of an individual who is influenced over time by a variety of relationships and observations. As Watson asserts:

When we come down to the level of the individual member of society, we can analyse their lives by examining how, on the one hand, they are active 'agents' who create narratives, define their own identities and thereby contribute, each in their own small way, to those patterns which we call societies. But, at the same time as this is occurring, that individual is being 'made' by this social and cultural world. (2009:449)

Before introducing literature from organisation and management studies it is important to highlight comparable research from clinical psychology (Park 2010), which explores the processes of how individuals make and generate meaning. Although the context is very different to this study of individual commitment, many of the tensions outlined by Park are relevant for this study. Park summarises a larger body of literature as 'meaning-making efforts' and 'meaning made' within clinical studies of stressful events involving major illness and bereavement.

Park provides a 'meaning-making' model which proposes that in stressful situations individuals attempt to restore congruence between their beliefs, goals and sense of purpose while trying to understanding what is unfolding within a situation. These involve a variety of processes, including assigning meaning to the stressful event, determining what individual adjustments are required, and implementing desired meaning-making processes to reduce discrepancies between their appraised meaning of the event and their beliefs and goals. According to Park, given the nature of meaning-making a number of outcomes may be generated, which comprise arriving at a view of having 'made sense', a changing of identity and/or a modification of beliefs and/or restoration or change in life purpose. Finally, Park asserts that making meaning involves both cognitive processing of information and emotional determinations of the disturbances experienced.

It is also useful to acknowledge that studies in clinical psychology exhibit many of the strengths and weaknesses of the literature in organisation and management studies (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010; Smerek 2011; Sonenshein & Dholakia 2012). Primarily there has been a preoccupation with exploring how people make retrospective sense of highly stressful events and difficult situations. This is particularly true in theorising and study of sensemaking, where there has been little or no interest in exploring meaning over time in less dramatic or stressful situations.

In summary, the diverse literature drawn on from these scholars provides context to investigate making meaning within the non-clinical context of ecological sustainability, which is very different in scale, orientation and timeframe. Park (2010) appears to support the need for such research by arguing that meaning making is a dynamic process that unfolds over time. Yet, as will be disclosed, there has been a preoccupation with measuring observations over a few time periods and choosing to place a greater emphasis on drawing on past memories and experiences to make sense of how people are thinking and feeling.

Five areas of the literature are reviewed: (1) the context of sustainability, (2) commitment over time, (3) individual interactions with stakeholder relationships, (4) key writings on identity and sensemaking, and (5) the role of emotions in shaping meaning and social construction. Following the literature review, the rationale is

outlined for using a processual approach for examining change over time, as a precursor to the third chapter which outlines the methodology. In Chapter Three, more details are provided on how individual commitment is examined within the empirical context of ecological sustainability.

## ***2.1 The context of sustainability***

To study individual commitment over time it is important to provide an overview of challenges facing individuals in the selected context of investigation. The focus of commitment in this study is ecological sustainability. Literature has been chosen which assists understanding of the tensions and paradoxes which confront individuals in business who are have the interest, motivation or designated authority to make improvements to sustainable practices in business. It is important to highlight that the prime interest of this research is on how individuals make meaning of their commitment within this challenging context.

Given the scale and size of the literature on sustainability, emphasis has been placed on providing sufficient context to proceed with the examination of commitment within the selected target of investigation. The choice of the context of making improvements in ecological sustainability highlights a contemporary challenge which is currently facing businesses and organisations. In later sections of the literature review other materials pertaining to sustainability and environmental psychology are outlined, where appropriate, to build understanding for analysis.

The challenge of living sustainably is not new to human civilisation, as it has been explored for thousands of years. This encompasses those who have taken actions to improve the levels of sustainable balance and those whose practices have led to destruction and degradation of the natural environment (Diamond 2005; Hughes 2009). In recent decades, sustainability has been addressed in many disciplines including the biological and natural sciences as well as organisation and management and, depending on the focus, can mean many things to different audiences and researchers. It can involve study and discussion of environmental concerns such as reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in order to mitigate climate change and ecological damage,

and can extend to human rights and social justice issues such as poverty and illiteracy (Sharma, Starik & Husted 2007).

Problems of definition, object of investigation and changing terminology present on-going challenges to students and scholars as to the meanings associated with sustainability (Banerjee 2003; Benn & Dunphy 2007; Montiel 2008) As Benn and Kearins assert, 'sustainability is both a contested concept and a social movement of our time. It has different meanings for different people, and is used in a wide variety of contexts, not least in relation to organizations including business' (In press:557).

The Brundtland Commission Report into the 'Common Future' of the planet set the foundation for many discussions of sustainability. The report defined sustainable development as meeting 'the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987:24). According to Waddock (2007), this landmark report set a challenge for future leaders and managers to develop new skills to contribute to the wellbeing and health of natural capital as well as meet the needs of social justice between the rich and poor nations of the world. Langeland (2005) simplified sustainability into three elements of focused activity: ethical awareness, social responsibility and environmental consideration. Academics claim that commitment to sustainability outcomes not only improves the health and wellbeing of the environment and society but also provides a powerful force for innovation (Hahn, Kolk & Winn 2010), competitive advantage (Shrivastava 1995), knowledge sharing (Benn, Dunphy & Martin 2004), education (Bradfield 2009) and sustainable development (Guest 2010).

The meaning of sustainability has been contested and this is evident in the difficulty in finding a suitable definition of ecological sustainability for use in this study. One of the more practical explanations of ecological sustainability comes from the Swedish based Natural Step Organisation that suggests that within organisations ecological sustainability comprises four principles (Bradbury & Clair 1999; Mack 2006; Yencken 2010). These are:

- the maintenance of biodiversity (genes, species and ecosystems);

- protection of natural capital (air, water, soils, etc);
- maintenance of the energy and material cycles of the planet; and
- the health and resilience of all life support systems and their capacity to absorb wastes through natural cycles.<sup>2</sup>

The Natural Step definition of ecological sustainability lifts the social and economic purpose of ecological sustainability well beyond conversations on pollution control and reduction of water usage, energy and waste, to include matters pertaining to the preservation and health of ecosystems, diversity of species and the preservation of communities affected by globalisation and modernisation. Linnenluecke, Russell and Griffiths (2009) argue that the fundamentals of ecological sustainability are firmly based on the premise that organisations are highly interconnected and immersed with the natural environment, and that as a consequence organisational activities have a significant impact on the planet and the biosphere. Emissions that contribute to climate change are one example.

To help meet the challenge of being more ecologically sustainable in business it is suggested that managers and individuals within organisations can take a number of actions to reduce the emissions within their business operations, supply chain and surrounding product usage and disposal (Wittneben & Kiyar 2009). These actions consist of the following, which are revisited later in the thesis, notably in Chapter Four:

- *To lower the impact of a business on climate change:* capitalise on energy efficiency gains, switch to renewable energy sources, collect and apply best practice examples, increase expectations of suppliers and consumers, encourage individual behavioural change within the company's reach, integrate mitigation thinking into decision-making, develop novel approaches to reduce greenhouse gases across the systems of production and consumption, communicate achievements in lowering emissions, and assist in furthering effective climate change policy.

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<sup>2</sup> The Natural Step web site <http://www.naturalstep.org/> accessed 22 Feb 2011 and definition accessed from <http://www.australiancollaboration.com.au> 22 Mar 2011

- *To analyse the situation in which a business finds itself:* undertake a risk assessment of climate impacts on operations and of locations where businesses are operating, determine insurance needs, and keep up to date with climate policy developments.
- *To initiate action to decrease the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events:* reduce reliance on scarce resources, consider climate change impact in different locations, set up adequate insurance, consider contributions to community challenges such as flood defences, civil unrest and climate refugees, and communicate effective ways to adapt to climate change.

Apart from exploring issues of definition, justification and responsibilities of managers in implementing environmental friendly practices, other scholars explore how to improve levels of commitment to sustainability in business. Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn (2007) argue that corporate commitment to sustainability includes addressing both human and ecological sustainability outcomes. They argue that moves to sustainability are heavily influenced by the development of human capabilities and skills in conjunction with the focus on ecological concerns. Cultural change requires close attention to managerial processes, governance and engagement. The transition to becoming a sustainable organisation can involve six steps, beginning with rejection, moving on to non-responsiveness, compliance, efficiency, strategic pro-activity and finally the creation of a sustaining organisation. They assert that, at the highest level of performance in ecological sustainability, the sustainable organisation is an:

active promoter of sustainable values and seeks to influence key participants in the industry and society in general. Environmental best practice is espoused and enacted because it is the responsible thing to do. The organization tries to assist society to be ecologically sustainable and uses its entire range of products and services to this end. The organization is prepared to use its influence to promote positive sustainability policies on the part of governments, the restructuring of markets and the development of community values to facilitate the emergence of a sustainable society. Nature is valued for its own sake. (2007:27-28)

Clifton and Amran highlight the importance of becoming a sustainable organisation, arguing that if an organisation is to be an outstanding performer in the sustainable

world it needs to consider its impacts on the broad social-ecological system. Thus when it comes to developing strategy and action for corporate sustainability, ‘nothing in the corporation impacts-on space can be allowed to slip through the net – everything matters’ (2011:127). The authors give two reasons for their high attention to sustainable practices. First there is the question of ‘justice where harm cannot simply be dismissed or ignored because they are remote or otherwise hidden from the mainstream public eye’ (2011:127). Second is the cumulative assessment that ‘small’ impacts by all corporations ‘easily add up to a major problem, and what might seem an insignificant impact at any point in time might easily accumulate over the years to become highly significant in the future’ (2011:127).

Wilkinson and Reed (2007) argue that progress in creating a low carbon built environment requires commitment from a wide range of stakeholders to increase the chances of improving levels of shared understanding, decrease disillusionment and enhance the potential for a co-ordinated, integrated approach to change. According to Wilkinson and Reed the barriers to commitment can be divided into the categories of social (or professional), economic (market driven) and political (macro and micro level). Social barriers are related to lack of knowledge for implementing and delivering reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Economic barriers are related to the view that the marketplace is yet to be fully convinced of the merit and value of taking action. Political barriers can be classified as involving high profile support of government. On a micro-political level, resistance of professional groups and networks can lead to reduced support for action on climate change.

Haugh and Talwar (2010) provide a list of interventions which they believe embed sustainability across large organisations. Actions comprise creating codes of conduct, reviewing structures and policies, improving outcome measurements, purchasing and supply chain initiatives, programs designed to improve communication and dialogue, employee training, company visits and corporate volunteering. These interventions are examined within one large organisation, and descriptive accounts are provided of what is undertaken within that context. Haugh and Talwar then suggest what might occur in smaller businesses, but without empirical evidence to justify their claims.

In considering these interconnections between organisations and the natural environment, it is important to also be critical of the assumption that commitment to ecological sustainability will always be a positive contribution to business activity. As revisited in the analysis, it is not always possible or plausible for individuals to take action on climate change within business. There opposing demands on time, prioritisation and commitment which can conflict with the needs of ecological sustainability. The sustainability literature on 'trade-offs' encourages questioning of the assumptions of the 'win-win paradigm' in the sustainability literature. Hahn, Figge, Pinske and Preuss state:

According to the win-win paradigm, environmental and social issues are only taken into account to the degree that they contribute to an enhanced corporate economic performance. Consequently, within the win-win paradigm and the business case, the relevance of environmental and social issues for corporate sustainability is derived from a purely economic perspective. (2010:218)

Pinske and Kolk (2010) explain their thinking on the 'trade-offs' by providing three compelling reasons for resistance by business people to climate change action. First, there is a tension between installing emission-reducing technologies and acceptance that there are often no 'silver bullet' solutions to the challenge. Second, even if a business generates sufficient demand for services and products, the cost of new environmentally friendly technologies and innovations may make the marketplace price prohibitive. Finally, there is some element of risk when companies choose to collaborate with others, particularly if future competitiveness may be compromised.

Given the challenges of successfully implementing environmentally friendly practices in business, it is not surprising that the factor of leadership has been highlighted within the sustainability literature. It has been suggested that an organisation committed to corporate sustainability is heavily influenced by the quality of leadership and the ability of individuals to be responsible and responsively use their power to facilitate change (Benn & Dunphy 2009; Griffiths, Dunphy & Benn 2005). Other research identifies a number of attributes which support the ability to provide leadership to environmental sustainability: openness to experience; career mobility and work history demographics; personal and position power; strategic social networks; the culture of their organisations; and personal qualities, including the

ability to persist under adversity, and deeply held personal values which stimulate high levels of commitment (Taylor 2009a, 2009b).

It could also be argued that these features involve technical and adaptive change (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009a, 2009b), with critical examination of leadership and management practices over time. Together these discussions are helpful but they are clouded by the observation research studies within the realms of corporate social responsibility, sustainability, and complex adaptive change are often based on different theoretical frameworks and empirical foundations. In time it would be interesting to examine the consistencies and disparities between the diverse fields (Denzin & Lincoln 2005; Swanson & Holton 2005), but that is not the intention of this research.

It also worth acknowledging that much of the organisation and management literature makes assumptions about the likely effect of interventions and leadership on business performance and culture without due recognition of the complexities, paradoxes and tensions of change over time. Within the theorising as to what cultivates a sustainable organisation there are also a number of assertions regarding individual leadership, the importance of cultural change and support of pro-sustainability behaviours. There is increased recognition of the need for a greater level of collaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas between different disciplines of organisation and management studies and other fields to enhance the capacity to progress in areas of social and ecological concern (Kasper 2009; Shwom 2009).

Linnenluecke and Griffiths (2010) cast doubt on the merits of extant models and theories unless they demonstrate a deeper appreciation of how organisational change manifests and how it can either help or hinder achievement of sustainability outcomes. They recommend that research should place greater emphasis on studies designed to understand the complexities of the relationship between organisational culture and corporate sustainability. Linnenluecke, Russell and Griffiths reinforce the need to be careful about making blanket claims as to cause and effect in change management interventions. Such claims do not account for the different sub-cultures in organisations of intra-organisational activities as they respond to sustainability issues. They report:

employees who belong to a subculture with a stronger emphasis on hierarchical values (the high internal process cluster), and who have less knowledge of the corporate sustainability policy, have a higher emphasis on an economic understanding of corporate sustainability. On the contrary, employees who belong to a subculture with a low emphasis on internal process culture (the balanced cluster) did not display a holistic understanding of sustainability. (2009:447)

In the broader context, what makes these discussions of ecological sustainability difficult to contextualise is that many conversations and assumptions are formulated on similar but not identical areas of investigation. These include research and theory development on corporate social responsibility (Angus-Leppan, Metcalf & Benn 2010; Benn, Todd & Pendleton 2010) and sustainability (Benn & Dunphy 2009; Taylor 2009a). Organisational commitment to ecological sustainability is commonly included within discussions of corporate social responsibility (Cramer 2003). It appears that fields like sustainability and corporate social responsibility share a common challenge, namely to identify how people make meaning in situations that are categorised by lack of order and clarity in social, business and political complexity. Depending on the context and situation, a commitment to corporate responsibility can involve a range of voluntary acts to address social and environmental concerns by incorporating these considerations into business operations and into interactions with stakeholders (Van Marrewijk 2003).

Like sustainability, the construct of corporate social responsibility is ambiguous and complex, requiring organisations and their people to adapt over time to new language and values and to enter into decision-making and learning processes on either economic or moral grounds (Angus-Leppan 2009). If there is a subtle differentiation between these fields of research, corporate social responsibility could be asserted to be about what is 'practised', whereas corporate sustainability is more 'aspirational' (2009:19). In a number of cases, empirical research has adopted case studies to explore organisational sensemaking within corporations that implemented corporate and social responsibility practices (Angus-Leppan, Metcalf & Benn 2010; Cramer, Jonker & Van der Heijden 2004; Van der Heijden, Drissen & Cramer 2010). However, these studies did not consider how these processes might have influenced individual commitment over time.

It is argued that these explorations of the complexities of sustainability provide justification for a research approach that is less deterministic and where there is a greater tolerance for the dynamics of change over time in society and in organisations. More specifically, how do the complexities of sustainability influence the making of meaning and the manifestation of commitment over time? To assist understanding, the following discussion critiques foundation literature on individual commitment, with a justification provided for the decision to undertake an analysis of commitment over time.

## ***2.2 Commitment over time***

Roe, Solinger and Van Olffen (2009) argue that the study of commitment has been too heavily focused on a point-of-time analysis, failing to address fluctuations and changes over time. They claim that the few explorations of change over time have taken place over only a few months and are dominated by North American organisation and management theory. In the organisation literature, commitment is often seen in terms of the moment of analysis, and is normally focused on employee workplace loyalty to an employer. Thus the associated research views commitment as an intervening variable affected by managerial policies which influence levels of absenteeism, turnover, productivity and performance (Brooks & Wallace 2006).

According to Ployhart and Vandenberg (2010) scholars often make assumptions of longitudinal implications but these are rarely tested, studies also lack innovation in how personal stories and narratives are captured. Ployhart and Vandenberg explain: 'the vast majority of theory testing in the organizational and applied social sciences still uses cross-sectional designs whereby inferences are made from associations between two or more static variables' (2010:95). To understand complex concepts like commitment requires a 'focus on the change in the substantive constructs of interest rather than on static representations of the constructs' (2010:97). To address this concern, this thesis has resisted using quantitative analysis to enhance understandings but instead has chosen to gather longitudinal data from reflections and accounts from 31 individuals over time.

This thesis addresses a gap in the literature by focusing on individual commitment to ecological sustainability, not only within current job roles and responsibilities but also as views and levels of enactment may change or emerge over time. Critique of the literature indicates that there is little organisation and management research into individual commitment over time. However, some exploration of commitment to ecological concerns is found in the environmental psychology literature (Bamberg & Moser 2007; Lokhorst et al. 2011; Quimby & Angeli 2011; Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2010). Neither the organisation studies nor the environmental psychology literature have explored empirical observations of commitment to ecological sustainability within a social or political context where individuals are constantly re-prioritising personal and work goals in response to the changing demands arising in business and society.

What makes this empirical examination challenging is that individuals have different perceptions of the level of urgency required in taking action in areas such as ecological sustainability. These variations are influenced by different mixes of personal and social experiences over time (Zimbardo & Boyd 1999) which determine the nature of personal decision making, interpretation and meaning (Slawinski & Bansal 2009). It is also argued that it is imperative to consider that individuals have different notions of time when undertaking research in organisational strategy (Mosakowski & Earley 2000) and organisation culture (Schein 2010). As Bluedorn (2002:3-6) suggests, the fact is that 'times differ', 'all times are not the same' and 'all times are different'. While Gherardi and Strati (1988) argue that organisations develop shared approaches and norms to create rhythms for organising, based on their assumptions and orientations regarding time.

Building on the theorising of the potential relationships of individuals and time, a critique of the extant literature of commitment provides added justification for the rationale and focus of this study. The work of Allen and Meyer (1996; Meyer et al. 2002) and Mathieu and Zajac (1990) over the last two decades supports the conclusion that quantitative studies of employee commitment have failed to capture the rich narratives that come from studying individual reasoning and behaviour over time. As a result, much of the literature is heavily focused on a closed system of

organisational existence, leading to measures of internal issues of employee turnover and on-the-job behaviour including performance, absenteeism and citizenship. Not surprisingly, most of the organisational commitment literature is grounded in the assumption that employees are obligated to meet the needs and wishes of organisations. This trend continues to the current day with recent articles confirming the preoccupation with employee, organisational or workplace commitment (Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield 2012; Soumyaja, Kamlanabhan & Bhattacharyya 2011).

Within the literature on organisational commitment there is an implicit assumption that high commitment of an employee to an organisations goals is always a good outcome (Ellemer 2001). What happens if an individual employee is forced into action that is good for the organisation but bad for society? Whyte and Nocera (2002), Randall (1987) and Somers and Casal (1994) indicate that high commitment to an organisation may be generated by regimes of compliance that can reward inefficiencies, lower flexibility and sluggish innovation or unethical acts. Such areas of enquiry have been least researched.

It is important to acknowledge the variety of conceptual frameworks in the literature on organisational commitment that assist with understanding of commitment. The most valuable model was that pertaining to the three components of organisational commitment (Allen & Meyer 1990; Meyer & Allen 1991). Although Allen and Meyer's scales within their model needed refinement to apply to scenarios such as commitment to noble or moral purposes over time, the overarching theory was helpful in gaining a better depth of understanding of the level and nature of individual engagement within the study. According to Meyer and Allen (1997) there are three components of commitment, namely affective, continuance and normative commitment. They are defined as follows:

- *Affective commitment* – an individual's strong desire to pursue a course of action of relevance to a target.
- *Continuance commitment* – if involvement is discontinued, the individual's current or past investment is perceived to be lost.
- *Normative commitment* – an individual's obligation to pursue a course of action towards the attainment of a goal.

Numerous quantitative studies (Allen & Meyer 1996; Meyer, Becker & Van Dick 2006; Meyer, Becker & Vandenberghe 2004; Meyer et al. 2002) using these scales have shown the existence of causal effects between affective, continuance and normative antecedent variables and subsequent behaviour. The 'net sum' of a person's commitment to an organisation is reflected in each of these separable psychological states. Quantitative studies have shown that there is some relationship between affective and normative commitment, while continuance commitment is the most independent. The research suggests that overall commitment is most stimulated by affective commitment. Employees with strong affective commitment would be motivated to higher levels of performance and make more meaningful contributions than those who expressed only continuance or normative commitment.

Some recent studies have developed a deeper knowledge of how and why an individual's commitment varies between contexts. These studies provide a more complex and differentiated view of motivation patterns between individuals and groups (Gellatly, Meyer & Luchak 2006; Johnson & Chang 2010; Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova 2012; Somers 2010). In undertaking these explorations it is hoped a greater awareness of the interconnections of context, self-identity and commitment will evolve. Meyer et al. (2012) found that individuals who feel compelled to stay with an organisation (continuance commitment) are less likely to undertake discretionary actions to assist an organisation than those who exhibit a strong desire (affective commitment) and feel obligated to assist (normative commitment). There is also increased recognition that commitment is adversely affected by the devastating effects of emotional exhaustion caused by inadequate resources and support (Lapointe, Vandenberghe & Panaccio 2011). These studies again are quantitative and do not provide qualitative data.

The change management literature provides another lens by which to examine commitment. One of the main drivers for this research is the commitment of individuals, and much of the interest lies in the on-going dissatisfaction with the high failure rate of change initiatives in organisations (Palmer, Dunford & Akin 2009). Jaros advises that apart from making improvements in the predictive and measurement qualities of such research, researchers need to build a deeper

understanding of the core psychological processes that influence commitment within carefully chosen contexts of investigation. Jaros also recommends that researchers ‘continue to generate the basic knowledge about commitment to change and thereby help practicing managers implement change more effectively’ (2010:105).

It is argued that studying the processes of making meaning associated with individual commitment to change within the context of ecological sustainability is highly congruent to this recommendation. In this regard, the internal and external influences on individual commitment were explored over time in the present research, within a dynamic and complex context of change, without the imposition of exploring only organisational commitment. This research is designed to move beyond ‘organisation-centric’ explorations such as decision-making, quality of communication, trust in management and history of change (Soumyaja, Kamlanabhan & Bhattacharyya 2011) to matters including the dynamics of individual meaning, which may have nothing to do with the expectations and pressures of business.

Apart from the literature from organisation and change management, other fields aid understanding on individual commitment; particularly relevant to this thesis are studies of pro-environmental behaviour. Most of these viewpoints are presented in the environmental psychology literature. One of the most useful contributions to this study comes from Davis, Le and Coy, who explored what stimulates on-going personal commitment to the environment by examining the ‘psychological attachment and long-term orientation to the natural world’ (2011:257). They argue that individuals who sustain their commitment to the natural world are more likely to have a history of environmental intentions and positive associative behaviours. The stronger their attachment to the environment the more likely they will be to take sustainable action and make sacrifices to facilitate change. A willingness to sacrifice refers to ‘foregoing one’s own immediate self-interests to promote the well-being of the partner or relationship’ (Van Lange et al. 1997:1331). Studies have shown that individuals less likely to make changes in regard to pro-environmental behaviours are more likely to complain about lack of time and money or exhibit low self-efficacy and feelings of hopelessness about what can be achieved (Quimby & Angelique 2011).

Willingness to sacrifice and matters pertaining to self-identity are both discussed in the analytical chapters in this thesis.

These observations on taking action have a close connection to earlier discussions of ‘trade-offs’ (Pinske & Kolk 2010), where environmentally friendly action in businesses was often stifled by self-interest and lack of desire to sacrifice. A meta-analysis (Bamberg & Moser 2007) of 128 studies between 1986 and 2006 supports the view that at the heart of commitment to environmentally friendly practices is an on-going tension between being self-interested and/or being socially motivated. Bamberg and Moser suggest that interchanges generate a number of questions which appear to drive the nature of pro-environmental behaviours. They are:

How many positive/negative personal consequences would result from choosing this pro-environmental option compared to other options?’  
‘How difficult would be the performance of the pro-environmental option compared to other options?’ and ‘Are there reasons indicating a moral obligation for performing the pro-environmental option?’  
(2007:21)

The tensions between self-interest and social motivation are seen as central to the processes of plausibility, where individuals consider the advantages and disadvantages of making commitments. These findings are complemented by the finding of Whitmarsh and O’Neill (2010) that commitment to pro-environmental behaviours is closely associated with self-identity. A strong identification of self as being environmentally friendly made it more likely that individuals would take action to reduce their impact on the planet and other environmentally related matters. A number of other studies (Cialdini 2001; Lokhorst et al. 2011) indicate a close relationship between the nature of commitment and self-identity, particularly when behavioural change is motivated by personal, durable feelings and beliefs. Cialdini (2001) suggests that for commitment to lead to behavioural change there need to be written goals and plans, a public display of intention, a recognition that the new commitment is effortful or difficult, and finally a need to accept that the behavioural change is consistent with one’s desires. Although helpful, these generalisations appear to gloss over the complexities of making commitments. These aspects are further explored in the present research.

It is important to acknowledge that the cited studies from environmental psychology in commitment over time are typically derived from surveys of citizens in society. The findings provide important pointers to individual values and behaviours within business. Notably, issues pertaining to sacrifice, self-efficacy and social motivation are revisited in later chapters.

### ***2.3 Individual interaction within multiple stakeholder relationships***

For an observer of personal and professional change it seemed incomprehensible for studies of commitment over time to ignore the meaning associated with multiple stakeholder relationships. Studies within this thesis extend and deepen these considerations by exploring these dynamics of individual commitment in relation to the context of ecological sustainability. These aspects are highlighted as a way to understand how commitment is influenced by how individuals make meaning of often complex and evolving relationships. The research investigates how individuals make sense of multiple commitments within the complexities, tensions and contradictions of their relationships over time.

The social construction of what is meant by stakeholders is directly relevant to this thesis. Santana argues that the social construction of individuals is a major catalyst in how stakeholders are viewed. Depending on the processes of meaning making used, perception of stakeholders and their legitimacy varies. It is also argued that these representations of the complex social context are influenced by a number of factors, such as:

societal norms and accepted behaviors; organizational values, principles, and strategies; organizational structure of power; personal values and beliefs; and even self-serving interpretations (see, for example, Brown (1994)). In addition, the perception of legitimacy is a collective construction in which individual interpretations are assembled and negotiated through sensemaking and sensegiving processes (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). (2012:258)

Santana advises that further research is needed to explore how managers articulate their views and perspectives on their assigned stakeholders as a means to better

understand decision-making. Power, values and influence need to be considered in determining how stakeholders are viewed over time. These perspectives provide a justification for including data in this thesis about how individuals make meaning of stakeholders and how their social construction influences commitment to sustainability. These preliminary considerations extend later in this thesis to the dynamics of morphing, where individuals and their perceived relationships with their context simultaneously transform and change identity over time.

The assumption driving my curiosity in this theoretical area is that individuals make judgements and determinations based on how they make meaning of their own unique blend of stakeholder relationships. Depending on the nature of exchanges, individuals extract cues that influence the nature of their commitment to stakeholders. As Gergen states, ‘what we take to be knowledge of the world grows from relationship, and is embedded not within individual minds but within interpretative or communal traditions’ (2009a:88). These views have a strong link to the theorising that people are relational (Gergen 2009b) and that these processes of social construction have a major influence on the generation of meaning.

Historically, stakeholder theory has mainly examined stakeholders such as organisations, firms and lobby groups as part of the capitalist economy (Freeman et al. 2010; Pajunen 2010), and has not addressed how individuals operate and make sense within the nominated area of investigation. Stakeholder theory has been useful in assisting organisations to plan and explore issues pertaining to strategic management in large to medium sized private sector firms, but has neglected capturing how individuals socially construct meaning associated with their stakeholder relationships. As Laplume and Sonpar (2008) state, stakeholder theory rarely reveals the stories of individual perception and managerial understanding.

When seeking a suitable definition of stakeholder it was discovered that most explanations placed organisations as the chief area of examination (Friedman & Miles 2006). Beginning with the seminal work of Freeman (1984:58) who designated a stakeholder as, ‘those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist’ (1984:31), various scholars have made some modifications but the fundamental assumption is that the organisation is the prime focus of attention. Many of these

definitions have been proposed with an explicit bias towards private sector organisations and their role as the economic powerhouse of a free market or capitalist society. Recently, Freeman et al. (2010) have broadened the conversation to acknowledge the emergence of literature on ethical and business challenges of value creation and entrepreneurship and the rise of interest in stakeholder theory in fields of public administration, environmental policy, health-care and legal studies.

These shifts in focus on the relationship between human activity and the natural environment are indicative of increasing recognition that organisations operate as open complex systems comprising rapidly changing environments of multiple relationships within and outside of formal organisational structures (Albert & Whetten 1985; Brown 2009; Katz & Kahn 1978; Scott 1981; Weick 2001; Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers 1986). Beck, Bonss and Lau (2003) highlight that modernity generates discontinuous and uncertain futures in which individuals, groups and organisations struggle to make meaning and commitment in a world of constant flux and ambiguity. Change by its very nature is nonlinear and involves periods of disturbance and instability; it is not always fruitful to attempt to control it in an incremental way (Hayes et al. 2007). The present research provides an opportunity to advance new theory by allowing the individuals within the study an opportunity to tell their story about how they make sense of personal challenges over time.

McVea and Freeman (2005) suggest that if stakeholder theory is to remain viable as a strategic management theory, it needs to move away from a view of stakeholders as generic groups or organisations and towards a 'names and faces' orientation, seeking greater specific understanding of and communication in each stakeholder relationship. These tensions are evidenced in various collaborative and governance arrangements currently existing within industry clusters and private public partnerships. Here individuals from different organisations and multiple interests establish communication and governance processes to facilitate higher levels of commitment and performance in matters such as those pertaining to increased social and ecological contribution (Benn, Dunphy & Martin 2004; Benn & Martin 2010).

As this study involves addressing individual commitment within the context of ecological sustainability it is important to acknowledge that an increasing number of

scholars assert that stakeholder theories have progressed to the point where the natural environment (Winn & Kirchgeorg 2005) should be given legitimate stakeholder status (Driscoll & Starik 2004). Starik asserts that a stakeholder is ‘any naturally occurring entity which affects or is affected by organisational performance’ (1994:92). He argues that just because an entity may lack a political or economic voice that does not mean it should not be considered as a stakeholder. Waddock reinforces this view, asserting, ‘it is obviously up to human beings to generate dialogues, conversations that allow the “voice” of these unspoken stakeholders, as well as the manifold interests of humanity to be heard in policy arenas’ (2012:205). Waddock argues that individuals and their institutions need to take a long-term, stakeholder perspective on the wellbeing of humanity and all living creatures and entities of the planet.

We are all stakeholders of the Earth’s capacity to sustain life as we know it. For long-term considerations, such as the survival of humanity, or the health and well-being of natural systems and nature’s living beings other than humans, the corporation, organization, and even whole societies are at a too low level of analysis. (2012:192)

Haigh and Griffiths consider on the issue of inclusion of the natural environment in the strategic thinking of business. They argue that it is particularly relevant when one considers the powerful, legitimate, urgent and proximate properties of the natural environment caused by extreme weather conditions which can ‘alter or destroy business infrastructure, resources and markets’ (2009:356). In an empirical study of Australian electricity supply organisations, Haigh identified eight climate change issues that either were affecting or were believed to affect those organisations:

a carbon price, the need to manage GHG emissions, incremental changes in ambient and peak temperature, water availability, the need to respond to changing stakeholder expectations, extreme weather events, and the need to manage vegetation more closely and rising sea levels. (2008:99)

Despite the views of scholars who argue for the natural environment being awarded legitimate stakeholder status, many scholars disagree with these viewpoints (Freeman et al. 2010; Phillips 2003), stating that the planet and the natural environment may well have moral status but that is not the same as calling them stakeholders. Given the diverse and at times polarised views as to what constitutes a legitimate ‘stakeholder’, attention in this thesis is placed on how and why individuals make sense within these

complexities and why they make assertions in regard to these relationships. However, 'stakeholder theory as it currently stands is poorly equipped to assist managers in the execution of their obligations to progress a sustainable world' (Clifton & Amran 2011:133). Continuing to fuel inertia in management and organisation studies is a bias towards business models that assume that 'current economic and social conditions will continue to flourish regardless of unfavourable conditions within the natural environment as well as viewing change in terms of stability and linearity rather than longitudinal processes that evolve over time in a non linear and non predictable ways' (Winn et al. 2011:158). These reflections reinforce the need for deeper and different thinking about how individuals make meaning and respond within a paradigm of turbulent, unforeseen and complex adaptive change (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009b).

It is argued that the struggle to understand sustainability, global warming and climate change are representative of this tension. Individuals can struggle to make sense of the scientific and public debate while also contemplating the merits of a wide range of plausible futures. It is clear that diverse literatures support the notion that the individual should focus on the study of commitment over time in linear and nonlinear ways. It is claimed that unless organisations and industries become more adaptive and resilient to the impacts of climate change the vulnerabilities which currently exist will worsen much further in the future (Linnenluecke 2009).

According to Davenport and Leitch (2005), what makes a stakeholder act remains largely ignored in the stakeholder mobilisation literature. They assert that stakeholders act in response to an issue, whether it is of a social nature or otherwise, that arises in the relationship. Others state that stakeholder relationships change character (Mahon & Waddock 1992) as the issues and positions of each stakeholder evolve with new challenges (Kochan & Rubinstein 2000). The contention that the quality of stakeholder relationships is ever-changing is supported by literature highlighting the pressures and demands placed on individuals to mobilise personal action in line with broader organisational, vocational and/or community demands (Hogg & Terry 2000; Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep 2006).

Cross and Parker (2004), Ibarra and Hunter (2007) and Neville and Menguc (2006) argue that business and individual performance and contribution is contingent on the ability to develop commitment within a complex web of multiple relationships and social networks. Innovation and individual receptivity to change are also considered to be reliant on the ability to build and nurture successful networks. These thoughts are supported by the literature on social capital, where importance is placed on reciprocal exchange to develop cohesive bonding relationships and a spirit of goodwill that comes from building and sustaining strong connections (Adler & Kwon 2002; Nahapiet 2008).

One of the key challenges of sustainability is generating purpose and understanding among multiple stakeholders who do not share the same goals (Crosby & Bryson 2005; Dunphy, Griffiths & Benn 2007). Rowley and Moldoveanu (2003) assert that the reality of organisational environments is that a stakeholder group's members play many roles in their lives, having multiple and possibly conflicting interests. The implication is that ties such as organisational membership, interests and identities must be considered when examining stakeholder relationships. Indeed, Mitchell et al. argue that the list of possible stakeholders is 'bewilderingly complex for managers to apply' (1997:857).

Clegg, Courpassion and Phillips (2006) state that power is not sufficiently discussed in organisation studies literature. This view is supported by Banerjee (2003) who suggests that the social power of the stakeholder is based on economic exchange and that conventional stakeholder theories overlook such topics as asymmetrical relations of power and systemic inequalities, which can lead to injustice in society. Theories of stakeholder salience and power provide a useful framework for considering the rationale for individual stakeholder action. Rowley (1997) assert that stakeholders' attempts to influence depend on their networks and the power surrounding their relationships. Stakeholders with sufficient saliency have greater capacity to take action. Mitchell et al. (1997) state that power, legitimacy and urgency are the most important attributes in assisting individuals to prioritise and meet competing stakeholder claims. Laplume and Sonpar (2008) assert that stakeholder saliency is a

function of organisational commitments and culture, and fluctuates during the lifecycle of a business and the political context of the industry. Myllykangas et.al. suggest that stakeholder saliency can be enhanced by the perceived value creation generated from useful collaboration and exchange. The six characteristics of importance are:

(1) history of the relationship, (2) objectives of the stakeholders, (3) interaction in the relationship, (4) information sharing in the relationship, (5) trust between stakeholders, and (6) the potential of a stakeholder to learn. (2010:70)

Driscoll and Starik (2004) advance the work of Mitchell et al. by adding the attribute of proximity into their stakeholder salience framework. Proximity can include a number of features such as closeness of physical location, similarity of ideas, approaches and actions, membership of the same industry association and knowledge networks, or the sharing of similar supply chains and marketplaces (Neville & Menguc 2006). Together, these attributes provide a useful framework for examining what entices individuals to become curious and connected to the needs and wishes of the specific stakeholders in their lives. To help build further understanding of how individuals generate meaning that may influence their commitment, the next section draws on relevant literature on identity and sensemaking.

## ***2.4 Identity and sensemaking***

Given the arguments surrounding sustainability, commitment over time and stakeholder relationships, the exploration of meaning making is important to understand how people make meaning over time. When it comes to researching individual commitment, it is assumed that individuals would have different accounts based on their experience, even when they share the same event or episode, as their meanings were constructed differently. It is suggested that individual identity is constituted largely as a result of how individuals see themselves in respect to others (Baumeister 1998) and how a sense of self guides the sensemaking of those with whom we interact (Markus, Smith & Moreland 1985; Swann 1987).

In drawing one of many possible conceptual links between identity and sensemaking, Maitlis defined sensemaking 'as a process of social construction of identity(Berger &

Luckmann 1967), in which individuals attempt to interpret, explain and use different sets of cues from their environments' (2005:21). These observations reflect a pattern, in as much as the beginnings of a theory of sensemaking and identity appear to come from similar sociological routes, but many of the interconnections are yet to be explored. Identity is understood by Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas as dynamic and evolving. Central to these considerations is the assumption that people ask questions about how one can be, how to act in changing circumstances and how to gain institutional and material support from others. These reflections are representative of social constructionists, who argue that the development of identity involves embodied interaction and the creation and dismantling of meaning over time. For Alvesson et al., identity refers to the:

subjective meanings and experience, to our ongoing efforts to address the twin questions, 'Who am I?' and—by implication—'how should I act?' (Cerulo 1997). One's personal identity implies certain forms of (often positive) subjectivity and thereby entwines feelings, values and behavior and points them in particular (sometimes conflicting) directions. (2008:6)

Identity is an important meaning making process in the development of human purpose, self-efficacy for action, value and justification of self, and self-image as a worthy individual. These views from the literature consistently imply that the making of meaning is closely associated with the perceptions and social construction of identity and as a consequence influences the nature of commitment. Individuals' 'reflections and discursive elements' (Kuhn 2006) are considered in later chapters, to build understanding of the potential influence of self-identity on commitment to ecological sustainability. Reissner (2010) supports the view that identity is a source of meaning which attempts to reduce anxiety and is reflective of a person's values, feelings and thoughts. These views are heavily influenced by the work of Sommer and Baumeister (1998), who argue that meaning making directly influences how people think and feel about their identity. These processes in time are influenced by their perceptions, roles, experiences, relationships and their observation and reaction to social change.

### **2.4.1 Self-identity and its potential influence**

Relevant literature on self-identity and how it relates to sensemaking are now discussed. A focus on self-identity has been chosen in this research to help develop a deeper understanding of the inner workings of individual social construction, and the potential relationship to sensemaking and commitment. As indicated, identity is heavily influenced by experiences within changing contexts. People form, repair, maintain, strengthen, or revise their social construction in response to change (Sveningsson & Alvesson 2003). Depending on the nature of meaning making, these determinations can lead to either contribution or resistance to what is emerging. According to Alvesson (2010:211), people demonstrate different qualities of subjectivity and destruction, which can lead to degrees 'of insecurity, fluidity and ambiguity' versus a 'degree of coherence, robustness and integration of self-identity'. Self-identity is an area of interest in investigating how individuals make meaning, consider their commitments and respond to commitment over time. Scholars build on these assertions to argue that self-identity is constituted and re-constituted through on-going process of 'self-doubt' and self-openness which continually demands choice making and interpretation (Alvesson & Spicer 2012; Carroll & Levy 2008).

When researching the literature is not surprising to discover that the field of identity has burgeoned in recent decades. Similar observations could also be made in the fields of philosophy, literature and sociology, fields that have also invested significant energy in making sense of what builds and shapes individual perception over time. Pullen acknowledges the multi-disciplinary contributions to studies of identity in management and organisational studies:

George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionist studies of sensemaking, the functionalism of Talcott Parsons, the development of role theory by Robert Merton, the dramaturgical sociology of Erving Goffman and Harold Garfinkel's ethno-methodological studies of how social membership is achieved through talk. (2008:630)

Giddens considers that personal relationship to self-identity is highly reflexive and involves a variety of perspectives including:

What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity – and ones which on some level or another all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behaviour. (1991:70)

In these writings there is much focus on how these interconnections may change and unfold. Holstein and Gubrium link identity theory to the circumstances of social construction by providing ‘three caveats’ on what may influence sensemaking over time. The first caveat is ‘local cultures or formal organisations’ which ‘supply resources for interpretation, not injunctions and absolute directives’. The second caveat concerns the construction of self that is embedded in and shaped by the meaning making apparatus existing within organisations. Finally there is the complex process of multiple layers of interpretive constraint and narrative resources generated by discursive practices. When discursive elements interact they generate a ‘vast array of possibilities, including those taken from broader cultural understandings such as might be drawn from race, gender, class and a myriad of other configurations of meaning’. Intricate elements invite ‘narrative slippage and innovation, as stories are locally crafted from a variegated range of standpoints and resources’ (2000:167). These considerations provide an opportunity in the research to examine social construction within a broader context than just organisational settings.

Wieland (2010) claims that these constructions between one’s perception of self and the external world (Watson 2009) generate tensions as individuals seek understanding of who they are in relation to the world around them. Fuelling these tensions is the constant pressure to make comparisons between oneself in relationship to others. Strauss (1997) asserts that transformations of identity unfold when people are forced to accept that their identity has changed or needs to change. These moments are sparked by ‘misalignment, surprise, shock, chagrin (feelings of disappointment), anxiety, tension, bafflement and self-questioning’. Obodaru (2012) states that setting standards for self and others is a central catalyst for self-awareness of levels of achievement, social acceptability and distinctiveness in a given cultural context.

Identity is also explored in the view that individuals ‘play’ in regard to how identities evolve and change. ‘Identity play’ is seen as a process that enables individuals to

explore and create new possibilities and seek the preservation of existing identities by complying with their understanding of the external world. Ibarra and Petriglieri suggest when people are engaged in identity play, they may ‘rehearse a variety of possible selves, without necessarily seeking to adopt any of them on a permanent basis’ (2010:17). These conceptualisations are examined in Chapter Four.

Shaping and building identity generate tensions, which are indicative of individuals trying to make sense of their existence. Willmott (1997) sees identity construction not as a matter of making clear-cut choices but as characterised by confusion and conflict as individuals construct and deconstruct their identity. Beech (2010) argues that identities are constructed and deconstructed over time through three processes of inquiry: (1) *experimentation* in which versions of the self are tried out or modified, (2) *reflection* via an internalised dialogue that entails self-questioning and self-change along with reacting to (or absorbing) external influences and perceptions, and (3) *recognition* that things are different, typically in response to a ‘confounded expectation or a turning point’, which leads to a ‘heightened noticing’ of a new meaning. Alternatively, the recognition can come all at once, as an epiphany whereby there is an overnight or instant realisation that things have changed.

Scholars have suggested that individuals describe themselves and others in a multiplicity of ways (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Pullen 2008; Tracy 2002). Such observations are supported by a number of sociologists (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Goffman 1971; Schutz 1967) who take the phenomenological perspective that it is impossible to ‘truly know the other’. Gergen asserts that social construction is built from a multi-being relational achievement. He points out that we each have the capacity to live in multiple worlds, as presented in the following example:

What is real, rational and good when we are talking with parents or a clergy member may be quite different than when we are relating with pals at a party or a football game. The world we create with a younger brother or sister may be very different from the world we share with a teacher or a grandfather. One might say, then that we are multi-beings, capable of being many persons. (2009a:112-113)

Coupland (2007) states that identity can be interpreted differently depending on the context and the situation. The first asserts how individuals describe 'oneself' or 'others' reflecting a factual labelling or categorisation of themselves. Then, depending on their categorisation, they can express themselves with a label as a means of communicating their identity. Labelling can include categorisations such as – I am a 'blue collar worker', she is a 'typical Virgo' and/or they are a 'typical public servant'. The second and more recent philosophical position is where it is proposed that individual identity adapts and responds to the expectations, norms and discourses that exist in society and in organisations. Engineers, for example, could view themselves quite differently based on the nature of their work and the organisation they work for. In this perspective, identity adapts to the nature and frameworks of power, discourses and managerial expectations around them. These understandings allow a more flexible study of identity.

Within this thesis the conceptual frames of 'personal identity' and 'social identity' are used to represent that individuals sometimes make generalisations of themselves and others without making explicit reference to wanting to understand or reveal the inner workings and multiplicities of self. In choosing the theoretical frame it is also recognised that academics and people generally use a variety of other forms of identity descriptors, including 'social identity', 'professional identity' and 'organisational identity'.

In attempt to develop a framework to connect employee commitment, work attachment and social identity, Meyer, Becker and Van Dick (2006) developed an integrative conceptual model. They did this in response to the recognition that there was little theory and research in regard to the distinctions between social identities and commitment, and the nature of relations among them. They define social identity as 'inclusion to multiple groups or collectives' (2006:666). In their opinion, social identity can involve seeing one's self concept in terms of one's belonging to multiple groups from time to time. Social identity involves 'cognitive awareness of membership in a collective, an evaluation of the collective and self as a member and an emotional reaction to that evaluation' (2006:667). Meyer's work is based to a large extent on the assumption of a binding relationship between an employer and

employee. In this case Meyer and colleagues give common examples of social identity as an organisation, division and work team. It is believed that thinking on social identity could be broadened to include other forms of inclusion, such as clusters, an industry, a community, or feeling attached to a complex challenge, such as implementing environmentally friendly practices.

Pullen and Linstead (2005) argue that identity is a process, which generates many of the emergent qualities discussed. They propose that individuals develop their own unique brand of 'identity capital' that draws on a variety of sources such as time, place, body, sex, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, culture, life-history and psychodynamics. Identity capital then joins up with aspects of 'identity formation' and 'identity performance' to create a conceptual framework which involves a process of subjective identity that is highly interconnected to external forces and dynamics of power relations and reflexivity. Pullen (2008) states that identity capital can be both a burden or an opportunity, and it can lose or increase in value as a person moves from place to place. Identity, by its very nature, can also change based on interpretations of history and future projections.

The next area to be examined is the literature on sensemaking, with some commentary on sensegiving. Given the desire to develop understanding of making meaning, a critique of these literatures is provided. As has been outlined, there are similar philosophical routes of social construction between the fields of identity and sensemaking. Following this critic, important synergies and disconnections are outlined.

#### **2.4.2 Weick and beyond, unravelling how people make sense**

Much of the popularity among scholars of the literature on sensemaking in organisation and management studies can in part be attributed to the work of Karl Weick. To put this into context, Weick's work is now explored. One of his earliest contributions was on the process of organising (Weick 1969, 1979), landmark works which served as a basis for his later writing on sensemaking. He used the work of scholars from multiple disciplines including Garfinkel (1967), Mead (1956), Schutz (1967) and Simon (1957) to develop a range of perspectives including 'enactment'

and 'plausibility'. In his theory on organising, Weick argued that managers 'construct, rearrange, single out and demolish many "objective" features of their surroundings. When people act they unrandomize variables, insert vestiges of orderliness and literally create their own constraints' (1969:243).

Weick saw individuals as constantly responding to their environments by creating the environment to which the system then adapts. He argues that human beings do not react to an environment: they enact it. Weick highlights the work of Schutz on how people make sense of their world. He discusses how people make sense by performing a 'reflective glance', where they take action based on analysis of the past, always made from a shifting here-and-now. Weick argues that an enacted environment has a number of properties, first being the creation of meaning coming from revisiting what has already occurred. He supports the view that attention can only be directed backwards from a given point of time (current) and that, whatever their past experiences, individuals focus on past meaningful objects. These views are consistent with those of Mead (1956:136), who wrote: 'we are conscious always of what we have done, never of doing it'. Kierkegaard wrote, 'It is perfectly true, as philosophers say, that life must be understood backwards. But they forget the other propositions, that it must be lived forwards' (Dru (Trans) 1938).

In the second edition of his work on organising, Weick (1979) builds and advances his thinking on the 'reflective glance' by incorporating guidance from Garfinkel (1967) on the 'historicizing of conversations'. He qualifies that an episode of organising is heavily influenced by the context or field in which it happens to be embedded, the inputs being processed, the cycles available and the interpretations that are acceptable and unacceptable at that point of time. As Weick argues, 'much of sensemaking can be viewed as cycles of writing plausible accounts, histories and sequences for enactments' (1979:195) or, as he writes in later work, 'as a process of interpreting "what is known" about the underlying pattern' inherent to the process of organising (2001:21).

Since his early writings in the 1960s, Weick has built a reputation as a leading thinker in the field (Weick 2006; Weick 2012). He suggests that the field has shifted from a

highly rational and organised view of sensemaking to a view that is more tolerant of emotionality, contextual plausibility and the use of story to enhance understandings.

Weick's legacy is that he built clarity on the features and qualities of sensemaking and suggested that sensemaking is not about getting it right but is about developing our stories over time. Sensemaking concerns questions of: What does an event mean? In the context of everyday life, when people confront something unintelligible they ask: What is the story here? Now what should I do? Sensemaking also concerns dealing with ambiguity, searching for meaning, settling for plausibility and moving on (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). In his more recent thinking Weick defines sensemaking as 'the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing' (2008:1403). Weick appears again to strongly support the views of Schutz (1967:61) who argues this is done in the 'future perfect tense' where imagining of the future is seen as a cognitive process by which an 'actor projects his actions as if it were already over and done with and lying in the past. Strangely enough, therefore, because it is pictured as completed, the planned act bears the temporal character of "pastness" In this research it was originally intended for people to recall the past pertaining to their memories of commitment as a means to understand their social construction.

This preoccupation with retrospective views as the sole agent for sensemaking has been questioned by a number of theorists (Boje 2008; Gephart, Topal & Zhan 2010; Shotter 2008). In this context, Boje (2008) proposes 'narrative fragments of "here and now"' in the moments of 'being' and 'prospective' ways of sensemaking, which are included in the analysis in this study. These conceptualisations provide an opportunity to move the analysis of individual commitment away from the preoccupation with retrospectivity to other forms of social construction.

Weick (2008) consolidates many of his views on sensemaking by specifying a number of properties, which include helping people maintain continuity and exploring new frontiers. To begin with, people socially construct meaning based on social context, social support, consensual validations and shared relevance. Perception of one's identity provides a powerful explanatory framework for enactment. People rely on retrospective glancing to past events, episodes and situations to make plausible

interpretations of past experience in order to extract meaning. Individuals seek to find clues and confirm evidence that permits confident or plausible diagnosis for enactment. Individuals appear to make sense and meaning of others not physically present. When one looks at sensemaking it is not so much about decision-making; it is about people making sense in regard to their decisions. Finally, individuals construct sense based on plausibility more than accuracy. There is a constant struggle for accuracy, and settling for an updated plausibility. Sensemaking is a process of active construction, not passive interpretation. It is driven by the demands of information overload and the pressures of being too busy or being in situations where interpretations can quickly become out of date.

Now that many of the central ideas of Weick have been addressed, the thoughts of other authors are included to provide a more solid justification for including sensemaking in the exploration of commitment over time. In selecting these thoughts there was a realisation that scholars such as Weick and his followers did not fully acknowledge the importance of many of the constraints that people face in their lives. Sensemaking literature has often been consumed by rationality and has failed to adequately explore the interplay between context, enactment and emotion. In recent times scholars have initiated a number of studies that reveal the tensions and paradoxes faced by individuals as they attempt to make meaning of what is unfolding. This research suggests that the literature on sensemaking is consistent with theories of identity, where individuals are perceived as making meaning in relation to changing contexts and situations in life. Whittle and Mueller describe sensemaking as a 'process through which people interpret themselves and the world around them through the production of meaning' (2012:114). Furthermore, Thurlow and Helms Mills (2009) agree with the view (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005) that identity construction is central to how people experience change and how they make sense of events and make meaning.

Luscher and Lewis (2008) note that managers are often confronted with situations that are messy and hard to resolve. These moments generate difficulties in performing, belonging and organising, and managers are required to explore alternative ways to change relationships, communication patterns and strategic approaches to make

progress. These findings, in the context of facilitating change in corporate social responsibility, highlight the importance of adapting to different and emerging contexts over time, as individuals attempt to make sense and organise themselves to meet the challenges. Individuals are often conceptualised as taking pragmatic action to increase clarity, becoming more externally focused in communication, implementing procedures, policy and protocols to operationalise change (Cramer, Van der Heijden & Jonker 2006). Sensemaking relies on the development of mental structures and maps (organising frameworks) to assist the making of meaning (Van der Heijden, Drissen & Cramer 2010).

Snowden (2005) provides a number of perspectives on how understanding of social complexity can inform sensemaking theory. He argues that social complexity suggests that some things just 'are', by virtue of multiple interactions, and that the concept of a single explanation or prescription of who should receive credit or blame is not necessary. It is suggested that people structure their social interactions to create order by their capability to store knowledge. Finally, the importance of context for sensemaking is stressed. As Snowden explains, 'working as a crew in a bush fire is by identity very strongly associated with the role and common threat and I can sustain it for a period of time while I am "on watch"; however such a contextual identity and the behaviors associated with it cannot be transferred outside of the context' (2005:8). If the context shifts to another role, such as providing education to schoolchildren, a new identity is formed.

Such commentary adds weight to the decision to explore sensemaking by providing an opportunity for individuals to express the social construction of the scenarios and contexts they were facing in the challenge of addressing ecological sustainability. As Taylor and Van Every claim, sensemaking neglects the impact of the bigger social, historical and institutional context. They argue that sensemaking is 'not an accomplishment in a vacuum, it is not just context-free networking' (2000:251). Considering sensemaking theory in the context of multiple stakeholder relationships, Vlaar, Frans, Den Bosch and Volberda (2006) highlight that the problem of understanding will often exhibit itself within collaborative exchanges. Indeed, building on earlier discussions of individual interaction with multiple stakeholders,

Rhodes and Brown (2005) assert that language, talk and communication can have a dramatic impact on situations, organisations and environments.

Scholars have consistently argued that management and organisation studies neglect issues pertaining to power, more specifically in relation to sensemaking (Clegg 1989; Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006) and sensegiving (Huzzard 2004). Humphreys and Brown highlight that sensemaking within organisations is heavily influenced by processes of power, legitimacy and social construction where individuals and groups continuously construct, invent and re-invent what is unfolding through storytelling and dialogue. Furthermore, the authors argue that individuals in organisations draw on shared discursive resources and stories to make sense of themselves and their organisations (Brown & Humphreys 2003, 2006; Humphreys & Brown 2002, 2008). As discussed earlier, these understandings indicate a need to develop deeper awareness of the narrative between internal and external stakeholders (Brown, Humphreys & Gurney 2005).

In recent times, scholars in organisation and management have extended exploration of the meanings attributable to stories to contexts involving social change. Notably, how do some old stories remain powerful over time while others lose their hold on the thinking of people? At the same time, why do some new stories emerge and become more impactful? Humphreys, Uchasaran and Lockett (2012) suggest that stories by themselves do not guarantee that sensegiving will bring about change, as many stories may be contested and not necessarily influence the sensemaking of individuals or groups. Vuori and Virtaharju suggest that, to increase the influence of sensegiving on the making of meaning, actions must be taken to arouse emotions. They argue that ‘while the cognitive component determines the beliefs individuals come to hold, the emotional component influences how intensively they will hold these beliefs’ (2012:48). As Colville, Brown and Pye state, ‘while sensemaking is a balance between thinking and acting, in a new world that owes less to yesterday’s stories and frames, keeping up with the times changes the balance point to clarifying through action’ (2012:5).

Eisenberg (2006) explores the relationship between sensemaking and communication through the role of interactive talk and use of the resources of language. Several

scholars (Camille & Minnis 2004; Denning 2001; Hardy, Lawrence & Grant 2005; Ricketts & Galloway Seiling 2003) suggest that an understanding of narratives can assist in developing deeper awareness of the reasoning that drives human behaviour. For others, sensemaking processes are fuelled by identity formation among multiple stakeholders, which encourages and enhances the sharing of common narratives and stories (Adobor 2005; Choo 1998; Downing 2005).

A number of scholars (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Maitlis & Lawrence 2007) have investigated 'sensegiving' as their primary focus. They argue that sensegiving is a prevalent activity that plays a major role in change management, leadership and decision-making. Ravasi and Schultz (2006:437) assert that organisational culture supplies members with cues for making sense of what their organisation is about—and for 'giving sense' of it as well. They also appear to support more empirical research that involves combining an understanding of context with the nature of sensemaking and sensegiving. Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) contend that little is known about the conditions associated with sensegiving in organisations—where, when, or why it occurs and this will be discussed next.

Czarniawska (2006) critically assesses sensemaking and identity formation as a continuous process that is inflected by qualities of emergence and flow. Sensemaking is seen as more temporal, where morphing of language and emerging norms can shape new meaning well beyond established structures and specific events in time. In making the philosophical position clear it should be noted that some scholars (Albert & Whetten 1985; Erikson 1959) argue that identity is relatively enduring, whereas others stress the more adaptive and evolving qualities of identity (Burner 2002; Gioia, Schultz & Corley 2000; Pullen 2006). In the latter case individuals are seen as 'evolving beings' constantly questioning their beliefs and testing assumptions, then re-considering their hopes and fears for the future as conditions undergo transition over time. Disagreements exist within the literature as to whether identity is a product of interactions (Weick 1995) or is more a result of social interaction typified by on-going reflection, practice and performance (Garfinkel 1967; Goffman 1971).

### **2.4.3 Bringing these theories together, synergies and disconnections**

In literature discussed in preceding sections, numerous examples were given that indicate the interconnections between sensemaking and identity (Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). Gautam, Dick and Wagner (2004) and Ravasi and Schultz (2006) assert that there are links between these theoretical areas, yet there is no empirical evidence to justify these claims. This thesis aims to explore these interrelationships, while also informing how these processes influence the nature of commitment with empirical research.

At times, the analysis of the theoretical connections between identity and sensemaking is more problematic than helpful, as there appears to be general agreement that social construction is at the centre of human existence and experience. To sum up the strengths of these fields, the identity literature appears to be better in theorising the tensions of self, while the sensemaking literature helps shape thinking on how people organise themselves to cope with what is unfolding. Further, the sensemaking literature seems to place greater currency on rational thought and cognition to explain social construction. In the sensemaking literature, human emotion seems to be placed in the background of decision-making and interpretation. Identity theorists seem to be more tolerant of struggles of meaning making within uncertainty, and as a result are more curious and trusting of the felt or emotional response in social construction. Both theoretical areas appear to have neglected research that assists understanding of why identity and sensemaking influence commitment and meaning over time. It is here that this thesis can assist organisation and management studies.

In undertaking this study it is believed that the wish of Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas for improved research into identity and associated social construction is addressed:

After approximately 20 years of expanded identity research in organization studies, there remain opportunities and challenges to deliver on its promise—to develop novel and nuanced theoretical accounts, to produce rich empirical analyses that capture the inter-subjectivity of organizational life in a thoughtful and empathetic fashion, and to demonstrate how individual and collective self-constructions become powerful players in organizing processes and outcomes.(2008:7)

In completing this overview of the identity and sensemaking literature it is important to acknowledge that within this thesis these interconnections are explored within the tensions and paradoxes of sustainability. To do this requires some understanding of the social construction processes deployed by individuals. Angus-Leppan's research on stakeholder sensemaking and corporate responsibility is based on the assumption that people are faced with a context which is confusing and full of ambiguity, and that what is required is a 'sensemaking lens' which helps provide a 'view of the subtle forces at play in interpretation and action (2009:3). As Angus-Leppan articulates:

When information is distributed among numerous parties, each with a different impression of what is happening, the cost of reconciling these disparate views is high, so discrepancies and ambiguities in outlook persist. Thus, multiple theories develop about what is happening and what needs to be done, people learn to work interdependently despite couplings loosened by the pursuit of diverse theories, and inductions may be more clearly associated with effectiveness when they provide equivalent rather than shared meanings. (2009:102)

## ***2.5 Considering emotions as part of the conversation***

Organisational and management studies have historically undervalued the role of emotions in favour of rationality, as seen in the commitment, sensemaking and self-identity literature. Fineman reaffirms the trend of the literature, noting that 'emotion theory has raised serious questions amongst the notion of rationality in organisations. Traditionally, emotions have been seen to be the enemy of rationality, interfering with deliberations when seeking optimal decisions' (2008:430). As a consequence, considering emotion as part of the conversation on how commitment over time manifests is analysed. In examining this recommendation, one sees merit in expanding the study beyond only emotions that promote commitment to pro-environmental practices, to also include those that may generate anti-environmental or non-sustainability behaviours (Bluhdorn 2011).

Building on the view of neglect of the study of emotion in the literature, Dougherty and Drumheller argue there is an implicit assumption that individuals carefully control their emotions, choosing to rationally recite their emotional experiences or to relegate inappropriate displays of emotions to times and places other than their work. Dougherty and Drumheller further assert that within organisations 'members would be

far more successful at producing rational outcomes if they spent less time and effort trying to shove their emotions into rational norms' (2006:235). I support their view that rationality is a dominant discourse in organisation and management studies and hence creates a benign and unemotional interpretation of what happens in life.

It should be noted that these reflections on the neglect of emotion in organisation and management research are not new. Goffman (1971) asserted the importance of studying emotion at work, arguing that such propositions have been largely ignored. It is recognised that there has been an increased focus on emotion in recent times; however, relevant research falls behind more rational and cognitive explorations. Several authors (Fineman 1993; Fineman 2006; Fineman 2008; Frost 2003; Payne & Cooper 2001) have raised awareness of the importance of emotion for organisation and management studies, and others have called for greater ingenuity in the design of methodological approaches to explore and study emotions.<sup>3</sup> There is also increased recognition of the importance of emotional reflexivity when undertaking study (Holmes 2010; Munkejord 2009; Rosenberg 1990 ).

When emotion is discussed in the field of management it is often discussed within a closed system. One example of theory indicative of this approach is 'affective events theory' (Weiss & Cropanzano 1996). Here the majority of analysis has focused on internal events within organisations, and their effect on the nature of risk taking, creative thinking, vigilance in decision-making and resistance to change and motivation (Ashton-James & Ashkanasy 2008). This study broadens the discussion to include examination of external events and non-work issues (Pratt & Dutton 2000).

The study also questions the implied assumption that emotion is an effect of an event or series of events over time. Emotions could alternatively be seen as constantly 'on the move' as individuals shift their attention between multiple events and situations. Whether examining the complexity of emotions during repeated changes or understanding what occurs during new or unfolding challenges, in both cases greater focus is needed on the role and function of emotion in organisation and management

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<sup>3</sup> References: (Briner, Harris & Daniels 2004; Coupland et al. 2008; Ekman & Cordaro 2011; Fineman 1993; Hopfl & Linstead 1997; Izard 2011; Levenson 2011; Patient, Lawrence & Maitlis 2003).

studies (Klarner, By & Diefenbach 2011). Fineman makes a similar comment with regard to consideration of the context of an individual's existence, stating that 'the social construction of emotion emphasizes the different ways in which emotion is influenced by interpersonal, social and cultural settings' (2008:429). As Salanda (2009) asserts, by including emotion in the research we gain greater insight into perspectives, world views and life conditions of the individuals under investigation. Indeed, Corbin and Strauss advise that 'one can't separate emotion from action; they are part of the same flow of events, one leading into another' (2008:7). Salvatore and Venuleo agree that for construction of meaning to occur it must include emotion at the 'heart of the matter' (2008:33).

One of the idiosyncratic qualities of the literature on emotions is the lack of an agreed position as to what constitutes a basic emotion<sup>4</sup> and how the human brain processes cognition. Indeed, there is great disparity in how these areas are studied and understood. The psychological and organisation and management literature is riddled with different definitions of what constitutes a basic and discrete emotion, and consequently with research that serves different purposes, agendas and assumptions (Izard 2011). As Stanley and Burrows (2001) state, approaches can range from those that stress the biological to those that are primarily psychological.

Scholars in psychology suggest that the interconnect between emotion and cognition is largely problematic. The ambiguities that are generated can be traced back to how cognition and emotions are defined (Levenson 2011). If cognition is defined as 'anything the brain does', all emotion requires cognition will hold sway. If, alternatively, cognition is defined as a more lengthy and considered process of weighing possibilities, considering alternatives and planning responses, then the position that emotion can occur without cognition is valid. In recognition of these polarised views, the inner workings of emotion and cognition are not explored in this thesis. It is accepted, however, that emotion should be considered in the exploration of individual commitment. It is also clear that the infusion of emotion into decisions is

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<sup>4</sup>References: Frijda 2007; Kalat & Shiota 2007; Ortony & Turner 1990; Plutchik & Kellerman 1980; Stanley & Burrows 2001

an under-theorised area, whereas in this research it is seen as central to the study of individual commitment over time, reinforcing the view that the social construction of reality is not a purely rational, cognitive process.

Given there are fundamental disagreements about the number, definitions and effects of emotions, including their relationships to our feelings, thought and body. In this research it was decided to use a very simple definition by Fineman, derived from the Latin word 'emovere' which means to 'to stir up or move' (2008:423). Accepting this definition allowed the data from the empirical study to inform one of the range and nature of emotions in existence. Alternative viewpoints, including the critique of positive emotional research (Fineman 2006), studies of organisation misbehaviour (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999; Greve, Palmer & Pozner 2010), the organisation of resistance (Spicer & Bohm 2007), and the effect of ambivalence on creativity (Fong 2006), helped provide a more balanced exploration of the influence of emotion on individual commitment.

Emotions are seen as filtering agents for cognition, without people being consciously aware of their role and function. The principal agent for the emotional hijacking of the rational processes of cognition and social construction is said to be the amygdala structure in the brain (Goleman 1996, 1998; Levenson 2011). As Ekman explains:

When we are in the grip of an emotion, a cascade of changes (without our choice or immediate awareness) occurs in split seconds in: the emotional signals in the face and voice; preset actions; learned actions; the autonomic nervous system activity that regulates our body; the regulatory patterns that continuously modify our behavior; the retrieval of relevant memories and expectations; and how we interpret what is happening within us and in the world. (2011:366)

Closely related to these explorations is the field of 'emotional intelligence', which during the last two decades has become a popular topic and research area among scholars and practitioners. Emotional intelligence is defined by Mayer, Salovey and Caruso as 'the ability to perceive and express emotion, assimilate emotion in thought, understand and reason with emotion and regulate emotion in the self and others' (2000:396). Unfortunately there is significant disagreement on emotional intelligence terminology and operationalisation (Cherniss 2010; Lindebaum & Cartwright 2011).

Although emotional intelligence is not a focus of interest for this thesis, it is worth noting that there appears to be an understanding that the way people positively manage their emotions does enhance the quality of performance, reduce levels of stress and enhance the quality of social interactions.

In the interests of a more central role for emotions, organisation and management studies would do better by giving more attention to the discoveries of the neurosciences. Research from the neurosciences (Greenfield 2001; Restak 2000) suggests that cognition is stimulated by a series of subconscious electrical activities well before we respond or act consciously. Research has also shown that we deal with a complex array of different neurological, hormonal and electro-magnetic information. In the field of organisation and management studies, Ashkanasy (2003) appears to accept the view that emotion is an active player in meaning construction by stating that individual cognition is at the mercy of unconscious processes of emotion based on the neurobiology of the human limbic system.

Recent years have witnessed heightened interest in the role of positive emotions for individuals and organisations, particularly in the thinking coming out of North America. The University of Michigan (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn 2003; Dutton, Roberts & Bednar 2010) and Cape Western Universities (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros 2003) have developed a groundswell of research generating a large volume of publications on topics such as positive organisational scholarship and appreciative inquiry. Many of the influences of this work can be traced back to scholars such as Martin Seligman (Peterson & Seligman 2004; Seligman 1998, 2002) who highlighted that much of the psychological literature was too preoccupied with human deficits and deviance. Seligman's influence has also generated interest in other authors for their work on strength-based leadership (Buckingham 2007) and positivity (Fredrickson 2009). In response to the recent literature on positivity, some scholars have cautioned against only exploring positive emotions and identities, as it misses the opportunity to research matters pertaining to the exploitative and degrading aspects of work and individual employee resistance (Learmonth & Humphreys 2011).

A number of scholars have sought to explain the absence of the examination of emotions in sensemaking (Maitlis 2009; Maitlis & Lawrence 2007). Elsbach (2002) suggests that processes associated with sensemaking have either been based on 'cold cognitive scripts' and rules or based on strong emotional attitudes built around values. Magala (1997) argues that there is a need for a full-blown theory of organisational sentiments in sensemaking. Eisenberg states:

The treatment of emotion is still somewhat mentalistic and bloodless. It misses a complete consideration of emotions from the neck down, one that incorporates the whole body and in particular the senses other than thinking. ...Specifically it is exciting to imagine ... the marriage of Weick's ideas and performance ethnography of Conquergood (1991) or the auto-ethnographic of Goodall (1989) both of whom have taken great pains to document the sounds, touch, smell and feel of organisational life. (2006:1701)

This brings to a close the review of the foundation literature pertaining to this thesis. Additional literature is introduced in coming chapters as new insights, methods and reflections are shared in relation to the data analysed. These include theories that enhance and deepen understandings already revealed as well as some which provide new insights in areas pertaining to personal leadership, learning, and adaptability to change. The critique of the literature has confirmed the need to research stakeholder commitment over time. To cement the connection between the literature review and the next chapter on methodology, the rationale for deploying a processual approach to change is now outlined.

## ***2.6 Processual approaches to change***

The literature review exposed an opportunity to undertake research where individual transition was seen as an iterative exchange between the personal quest for social construction and a lived experience requiring constant reappraisal of what is plausible and achievable over time. The conceptual frame of change must therefore embrace the tensions and paradoxes of emergence and morphing of social and political complexity (Goldsprink & Kay 2010; Goldstein 1999) as individuals attempt to make meaning of what is 'unfolding' and 'on-going'. To do this, it was decided to undertake a processual approach to change (Dawson 2003; Pettigrew 1997), which would help to explore emerging views in relation to changing contexts. Each individual told his or

her personal story of change, and their views were subsequently compared to discursive exchanges in other cases.

Czarniawska argues that much thinking associated with organisation and management research is too narrow:

Organizational researchers rarely spend time in organizations they study, but during their relatively short stays they try to map the organizational landscape as well as they can. They draw maps, charts and diagrams, trying to capture structures, networks and hierarchies. In doing so, they often miss the processes, as organizations are not so much landscapes, as assemblies of organizing processes. (2008:32)

In this research I did not wish to repeat the mistakes of the past, where deterministic solutions were proposed to complex organisational and individual phenomena. It was important to provide a representative picture of individual commitment over time without over-simplifying the pressures and challenges that people face, including issues such as addressing norms, juggling expectations and establishing priorities. The study is not about complex theory (Palmer, Dunford & Akin 2009; Stacey, Griffin & Shaw 2000) but about how individuals respond and relate to the complexity that faces or surrounds them. In this context it is a study of how individual commitment takes shape in relationship to ecological sustainability.

In this approach a concerted effort was undertaken to explore context and action in tandem, as providing an ideal framework for exploring longitudinal data (Van de Van & Huber 1990) with all its complexities and tensions. In some cases, as people expressed themselves, insecurities and vulnerabilities arose they explored their feelings and perceptions of reality. These examinations provided multiple and often conflicting accounts. In signalling these intentions to examine different and multiple interpretations of similar phenomena, it should be stated that the empirical data was co-constructed between my self as the researcher and the 'research subject'. It is acknowledged that my personal meaning that was discovered was socially constructed. These views are supported by the work of a number of sociologists (Goffman 1971; Schutz 1967) in the area of phenomenology, who argue that it is impossible to truly know the 'other' in what they are saying or meaning.

Pettigrew (1997) provides much of the foundational thinking on process within the organisation and management literature, especially in his major study (Pettigrew 1985) of Imperial Chemical Industries in the United Kingdom. This research describes the unfolding nature of change over a 20-year period, demonstrating that 'change processes are best understood as contextually located continuous processes with no clear beginning or end' (1985:453). He also shows how unfolding culture, power and strategy heavily influences perception, choices and action. One way to explore these relationships over time was to undertake comparative case analyses to uncover divergence and similarities. As Dawson says, there is a:

need for a broader understanding of the complex untidy and messy nature of change. But in so doing, the processual approach is not making a statement against the importance of planning for change, rather, it is pointing out that change is unpredictable and therefore that there will be a need to accommodate and adapt to the unexpected, the unforeseen twists and turns, the omissions and revisions that are all part of managing the process of change over time. (2005:387)

A processual perspective provided an opportunity to study cases in context by exploring change and by identifying the timing and sequence of situations and events. For me, change comprises multiple and ever-changing stories that emerge, are re-written, compete and variously shape and are shaped by those experiencing change. Deploying this approach also allowed examination of the emerging empirical data for multiple narratives concerning what was emerging and unfolding over time. Buchanan and Dawson (2007) suggest that empirical studies demonstrate that individuals provide different versions of the same event or change, creating research narratives that are 'multi-authored'. Buchanan and Dawson directly observed multiple authored narratives by stakeholders. In some cases the multiple stories were similar, but on other occasions they were completely different, showing that situations are interpreted differently depending on social constructions of what is perceived to be unfolding. Similarly, individuals can be observed telling and scripting stories (Dawson & Buchanan 2005 ; Dawson, Farmer & Thompson 2011) to justify their performance (Clausen & Olsen 2000; Ng & De Cock 2002) in their roles. The processual perspective was seen as providing a means to analyse how scripts, stories and discursive exchanges influence or inform commitment within this study. The research also enabled personal accounts to be examined; accounts that may be self-

serving, politically motivated and informed by only partial knowledge of what actually happened (Leitch & Davenport 2005).

The existence and observation of multi-authored and conflicting personal accounts, as will be highlighted in this study, provided an opportunity to understand in greater depth how the making of meaning and levels of commitment manifest in the area of ecological sustainability. The integration of these perspectives provided a novel means with which to study expression of the enactment of commitment. Such integration also generated deeper understanding of the relational influences between the processes of sensemaking, sensegiving and identity formulation. The rich empirical context also assisted the exploration of what it was that individuals considered as well as what was implemented over time. These areas of investigation have not been undertaken previously.

## ***2.7 Chapter conclusion***

The review of the literature provided in this thesis is strong justification for the study of individual commitment and how people socially construct meaning over time. This review informed the decision to empirically explore the tensions and paradoxes which exist within these interrelationships and in how people make meaning in relationship to their commitment. Numerous gaps within theory have been identified and are addressed in a research study designed to build better understanding of why business people commit or resist action within the context of sustainability. This thesis makes a contribution to these arguments by allowing individuals to present personal accounts that highlight how they adapt and respond to changing contexts by modifying and reinforcing mental models and social constructions. It is important to highlight that this research has been undertaken without any expectation of generating deterministic and prescriptive solutions. The premise of this inductive research is a belief that new understandings may emerge if one looks at multiple interconnections between different theoretical constructs.

As outlined in this chapter, how and why individuals make meaning is an under-theorised area of study and is the focus of this thesis on individual commitment over time. To assist in this exploration, a processual perspective on change has been

selected to better understand how the social construction of individuals is influenced by the interplay of action and context. In contrast to past research, attention is given to a longitudinal view of individual change, unlike the traditional regime of macro-observation of change management within organisations. Interconnections between commitment, sensemaking and self-identity reveal many of the ambiguities, contradictions and uncertainties that exist in society and business, and provide a deeper understanding of personal transformation and why fluctuations in meaning occur over time. Many of these areas have been neglected in past research.

As introduced in Chapter One, a number of investigations were undertaken to achieve the aim of this doctoral study, to increase awareness of how and why commitment occurs as individuals seek to make meaning of the various contexts they face in their lives. The investigations included exploring the relationship between individuals and context, presenting theory on the inner workings of commitment and learning more about the influence of sensemaking and sensegiving on desire or interest to take action. In this research, the primary target of commitment centred on improving the performance of environmentally friendly practices in industry. In later chapters commentary is provided on other theoretical areas as the empirical data is presented. The thesis now moves on to discuss the methodology adopted.

## CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Individual commitment over time remains an under-theorised area. The research method in this thesis involved the examination of personal accounts and conversations (Shotter & Gergen 1989) drawn from transcripts of semi-structured interviews with 31 individuals participating in the implementation of ecologically friendly practices. Empirical data comprised individuals' reactions to and observations of changes pertaining to their direct involvement in cluster and organisation-based activity. An important part of the study involved re-interviewing 20 individuals for a second time. The examinations were held 12 months apart, significantly enhancing understanding of the relationship between commitment, sensemaking and self-identity over time.

In order to build understanding, a processual case study (Dawson 2003; Pettigrew 1997) was undertaken using a social constructionist approach (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Gergen 2009a; Shotter 2008). It is important to acknowledge that the theory pertaining to the social construction is highly consistent with the view that individuals live in a world of multiple realities. The meaning associated with social construction is often a reference not only to worldly items like things and facts but also to the beliefs that individuals attach to them (Hacking 1999). These examinations provided a useful means to explore how individuals impose order on the flow of experience and how they seek to make sense from past events and actions.

Gabriel (2004) suggests that personal accounts and stories feature prominently as sensemaking devices through which events are not merely infused with meaning but constructed and contested. The research also provides a means to examine the relationship between storytelling and the influence of change, power and ethics (Brown & Humphreys 2006; Dawson, Farmer & Thompson 2011; Pritchard, Jones & Stablein 2004; Rhodes, Pullen & Clegg 2010). Many of these relationships are explored within the research.

The primary source of data was 'retrospective' glances at past events and experiences (Garfinkel 1967; Schutz 1967; Weick 2008), but other fragments of understandings including 'here and now' and 'prospective' (Boje 2008) views were also used. Shotter

explains interest in diverse accounts of experience by suggesting that conversation within social construction combines two different processes of meaning making:

(1) a retrospective, justificatory, reason giving account and an already achieved outcome or (2) a prospective, action guiding account of the detailed struggles required to achieve, develop or construct an outcome for the very first time in practice. (2008:11)

The research process stimulated questions about how people make sense of themselves and others and how they evolve and become differentially aware of who and what they are over time. The analysis led to new theory being presented which highlighted the connection to possible relationships between individual commitment, sensemaking and self-identity. Memories and events from past work experiences, observations of trends in society and childhood memories, were also gathered and examined within the context of the major interest in the dynamics of commitment over time. Examinations generated data that enabled analysis of how individuals contemplated and determined commitments as well as advancing theory on personal tensions and paradoxes of change and complexity. Knowledge of the literature enabled the theory to inform the analysis as well as allowing emergent reflections to emerge.

Also supporting the inquiry within this thesis, Roe, Walker and Clegg (2009) conclude that the concept of time has been under-theorised in organisational research. Roe (2009) considers that when undertaking study with regard to time two conceptual frames could be considered. The first is 'chronos' and the second is 'kairos'. Individuals adhering to a chronos orientation would objectively measure time by calendar and clock. Here people express their observations based on identifying the points of time when critical situations and episodes happened and how a series of events unfolded. A chronos orientation is more likely to attract research that is more quantitative and positivist. Kairos-oriented people tend to socially construct their experience, leading to them making sense based on the events and episodes they face. When studying kairos there appears to be a more natural connection to qualitative research where individuals are more interested in the social construction of meaning. Roe further argues that individuals could equally use a combination of approaches to make sense of what might be unfolding or what might be interpreted subsequently.

These considerations add additional layers of complexity to the study of commitment over time. As Roe states:

Although many authors in the organizational field nowadays endorse the call for ‘more time’ in theory and methods, it should be clear that the implications of this view are by no means simple’ ...’ Whatever efforts are necessary to understand time from the perspectives of actors, we shall not forget to measure time. And finally, we must avoid putting time in the foreground and rather keep it in place where it belongs – i.e. in the phenomena. (2009:309)

The chapter begins with justification for employing a social constructionist approach to presenting theory from empirical observations. It proceeds with a description of investigation and the cases as well as an explanation of the approaches deployed in data selection and data analysis. In August 2010 feedback was presented to the government Environment Department, at which time the research findings were discussed, and responses and recommendations from participants were subsequently used to inform the analysis and the arguments presented. Learning from these exchanges assisted further development of theory and practical recommendations. The final discussion on methodology contains a critique of literature on reflexivity (D’Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez 2007; Humphreys 2005) which assisted a deeper and rigorous exploration of the empirical data and theory.

### ***3.1 A social constructionist approach***

According to Denzin and Lincoln, the goal of qualitative researchers is to ‘study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (2005:3). Methodologically, this research is inductive and is heavily influenced by social constructionist thought and ‘based on multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, and the intent of developing a theory or pattern’ Creswell (2003:18). The theory pertaining to the social construction of identity is highly consistent with the research approach of constructivism (Crotty 1998; Denzin & Lincoln 2005). In a constructivist paradigm, individuals live in a world of multiple realities as their meanings are constructed differently. When it comes to researching commitment one of the assumptions is that individuals will have different interpretations based on their

experience, even when they may share the same situation (Buchanan & Dawson 2007).

Shotter and Gergen argue that language is a major vehicle for structuring meaning, as 'people can be "moved" linguistically into treating their circumstances into certain socially recognized and recognizable ways' (1989:148). Hence the primary research approach in this study involved questioning people and asking them to reflect on what had happened or was happening to them in regard to their capacity to commit to ecological sustainability. This harnessing of cognitive and emotional recall required analysis of past experiences and of how they might have felt or thought about that experience. This approach also allowed examination of empirical data within a broader inquiry, rather than relying solely on retrospective glancing, thus permitting examination of the 'here and now' and the prospective elements of the 'next' (Boje 2008).

In following a social constructionist approach it is assumed that knowledge is created through discursive exchange between a researcher and those being researched (Rhodes 2009). An open and curious exploration also allows new theory to be presented as investigation and analysis to be undertaken (Richards 2005). The research highlights the emergent power of personal accounts as a major catalyst for disturbing or influencing complex social systems. In seeking to understand commitment over time it is accepted that human beings cannot be predicted (Hatch & Yanow 2003) but that they do have an innate ability to make choices and undertake sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). It is in this light that personal accounts were examined during the analysis. The chosen methodological approach enabled theory to be presented by exploring my own sensemaking and reflexivity in parallel to the phenomena under investigation by research that was primarily qualitative. There were times, however, when personal accounts comprised quantitative data to provide emphasis to their explanation.

### ***3.2 Choosing a case study approach***

Individual cases were described, compared and contrasted (Siggelkow 2007) in an endeavour to build conceptual links and patterns, providing a rich narrative (Boje 2001; Weick 2007) and a human element (Gephart 2004) for theory-building. As discussed in Chapter One, a processual approach to change was used to explore the influences and dynamics of individual cases, the better to examine commitment over time. In utilising case studies, data was examined at the level of the individual to address weaknesses in existing organisational commitment research. Research in the sensemaking and sensegiving of individuals (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Maitlis 2005, 2009; Maitlis & Lawrence 2007) also helped develop a conceptual understanding of how the case study approach could be undertaken, although none of those studies informed how commitment could be observed as an emergent process.

The case-based methodological approach has provided a rigorous and rich analysis of the empirical data to present theory, especially in tracking commitment over time. Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that a case study is appropriate for building new theory or where existing research methods are inadequate. The primary work consulted on theory development from case studies was that of Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), Flyvbjerg (2006), Patton and Appelbaum (2003), Verschuren (2003) and Yin (2003). Drawing on these sources, new theory was presented by linking the data analysis of personal accounts to the process of exploration over time. The iterative nature of the case study analysis enabled the theory to inform the data through close examination of the narratives and reflections generated from semi-structured interviews, testing and being critical of established theory, actors and audiences (Carr & Kemmis 1986) while producing novel and empirically valid (Stake 1995) conclusions.

Eisenhardt and Graebner state:

The central notion is to use cases as the basis from which to develop theory inductively. The theory is emergent in the sense that it is situated in and developed by recognizing patterns of relationships among constructs within and across cases and their underlying logical argument. (2007:25)

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), scholars who use the case study approach typically revise their preconceived views, assumptions, concepts and hypotheses as they undertake their analysis. This was certainly the case in my thesis. Undertaking an empirical case study approach created an opportunity to close in on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfolded in practice. The research provided an opportunity to examine individual cases as well as draw connections to organisation-based activity. The analysis was also assisted by the comparison of individual commitment between both similar and dissimilar clusters. As stated in Chapter One, a working definition of a cluster is a ‘formally established collaboration arrangement between businesses to assist the levels of performance, governance and innovation over time’. The grouping of data revealed both predictable and surprising results between different organisational and cluster contexts. When developing theory, the study of individual cases of commitment over time enables one to meet these criteria and explore the connection and relationship between theories of sensemaking and identity. As Elliott (2005) suggests, individuals can be seen as both unique and complex cases, bringing their situation-specific biographical trajectories into the research process. Case study also embraces the idea that each individual’s conceptual schema is reflexively generated in establishing and revising his or her self-identity.

### ***3.3 Empirical context of research***

The overall case study of 31 individuals occurred within the context of individual involvement in a cluster-based arrangement funded by a State Government, with the goal of improving environmentally friendly practices in industry. Various organisational types were sampled, including private and public sector organisations, non-government organisations, professional associations, industry groups, third party organisations such as consultants, as well as local government. To assist understanding of the case study, key features pertaining to historical background, overview of individual cases, explanation of clusters, stakeholder roles and how the context of the research changed are now explained.

### **3.3.1 Historical background**

During the research the name and structure of the government department changed several times in response to the demands of society and emerging views of political authorities. Ecological concerns for protection of species and natural environment were also within the emerging charter of the department. The goal of the cluster-based activities was to improve the level of business performance in the environment. The ultimate success of the program was heavily contingent on the contribution of both the individuals in the clusters and the clusters themselves. Reporting by decision-making authorities was established to justify on-going funding. This entailed many and varied evaluation measures designed to signal improvement and change in performance. Reporting included quantitative measures such as improvements in the use of energy, water, waste and the publicising of success stories. The pressure to justify achievements created a range of emotions, including anger, frustration, surprise and ambivalence.

Aside from the government officials overseeing the clusters under investigation and the subsidiary roles of independent contractors who provided facilitation, training and diagnostic assessment, the majority of cluster participants were from Australian small to medium enterprises with fewer than 300 staff. Each participant, whether a government official, contractor or member of a company, was seen as a stakeholder in the process of improving environmentally friendly practices within the cluster-based arrangements. There was no agreed definition of what was meant by cluster. In practice this meant participating in training and assessment processes as well as knowledge-sharing meetings. The duration and nature of these arrangements varied from cluster to cluster.

For the Department of Environment the initiative of resourcing cluster-based collaboration was a relatively new concept. The intention of the cluster was to engage and educate stakeholders about environmentally friendly practices. Historically, the governance of environmentally friendly practices had been undertaken by policing the performance of industry by issuing licenses that indicated legislative compliance to minimum standards in regard to the use and dispatch of water, energy and waste. Over

time a Licensing Authority merged into the functions of the Department. The result was that the Department was seen as performing the old Licensing Authority functions; indeed, many of the individuals interviewed still used the name of the Licensing Authority to differentiate compliance and legislative functions from other services performed by the Department. Companies could not join a cluster unless their organisation was compliant with the minimum standards of the legislation and prepared to pay a small contribution fee of A\$2500. However, there cluster members still expressed concern at times that the Department could issue an infringement notice if minimum standards were not being maintained.

### **3.3.2 Overview of individual cases**

Many of the research participants saw their company involvement in clusters as a way of improving their green credentials. For others their motivation was more centred on cost savings in the use of water, energy and waste. Some individuals saw the clusters as a means to keep up to date on the latest thinking and advances in environmental performance. The motivations, interests and emotions of the participants varied greatly. Some individuals saw their involvement as a desirable way to develop their skills, profile and expertise, whereas for others the involvement was an imposition placed on them by senior management. The diversity of the cases provided wonderful opportunities to explore multi-case comparisons in a variety of areas, including industry sector, gender and size of business operation and level of management. Moreover, individuals had different levels of cluster experience and depth of knowledge on issues pertaining to environmentally friendly practices. Some were willing participants; others were observed as struggling to find the time and motivation to contribute and participate. Levels of self-efficacy and social agency varied significantly between the high and low performing cases.

Many factors helped or hindered the enactment of commitment. These included the nature of power relationships among stakeholders, budgetary restrictions and workload levels. A number of external factors were also in evidence, including legislative requirements, community expectations and industry pressures such as the flood of cheaper imports into the Australian marketplace.

### 3.3.3 Explanation of clusters

The clusters in this study were a Recreational and Gaming cluster, a Region-based cluster and a Manufacturing cluster. The roles of individuals interviewed spanned representatives from each business, government officials, and contractors who provided training, specialist assistance and facilitation of cluster activity. A brief description of the clusters in which individuals participated is provided.

***Cluster One – Recreation and Gaming*** – In this cluster the members came from an industry where the core business was providing facilities for gambling and recreation to local communities throughout the state. Activities included provision of beverages, meals, gaming, entertainment and sports. The cluster started in partnership with the Department of Environment in 2006 and morphed into a new cluster that was rebranded and gained new members in early 2008. This study focuses on the original participants of the first cluster. The main focus of the original cluster was on improving efficiency in the use of water, energy and waste in their business. In this cluster eight of the ten individuals interviewed in 2007 were re-interviewed 12 months later in 2008.

***Cluster Two – Regional*** – The second cluster was based in a town in a regional area some distance from the largest city in the state. It was the oldest cluster under investigation: its origins go back to a meeting held in 2000. At that time 900 local people met to develop ways to improve the level of energy consumption in homes and businesses. As a result of feedback and further public consultation, a strategy was refined. As part of that emerging strategy the local council of the region chose to accept an offer for support from the Department of Environment. They would conduct an 18-month cluster pilot in a number of small and medium sized local businesses. The regional cluster started in early 2006 and ended in late 2007. At the time of my second interviews in 2008 there were some indications of forming a new cluster. In this cluster six individuals were re-interviewed.

***Cluster Three – Manufacturing*** – The third cluster under study was initiated in 2007 and involved businesses within a large Australian city. The goal of this cluster was to introduce initiatives in industrial ecology. Here the focus was on exploring ways to

dispose waste within supply chains. For example, waste for one business could be seen as a useful resource to another, as either an upstream or a downstream process of exchange. The cluster members saw industrial ecology as a massive opportunity for leveraging creative and practical ways of disposing of waste. All but one of the members and the facilitator had operated previously in a cluster program where the focus was on cleaner production and resource efficiency. The past history of collaboration meant that a degree of bonding and rapport between the individuals already existed at the beginning of the new 2007 program. The businesses that participated included manufacturers of heavy metal products, packaging systems and technologies, chemical products, whitegoods and sophisticated guidance systems. When the 2008 interviews were conducted significant turnover of individuals had occurred due to retrenchments, restructuring and the emergence of new players. Of the nine people interviewed in 2007, only five were available or could be re-interviewed in 2008.

### **3.3.4 Stakeholder roles**

In each cluster, nominated individuals performed a number of roles. These roles were designed to assist the functioning of the clusters. As the case study was carried out it became apparent that different understandings existed about the function and purpose of these prescribed roles.

***Cluster Member*** – The nominated representative for each business in each cluster. This person was seen as the prime point of contact and was responsible for facilitating change effort within his or her business. Individuals had varying levels of management support and backing for their involvement. Selection of business involvement was determined after vetting by departmental officials. A criterion for selection was the level of commitment of senior management to the process. After selection of a business to the program, its senior management chose the individual to be the cluster member. The initial level of enthusiasm did not necessarily translate into a high level of commitment by individuals who were chosen.

***Facilitator*** – Each cluster had a facilitator whose primary role was to co-ordinate cluster discussions and collaboration; in all cases in the study this was an individual

hired on a contract basis, not employed by the department. The facilitators' role was to provide on-going encouragement and support to the cluster group. Their role involved organising cluster meetings, scheduling on-site discussions and sensegiving activities. A key skill of facilitators was the ability to build confidence, resourcefulness and collaboration among cluster members. The Department of Environment looked to the facilitator to be the prime project manager for each cluster. Facilitators were expected to keep up to date and meet the obligations of hours and service outlined in their contractual arrangement. Nevertheless, each facilitator was involved in other projects and the amount of time they could commit was limited. At times facilitator availability to each cluster was a point of anxiety and tension.

***Module deliverer*** – During the cluster activities a variety of contractors delivered a range of programs to assist the purpose and capacity of each cluster. These activities comprised a variety of training modules and the assessment and deployment of diagnostic tools designed to assist sensemaking. In most cases these module deliverers performed other services including facilitation, training and assessment delivery for the Department and elsewhere. In early 2008 I interviewed six module deliverers to assist my understanding of what affected stakeholder interest over time. Their personal insights and industry understandings informed the depth of my analysis of commitment towards environmentally friendly practices. Personal reflections on how commitment can be shaped, as well as the motivations and organising principles of module deliverers, are included in the analysis in this thesis. The motive for interviewing the module deliverers was that cluster participants and the project sponsor saw them as a vital link in the sensegiving process. Their insights helped inform the re-interviewing of participants from the three clusters in 2008.

***Project officer*** – An officer from the Department of Environment oversaw cluster-based activities and the production of progress reports for departmental use. These people were the conduit for key contacts, resources and training pertaining to improving environmentally friendly practices in business. Responsibilities of project officers involve reporting on the progress of the cluster-based activities to the funding sources within the Department. In their job descriptions, government project officers had numerous cluster and other forms of business relationships. Workload pressures

restricted the amount of time that each project officer could give to each cluster. Where possible the project officer attended the cluster-based meetings.

***Project sponsor*** – The project sponsor had been the major advocate for the success of the program and had taken a keen interest in building the capability and performance of the service including a host of interventions in the Sustainability Program within the Department of Environment. These included a wide range of regional and industry clusters and specific business relationships. Each project manager reported directly to the project sponsor. In this regard, giving permission and inviting independent review of the function and services of the Department was symbolic of the project sponsor's personal desire to improve the effectiveness of the activities.

### **3.3.5 How the context changed**

The research unfolded over an 18-month time frame and many changes were observed and experienced. It is important to state this research was undertaken well before the fallout of the global financial crises that hit the world economy in late 2008; yet during 2007 and 2008 a number of events had a direct impact on the nature of conversations held during the interviews and on my analysis as a researcher. In 2007 and early 2008 the economic performance of Australia was perceived as good and this was reflected by some of the responses of the participants. As a result, interviewees felt comfortable talking about the merits of implementing environmentally friendly practices without the added pressure of poor business performance in a declining economy. It should be highlighted, however, that the prevailing narrative for implementing environmentally friendly practices was associated with a rational economic logic such as return on investment over time.

Climate change and the importance of protecting the environment by minimising the carbon footprint became common conversation in society during 2007 and 2008. Key events fuelled this discussion during the study, including the Australian release of Al Gore's movie *An Inconvenient Truth* on the 14<sup>th</sup> September 2006, and the Stern Report in the UK on the 30<sup>th</sup> October 2006. This report by economist Lord Stern stimulated global debate on the impact of climate change. Knowledge of both these events was in people's minds during the 2007 interviews.

In March 2007 the State government was re-elected and this led to expansion and rebranding of the Department of Environment. This change created a much higher profile for the Department and expansion of roles. Inclusion of the words 'climate change' in the new title signalled a significant increase in funding and resources. The increased profile and endorsement was a significant boost of confidence for departmental staff, particularly those who directly benefited from the changes. The new and enhanced role of the Department of Environment raised the expectations and pressures to obtain results and share case studies to legitimise its role and function. It also shifted the role away from administering legislative compliance with environmental standards to one of education, engagement and partnership with business and society.

In December 2007 a federal election in Australia led to a Labor Government being elected and a more supportive national policy on climate change enacted. Immediate action was taken to ratify the Kyoto Agreement. Australia had failed to ratify Kyoto under the 11 years of the previous Liberal/Coalition Government. In 2008, government authorities were beginning to develop policy in areas such as carbon trading schemes, initiatives not completed by the end of this research. Again these events stimulated discussion during the interviews with participants. In June 2008, towards the end of the research, the newly elected Australian government issued an interim report along the lines of the previously mentioned Stern Report from the U.K. Professor Ross Garnaut tabled findings and recommendations pertaining to the projected impact of climate change on Australia. Although the Garnaut Report did not directly affect the interviews, there was a clear understanding that both the Australian government and, to some degree, the State government within this study had shifted their thinking dramatically as well as their level of support and interest in areas relating to climate change. Although most interviewees were confused and uncertain as to what these changes would mean, they were confident that there would be a business imperative in the near future. All these factors added to the legitimacy and importance of cluster-based activity during this time. Other trends that had an impact on this research included increased electricity prices and smoking legislation requiring recreation and gaming facilities to be smoke free and have outside smoking areas,

while the manufacturing and region-based clusters were most affected by the pressure of cheaper imports from developing economies such as China.

As a consequence of these changes the cluster-based activities were in constant flux. Morphing in language, design and governance was the norm. Sensemaking was contingent on the knowledge and experience of participants and their considerations of the latest trends. The narratives generated by the individual cases reflected the complexity and emergence of the language in the field of sustainability and climate change. Terms such as ‘cleaner production’ and ‘resource efficiency’ were being replaced by new language such as ‘sustainability’, ‘industrial ecology’ and ‘carbon trading’. Apart from these influences, each individual case represented an example of on-going change as each person responded to a variety of organisational challenges and business pressures during the research. This case study provided an opportunity to examine commitment over time in clusters and businesses undergoing significant change and upheaval. How people made sense of these challenges and responded to them emerged as an important issue as the study of individual commitment unfolded.

### ***3.4 Data selection***

The primary data selection method in this thesis came from examining text from 775 pages of interview transcripts and 150 pages of journal observations drawn from ethnographic observations and associated explorations of theory. As each interview was completed transcripts from a digital recording were reproduced for subsequent analysis. In undertaking this approach to data selection, it was clearly recognised that the conversations generated in the interviews were mutually constructed within a complex web of interpretation and re-interpretation (Coupland 2007; Fontana & Frey 2008) as a result of a social encounter (Rapley 2004) between me and others. As Byrne asserts, ‘few researchers believe that in the course of the interview you are able to “get inside someone’s head”’ (2004:182). What an interview produces is a representation, account or social construction of an individual’s view or opinion.

In cognisance of these scholarly viewpoints, reflexive notations were made in journals (Mills 1959) on the interplay between me as researcher and the interviewee. I also undertook extensive memo-making using the associated functions of the data

management tool (Bazeley 2007; Richards 2005). Personal views and beliefs were captured to reduce the likelihood of my opinions and biases dominating analysis. Rhodes and Brown argue that narrative research is not a quest for scientific truth but a quest for meaning, in which the thesis writer must accept the ethical responsibilities of authorship (Rhodes 2005; Rhodes 2009). All research through semi-structured interviews is subject to bias, subjectivity and misinterpretation but, as Silverman (2006) suggests, interviews allow the exploration of complexity resulting from the relationship between context and action.

The research data also included ethnographic field notes (Delamont 2004; Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995; Saldana 2009) carried out on-site at business locations where individuals were employed. In most cases, a guided tour was provided of the facilities and observations were made on innovations and actions pertaining to environmentally friendly practices. Return visits 12 months later allowed discussion and observation of changes as they unfolded. In some cases, secondary data was also provided pertaining to organisational history, policy and plans. The World Wide Web assisted preparation by providing direct access to public information on organisation, industry commentary and trends. The Department of Environment also supplied policy and information on clusters and individual cases as new situations emerged.

Phase one of the research process involved interviewing 25 individuals within the three clusters. In the final phase of the research as many as possible of the original interviewees were re-interviewed. Thus interviews were held with 20 people a year later. Between these interviews, six individuals were selected to provide broader commentary on trends and observations on stakeholder commitment over time; each of these individuals was involved in supplying consulting and/or third party services to the clusters. The data collected from the six third party providers not only provided confirmatory observations of what was emerging in the analysis but also facilitated exploration of unresolved issues when it came to re-interviewing the 20 people again. The decision to broaden the research sample to include third parties came after initial research highlighted that training in both delivery and assessment of environmentally friendly practices was playing a vital role in the meaning making of affected individuals. Only one of these individuals had any direct involvement with the

clusters under direct investigation. In August 2010, once a first draft of the analytical chapters was completed, I held a seminar within the Department of Environment to share my initial observations and findings with the departmental and participating individuals. As a result of these presentations I was able to sharpen my findings and recommendations. Modifications and refinements to my interim discoveries were then incorporated into this final doctoral thesis. I now outline my approaches in choosing suitable cases and methods utilised within my interview design. Matters pertaining to securing high participation, ethics and research independence are also explained.

### **3.4.1 Choosing suitable cases**

Given the interest in individual commitment over time, it was important that I was able to obtain access to a range of cases to advance theory. It was my belief that this provided the greatest opportunity for me to contribute to the literature by comparing and contrasting different individuals. It also afforded a richer context to explore individual commitment between different industries, organisations and clusters. This thinking was consistent with the elements outlined in the processual approaches to change (Dawson 2003; Pettigrew 1997) by ensuring that individual cases were examined and compared with a view to exploring the relationship between context and action.

Specific access to individuals was made possible by an Australian Research Council (ARC) linkage grant on 'governance for environmental sustainability: the case of public-private partnerships' (Benn & Martin 2008). Once the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Technology, Sydney and the interested parties of the Department of Environment gave official clearance, attention shifted to choosing the cases to be studied. Access to 25 individuals was provided, involving three clusters directly related to Department of Environment activities. As outlined in earlier descriptions of the case studies, the clusters selected were very different and at various phases of development pertaining to implementing environmentally friendly practices. Cases included men and women from different cultural backgrounds and levels of management expertise. Other attributes of distinction included the size of the organisation and the industry type.

It should be stressed that the assistance of the Department of Environment was a vital element in my gaining access and encouraging the participation of individuals as interviewees. Significant resourcing by the Department in the development and enhancement of environmentally friendly practices in each business fostered the availability of individuals who were willing or felt obligated to participate. In only one case did an individual object to being re-interviewed. The added benefit of having contacts provided by the Department was that none of the selected individuals had experience of me as researcher or knowledge of me as a consultant. As a result I could maintain my identity as a researcher rather than a consultant.

The interview schedule undertaken is summarised in *Table 2.1*. Individuals were generally interviewed twice, with a gap of 12 months between each meeting where possible. All parties, regardless of whether they were interviewed once or twice, were encouraged to display their feelings and thoughts about the change process and to cast a retrospective glance onto key events and episodes that had influenced their commitment, as well as provide commentary on ‘here and now’ and prospective viewpoints. The empirical data includes references to these episodes and events within the cluster-based arrangements, as well as providing insights into other experiences that extended beyond the boundaries of these arrangements. Schedules were organised to complete the Recreation and Gaming and Regional cluster data capture before turning attention to the Manufacturing cluster. The key reason for this was to enable me to accelerate my understanding of the unique elements in each cluster. When travel restrictions impeded with my ability to conduct the interviews face-to-face, discussions were held and recorded by telephone.

*Table 2.1 – Overview of interviewing schedule*

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Commentary</i>	<i>Number of completed interviews</i>
<b>One</b> 5 March to 21 August 2007	First interviews of stakeholders in three clusters	25 in total: 10 in the Recreational and Gaming cluster, 6 in the Regional cluster and 8 in the Manufacturing cluster. Finally, the project sponsor was also interviewed.
<b>Two</b> 4 February to 8 February 2008	Interviews of third parties	6 in total including facilitators, module providers and diagnostic tool reviewers who were not directly responsible for the clusters under investigation but were able to provide commentary on the context and action of commitment over time to environmentally friendly practices.
<b>Three</b> 14 March to 18 July 2008	Second interviews of stakeholders in three clusters  (12 months after initial interview)	20 individuals who were interviewed in phase one were interviewed for the second time. This included 8 from the Recreational and Gaming cluster, 6 from the Regional cluster and 5 from the Manufacturing cluster. These were the last interviews of the research cycle. Finally, the project sponsor was also re-interviewed. 51 interviews in total

### 3.4.2 Designing and conducting interviews

The initial design of interviews was developed from a series of pilot interviews, resulting in the structure and interview questions used for the first year of data collection. In the second year of data collection a number of design modifications were made to enhance focus on the different cases of third parties and to allow a deeper analysis of change over time among the individuals who had been interviewed the year before. Questions were used as the guiding structure of my interviews. To facilitate consistency in data analysis a similar interview design was kept for each phase of the research. Once the interview began and rapport was established there was adequate opportunity to probe and improvise as required (Silverman 2006). The interviewees were given the opportunity to explore areas of their interest as the conversations unfolded.

As indicated, a number of pilot interviews helped sharpen questions for the official start of the data collection. The practice was an excellent way to build my confidence and familiarity with how interview data might inform the research. These pilot interviews involved a fellow student, my current and future academic supervisors, and an individual with significant industry experience in cluster-based arrangements. On a practical level, I was able to run through using a digital recorder and develop expertise in recording and backing up files onto computer hard and external disc drives. The pilot interviews also gave an introduction to the skill of creating and recording reflexive comments into my data management software. These actions led to an increased aptitude in noticing and articulating relationships with the data.

The criteria for my questions for phase one was twofold. First, the questions needed to address the research aims of my doctoral study, as well as the broader needs of the ARC grant. Interested parties were then consulted to ensure satisfaction with the proposed interview design and that the needs of the research process were being met. Second, questions were designed to increase the likelihood of generating useful narrative. A number of scholars (Marquardt 2005; Peavey 1994) have provided practical advice on the skill of asking good questions. An interview plan listing questions to be asked was produced to assist consistency and to ensure satisfactory

coverage of research areas, which also allowed freedom for areas of further exploration and elaboration (see *Appendix One*). All interviews were recorded and, as soon as possible, transcripts were generated. Each face-to-face interview took approximately 45 minutes. Telephone interviews ran for an average of 30 minutes. Before the first transcript was created from a digital recording I held several meetings with my transcriber to ensure that my interview approach supported the generation of the transcripts. As soon as the transcripts were received from the transcriber they were edited for accuracy by listening to the tape in conjunction with the transcript. Changes were made only when there was an important error of fact between the transcription and the recording. No changes were made to the natural language communicated. Reflexive comments were also made in journals during the editing process.

A key moment at the beginning of each final interview was recapping in summary the previous interview held a year earlier. This frank summary was used as a historical marker for each individual to explore what had or had not changed since his or her first interview. A rigorous and methodical approach to interview design led to the generation of rich data for further analysis. It also provided an ideal platform to examine commitment over time.

### **3.4.3 Securing high participation**

To secure the commitment and involvement of individuals over a 12-month period, it was imperative to establish early credibility and maintain goodwill throughout the research. Of the original 25 individuals interviewed in the first phase of the research, 18 were formally re-interviewed and two individuals were consulted with in a less formal basis. Of the five not re-interviewed or consulted with in the second year of research, two had been retrenched, two had left their organisation for other employment, and one refused to be interviewed. Two were deemed not suitable for formal re-interview due to the initial interview being incorrectly undertaken as a focus interview with more than one individual. In these cases, I resorted to conducting less formal on-site discussions to gauge what might have evolved over time. Memos were kept on the reflections and observations and were considered as part of the analysis but transcripts were not created for my second visit.

A key element of success in gaining a high participation rate was the constant assurance for participants that the research was not being conducted to judge them or to assess their performance but was interested only in their journey over time. Where appropriate, individuals were asked if they would be willing to be re-interviewed again in 12 months' time. All parties agreed to that commitment. When the individuals were re-contacted as planned in 2008, in a tactful and friendly manner their previous commitment was mentioned. All participants except one were more than willing to be re-interviewed. In carrying out these requests and exchanges, I was careful not to be too pushy. Each person was given ample time to respond to my requests for an interview. They had many options as to how and when we would meet. Third parties were clear that being transparent about what needed improving was something that was not always easy. There was an element of fear that what they said could be held against them at a later date; even with the reassurance of confidentiality, hesitation could still be sensed. Given these observations it was assumed that people might not have been totally frank during the research process.

The process of gaining high levels of participation was also aided by keeping the research meaningful and important in the eyes of the individuals being studied. This involved emailing each participant after each interview to thank them, and maintaining regular contact. The intention was to keep them informed and re-kindle the relationship prior to contacting them again at a later time. In response to one of my updates, I received the following correspondence that not only indicated willingness to participate a second time but also gave me an indication of change over time.

*Dear Alistair, Thank you for the update. We have made some major improvements in our efficiencies and attitude towards environmental sustainability since we spoke last. EG we have saved the amount in tonnes of CO2 emissions of a jumbo jet flying around the equator 5 times in the last 12 months. Looking forward to talking to you soon.*

### **3.4.4 Ethics and research independence**

Two central components in the methodological approach were (a) ensuring that adequate safeguards were deployed to ensure human ethics approval and (b) research independence. A key element of my ethical approval was that each participant signed a consent letter agreeing to participate in the research. The letter explained that the transcript would be considered for use in the analysis of both the A.R.C. grant and my PhD study. It also addressed the rights of the individual being researched, including the freedom to withdraw from participating from the research project at any time without consequences and without giving a reason. Contact numbers were provided for use if they had any questions, concerns or reservations about the study. They were also informed that any complaint made would be treated in confidence, investigated fully, and they would be informed of the outcome.

In assisting the management of on-going confidentiality during the research, special care was taken to ensure that adequate procedures were followed. Number-coded transcripts were used and all references to names of people and organisations were deleted. The names of the Department, clusters and individuals were changed without destroying the integrity and usefulness of the research. All written transcripts, recording of interviews and content analysis were kept in a fireproof and secure location for long-term security.

Having a commitment to ethics involves much more than just following procedural requirements; it involves generating a relationship that is both enabling and positive. Allowing individuals to share with me their thoughts and feelings as to their sensemaking enabled a safe and constructive relationship to be developed. An aim of the research was to build trust and integrity while providing the opportunity for each individual to speak candidly and openly without fear of retribution. The goal was to give voice to those being researched, as well as expressing mine. On-going ethical reflexivity (Bell & Wray-Bliss 2009), entailing constantly questioning and examining practice to ensure that it was not only following due process but also generating a constructive relationship was essential. In this regard, individuals were encouraged to share their perceptions of their experience and were assured that it would be unedited.

Every opportunity was taken to keep individuals involved in the progress of the research while ensuring anonymity of the data. In consideration of research independence, a variety of measures were implemented to ensure that the research was separate and detached from the broader study being conducted in the A.R.C. funded enquiry. Apart from short conversations to clarify some factual matters, I had little or no contact with the ARC research team regarding their research. I also chose not to consider their final report (Benn & Martin 2008) as part of my analysis of this thesis. All academic supervisors were helpful in ensuring that the integrity of my work was never jeopardised.

### ***3.5 Data analysis***

A rigorous and methodical approach to analysis was undertaken by being immersed in data and using a critical lens to review the literature (Cooksey & McDonald 2011; Frost & Stablein 1992). The relationship between theory and data was highly iterative and interconnected, as the theory informed the data and the data informed the theory (Landy & Vasey 1990). Several procedures were undertaken to ensure that analysis of the data and narrative was consistent with a focus on commitment, sensemaking and self-identity. As detailed in *Appendix Two*, a data analysis cue sheet was produced to assist on-going analysis. The investigation was enhanced by ensuring that all theoretical claims were supported by evidence that combined negative cases and alternative interpretations, including extracts from transcripts and personal observations and reflexivity captured in memos and journal entries. Great care was taken to record naturally occurring language in the transcripts accurately. As Silverman advises, ‘apparently trivial, often crucial, pauses and overlaps’ (2006:287) should be included to ensure creditability and authenticity. Furthermore, Silverman suggests that researchers need to be careful how they interpret what people say, as it may merely be an explanation, rather than ‘the truth’.

The methodological suggestions made by Maxwell (2005) were also followed. He states that researchers should explore how they relate to the data by asking a range of fundamental questions: How do you think and feel about the topics, people and settings? What assumptions are you making, consciously or unconsciously about these? What do you wish to accomplish or learn by doing this study? These questions

were pertinent in my intellectual and emotional approach to methodology.

Recognising my relationship with the data was therefore an important ingredient of successful research.

Conceptual thinking and theory were presented by discovering patterns of behaviour while also uncovering interrelationships between the elements contained within the data. There was a high commitment to go beyond simple descriptions of themes and, where possible, to look for deeper relationships and connections. The data management tool NVivo was used to assist analysis. To do this successfully required analysis beyond the superficial examination of concepts. Some critics of the social constructionist approach, such as Silverman argue, that an analysis such as mine could 'say anything about any other reality than the interview itself' (2006:131). By this comment Silverman draws attention to the pitfalls of reducing and extracting meaning from interviews, where what is said in interview is only one small part of an individual's social reality and its reading and interpretation through the research process. In other words, interviews bring together many components of social life through talk; this talk, however, can be reduced to single meanings that ignore the complexity of discourse in the social world. To reduce the potential for such legitimate criticism, strategies were employed that moved well beyond a single interview analysis to exploring patterns between cases.

One area of significant interest was the influence and role of emotions in commitment. My interview approach allowed individuals to express themselves in cognitive and affective ways. Notes were made during and after the interviews on the emotions and feelings that were expressed—not only what people expressed in terms of language but also how they communicated in non-verbal terms was recorded. After the completion of each interview, I listened to the tape and made further notes on matters pertaining to the narrative and emotions expressed. After the transcripts were put into the data management tool, various themes and sub-categories were created. Codes pertaining to the data were revisited on many occasions over a two-year time frame to improve the apparent validity of initial coding judgments. Taking this approach reduced the danger of relying on only one moment of subjectivity. The

research methodology contained many moments of reflection and review to ensure that more accurate examination of the data was undertaken.

In the examination of emotion, to address the lack of universal agreement (Ortony & Turner 1990) on what constitutes a basic emotion, I developed a coding structure based on every emotion that emerged throughout the data set. Using NVivo to manage this data set, I then re-categorised the dominant emotions that surfaced in the analysis of commitment and sensemaking over time to focus on seven basic emotions, namely ambivalence, anger, fear, joy, sadness, shame and surprise. Each emotion included diverse feelings that were perceived as relatively closely related to that emotional state. All these basic emotions commonly appear in the psychological, management and organisational literature except for the emotion of ambivalence, which is defined by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary as the ‘coexistence in one person of opposite and conflicting feelings towards someone or something’ (2006:32). In the case of ambivalence, various feelings were expressed including being detached, doubtful, uncertain and uninterested. Deep analysis of the relationship between emotions and commitment is a fruitful area for further investigation currently neglected in the management literature. *Appendix Three* lists all the emotions analysed and the definitions used. Outlined are the key strategies used in my data analysis. These show the four stages undertaken as well as the strategies employed to manage the data using NVivo.

### **3.5.1 Four stage approach**

Throughout the data analysis, I followed a four-stage methodological approach that began with the initial investigation of the literature and concluded with building and testing theory. Goertz argues that developing good theory requires good concepts. He writes:

A concept involves a theoretical and empirical analysis of the object or phenomenon referred to by a word. A good concept draws distinctions that are important in the behaviour of the object. (2006:4)

In reflecting on the early stages of the data collection, it is amusing to recall that I believed the analysis of data would be an easy task and it would be a relatively simple

action to write research questions, conduct the necessary interviews, code the transcripts using an array of colour pencils, and identify key themes. Then by osmosis an 80,000-word thesis would miraculously appear. Needless to say it was soon apparent that a much more sophisticated research method was needed. Even when the idea of using colour pencils to code the data was discarded and use of the data management software tool NVivo commenced, a more rigorous approach was required to go beyond the 'painfully obvious' and construct new theory grounded in an excellent understanding of the empirical data (Bazeley 2009a; Bazeley 2009b). The four stages of analysis are now described.

### Stage one – Noting first impressions

The first stage involved gaining initial appreciation of what the theory and data were suggesting. This process began with undertaking a critique of academic literature on relevant theories and methodologies. These explorations highlighted that building theory via a case study approach would be suitable for exploring individual commitment over time. Once empirical research began, it took almost a year to complete the first phase of research, in which 25 interviews were coded and various journals translated into the data management software program. The process was assisted by mind mapping software that allowed the development of possible relationships between emerging themes. Much time was required to learn the basics of the software. At that stage impressions of the theory and data enabled some initial anecdotal conclusions to be drawn but these were early reflections. I had been repeatedly advised not to become too fixated on early observations; the general advice was that it was a mistake to reach premature conclusions based on what could be superficial coverage of the material. The key was to remain open to all possible theoretical directions and avenues indicated by the readings of the data (Charmaz 2006).

Analysis strongly demonstrated that the empirical data was providing rich narrative pertaining to individual commitment, sensemaking, sensegiving and self-identity. Analysis was also uncovering many forms of emotions such as anger, fear, surprise, joy and shame. Further, potential theory in areas associated with ambivalence, the pressures of managing ambiguity, and managing workload was explored through

coding. An extensive list of capabilities was generated that appeared to be drivers for stimulating commitment. Although any critical review was delayed until all coding had been completed, some of the emerging themes were influential. Two examples were (a) the different patterns between individuals who showed high and low engagement and (b) the recurring patterns of individual identity that were an integral part of individual sensemaking and commitment. First impressions, although interesting, were generating only a very low level of reflexivity and analysis.

### Stage two – Cleaning the data

Apart from understanding the potential pitfalls associated with being too attached to first impressions of the research, a serious methodological flaw would be to accept the initial coding of data as accurate. By its very nature, coding is iterative, and what is listed as a theme or category at one time could change as further analysis is undertaken. An extensive review of data coding was commenced, resulting in approximately 20% of initial coding in the data management tool being deleted or changed. Consequently a more robust level of organisation and analysis started to emerge from the data. Improved selection and cleaning of data also meant the delineation more meaningful relationships within the empirical data. Significant reorganisation of the data occurred, with smaller, better formulated and differentiated themes for analysis. Six broad themes were generated to capture most of the empirical data. A number of independent 'free standing' nodes were also created that assisted keeping a careful account of the events and history that shaped my research journey. These included ideas for conceptual models, reflexivity and ethnographic observations. Cleaning and reviewing coding was the most important part of data analysis. It was here that the importance of verifying the accuracy of coding was learned, while also becoming aware of what the data may be communicating. Most of all, poorly coded data was culled or changed. The cleaning and modification of the data also help conceptual understanding by gaining a 'sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual and or theoretical organization from the array of first cycle codes' (Saldana 2009:149). It also created the potential for 'breaking down the qualitative data in discrete parts, closely examining them and comparing them for similarities and differences' (Strauss & Corbin 1998:102).

During the research, greater expertise was developed in selecting shorter and more precise sentences. An example of a poorly coded transcript was where large sections of text were selected as relevant to a specific node. When coding became more accurate the linking of nodes to text became more precise. Instead of paragraphs being selected in their entirety, I became far more selective in what I chose to code. When I revisited previous coding of data a metaphorical warning bell rang which suggested that if more than three lines of text was attached to a node revision was required. On these occasions, I looked at more precise ways of coding the particular text. In most situations action was taken to reduce the number of words chosen. Of course, there were exceptions when the previous coding remained unchanged. The iterative nature of coding embedded in the data management tool was one of its strengths. It was easy to delete, modify and change coding as required. To support this process an audit trail was kept (Richards 2005) to assist in tracking the changes made in categorisations over time. In making the decision to revisit my coding of the data I was aware that over-rigorous cleaning could allow important analysis to be discarded prematurely or unnecessarily. To stop this from occurring, where appropriate, a number of outlier codes were kept within the final version of data analysis. Past versions of the data analysis were maintained for safekeeping. The goal in cleaning the data was not to develop a perfect list of themes and sub-categories but to ensure that when transcript data was coded it was sufficient to describe the relationship between the empirical data and categorisation.

### Stage three – Gap analysis

After completing cleaning of the data I undertook a gap analysis. The rationale for this came directly from my academic supervision team who highlighted that I had become heavily immersed in my empirical data and it was important that I revisit the literature to better inform the direction of the upcoming thesis. Acting on this advice I commenced my gap analysis by developing a series of conceptual models based on the empirical data. These reflections led to increased awareness of the importance of self-identity in the processes of both commitment and sensemaking. The conceptual models also raised the possibility of exploring issues pertaining to power relations, plausibility and social agency. With a series of conceptual models completed, I

revisited the literature. My gap analysis was undertaken by answering the following questions:

- What was the major literature informing the thesis?
- What were the major attributes of each piece of literature?
- What did scholars say or contribute to the theory?
- What did scholars not say in regard to the theory?
- What was going on in my data that could inform the analysis?
- How does my data inform the theory outlined by these scholars?

As a result of revisiting the literature, I was able to identify gaps in theory. Important new discoveries included contemporary research on commitment over time (Roe, Solinger & Van Olffen 2009; Roe, Waller & Clegg 2009) that provided critical validation of my thesis and methodological approach.

#### Stage four – Developing and presenting theory

The final stage moved firmly to presenting theory. In making this statement, theory developed in the earlier stages of the analysis was not discounted. First impressions of the data were not trivialised and were important markers for reflexivity. Past memos and journal observations were reviewed during the entire research process. Over time, these insights provided a rich canvas on which to explore and study the research, while also helping to discover how what was studied changed or affected me. The dynamic relationship between self and data proved to be a wonderful catalyst for reflexive and reflective inquiry and further investigation. Building a successful thesis involved telling a compelling story and experimenting with the empirical data by asking questions of themes that were emergent.

The research allowed the data to inform the theory and the theory to inform the data. In a practical sense this meant that reflexivity was guided by critical examination of the data and its relationship with the theory. A major influence was last-minute discoveries from the literature (Alvesson 2010; Angus-Leppan 2009; Clifton & Amran 2011; Hahn et al. 2010; Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009b; Humphreys, Ucbasaran & Lockett 2012; Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova 2012; Park 2010; Winn et

al. 2011), writings that were unknown or unappreciated at earlier times. These insights helped sharpen thinking and enabled new areas to be explored that could not have been considered or known in earlier stages of the research. My strategy in developing and presenting theory was built on a critical review of the empirical data (Bazeley 2009a; Bazeley 2009b). Bazeley recommends discussing the concept and then describing it, after which one turns one's attention to comparing, contrasting and relating individual cases to help create a sense of order to the concepts. It is suggested that one address the interrelationships contained within the concept by weighting the incidence and nature of conversations pertaining to the concept under investigation. I became curious not only about individual cases but also about the patterns associated with clusters, gender and types of industry.

These broader considerations enabled me to develop a deeper knowledge of patterns that were more universal in nature. For example, if I were to take a research question such as 'How does the emotion of surprise impact on commitment over time?' it generated interest in a range of questions, such as 'Who talked about surprise?' and 'How did they talk about it?' From there I could start to compare differences in characteristics and boundaries pertaining to surprise. In this regard I investigated: Who talked about surprise? Why did they talk about surprise? What was happening when people explored commitment? When and where did surprise most likely occur within the cases, clusters and industries? Did women and men talk about surprise differently?

In adhering to the methodological approach, theoretical propositions were generated by drawing more meaningful conclusions about the nature of the concepts being discussed. Over time this enabled commentary on regularly occurring items to be validated and attention to turn to other conditions that were more isolated or variable. Strauss (1987) proposes that researchers should undertake a coding practice in which they constantly ask: Under what conditions does this category or theme arise? What actions/interactions/strategies are involved? What are the consequences and do these vary depending on the particular circumstances or form in which they are expressed? Record the questions you ask, and the results you find (or don't find) (Bazeley 2009b). Finally, in pursuit of developing and presenting theory I was able to make

connections between what I observed and the impact on social construction of me as a researcher. Observations informed not only my worldviews but also the quality of the research method. In this regard, questions were raised such as: What did I observe about the characteristics of processual research? What tensions, challenges and opportunities did it provide for future research in the fields of organisational and management studies?

### **3.5.2 Data management using NVivo**

The empirical data and journal observations were incorporated within the capabilities of the data management tool NVivo. The project was carefully organised to enable research queries to explore processual influences of change. The analysis enabled comparison of data on a longitudinal basis. According to Bazeley, a number of strategies help achieve this aim, including improving interpretation and naming of categories; using comparison and pattern analysis to refine and relate categories or themes; using divergent views and negative cases to challenge generalisations; returning to substantive, theoretical or methodological literature; creating displays using matrices, flow charts and models; and using writing to prompt deeper thinking (2009a:1).

Besides the practical tasks of managing the project, memos pertaining to the relationship to the data were recorded (Bazeley 2007; Richards 2005; Saldana 2009). Questions focused on aspects such as when I was surprised or what I felt about the data were central to on-going reflexivity. As Marshall writes, within his ground rules of qualitative coding, 'expect your emotions to be involved' and 'respect this emotional involvement' (2002:69). These notations were added to interview transcripts, as was important secondary information such as policy documents pertaining to stakeholder involvement. Comments were also placed within the bibliography reference tool EndNote as various literatures were examined. Where applicable all these entries were placed within the NVivo data management program.

The first formal attempt to use NVivo began with the coding of a transcript from an interview that lasted one hour and three minutes. It was recommended that I select a complex case to begin with, as it would generate large volumes of potential nodes,

memos and annotations, and indeed the task took five days to complete. The good news was that over time the duration dropped dramatically to an average of two to three hours per interview. The quantum improvement was achieved by my becoming vastly more familiar with the routines, skills and structure of the project. When examining the data I became curious about not only that which had been identified but also what might have been missed. One simple way to explore this possibility was to look at not only what was most coded within cases but also what was least coded. In this regard one must be inquisitive not only about what is interesting but also about data that is boring, has been neglected or ignored. Applying such a rigorous approach to coding and analysis was at the time very exhausting. Regular breaks were taken to ensure concentration, to maintain resilience and remain reflexive. Marshall (2002) suggests that when undertaking the process of coding, researchers needed to give themselves time out to help the imagination and unconscious to blossom. Routines and deadlines for coding were installed that maximised progress while minimising the impact of social alienation and fatigue that comes from physical inactivity and mental exhaustion.

The iterative nature of the software program was highly consistent with a social constructionist approach. When it came to cleaning the empirical data in the NVivo program, I carefully revisited existing codes by asking the simple question, “Which nodes would I most expect to be allocated to the prescribed text?” This was done before looking at the nominated nodes. Given the Australian context of the study, as new nodes were created they were defined using the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006) to provide a consistent approach to the definition of nodes. The capabilities of NVivo also enabled observations beyond my current level of understanding of the data. It was not until I started working through the data that critical questioning of the concepts emerging became apparent. For example, what were the differentiators between the low and high cases of self-efficacy? How did individuals make plausible choices concerning their commitment? What impact did self-identity have on their capacity to learn and unlearn? When selecting cases to code, the order of selection was chosen randomly. I asked a person not involved in the research to provide me with a selection of numbers, which were used in choosing the next case to code. The aim was to avoid making premature analysis that could potentially side-track thinking.

There were always opportunities to make reflexive comments but it was not until the end of the second year of NVivo analysis that I began the process of developing theory from the case study material. When it came to writing the first analytical chapter, a well-structured NVivo project meant that I was able to explore commitment over time, with all of its observable paradoxes, complexities and revelations. The decision to use NVivo enabled exploration of the emergence of the empirical data to be undertaken in an inductive way.

### **3.5.3 Feedback session to Department of Environment**

Once the findings were developed and refined, feedback was provided to the Department of Environment in August 2010. This feedback session was set up to discuss my findings to date with 20 key stakeholders in the Department and my academic supervisors. The purpose of this session was to share the data and test out the theories built to enable me to collate my thinking around how I would translate the research for management practice. In this I was informed by an action research methodology (Coghlan & Brannick 2005; Cooke & Wolfram Cox 2005) which casts researcher as a catalyst who enables a critical review of practice to bring about change.

Importantly, the research was undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry (Shani & Passmore 1985) with the interviewees and the Department. This aspect was essential to success in being able to research commitment from a longitudinal perspective. At times, my role as a researcher turned into that of consultant, requiring a reflexive awareness to pull back from being a practitioner, which could have compromised my research. Within this action frame, key considerations that were considered included the tensions between providing simple prescriptive solutions and discussing complexity; providing individual advice and collecting research data within the interview; the clarification of the role of researcher as it became blurred with that of consultant (during data collection and feedback, when forced to provide answers to management problems); and the writing of a scholarly thesis with the pressure to impact on management practice. Because the Department recognised me as a successful consultant there was added pressure to generate pragmatic advice

because of a lack of understanding regarding the due process of data analysis. In other words, some interviewees became frustrated with the length of time the research process took, especially in getting to the point of being able to offer substantive feedback.

During and after the feedback session I recorded all questions and reactions to my data. Overall, the comments were supportive and encouraging, as all stakeholders accepted my analysis. Critical features that refined my analysis included the notions of morphing of change (Marshak 2004) and relational reflexivity (D'Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez 2007) which unfolds within complexity. Before and after the session I recorded my observations, thoughts and feelings on the experience in my reflexive journal and I used verbatim recording (completed by my supervisor) of questions and my responses to inform further analysis, especially in developing my practice-based conclusions.

An extract from this journal, related to the experience of a feedback session to the Department of Environment is presented below:

*The moment had arrived to share the findings with the department. The goal was to provide practical observations on what was learnt. Academic referencing and discourse was kept to a minimum. People attending were mostly Masters Graduates, intelligent and highly reflexive. Many had heard of the research while others knew me in my role as a consultant. A few were unfamiliar to me and the research study. Two individuals were interviewed as part of the research. These included the project sponsor and a project manager. There was much anticipation in the room on the outcomes. Pressure to create a good impression was felt. The presentation was undertaken in front of my doctoral supervisors and there was an awareness of the student and academic relationship. A further layer of nervousness was experienced from the expectation of doing well for them and the University. The project sponsor was keen to see that the research within his department had been a worthwhile investment. Throughout the session people were on the edge of their seats waiting for some insight or research finding that could help them in their jobs. Their job role involved the supervision of industry-based programs designed to improve environmentally friendly practices. What made this seminar particularly timely was*

*the funding and support for such initiatives had diminished in recent times. They were under added pressure to deliver results. Each had experienced the disappointment of the December 2009 Copenhagen Summit. Morale and optimism was not as high as in earlier exchanges. The 2008/10 global financial crises had placed the climate change debate in the shadows.*

*The presentation was like giving a sermon to a church group awaiting a sign of divine intervention. There was recognition from participants of the complexities of facilitating change and individual commitment over time but they required answers. A number of observations were made. Everyone was a passionate advocate for the planet and environment, legitimate stakeholders in their own right. This confirmed the view that stakeholder literature needs to place a greater emphasis on sensemaking in stakeholder theory. An overview of the capabilities of successful change agents was warmly appreciated. The audience was able to differentiate high and low performance and find a way to assess suitable candidates for change programs. Finally participants benefitted from the cluster governance topic that gave practical steps for improving knowledge sharing and collaboration. Participants looked to me to 'nail jelly to the wall on sustainability'. Their questioning outlined their struggle with the ambiguity and expectations of resolving complex challenges.*

On reflection, the feedback session to Department of Environment sharpened the depth of analysis of how personal values and emotion play an important role in commitment over time. It crystallised the power of metaphor in helping to guide exchange in a variety of contexts and surroundings. Although situated in a specific political and social setting it provided possibilities to extend the value of the study to other horizons. Finally, the pressure I felt to develop practice-based conclusions highlighted the tensions generated by being expected to provide pragmatic solutions to a complex challenge that did not respond well to simple or prescriptive answers.

### ***3.6 Reflexivity***

Throughout this study reflexivity has been an important process in which to engage as a researcher (and consultant); important in the development of the research questions, the engagement with the collection and analysis of data, and the selection of data and

theory which inform the contribution of the thesis. There has been wide ranging interest in reflexivity across management and the social sciences, although the terms reflection, critical reflection and reflexivity are often used loosely and interchangeably (D'Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez 2007). Nightingale and Cromby state:

Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research. (1999:228)

In many cases when reflexivity is discussed it remains largely unreflexive, with a few notable exceptions such as Humphreys (2005) who writes about deeply entrenched views and vulnerabilities that inform the research process and how an author's story and voice needs to be verbalised. Humphrey's points out that the world comprises many scholars who conceal themselves when presenting research without illustrating their personal views and understandings which could enhance the readers interpretation of what is being presented. In this study attempts have been made to incorporate my reflexive voice as a qualitative researcher and as a translator of theory for practice. As such, the researcher is an inseparable player in the research process, not a detached observer (Hardy, Phillips & Clegg 2001; Shotter 2008). Although reflexivity has been hailed as a hallmark of excellent qualitative research (Clegg & Hardy 2006; Weick 1999), that view is not without its critics, who have labelled reflexive writings at times as indulgent (Daley 2010) or narcissistic (Weick 2002). The consideration and deployment of reflexivity has been of central importance in doing credible research with an element of learning from action. In this I have been transparent about how claims were made and constructed (Cunliffe 2003; Humphreys 2005); I follow Rhodes' (2009) concerns that reflexive inquiry comes with ethical and moral responsibilities, especially, I argue, within the context of environmental debates and action for sustainability.

Willig makes the distinction between two types of reflexivity: 'personal' and 'epistemological'. The former involves 'reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and

social identities have shaped the research’ and also ‘involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers’ (2001:10). In contrast, epistemological reflexivity requires us to engage with how the research has been produced and to question the extent of the conclusions. It involves questioning the design and method of the study and how the data was constructed to produce the research findings. In practice this involved five considerations: (a) acknowledging who and what voices were speaking and the tensions in the text between the researcher and the researched; (b) outlining personal assumptions during the research process; (c) being transparent about the reasoning used; (d) holding back from making assumptions, and offering multiple readings of the data before conclusions were consolidated; and (e) combining the motivation and thinking of the researcher with the views of the participants within the specific social and political context (Alvesson, Hardy & Harley 2008; Johnson & Duberley 2003). In this process, instead of considering the ‘otherness’ of the research respondents, I have explored what Cunliffe refers to as the ‘betweenness’ where ‘we construct and make sense of social realities in various forms of discourse; conversation, writing, and reading’ (2003:988) in surfacing the relationships between commitment, sensemaking and self-identity. The acceptance of ‘betweenness’ is consistent with a social constructionist approach (Shotter 2008).

D’Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) provided a useful framework which guided the research process, outlining three variations of reflexive inquiry. The first requires an individual making considered responses in relation to the research context, so as to make choices for further direction; the second involves a self-critical investigation of the knowledge being generated; the third is for researchers to investigate and ventilate emotions. The ‘emotionalisation’ (Holmes 2010; Munkejord 2009) contained within reflexivity as well as the rational elements are seen as centrally important to how people make sense.

Without deploying a personal organising system driven by a process of reflexive and intellectual stewardship (Mills 1959), arriving at conclusions that considered the emotion of others’ sensemaking in relation to my own would have been difficult. Critical questions include: What insights did I glean as to my relationship to the data?

How was my sensemaking affected by the research? What events had most impact on me in the research journey? What personal dilemmas and tensions surfaced during the research? What were key moments in the research journey and what was their impact? Ultimately, did the research process and observations change me? Were there areas that remained static or unresolved?

Furthermore, reflexivity became important in the writing up of the thesis to ensure that the messiness (Pullen & Rhodes 2008) of individual sensemaking was not cleaned up, allowing the tensions, contradictions and paradoxes of complex processes to be read. The tracking of sensemaking in the reflexive journal prompted both retrospective and in-the-moment reflexivity which forced me to turn my assumptions and ideas back on myself as researcher. One such area was organisation of the thesis. The order of the analysis was deliberately chosen to assist the accumulation of knowledge over time. The description and influence of the contextual issues of sustainability required articulation before matters pertaining to individual drivers of commitment over time were outlined. To assist this transition to a deeper understanding, the first analytical examination in Chapter Four on ‘the push towards and away from sustainability’ then assisted the exploration of the nature of commitment in regard to relational influences of sensemaking and self-identity over time, detailed in Chapter Five. This comprehension then assisted in the analysis of cluster-based sensegiving and its influence on individual sensemaking. Activities associating the sensemaking and sensegiving with the cluster-based programs in Chapter Six that form part of the thesis, although interesting and useful, were not sufficient to identify what inspires or drives commitment over time. Many other influences required understanding before the influence of clusters on individuals could be understood. Together, these three analytical chapters provided a solid foundation for the development of the conclusions, recommendations and reflexive commentary in Chapter Seven.

### ***3.7 Chapter conclusion***

This chapter has justified the methodological choices made throughout the research process and has discussed in considerable detail the processes of data collection, recording, analysis and data representation. Critique of the literature on methodology led to the deployment of a social constructionist approach to examining longitudinal data on individual commitment while also exploring processual influences of change. Methodologically this research resulted in the capture of an enormous data set, and through the process of coding and querying of the data three fundamental areas were selected for analysis over the next three chapters. The result of this approach was an increased capacity to investigate how individuals make meaning over time in relation to ecologically sustainable commitment over time. Through these investigations many tensions and paradoxes surfaced, which are explored throughout the thesis. Viewing the data as if through a camera lens assisted the examination; doing so one was able to study specific individuals as well as make generalised commentary on data gleaned from the broader sample of 31 people.

The data analysis comprises a four-stage process to describe, contrast and compare data over time. These angles of inquiry generated multiple avenues for reflexivity that informed understanding of the research areas but also stimulated awareness of myself as researcher and of how personal meaning and commitment were influenced. It is argued that these methodological approaches not only provided a chance to present new theory but generated an opportunity to apply a diverse range of research methods to a new area of investigation.

## **CHAPTER 4 - PUSH TOWARDS AND AWAY FROM SUSTAINABILITY**

In this analytical chapter, individual commitment is explored within the context of sustainability, the complex web of political, social and economic pressures existing in business, and the nature of personal motivation and job latitude. Empirical data is presented from a variety of individuals to enable understanding of the multiplicity of external business factors which influence commitment over time. As discussed, ‘push towards’ sustainability refers to the drivers or influences that encouraged and enticed people to take action, while ‘away’ refers to influences and drivers which discouraged commitment. Empirical data begins in the next section with a vignette of Brent, a facilities manager within a medium to small sized business. Brent’s vignette emphasises some of the tensions and pressures faced by individuals within this research. It is offered not as a general example but as a means to facilitate understanding of the complexities faced. Thereafter, data is analysed from other individuals and associated ethnographic observations. A similar pattern of analysis is employed in subsequent chapters, using data from other individuals and different data points to explore other areas of interest.

As outlined in the methodology chapter, data is described, compared and contrasted (Bazeley 2009a; Bazeley 2009b; Siggelkow 2007) between multiple individuals to enhance interpretation. Analysis of individuals includes attributes like cluster, type of industry and gender, as well as associations between the first and second interviews. The empirical data has been selected to provide an impression of how and why people make meaning in regard to individual commitment. This translates into capturing views of how meaning is generated from various social constructions of external complexities generated within business. As Rhodes and Brown (Rhodes 2009; Rhodes & Brown 2005) state, qualitative inquiry is designed not to provide scientific proof, but rather to develop understanding of how individuals may make meaning.

Analysis reveals that individual commitment is heavily influenced by the social construction within a complex array of multiple demands and priorities (Herold, Fedor & Calwell 2007; Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield 2012; Watson 2009). One of the contexts could be described as the demands and pressures of implementing

environmentally friendly practices in business. However, the data in this chapter and others indicates that individuals make meaning and consider actions among an infinite number of contexts at the same time, ranging from business targets to stakeholder expectations, job-related demands and demands of a more personal nature.

To me as researcher, individual commitment appeared whimsical and fickle, rather than radiating from a logical path of rational decision-making and deliberation. Although the prime unit of analysis of this study is the individual there are conclusions or observations that could also apply to broader concerns of group change, organisational change and societal change. Depending on the individual and the context faced, each person might display a wide range of behaviours and espoused theories, with the data suggesting that some individuals struggled to make commitments whereas others excelled. There were numerous examples of individuals working in very similar businesses, such as those in the recreational and gaming cluster, who had very different levels of optimism about the merits of making long-term investments in environmentally friendly practices. The ability of individuals to facilitate change was related not only to their skill in gaining and maintaining the support of key decision makers and opinion leaders but also to their ability to inspire confidence and passion within a challenge situation riddled by multiple tensions, ambiguities and uncertainties.

Empirical data indicated that individual and organisational commitment fluctuated from times of non-responsiveness to periods involving much higher levels of engagement and implementation of environmentally friendly practices. The data supports the view that development of both human and ecological sustainability oscillates between non-responsiveness, compliance, efficiency, and strategic pro-activity, and finally to the creation of a sustaining organisation. Assisting the transition towards a higher level of performance from the participants in this study was the measurability of outcomes such as savings in water, energy and waste and their level of confidence and skill in facilitating change.

Investigations uncovered a deeper appreciation of why individuals are prone to multiple interpretations of meaning and provided a clearer picture of why plausibility, accountability and achievability can change. Many individuals struggled to meet the

multiple expectations of business roles and responsibilities, while also battling with concepts like 'being sustainable' or 'enhancing the levels of sustainability'. In considering the actions which best respond to the economic, social and political pressures of building a low carbon environment (Wilkinson & Reed 2007), individuals are constantly confronted with new contexts that generate new meanings and imagery.

In some cases changes were incremental, but on other occasions the new contexts and nature of understanding was radically different in orientation and scale from what had occurred in the past. Making these explorations difficult was the observation that the meaning associated with sustainability was subject to change as a result of new understandings and social constructions appearing over time. These observations indicated that people changed their perceptions and began to morph in relationship to what was evolving around them. I argue that these observations are consistent with other contexts where emergence and unpredictability are the norm.

Fassin and Van Rosem (2009) point out that authorities and senior executives often attempt to understand concepts that are differentiated and ambiguous. For example, how do individuals contribute to something called sustainability when the meaning and implications unfolding have both predictable and unpredictable qualities? Ambiguities are accentuated by different interpretations among individuals, groups and stakeholders. As this study suggests, people are often required to make commitments when they are very unclear as to what is happening next. As will be presented in subsequent chapters, individuals not only make meaning of what is arising within their external world but also reflect and consider issues pertaining to how their perception of self-identity may be changing over time. As a consequence of these complexities and ambiguities, many individual accounts reflected an enduring tension generated by feelings of incompleteness, uncertainty and confusion (Alvesson 2010; Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas 2008). To operate within such pressures, individuals needed to make sense of something that was 'becoming' and 'emerging' in its own right. If one of the drivers for the making of meaning is a quest for clarity (Weick 2008) of ambiguity, to me this empirical analysis has clearly provided a fertile ground for the further exploration of how and why people change.

The empirical data clearly indicates that each individual faced numerous influences, distractions and pressures that could make it easy and/or challenging to make and sustain commitments over time (Angus-Leppan, Benn & Young 2010; Hahn et al. 2010). For some individuals, although they dearly wanted to take action on ecological sustainability, the pressures and challenges they faced in a situation might be too daunting for them to take the risk or generate the disturbance required for action to unfold. These explorations revealed that individuals were often placed in complex and contradictory situations where they needed to make decisions that might steer them towards or away from what was originally required. These paradoxes and tensions are fuelled by everyday demands of changing organisational culture and related political, business and personal pressures.

These empirical observations largely mirror the views of Heifetz and Linsky, who argue that individuals not only need to be authorised to take action; they also need to demonstrate leadership to facilitate change. They state:

The toughest problems that groups and communities face are hard precisely because the group or community will not authorise anyone to push them to address those problems. To the contrary, the rules, organizational culture and norms, standard operating procedures, and economic incentives regularly discourage people from facing the hardest questions and making the most difficult choices. (2002:24)

In a similar way, Kegan and Lahey (2009) argue that in order to bring about lasting and sustainable change, individuals, groups and organisations need to better understand the complexities of their respective commitments. To do this requires an exploration of the hidden reasons for resistance, by delving deeper into assumptions, worries and competing priorities that may be hindering commitments being achieved. This study strongly supports the assertion that to better understand commitment over time requires a process that can help reveal hidden assumptions, emotions and tensions that are shaping and driving the oscillations between immunity and susceptibility to change. This research consistently showed that individuals had their own unique and compelling story to tell about what was important and emerging to them in their life and in their work. These contributions were enhanced by close examination of the relational influences between levels of individual responsibility

and accountability and personal capacity to respond to emerging business and societal priorities.

Adding to these tensions and paradoxes of commitment is the interplay between the social construction of external complexities and the internal examination of self-identity. Decisions as to what is plausible and what should be acted upon appeared to be influenced by levels of self-efficacy, self-interest and the willingness to make sacrifices. The data suggests that people are primarily self-interested and are reluctant to make sacrifices (Van Lange et al. 1997) in their job. This thesis builds on the work of Bamberg and Moser (2007; Davis, Le & Coy 2011), to argue that, in a business context, being socially motivated to undertake pro-environmental behaviours is often subservient to self-interest.

Some individuals appeared motivated to challenge existing practices and to influence the manifestation of commitment within their sphere of influence by taking responsibility, demonstrating accountability and exhibiting the capacity to facilitate change. Others, however, did not feel motivated or obligated to make such commitments. Hesitancy about making personal sacrifices creates connections to the literature on ‘trade-offs’ (Angus-Leppan, Benn & Young 2010; Pinske & Kolk 2010). I would argue that the hesitancy to make sacrifices was mirrored at the individual level. Making commitments could be seen as either a career-limiting move or adversely affecting one’s livelihood, particularly if what was required was against the wishes and expectations of decision-makers.

#### ***4.1 Vignette – Brent’s journey of being a change agent***

Empirical data is now presented via the vignette of Brent, highlighting the dynamics of commitment over time in response to perceived challenges and pressures of ecological sustainability in a business context.

*Brent was the environmental, occupational and safety manager for a manufacturing business that produced sophisticated ocean surveillance buoys for the military. He handled tasks from dispatch and delivery of goods to being a participant in the manufacturing cluster. He was also responsible for facility issues such as ensuring*

*adequate warehouse lighting. Brent was employed as part of a global conglomerate and as a result was required to comply with international standards as well as local government laws on environmental management. To help him keep up to date with emerging developments in the field, Brent had in recent years participated in a variety of industry programs and cluster-based initiatives. He was a member of the Manufacturing Cluster that was examined as part of this study.*

*Brent's office was located at the rear of the factory near the loading dock. From where he sat he could view nearby offices as well as the warehouse. Brent had a job description that comprised a number of roles and responsibilities. As Brent suggested in his first meeting with me:*

*I guess in my role... is that- given that I have the corporate role of being the policeman on site- sometimes the authority can be used. Ah- obviously that's probably a last resort.*

*His desk was filled with hundreds of files, reports, pieces of hardware and equipment. My immediate reaction when encountering his office was here was someone handling many things at once. When I met Brent for the first time he shared a number of frustrations about his capacity to implement environmental sustainable practices. Problems included the safe disposal of the many types of waste and the inability to modify the leased building to enhance environmental performance. At the time, Brent was looking forward to gaining the benefits of being in the Manufacturing cluster. He had been a member of a previous cluster on cleaner production that involved many of the new Manufacturing cluster members. The cluster had not met at that stage.*

*When after a period of 12 months I met Brent for the second time, he appeared optimistic about his chances of implementing more environmentally friendly practices. There were a number of cues that indicated that he had been able to make some improvements within the business over a 12-month time frame. He had taken a number of important actions including investing in rainwater harvesting for use in the business. During the past year, he had invested in a new rainwater harvesting system only after he discovered improvements in the technology that made the outlay a worthwhile purchase within the current leasing arrangements for the building. Brent felt that senior management were more on board about the importance of*

*sustainability than they had been the previous year. He found that an on-site assessment of environmental performance was very helpful in shifting senior management opinion. As a consequence he was able to secure a significant increase in his environmental budget.*

*From observations, Brent's success was due in a large part to his research and investigative skills. He also took pride in keeping up to date on the latest advances in thinking. He was highly sceptical of the claims of some providers of products and services and clearly recognised that a few months could lead to new advances in technology and service delivery. He searched near and far to find good suppliers and was prepared to test their claims. For example, when he received new factory lights for the warehouse, he set up rigs to test the wattage. In the past, to his delight, he had debunked claims from several products as false. His attention to detail had saved the company many dollars.*

*During both interviews, Brent shared his views on what it takes to successfully bring about change in a complex technical and adaptive challenge of implementing ecological sustainability. He felt he was not in the position to force others to comply or be engaged and he clearly understood this. He believed that he needed to approach personal and organisational change with tact and subtlety. As he pointed out in 2007:*

*I guess try and work with the companies to be a pest without being a pest. Um, obviously most of us are doing this as an adjunct to our current activities.*

*One of the recurring irritants expressed by Brent was how to find time to get things done. As stated at our second interview:*

*I guess it's a factor of time. Um, these initiatives take a lot of time. And given that most of the people on the site here involved in these initiatives have fully loaded positions anyway so it's all additional work. So we don't have a person dedicated to the site to run these projects, so it's always an additional project.*

*Looking ahead, Brent felt that many of the challenges of industrial ecology were yet to be resolved, including how to offload waste for use by other businesses. He argued that this would take a couple of years before the real benefits could be seen. On*

*balance, however, he felt that his efforts had led to an increased level of acceptance and legitimisation for sustainability initiatives within the business. As he proudly shared:*

*So it was not as if we didn't want to do it before and we were quite happy to go down the path we were going- it's just a lot of the projects we've now got in place are fitting in with the corporate strategy whereas before they may have been running parallel with it. But not necessarily supporting it. But now they are part of policy so that always gives you more support.*

Brent's vignette shows how one individual juggled multiple business pressures to take responsibility. In making this assessment I would argue that Brent appeared to maintain a commitment to environmentally friendly practices and he showed evidence of achieving positive outcomes. To do this he had to make sense of what sustainability meant as well as developing practical and workable programs. Central to success was a clear understanding of the nature of power relationships and what he could do with the resources, authority and information at his disposal.

It is important to state that Brent was not alone in his attempt to make sense of complexity and respond to the pressures of business. Others also sought to gain greater clarity about what was meant by sustainability as well as making determinations of the nature of micro-politics (Wilkinson & Reed 2007) and legitimacy to act (Myllykangas, Kujala & Lehtimaki 2010). These views mirror the opinion that individuals were reconciling and making meaning of multiple targets over time. The assumption that people are solely interested in one target is an oversimplification of what actually unfolds in daily life. As an engineer in the Manufacturing Cluster said about the difficulties of managing complexity and making choices on commitments:

*Yep- see if you look at your hand not all the fingers are of equal length- you know- so that complexities will always be there. You can't expect 110% commitment from all the cluster members- that's part of the game.*

Others in the study made specific reference to the importance of accountability and accessing and utilising institutional power to raise levels of commitment. Many of these comments highlighted the critical importance of gaining the backing and

support of senior managers and key decision-makers. As a third party consultant with many years of experience in the field of resource efficiency stated:

*Well I always come from the point of view that this environment sustainability stuff is all about you as an organisation understanding your risks and opportunities. So it's part of risk management and some organizations have very structured risk management and governance approaches to it- build the stuff into the way you do that.*

Attention now moves to the challenge of sustaining commitment among ambiguity and uncertainty. Data is then provided on personal motives and motivations, business challenges, and the nature of power relationships that appear to influence individual commitment over time.

#### ***4.2 Facing a world of ambiguity and uncertainty***

During the time of the study from 2007 to 2008 there was an observable increase in the level of concern by individuals in the community and business about ecological sustainability. The State Government enacted legislation on areas such as sustainable building codes, smoke free zones and environmental performance. Furthermore events such as the release of the movie 'An Inconvenient Truth', major reports by Lord Stern in the UK and Professor Ross Garnaut in Australia, and the election of the Rudd Federal Government fuelled a massive groundswell of interest in climate change and reducing our carbon footprint. These influences placed increased pressure on the individuals in this study to comply with new legislative requirements and meet higher industry standards while increasing levels of accountability for taking tangible action on climate change.

Examination of databases of major news and business publications in Australia and New Zealand reveals a high interest in matters pertaining to sustainability and environmental issues in business during 2007-2008. The highest frequency of articles occurred in 2007. The most dominant discourse within sustainability and environmental issues was about climate change.<sup>5</sup> Closer scrutiny suggests that much of the interest in 2007 was driven by public debate pertaining to climate change

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<sup>5</sup> In Australian and New Zealand newspapers the total number of articles comprising discussions on environ\* and sustain\* was as follows: 2006-549; 2007-830; 2008- 830; 2008-756; 2009-601; and in 2010 as at 03 November 2010. was 530 articles. Source <http://global.factiva.com> 3 November 2010.

policies and viewpoints between the Federal government and opposition.<sup>6</sup> The severe drought in Australia also stimulated constant public exchanges. These findings largely mirror the observations within the empirical data that the level of engagement in matters pertaining to ecological sustainability was higher in 2007 than 2008. Some of the contributing factors to a reduced interest in ecological sustainability among individuals in this study were increasing market pressures associated with cheaper international imports in the manufacturing sector, improvement in the drought conditions and fears that local and national economy was in decline. These observations were articulated before the meltdown of the global financial marketplace that occurred later in 2008.

In response to the coverage and mounting prioritisation of ecological sustainability, government and business programs were continually changing in attempts to address these challenges. Individuals involved in such changes were faced with scenarios where new jargon, research and reporting arrangements were the norm. Most individuals involved in the study presented here struggled to make sense of what was unfolding and where subsequent actions might lead. The language, text and the imagery were in constant flux as new discoveries, research and cases studies were considered. The result was that individuals felt pressured into making business decisions on sustainability based on limited information and understanding.

As discussed, there was certainly no universal view as to what was meant by being sustainable or environmentally friendly among the individuals in this study. The confusion over what was meant by 'sustainability' was confirmed when individuals were asked to share their understandings of the term. Their responses covered a wide array of vastly different definitions and descriptions. These ranged from the need to help business to be more efficient, profitable and competitive through to more altruistic viewpoints of assisting businesses to become more lasting and healthy contributors to society and the planet.

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<sup>6</sup> Business publications and news addressing the topic of 'climate change': number of references: 2006-1869 articles; 2007-5284; 2008-4086; 2009-5004; and as at 03 November 2010-2586. Source <http://global.factiva.com> 3 November 2010.

Although much of the literature on the environment and sustainability studies takes the view that making commitments to ecological sustainability is well beyond taking actions on improving pollution control and reduction of water usage, energy and waste, it is evident that the meaning of sustainability is highly dependent on the individual and the nuances of their own social constructions. The associated meanings of sustainability are therefore heavily contextualised within the different life experiences of individuals and groups.

The Project Sponsor and Program Manager's indicated that the Department of Environment cluster programs were under constant pressure from political forces within government to demonstrate their contribution and legitimacy. In an attempt to keep up to date and to meet the expectations of opinion leaders, programs were constantly reviewed and updated. Individuals in this study who were part of these initiatives experienced programs that were undergoing constant change and modification. The tension for individuals was how to make meaning of something that was constantly changing and evolving. Regular modification of design and delivery generated a range of emotions, including joy around the quest for enhanced credibility, innovation and relevance but some frustration associated with the lack of stability and consistency. The Department response seemed to be a consequence to the desire to be seen as contemporary within a marketplace where a number of external providers provided similar services and products.

The reason for participating in sustainability programs varied between individuals. Some felt that unless their businesses took immediate action to abate their contribution to climate change they would struggle in the future. Others had more short-term objectives and were more interested in reaping rewards and savings over a much shorter timeframe. The latter individuals typically felt they were under pressure within their businesses to achieve quick wins within their job and were less interested in viewing the natural environment as a primary stakeholder in their business. They needed to demonstrate that implementing environmentally friendly practices could achieve immediate financial benefit, even though most understood that return on investment could take some time to achieve. The organisations thus varied; some individuals worked within businesses which had a higher level of shared

understanding of the longer term benefits of response to implementing environmentally friendly practices, and others were in businesses which rewarded and valued short-term outcomes. The challenge for a change agent was how to make sense of different views and factions' pertaining to what was required, including the importance of taking action on climate change, disagreement as to the time horizons for action, and what else needed to take precedence. To resolve these tensions, individuals needed to understand not only the discursive exchanges and organisational culture but also the sources of authority and leadership within the business.

During the time of the study individuals were increasingly frustrated and confused by the volume of claims and counter-claims in the marketplace about the benefits of new technologies and services. There was also a slight increase in scepticism about whether climate change was man-made or a natural and harmless occurrence. Individual levels of ambiguity and uncertainty were also fuelled by the marketplace where they were confronting new providers offering a multitude of technologies and services under the banner of sustainability. Associated with this growth was increased difficulty in determining quality and value of claims. Specific technology could change dramatically in a short timeframe as new advances, thinking and incentives were introduced. This was observed with solar technology, air conditioning, water harvesting and lighting during the duration of this study. Advances in the disposal of waste also underwent improvement. This process of determining plausibility was not helped by doubt over claims and counter-claims about research, applications and programs.

In comparing the levels of discomfort over ambiguity and in 2007 versus 2008 it appeared that people had become more accepting and familiar with many of the challenges of keeping up to date and being informed. In this context sustainability could be described theoretically as a 'becoming' phenomenon where the established norms, boundaries and frontiers were yet to be understood and established (Harding 2007). Heightened levels of confusion and doubt were fuelled by debate in the media on the authenticity of claims and counter-claims of climate change. These tensions persisted well beyond the duration of the study (Bluhdorn 2011; Dubash 2009).

The experience of sustainability also generated glimpses or impressions of enhanced predictability and stability. A well-chosen measure that indicated reduced levels of water and energy usage and waste had the influence of generating some confidence that sustainability could at one level be predicted and controlled. Cause and effect measures associated with the return on investment were often used to raise levels of reassurance. Glimpses of stability were further reinforced once tangible proof was experienced or measured. Learning from field studies and receiving reduced water, energy or waste bills were commonly shared as ways of increasing the argument for enhanced sustainability.

Interviewees found it easier to invest time and resources in improved sustainability when their business could argue an adequate return on investment or felt obligated to comply with laws or government legislation. One notable example of compliance was reported by the members of the Recreational and Gaming cluster, who were required to provide smoke free premises in their facilities by July 1<sup>st</sup> 2007. This new law forced individuals to consider using sustainable design in renovations or new premises. The result of these forced changes led to heightened awareness of reducing water and energy usage and waste in their business. However, if investigations or feedback indicated otherwise, doubt and uncertainty would quickly return. In making these observations I assert that enactment within the context of sustainability was often associated with people taking calculated risks based on trusted and assumed evidence rather than relying on proven facts. Once people were given a script that made sense they were more willing to make commitments.

It was apparent that the complexities and ambiguities of sustainability generated a variety of difficulties, tensions and opportunities, and the lack of clarity about what sustainability meant and what it was becoming generated anger and frustration. These factors also provided room for the more proactive individuals to seize the opportunity to experiment with new frontiers and domains of thinking. Successful implementation was more often connected to a person's ability to suspend disbelief and take action rather than relying on demonstrated research or precedents. Self-doubts were fuelled by discursive elements that cast suspicion that climate change might not be created by

human kind. Take for example the view of Graham, a third party provider of an environmental management service. He expressed his doubt in the following way:

*If climate change is real or if it's not real it doesn't matter because we are going to run out of coal, we are going to run out of oil, we are going to run out of (laughs) - so ultimately we'll face all of these issues.*

Individuals also experienced pressure to jump on the 'green bandwagon'. Some participants were happy to be a part of this journey but others felt angry that competitors from overseas did not have to comply with the same environmental standards. These comments were more prevalent in manufacturing businesses, where the cost pressures of overseas imports were acute. Individuals in a variety of industries passionately argued that commitment to environmentally friendly practices meant more than enhancing profitability and compliance. These people typically came from businesses where the organisational culture saw improving sustainability as much more than an avenue for saving costs: also as a fantastic opportunity to enhance their image and reputation in the marketplace and in society. They stated that it provided an excellent opportunity for them to show their green credentials to the marketplace. These individuals commonly raised the importance of being a leader within an industry. Finally, it should be noted that as that every individual within the study was assisting or participating in a program designed to aid the implementation of environmentally friendly practices the levels of doubt were not all consuming. Yet they were always there in the background, generating some insecurities and vulnerabilities.

In reviewing these findings, it could be argued that individuals are somewhat comfortable in dealing with uncertainty, but the empirical data indicate that it is a little dangerous to make such sweeping generalisations. Predicting how a person will respond to complexity is highly problematic, as responses are heavily contextualised within the existing meaning making processes. Individuals have their own relationships to complexity and, depending on their social construction of these pressures, different commitment is generated. These reflections on how people respond to complexity and ambiguity are important when considering why people make commitments over time.

The data does suggest, however, that the making of meaning is heavily contextualised in an iterative exchange between self-identity and the social constructions of the multiple contexts of the external world. These disclosures appear consistent with the views of Humphreys, Ucbasaran and Lockett, who write:

Although frequently studied in the context of major organizational change events in established organizations, sensemaking and sensegiving are triggered in a broad range of contexts, particularly where issues are deemed to be significant to leaders and/or stakeholders and in environments characterized by uncertainty and complexity (i.e. equivocality) (Maitlis & Lawrence 2007; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). (2012:42)

For some individuals, making meaning of complexity and uncertainty is an all-consuming challenge. Others, however, can be ambivalent or uninterested in such explorations. In the case of ambivalence, individuals may focus their attention on more immediate or practical matters. One general explanation for ambivalence is that people are addressing so many contexts and targets in life that taking the time to overly reflect on complexity is not a priority. They would just prefer to keep things simple, stay safe, and do what they can to maintain some control in their life.

Putting aside this general explanation, the study suggests other reasons why someone might appear uninterested or disconnected to a challenge like ecological sustainability. Quite simply, making a commitment to ecological sustainability might not be their highest priority. As discussed earlier, unless there is a worthwhile reason to commit, it is less likely that people will take action. As some individuals explained, there were moments or situations where they had neither the time nor the energy to make commitments to environmentally friendly practices. As the literature (Bamberg & Moser 2007; Cialdini 2001; Lokhorst et al. 2011; Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2010) suggests, it is less likely that a people will sustain a commitment if is not congruent with their self-identity. Here are some glimpses of these tensions and paradoxes in action as people expressed ambivalence:

*There are certainly lots of other people interested in the idea or the concept, but because we are busy now, it's much harder to get people excited about coming to a meeting*

*not every bloke is interested in reading all this stuff. He just wants to do what he's got to do*

*Um, to be honest I become a bit more blasé about it.*

The analysis now explores the motives and motivations for individual commitment to environmentally friendly practices. These insights help to develop a deeper picture of how social construction of commitment manifests, with some surprising results. The complexities of modern businesses are revealed and how they affect the push towards and away from sustainability.

### ***4.3 Individual motives and motivations***

Individuals' accounts of their motives and motivations illustrated why individual actions and commitments were subject to change and highly variable. Ultimately the decisions to commitment or not to commitment might have nothing to do with the intentions, merits and moral obligations of sustainability. The decision to undertake this investigation arose from initial observations that people had a variety of personal reasons for becoming involved in environmentally friendly practices. Here is the account of Grant, a senior manager in a regional recreational and gaming business.

*Um, I want to sort of make an example to my kids- when they are growing- I mean they are growing up now, but I mean when they're in their- when they're building their houses or when you know they are doing things around the environment- they know that we've got to look after this otherwise it's not going to be around.*

Grant's partial justification for his involvement by being a role model to his children is representative of the observation that the motives and motivation of individual contributions were varied. To help explore these diverse accounts two investigations were undertaken. The first involved looking at individual accounts of why people may have been interested in implementing environmentally friendly practices and the second entailed undertaking a broader examination of intrinsic motivations that appeared to influence levels of participation. Together, these two lines of inquiry painted a clearer picture of individual motives and motivations.

I first undertook an analysis of the data by referring to Carroll's (1991) conceptual framework that outlined a pyramid model of corporate social responsibility. Carroll

used a pyramid as a visual representation to reflect his view that there was hierarchical relationship among four areas of responsibility. Economic responsibility acts as the base of the pyramid and then in ascending order come legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities. In using the model an assumption was made that implementing environmentally friendly practices was consistent with being socially responsible. Carroll and Buchholtz in a later piece argue that 'social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary (philanthropic) expectations of society of organisations at a given point of time' (2006:35). In using this framework it is important to note that Carroll did not define commitment as a theoretical concept. However, I suggest that an individual taking responsibility is a very similar theoretical concept to demonstrating commitment. I would also assert that the phrase 'at a given point of time' in the above definition provides some acknowledgement of the temporal qualities of individual commitment that are expanded upon within this thesis.

In undertaking the analysis, the four areas of economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic motives outlined by Carroll were a useful framework for better understanding of what might be driving people to action on environmental sustainability. However, the hierarchical pyramid relationship was found to be unrepresentative of what was accounted for in the empirical data during the 12 months the study. Individuals were less concerned with the legal motives for obeying the law and adhering to regulations and more concerned with achieving economic and ethical outcomes. This observation could be attributed to the fact that to participate in programs designed by the Department of Environment businesses needed to provide verifiable evidence of compliance with minimum standards in environmental performance. Economic motives included being profitable, minimising costs and making sound strategic decisions. All cases understood and accepted that the economic rationale was a primary motive in decision-making. Personal accounts of ethical responsibility included avoiding questionable practices and a genuine commitment to the environment. For individuals to make the transition from economic and legal justification to philanthropic they needed to turn their attention towards ethical concerns. People sometimes combined their ethical intentions with being economically, legally and philanthropically responsible.

Philanthropic commitment was evidenced by actions including community engagement and greater focus on image and reputation. Individuals who were able to express philanthropic motives in their workplace were more likely to express a high degree of joy or happiness about their contribution to the business. A number of inspiring stories were shared, including an individual involved in a waterway regeneration project on the business site and another educating staff and customers on water saving in the home. In presenting the data it is worthwhile to mention some distinctions. In the Recreation and Gaming cluster, all individuals discussed their close association with local communities, which necessitated ethical accountability. This discovery was not surprising given that businesses in this industry need to maintain strong bonds with their local communities to survive. Personal accounts in the Regional and Manufacturing clusters, on the other hand, regularly expressed a desire to reduce their carbon footprint and improve their standing as a green manufacturer.

The use of Carroll's model led a conclusion that it did not adequately theorise the value and range of philanthropic contribution. The model has an implied assumption that profit drives most organisational activity and as a consequence it ignores organisations that generate public value in other ways. Public sector and not-for-profit organisations were neglected. It also appears to discount the possibility that organisations can generate sustainable value (Laszlo 2008) by doing good and ethical business. In the later publication (Carroll & Buchholtz 2006), although accepting the importance of being a good corporate citizen, contributing resources to the community and improving quality of life, appear to have glossed over opportunities to include accountability for environmental sustainability as part of the individual thinking in either ethical or philanthropic considerations. This neglect is indicative of the field of corporate social responsibility and corporate sustainability, where the many writers appear to lack a common value set or ideological frame (Montiel 2008; Orlitzky, Schmidt & Rynes 2003; Orlitzky, Siegel & Waldman 2011).

When attention was directed to the second area of investigation on intrinsic motivation, the empirical analysis identified three observable motivators: altruism, achieving goals and keeping up to date. Individuals who demonstrated both ethical

and philanthropic motives appeared to be more interested in altruism. These people were likely to accept that being interested in the environment was good not just for business but also for the planet. They were interested not only in contributing to business but also in providing a legacy for the future. They often shared the belief that climate change could not be ignored and that action needed to be taken. Furthermore, they had an expansive view of stakeholder relationships, which included the natural environment (Driscoll & Starik 2004; Haigh & Griffiths 2009; Waddock 2012) as part of their making of meaning. This view was particularly high among the officials of the Department of Environment. Not surprisingly, all the individuals within this study and other individuals who I met in the course of the research were passionate believers in the merits and obligations of being environmentally responsible. These views of what constitutes a stakeholder are at odds with theorists in stakeholder management (Freeman et al. 2010) who argue that the natural environment does not hold legitimate status in its own right.

Many individuals were motivated to such goals, which typically included setting targets, accomplishing objectives and managing projects. They found this a pleasurable and rewarding experience. Achieving goals was more likely to evoke greater desire if they could drive the process and were able to track progress on completion. These people were frustrated or angry when they were stifled or unable to obtain clarity about their roles. If left unchecked or unexplored, ambiguity could fuel anxiety and de-motivation. Some individuals, however, appeared more motivated by self-interest, as evidenced by their pursuit of career advancement and job security rather than displaying a passion for sustainability. Some individuals with engineering backgrounds openly expressed their pleasure in fixing equipment and systems, without any direct reference to the need for improving environmental performance.

Exploration of job roles indicated that pleasure in achieving goals was closely associated with the nature of the rewards and recognition programs. Individuals who were remunerated or recognised for undertaking specific tasks would more likely contribute in that way. When they were asked to deliver results for environmentally friendly practices their contribution would be directed into those activities. The alignment between performance management and environmental sustainability was

not always evident. As demonstrated in the case of Brent, individuals within small and medium enterprises were responsible for multiple tasks, including improving the quality of environmentally friendly practices. Some who had a strong need to supervise and manage performance saw close scrutiny of the measurement of environmental outcomes as a good means to exert greater control over the employees of their workplace or their teams.

Finally, there were instances where people were highly motivated to keep up to date on the latest trends, case studies and thinking. These people gave the impression of being happier when they had the opportunity to build on their ideas by connecting and collaborating with others. They appeared more likely to view collaborative arrangements such as clusters as a way of enhancing their job satisfaction and career development. The next discussion critically identifies business challenges within organisations that appeared significantly to influence individual commitment over time to environmentally friendly practices.

#### ***4.4 Understanding business challenges***

Apart from presenting data on how individuals made meaning of the manifestation of sustainability and considering the potential relationship to personal motives and motivations, it was also imperative to understand how business challenges shaped the push towards and away from the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. Here again the emphasis is placed on individuals and how such influences might have influenced their level of engagement, commitment and enactment.

Consistent with the literature on 'trade-offs' (Hahn et al. 2010; Pinske & Kolk 2010) analysis highlights that business challenges at times made the implementation of environmental practices difficult but on other occasions made things easier. No study has addressed the tensions and paradoxes of individual commitment within this context. There was a consistent view among interviewees that organisational commitment to ecological sustainability required on-going effort to embed supportive policies and procedures. These views are highly consistent with the literature that suggests that the change process requires a sustained effort combining both human

and ecological sustainability outcomes (Clifton & Amran 2011; Dunphy, Griffiths & Benn 2007; Haugh & Talwar 2010; Linnenluecke, Russell & Griffiths 2009).

Pfeffer (2010) argues that the sustainability literature needs to give greater attention to the human and social environment rather than just matters pertaining to the effects of organisations on the physical world. This thesis has accepted this criticism and has focused on the human factor in the ecological component of sustainability. When studying fluctuations in political, economic and societal interests, therefore, recognition was given to personal willingness and the capacity to commit over time. In outlining these accounts it is important to acknowledge that the comments were contained within the rules, norms and rituals of organisational culture (Linnenluecke, Russell & Griffiths 2009; Schein 2010) and human instincts (Nicholson 1998; O'Keefe 2011), where individuals make decisions based on their desires for social belonging, status and acceptance, which have both direct and indirect influences on how individual commitment to sustainability might be exhibited. Personal accounts would suggest that individuals are relational beings (Gergen 2009b) who extract meaning from an infinite array of sources in life. The study also indicates that individuals who had a strong identification with the images and goals of their organisation (Brown 2009) appeared more likely to think and act in accordance with the values and ideals of their organisation (Gautam, Dick & Wagner 2004).

Choo (1998) suggests that organisational life can be thought of as a web of sensemaking communities whose varied interpretations can stimulate innovation, experimentation and discovery. While creativity can be an outcome of diverse social construction in and between organisations and stakeholders, equally sensemaking is related to developing shared understanding and commitment. These similarities and differences were explored to strengthen the understanding of the business constraints and latitudes that push individuals towards or away from sustainability. These tensions and paradoxes are rarely discussed in the organisation and management literature and provide another layer of complexity in the examination of commitment over time.

To help make meaning of the complex array of business challenges that pushed individuals towards and away from sustainability, the analysis was organised using

headings outlined by the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton 1996). This framework provided a ready-made and highly respected structure through which to examine the diversity of business challenges faced by the individuals in the study. The Balanced Scorecard categorises organisational performance into diverse areas with the aim of generating an integrated and holistic approach to management. This framework has become popular in industry because it encourages individuals to think more broadly than focusing just on financial performance as the catalyst for business longevity. Depending on the context and application the balanced score areas can vary in number, description and analysis, but they typically include investigations into areas pertaining to customers, financial, environmental, and internal business processes, learning, growth and people issues (Kaplan & Norton 2001a, 2001b; Viljoen & Dann 2003).

The Balanced Scorecard heading 'customer' was modified to also include matters relevant to society. The inclusion of society in the revised heading 'customer and society' provided an opportunity to capture personal accounts pertaining to community engagement and consultation that were not addressed under the typical Balanced Scorecard categorisation. Although Kaplan and Norton sought to provide a far-reaching and expansive discussion of organisational performance and contribution, financial considerations such as increasing sales and reducing costs remained a dominant force in their concepts of decision-making. These observations are consistent with earlier discussions that highlighted that economic motives were important considerations in facilitating higher levels of organisational engagement to sustainability. In addition, the analysis had strong parallels to an alternative case study (Humphreys & Brown 2008) which found that commitment to corporate and social responsibility was difficult to implement unless there was a strong economic imperative for action.

The data strongly suggested that the areas within the categorisation were not mutually exclusive and were in fact highly interdependent. For example, improvements in business culture to assist the implementation of environmentally friendly practices could involve setting targets and making changes in a variety of areas including those pertaining to internal business processes, learning and growth, and people-related

issues. Analysis now begins (in alphabetical order) with the amended category of customers and society.

#### **4.4.1 Customers and society**

When individuals were able to anticipate or view improved service to customers and society there was a firm belief that their organisation and themselves would benefit. There was a common realisation that investing in ecological sustainability not only helped the environment; it would also save money and enhance image and reputation. Being seen as or becoming a 'green friendly' business was a common aim among participants. These aspirations included actively engaging with their local communities and enhancing an excellent business image and reputation. The Recreation and Gaming cluster participants were most concerned about managing the expectations of their local community. During the study, the peak body representing this industry championed a number of initiatives to improve the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. These included publication of a special issue on 'green clubs' and the introduction of an award of excellence for environmentally friendly practices. Two businesses within the study won awards for excellence in environmental performance. It is worth noting that the individuals who represented those businesses in the research were the primary facilitators of change in their organisation.

Discussions about being competitive were more widespread across the study, and these personal accounts reflected needs to adapt to the global economy, to manage risk and to be prepared to think strategically as well as being responsive to the needs of the clients, suppliers and customers. Image and reputation were more frequently by the higher performing people who appeared to be more confident in ability of their business to reap the benefits of enhanced profile and status in the marketplace and society. Leadership and management cultures within their businesses had become supportive of the challenge, and less effort was required by the participants to convince people of the benefits to customers and society of being environmentally sustainable. As a consequence, these higher performing individuals were more strategic and ambitious in their goal setting.

*For example, Keith had become a keen advocate for the 'green business' ethos. Keith was in charge of the operations of a boutique manufacturer of bathroom appliances located in a rural area and was a member of the Regional cluster. Over time he became an enthusiastic communicator of the green credentials of this business. Keith saw high performance in environmentally friendly practices as a valuable addition to the business brand. He believed that customers would be prepared to pay more for local product than for cheaper imports if the business had the reputation of being a green manufacturer. He argued that long-term business survival depended on keeping costs down and being innovative. It was observed that Keith demonstrated an important ability to communicate the benefit of implementing change. When meetings were used to review progress he would take the time to capture key learning. In conjunction with his small team, Keith put into action an employee engagement program that reduced the levels of water, energy and waste used in the business. Savings generated by cleaner production, resource efficiency and industrial ecology in combination with higher staff morale led to an improved ability to profile the manufacturer's green credentials to the marketplace. Keith stated that the investment in cleaner production and more environmentally friendly practices had attracted more customers and increased sales. This was an excellent result, given that the business had to compete with cheap overseas imports in the Australian marketplace.*

Keith's experience was replicated by other individuals in the study who saw environmentally friendly practices as increasing their chance of survival in their highly competitive marketplaces. The businesses most successful in implementing environmentally friendly practices were those interested in matters pertaining to image, branding and reputation (Schultz, Hatch & Holten Larsen 2000). They also were very strategic in how they developed their know-how by fostering synergetic and collaborative knowledge enhancing business relationships (Ibarra & Hunter 2007). These realisations were based on the understanding that business longevity required excellent stakeholder engagement and a leadership culture that constantly reminded people of the importance of excellent service and delivery.

#### **4.4.2 Environmental**

Individuals raised a variety of challenges to making innovations and implementing environmentally practices. Data suggested that it was vitally important to keep staff and other important stakeholders not only engaged in the cycle of implementation but in also sharing what was achieved. To maintain momentum in the change process, decision makers needed to be kept up to date with the latest advances in technology and services as they unfolded. What appeared to fast-track action was the use of water, energy and waste audits to determine current consumption and disposal patterns. Once this information was understood, individuals were able to organise themselves and mobilise into action.

The most common strategy for rolling out environmentally friendly practices was to begin by looking for early wins on water and energy before turning attention to waste reduction and disposal. People were often surprised how simple actions could make such significant differences to costs and environmental performance, but it was in the area of solid and liquid waste that most surprises occurred. It was particularly startling when improvements in recycling and packaging provided massive savings to the business as well as being good for the environment. Experience in making improvements in achieving environmental outcomes suggested that reducing the levels of water and electricity usage was much easier to accomplish than making changes relating to waste. Simple acts such as installing aerated water taps and power saving light bulbs provided immediate and measurable savings to the business. More expensive and complex infrastructure changes with air conditioning and water harvesting took longer to justify and to gauge whether the investment had been worthwhile. Brent's story indicated this where the investment in water harvesting by his business came only after a clear and compelling analytical argument was first understood and communicated to the senior management team.

When examining environmental challenges it was particularly apparent that people were having difficulty balancing the economic needs of business with the commitment to be a positive contributor in the battle against climate change. The literature places weight on the consideration of climate change becoming an integral

part of business strategy (Haigh & Griffiths 2009; Linnenluecke 2009; Weinhofer & Hoffmann 2010). The individuals in this study were interested in lowering the impact on business of climate change and in analysing the situation in which the business found itself, but not interested in initiating action to decrease the frequency and intensity of extreme weather conditions (Wittenben & Kiyar 2009). The thinking on adverse weather conditions and climatic change was more difficult to comprehend than making practical and technical improvements in cleaner production, resource efficiency and industry ecology. In making this observation it should be noted that the drought of 2007 did become an important context for the conversations on climate change, and it created more urgency and increased realisation that adverse weather conditions in the future may be more the norm than the exception.

#### **4.4.3 Financial**

As outlined, the analysis highlighted that financial matters and economic logic dominated the rationale for implementing sustainable practices. Financial arguments and dogma lay at the centre of many of the views expressed. These included accounts pertaining to dollar savings, increasing costs, enhanced profitability, fear of damages and litigation, capitalising on government subsidies and return on investment on fixed assets and human capital purchases. Where doubt existed as to the viability of a business or the potential for any worsening of the economic situation, individuals felt it was less likely that any large investment in environmentally friendly practices would be accepted. A number of participants claimed that just surviving the next year was their only real consideration. These accounts appear to be consistent with research arguing that managers are often compelled to pursue goals that do not conflict with profit maximisation even though they may directly or indirectly influence more morally preferable initiatives such as those pertaining to environmentally friendly practices (Alexander 2007).

One on-going pressure was the need to determine a return on investment on capital and to decide whether to purchase, hire or lease new equipment. Considerations involved determining reasonable payback periods. If people could be convinced that there was a return on investment over a reasonable time frame they were more

interested. This translated into greater confidence in making financial arguments to key decision makers. Only a few individuals demonstrated a direct interest in the impact their decisions would have on the environment. Most decisions appeared to be restricted to short-term financial gain or just surviving the upcoming business cycle.

Decisions about return on investment were assisted by mathematical calculations as well as seeing first hand new technologies in operation. Matters pertaining to acquiring and maintaining plant, machinery and equipment were complex and wide ranging. When it came to acquiring or trialling innovations, the rationales that drove the decision to proceed nearly always came back to economics. There were some exceptions. In a recreation and gaming business, for example, Tony faced the decision of whether or not to purchase glass-crushing equipment for the food and beverage areas of the facility. On first impression the cost of the acquisition was prohibitive, but when he considered the potential risks of injury to staff and customers from large shards of glass his thinking and argument changed. As he pointed out:

*So I mean that's you know we used to have guys that would just carry or wheel 240 litre wheelie bins full of glass and we'd have to take that out and dispose of it- and we introduced glass crushers and um, you know they cost us about \$700 a month more than what we were paying to have the other stuff taken away – um, but, I guess the potential for someone to injure themselves and for us to be struck with a huge compensation claim was enormous compared to what it is now- so for \$700 a month- ah it's not a lot of money to first of all safeguard your staff and to avoid some of the potential compensation claims you could be exposed to. So we are happy to pay the extra \$700 if it means we're not going to have somebody hurt and off work.*

The availability of tangible forms of government or industry subsidies and incentives helped the uptake of sustainable practices. The persuasiveness and dominance of financial considerations was also accentuated when a number of individuals stated that their business was not prepared to participate in the Department of Environment cluster program until financial incentives were supplied. It is clear that without these incentives those businesses would not have participated, even though each business had been compliant with minimum industry standards of environmental performance.

#### **4.4.4 Internal business processes**

It became apparent from analysing the data that individuals in the small to medium businesses had unique internal business process priorities. There were some similarities within comparable organisations such as heavy metal manufacturing operations and recreational and gaming cluster members, but there were also many different elements to be considered and contemplated. Depending on the business context, priorities could change over time as compliance, risk management, and work re-design issues were assessed and acted upon. Some of these challenges assisted the implementation of environmentally friendly practices while others could lead to delays, postponement or cancellation of proposed initiatives.

Smarter, better work design was implemented during the study in several cases, leading to engaged staff and the creation of positive work cultures. Businesses that had the greatest success in building commitment to environmentally friendly practices used staff consultation in work design as the key catalyst for reform and renewal. Many of the programs involved were designed to improve levels of workflow and efficiencies in production and services and to reduce unnecessary use of water and electricity and cost blowouts caused by inadequate governance and performance management. The more experienced change agents appeared to be more aware of the complexities and tensions of technical and adaptive change and the requirement to remain vigilant and on purpose, in order to make the required improvements over time. There was a viewpoint that younger people were more interested and supportive in businesses that carried out environmentally friendly practices. Older workers wanted to protect the status quo or were preoccupied with matters concerning demarcation or ensuring that current arrangements remained. These assertions remained untested at this stage.

#### **4.4.5 Learning and Growth**

The size and scale of organisations created both unique and common challenges in the push towards and away from sustainability. Some businesses reported directly to global authorities whereas others conducted their operations locally outside the reach

of the governance of others. A number of individuals felt strongly that smaller organisations would always struggle with the demands of implementing environmentally friendly practices. They believed that smaller operations lacked the resources or time to invest in such practices. However, the study suggests that this was not always the case. There were numerous examples of individuals who were performing well beyond their weight when compared to others in the study who were employed by larger organisations. Some of the best performers in the study came from businesses with the least employees. In these instances staff engagement was a key enabler in bringing about changes in work design, reduced operating costs and improvement in the level of environmental governance. This observation is quite different from the views of Darnall, Henriques and Sadorsky, who argue that:

smaller firms are less likely to undertake as many proactive environmental practices as larger firms, they are more responsive to perceived pressures from value chain, internal, and regulatory stakeholders. (2010:1091)

There was no clear evidence to suggest that investment in environmental implementation was related to stage of organisational growth or financial performance. The data was more in line with the observation that environmental policies are heavily influenced by the collective impact of many characteristics occurring within each organisation (Elsayed & Paton 2009). In smaller organisations represented in this study, the advocacy and leadership of the owner and manager presented as a major influence on the levels of engagement and compliance towards sustainability, particularly with business practices being less bureaucratic and more open to informal communication and knowledge exchange about what was required. These observations appear consistent with research by Bos-Brouwers (2010), who surveyed levels of innovation of sustainability within small and/or medium sized enterprises.

Levels of expertise and availability of labour were on-going concerns for many of the individuals interviewed. The focus of attention was not only on finding and keeping talented and motivated employees but also on finding suitably qualified contractors who could perform functions such as implementing environmentally friendly practices. Where expertise was seen as high or where successful systems existed to

attract and keep talent there was a greater level of confidence about the future. Primary areas of concern involved finding and developing expertise, undertaking adequate restructuring, and ensuring that the size of the operation was ideally suited for future growth. Several of individuals shared frustration about difficulties in finding suppliers who could adequately attend to their needs in the areas of environmentally friendly practices. This was heightened for businesses that were isolated geographically.

In a few cases individuals addressed the tensions associated with restructuring within their businesses. For example, George was constantly frustrated by the ambiguity within his printing business. Formal authority and associated reporting structures pertaining to environmental management appeared uncertain and in flux, leading to confusion as to roles and responsibilities. In some situations, restructuring could result in lower qualified staff being appointed with the responsibility of implementing environmentally friendly practices. This led to bewilderment and sadness about the logic of such decisions.

#### **4.4.6 People**

The last area relating to business challenges is connected to the values and beliefs of an organisation's people. In the more positive and constructive workplace cultures, job design and the involvement of employees in planning and being personally accountable for performance outcomes were more common. Breakthroughs in work re-design often resulted from cross-functional collaboration, where individuals joined together to produce better outcomes. It is theorised that this adds weight to the surmise that exchange of views across 'subcultures' (Linnenluecke, Russell & Griffiths 2009) is helpful in building a shared understanding and commitment on what is required to progress forward. If people were accepting and supportive of initiatives for ecological sustainability it appeared to increase the chances of securing lasting reform. In workplaces with a higher incidence of unpleasant and 'toxic emotions' (Frost 2003) much more effort was required to bring about higher levels of engagement. People often expressed sadness and ambivalence about what would or could be done to facilitate change.

One of the more complicated aspects of managing people when implementing environmental practices was determining adequate rewards and recognition. Individuals consistently argued that long-term change could only be achieved with a leadership culture that built levels of individual respect and collaboration in the business. In many cases requests to employees to help reduce their impact on climate change were warmly received. Trying to encourage motivation by using cash incentives typically worked only for short time frames. Keith, the operations manager of the boutique bathroom manufacturer was a case in point. He discovered that financial incentive programs to cut costs and contribute practical ideas were not sufficient to sustain long-term commitment. Many of the individuals interviewed argued that finding the right person to drive the change process was central to success. Where individuals felt that their workplace culture had been positively influenced by their actions, joy was often shared. Where the reverse was true, sadness and ambivalence were often expressed as consequences of expectations not being clear or understood. The study supported the need to build the capacity of constructive qualities of leadership and management (Hubbard et al. 2007; Jones et al. 2011) as well as developing meaningful collaboration (Huxham & Vangen 2005) between stakeholders and opinion leaders. Empirical observations are consistent with the recent literature on positive identities and organisations (Roberts & Dutton 2009) when building a supportive organisational culture is imperative.

#### ***4.5 Responding to the intricacies of power***

One of the most persuasive observations arising from the research was the widespread account that the role and function of power was central to how and why individuals choose actions and make commitments. The research strongly suggested that individuals operated within businesses that were highly political, requiring participants to make sense of the intricacies of power embedded within their business culture and stakeholder relationships. The data supports the view that interpretations of and use of power are fundamental to stakeholder salience (Clifton & Amran 2011; Driscoll & Starik 2004; Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997; Roome & Wijen 2005), and individual sensemaking and identity construction (Brown 2000; Humphreys & Brown 2008) while also explaining why organisational processes, systems and procedures

evolve over time (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006; Greve, Palmer & Pozner 2010).

The push towards and away from sustainability is seen as highly political process involving individuals making decisions based on the level and nature of support at any point of time. The motives which drove commitments appeared to involve not only the desire to make contributions to business challenges and ecological sustainability but also considerations about how to survive and thrive in a political system involving a wide array of logical and emotional arguments and responses. It is asserted that these dynamics are not unique to sustainability; they reflect a central quality of the human experience where individuals endeavour to make judgements and choices based on the personal and institutional power available to them.

Personal accounts commonly stated that individuals' capacity to act was directly connected to having sufficient funds, systems support and political support to make the required changes. Intricacies of power include both concrete mechanisms for embedding behaviours such as obedience to procedures and processes driven by formal rituals and hierarchical elements (Brown & Humphreys 2006; Hardy & Clegg 1996), as well as more implicit strategies whereby individuals make sense of power relationships and decide what possible action they can undertake within these dynamics (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006; Hogg & Knippenberg 2003). Power relationships can range from leadership activities that stimulate inclusion, risk taking and acceptance (Galinsky, Rus & Lammers 2011) through to 'collaborative thuggery' (Huxham & Vangen 2005:44) where individuals can feel obligated and manipulated into submission.

Commitment seemed to be more about maintaining credibility and self-interest rather than supporting a set of actions. There were various examples of participants who, although highly committed to the ideals and doctrines of environmentally friendly practices, felt they were poorly placed to support change at the point of time because they lacked formal authority. Important in this pursuit was attaining the skill and confidence to hold constructive dialogue with senior management and other key stakeholders. Exceptional senior management backing was seen as more than just assurances. It involved advocacy and representation on steering committees, boards

and cross-functional teams. Without this backing participants often struggled to make headway in facilitating the desired programs and initiatives.

The study suggests that the capacity to mobilise others involved a subtle process of increasing or decreasing levels of compliance and engagement to achieve desired aims. These included strategies that enforced adherence to rules and norms that were consistent with organisational governance as well engagement in processes that inspired contribution at higher levels. Feelings associated with the need for recognition, acceptance and control could also shape the nature of power relationships. Participants often spoke of not wanting to be ashamed or embarrassed by being seen as poor performers, and wherever possible individuals would consider and take steps re-establish credibility and social standing in a group or business culture. As indicated, there were cases where individuals were absorbed in self-preservation and self-interest rather than focused on making the necessary changes or sacrifices of sustainability. These individuals were attracted to short-term and instantaneous results. Such pressures were exacerbated by the expectations of stakeholders who required quick results, tracked progress and documented successes, thus appearing to enforce behaviour that was either helpful for or inconsistent with lasting and sustainable change.

Another important influence on the dynamics of power was related to the timing and urgency of requests received. At times it was convenient to act but on other occasions it was extremely inconvenient. Examples of problematic or serendipitous timing were shared during the research, including the impact of new government legislation, the launch of a new sales campaign, and an opportunity generated by new funding. The timing of requests was also connected to workload. For participants who had little space left in their diaries, rescheduling was difficult and generated feelings of sadness. They needed to decide how they would respond and this was often not an easy choice. Prioritising and planning ahead helped, but sometimes thinking on their feet was important in order to juggle responsibilities and manage expectations. Jacob, the Project Sponsor from the Department of Environment cluster program, supported these observations. When asked about his experience of why individuals lose momentum in implementing environmentally friendly programs, he explained:

*There's only a certain amount of time that senior management can run on a certain issue- they run it through, they invest in it- they want some outcomes and cost benefits over a short period of time- that may work through. And it may not be that the program is poor- they just may have another priority.*

The conversation about consequences and manifestations of power is complex and far reaching, and is a recurring theme in upcoming discussions including that pertaining to the capabilities of successful change agents.

#### ***4.6 Capabilities of successful change agents***

As the data emerged it became apparent that a number of capabilities seemed to differentiate between successful and unsuccessful change management of complex issues such as those pertaining to ecological sustainability. The research in this study indicated that individuals needed certain capabilities to better influence the demands of chaotic, confusing and complex challenges in the modern workplace while also assisting people to make sense and feel safe with what was emerging. A select number of individuals appeared to outperform others and succeeded against all odds in delivering outstanding results. The analysis revealed three capabilities that differentiated between high- and low-performing change agents, namely taking responsibility for resolving difficult challenges, articulating compelling scripts for change, and ensuring accountability over time. These conclusions were formed by analysis of individuals and were also the perception of participants themselves about what they saw of others over time.

The investigations painted a moving picture of how managers and leaders could assist or hinder commitment in times of complexity. It should be noted that the analysis of successful change agents was undertaken well before the competencies revealed by the literature were known. Given the number of people interviewed it was not surprising that a long list of suggestions was developed about what it takes to be more successful in facilitating and influencing complex change. More readily apparent was that for individuals undertake the role of change agent they needed to modify their usual behaviours, to bring about change by utilising more intentional and conscious choices about what was required (Carroll & Levy 2008). As Watson asserts:

In organizations, people are required to take on various corporate personas. These personas are likely to differ from the ones that they adopt in other parts of their lives and, indeed, may come into tension with them. But they are also personas which the individual is required to adapt and change as global, societal and organizational circumstances change. (2008:122)

Empirical observations confirm many of the frameworks, competencies and capabilities within the change management literature related to identifying the important qualities of change agents. According to Anderson and Anderson (2010) there are four compelling reasons to lead the dynamics of change, namely the desire to achieve better results, to produce a more committed, aligned and healthier workplace, to sustain operational performance and to promote greater levels of capability. Change agents thus found themselves influencing a number of human needs, including enhanced levels of security, inclusion, connection, power, order and control, competence, and fairness and justice.

Palmer, Dunford and Akin (2009) argue that leadership of change requires a versatility in approaches, from moments when there is a need to control the dynamics of change to those which involve the shaping and modification of behaviours. Other writers (Bass & Riggio 2006) see change leadership as using a combination of approaches, from transactional strategies, where rewards and punishments are used to influence the nature and level of performance, to strategies more transformational in nature, where leaders grow and develop individuals by empowering them and by aligning their activities to the purpose and objectives. The literature indicates that facilitating change requires both compliance and engagement. These observations of the need for compliance and engagement emerged within research in this study.

Managing change also requires acute awareness of the technical (known problems that can be solved through known solutions) and adaptive challenges (unknown or uncertain problems that require a process to create new solutions) (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009b), as well as being comfortable with the tensions pertaining to power and uncertainty (Grint 2005). Closely associated with this thinking is the recognition that successful change management requires an understanding of the various phases of change, including the investing of time and effort in helping raise awareness of the change, increasing levels of desire to participate, carefully building the knowledge

and skills to bring about transition, considering levels of ability, and finally reinforcing behavioural change (Hiatt 2006).

Dunphy, Griffiths and Benn suggest that change agents for corporate sustainability need to exhibit goal clarity, role clarity, self-esteem and the desire to achieve mastery. They also state that such individuals need:

...clarity of vision, knowledge of what we wish to change and the skills to implement the changes. But none of these can be fully effective without maturity and wisdom. In the end it is who we are, not what we know or can do, that makes the crucial differences in effective organizational change. (2007:293)

Benn and Dunphy (2009) also address issues around leadership required for sustainability. However, study of the capabilities that matter most is complex and requires further investigation. It is here that this chapter makes its final contribution and provides a launching pad for further examination of individual commitment over time in subsequent chapters, by identifying which capabilities most differentiated the higher performing and lower performing change agents.

To help place these initial comments as to what constitutes a high-performing change agent, the cases of Glen and Betty are presented, followed by those of Frank and Grant, who expressed more difficulty.

*Glen instigated a major refit and refurbishment of his recreational and gaming facility while also engaging staff to support and embrace a number of technical innovations for saving water, energy and waste. He did this by articulating a vision of being number one in his industry, being prepared to resolve complex challenges and, in his own words, 'giving it everything'. Glen did not lack courage in experimenting with new ideas. Born into a family in the building trade, he had learned from his father at an early age that there was always an answer to any problem you faced. Glen appeared to become inspired and motivated when he faced a difficult challenge. If he was struggling with an issue he made a special effort to connect with someone to help him.*

*Betty, in a similar but much smaller business, was able to secure government funding*

*to install a large underground water-harvesting scheme servicing the needs of an outdoor bowling green. This was undertaken at a time when significant water shortages were being experienced due to a major drought in South-Eastern Australia. Betty demonstrated an outstanding capacity in gaining funding for her project, and also project managed the whole installation.*

*Alternatively, there were participants who struggled when faced with similar pressures and challenges in the same industries. Frank took up the role of senior manager of his facility and was finding it very difficult to justify any funding or the time needed to introduce innovations in environmentally friendly practices. His position in the past had been that of gaming manager, and he candidly stated that this was where his expertise lay. He argued that he found it much easier to justify the installation of a new gaming machine than spending his time and money on reducing water, energy and waste. His view was that business survival was dependent on short-term cash flow and gaming revenue. If there was to be any change to his level of commitment it would require practical assistance from elsewhere.*

*Finally, Grant had been the senior manager in a rural based recreational and gaming facility for over 10 years. He had become disillusioned and let down by the low level of support and backing he had received in sustainability issues. He felt isolated and did not have the funds to travel to the city to hold discussions on these challenges.*

In comparing the characteristics of people who succeeded or struggled in implementing environmentally friendly practices it appeared that higher performing change agents thrived with ambiguity, became curious rather than angry about the contradictions of change, and were able to convince key stakeholders. They were able to let go of thinking or behaviour that limited their capacity to influence the agenda for change, while finding the time and energy to fix technical problems. The individuals who struggled most appeared to be more marginalised and unconnected within their organisation. They also appeared to lack the formal authority, time and confidence to facilitate change. These participants regularly discussed being powerless, saddened or ashamed about their inability to bring about change. They also struggled to search out solutions to their challenges. These participants commonly complained about the lack of available resources to perform their job. Low performers

were more likely to be fatigued and less resourceful compared to more successful change agents.

To build the theoretical contribution, a competency model was developed for what most assisted on-going commitment to sustainability. The model, shown in *Appendix Four*, contains six listings of competencies. These six areas are: building relationships, mobilising effort of others, planning and evaluation, power and influencing, resolving ambiguity and taking responsibility. The organising and grouping of competencies led to a deeper analysis of what differentiated high and low performing individuals. Officers of the Department of Environment enthusiastically supported these specific explorations when I presented initial findings in August 2010. A checklist, shown in *Appendix Five*, was produced to assist future activities in identifying and recruiting suitable change agents.

In making these assertions it is important to highlight that there were many competencies that were helpful but not sufficient in guaranteeing success. Managing workload was an excellent example. Managing the pressures of business appeared to be a never-ending challenge for the individuals interviewed. No participants complained about having too little to do; they all raised the issue of how to juggle their responsibilities in order to deliver on the expectations. Some participants appeared to be well trained in this area, whereas for others the opposite seemed to be true. Fear of workload increasing was a significant influence on commitment. When individuals felt more in control of the situation they appeared less fearful of increased workloads. The less confident individuals were more likely to blame high workloads on factors outside their control. Adaptability to change was seen as vitally important in meeting the pressures of a high workload as well as securing additional resources and funding when required. Take for example, *Robert*, an engineer near retirement in a business that manufactured brakes for transportation carriages.

*Robert loved fixing equipment and trouble shooting the latest problem in production. He was not motivated to invest time and energy into organising new systems and procedures to improve the levels of resource efficiency and cleaner production. In his own words Robert reflected an on-going struggle in finding the time, resources and motivation to contribute the challenges he faced:*

*I think that's one of the biggest things as far as industry goes- is that particularly these days where everybody's doin' 20 jobs – that you just don't have time. (first interview)*

*I mean I've been sayin' for a while that I reckon we should have one person here full time- and again don't ask me where you get him. But full time just lookin' after the situation of standards, procedures, um, health and safety, all that sort of thing. All the paperwork associated with that is an absolutely humungous job. (second interview 12 months later)*

Robert acknowledged that unless he obtained someone to undertake the task of establishing good systems and procedures nothing would progress in sustaining improvement in environmentally friendly practices.

Justification for each of the three change agent capabilities is provided with relevant literature to strengthen the analysis. The first is the ability to take responsibility for resolving difficult challenges.

#### **4.6.1 Takes responsibility for resolving difficult challenges**

High performing change agents become energised and alive when confronted by complex problems. Such individuals had more reserves of resilience, courage and personal agency than lower performing cases. Typically, these individuals believed that they had the choices, capabilities and resources they needed to drive action. Individuals who had a long history of experience within their industry or workplace were well placed to be high performers, but this was not sufficient to guarantee success. More important was their belief in what they were doing and the motivation to make a difference. In the data analysis 'taking responsibility' was defined as 'an individual taking action without falling into the trap of blaming others, justifying oneself and not taking the initiative'. There is a range of literature in organisation and management studies and psychology that discusses the ability to remain attentive when facing complex and hard to resolve challenges. Heifetz and Linsky write about the importance of holding steady in the heat of the action. They explain that in managing change, 'the pressure on you may be almost unbearable, causing you to doubt both your own capabilities and your direction. If you waver or act prematurely your initiative can be lost in an instant' (2002:141).

Other scholars have explored what it takes to make oneself indispensable and resilient to the tensions of change, arguing that it is vitally important to be tuned in to your own unique strengths and to continue to grow and nurture these over time (Zenger, Folkman & Edinger 2011). Buckingham (2011) argues that to sustain and raise your performance to the next level, you need to keep learning, champion the growth of others, develop theories to manage your practice, refine your storytelling, build your networks and stay in touch with people who have helped you to grow and develop. Similarly, in relation to remaining indispensable or steady, the concept of 'grit' is cited. According to Duckworth et al. (2007), grit can be defined as perseverance and passion for long-term goals.

Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course. (2007:1087-88)

These observations on indispensability, staying steady and grit appear to be consistent with the qualities of high performing change agents in this study. Empirical data indicated that these personal qualities appeared to stem from an accumulation of life experiences that shaped self-belief in their ability to overcome any obstacle or challenge they faced. Their high levels of agency were heavily influenced by their perception of self-identity, belief that they had the resourcefulness and initiative to address both technical and adaptive challenges. Mentoring at an early age recurred in the accounts of the higher performing change agents. A number of the higher performing leaders recalled memories of parents and past managers who had informed them how to overcome adversity and difficulty. To them, innovation in environmentally friendly practices was just another challenge they faced in their life and, as in the past, they would overcome and prevail by being resourceful and solution-focused. It reinforced their belief that they could make a difference in whatever they addressed. Their job not only allowed them to complete their work but it enhanced their self-esteem and confidence.

These individuals also appeared to be more successful in addressing difficult challenges, using a dynamic array of social networks and connections in clarifying areas of confusion or uncertainty. Their success was in large part due to their capacity to keep up to date on the latest thinking. They found the time to research best practices and explore the feasibility of emerging technologies into their business. In undertaking research into environmentally friendly practices they not only discovered vital information but were able to learn and discover compelling justifications and scripts to assist the required change. These findings are consistent with the literature that argues that leaders and change agents in business are well connected and networked (Cross & Parker 2004; Ibarra & Hunter 2007).

The successful change agents were well-organised and excellent project managers, prepared to pitch in when things got tough and difficult. Most of all, they had a plan for the future and enjoyed the challenge. They were not looking for someone to rescue them, or seeking to blame someone else for their struggle or demise. Kevin, a highly experienced facilitator of the Manufacturing cluster, said in his 2007 interview:

*Well you're getting into this sort of leadership area- where someone is proactive and not afraid to challenge the process- they're not afraid to try new things and they will just get on and do it. You know I think it's sort of a leadership trait in a lot of the leadership models.*

The findings on 'taking responsibility for resolving difficult challenges' can be informed by the literature on self-efficacy. Bandura (2008) argues that self-efficacy can be developed by mastery of experiences, social modelling of others, being open to persuasion by others, and finally, being able to harness one's physical and emotional states. People with high self-efficacy are more able to approach difficult challenges or tasks as opportunities. Individuals with low levels of human agency see difficult challenges as potential threats and as a consequence are more likely to have low aspirations and weak commitment to their goals. Herold, Fedor and Calwell (2007) argue that self-efficacy is a 'coping resource' in change and leads to a higher likelihood that an individual will stay committed when facing turbulence or upheaval.

#### **4.6.2 Articulates compelling scripts for change**

The second capability which emerged from the data was that higher performing change agents had a consistent ability to articulate compelling scripts for change. They were able to inspire action by providing clear and unambiguous messages on why commitment was necessary. The influence of scripts on the commitment of others appeared to be highest when individuals had the ability to exert their power and influence on the meaning making of others, through either formal or informal authority. These views are consistent with the assessment of Hope (2010), who argues that organisational change requires a tight coupling between power, politics, sensemaking and sensegiving.

Successful change agents had the capacity to adapt their messages and delivery methods to engage interest among a wide range of different stakeholders. Well chosen scripts, slogans and procedures also helped to organise and structure new ways of thinking (Grant et al. 2004). The scripts appeared to be instrumental in the articulation of associated beliefs, theories and pragmatic advice that drove motivation, enactment and innovation. Successful change agents had the capacity to adapt their messages and delivery methods to engage interest among a wide range of different stakeholders. They were also curious about adapting their storytelling based on the level of interest and engagement in what was being communicated (Humphreys, Ucbasaran & Lockett 2012).

Compelling scripts provided vital clues about what to do to bring about change, also arousing a strong self-belief and inner confidence that change was indeed possible. They also provided a means to stimulate the making of meaning through novelty, problem-solving and linkages between present innovations and past experiences and future aspirations (Bartel & Garud 2009). When this occurred people appeared more willing and able to re-prioritise their time and organise themselves to move forward. Discursive elements embedded within the dynamics of organisational learning (Argyris 1990; Argyris & Schon 1996) and culture (Schein 2010) were critical to these dynamics.

Not unlike a core message in a political or community campaign, a well-formulated and communicated script galvanised personal curiosity and enticed a call to action. To this end people needed assurance and hope that visions for the future were worth working towards and were achievable. In this study, the most frequently observed scripts involved the use of spoken or written words to influence decision-making and levels of commitment. It should be stated that other forms of script delivery discussed by the participants during the research included print media, industry video updates, webcasts and websites to communicate the reasons for and messages of change. Individuals needed a clear personal account that provided a confident and well-organised framework to proceed forward.

The desire for a clear script is driven by the human need to simplify complexity and ambiguity. When this does not exist people could be more likely to experience unpleasant emotions such as anger, fear and sadness, as well as becoming detached and ambivalent. The research strongly indicates that compelling narratives comprising stories and well formulated delivery aided meaning making by providing well constructed and clearly argued reasons for change. The research indicates that when people were confronted with ambiguity they craved order, structure and safety. As Weick suggests, 'words can induce stable connections, establish stable entities to which people can orientate' (2001:49). Labels, or what I call scripts, 'carry their own implications for action, and that is why they are so successful in the management of ambiguity'.

These reflections were particularly relevant in the push towards and away from sustainability where people felt smothered by multiple imagery, conflicting messages and disruption to the status quo. Here a major tension for change agents who are tasked with facilitating change is that ambiguity is the norm, and careful attention is needed to turn discursive exchanges into action. As Czarniawska states, 'It is ambiguity that makes the world go on; perfect information is redundant' (2004:399). In hearing the personal accounts of the more skilled deliverers of scripts it became evident that these individuals had a wide repertoire of linguistic expression and could tailor the messages to their recipients. Scripts for change included the use of economic logic and mathematical reasoning as well as the ability to share compelling stories and

case studies. One of the discursive techniques was the use of analogies to add emphasis to arguments and rationale for change.

Here are examples by Glen and Keith in the use of compelling narratives to justify innovations in environmentally friendly practices. Both these accounts exhibit the persuasive power of language. Glen, a young operations manager, explained the benefits of new environmentally friendly innovations in his recreation and gaming business by saying:

*A couple of things I might say to you is just- ah- so far from the initiatives, we've um, we'll be reducing water usage- which is equivalent to yearly water consumption for 42 houses in the (name of suburb) um- reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> which is the equivalent of taking 100 cars off the road. A diversion of waste from landfill by 92 tonnes per year and a reduction in electricity usage- which is equivalent to 55 houses per year as well. So those sort of figures- when I mention those sort of figures in the staff meetings- that's where it shows that their involvement is creating these figures.*

Keith, the boutique bathroom appliance manufacturer, shared a story of how one of his employees loves searching the Internet for ways to save money by installing more efficient devices and technologies. Keith recalled:

*Yeah he's enthusiastic about it and he loves coming back and saying- look at what I've just worked out. Um, things like waterless urinals. Found all that information on the internet- that's um, 52,000 litres of water a year that we are now saving because we've gone to a waterless urinal system.*

In the context of implementing environmentally friendly practices, the emergence of new language was observed as a phenomenon that evolved over time. Instead of seeing the implementation of environmentally friendly practices as generating purely economic benefits, individuals began to accept that broader benefits could be obtained, such as enhancing image and reputation, while also meeting the moral and ethical challenge of climate change. As scripts were developed and refined they were increasingly used to influence decision makers, customers and other key stakeholders in the production and manufacturing cycle. This observation appeared to be particularly true in the higher performing cases.

### **4.6.3 Ensures accountability over time**

The final capability of a high performing change agent centred on the ability to access and nurture power relationships to generate personal accountability for change. Again these observations are consistent with the view that change involves a process of meaning making and clear understandings of the nature of power and resistance (Thomas & Hardy 2011; Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011). The research importantly showed that successful change agents used a combination of compliance and engagement in the systems, protocols and expectations associated with change. As a result, they created the impression that commitment over time was less personally driven and more strategic in nature. Here again, compliance and engagement for personal accountability were guided by compelling scripts that aroused supportive conversations, sustained responsibility and commitment over time.

These findings are supported by alternative studies of emergent environmental leaders (champions) in a variety of environmental contexts (Taylor 2009a, 2009b, 2010). In Taylor's studies it was found that high levels of personal power helped distinguish champions from lower level performers. Champions were more likely to exhibit abilities in 'articulating and inspiring vision', 'questioning the status quo', 'gathering political and managerial support', 'expressing enthusiasm and confidence,' and 'persisting under adversity'. Taylor observed diversity in the way champions exhibited themselves, ranging from those who were more 'extroverted and a higher potential for risks', to those who were more 'collaborative, consultative, emotionally stable and persistent' (2010:89). Again these findings are consistent with the change agents observed within this research, but it should be stressed that what made successful change agents particularly potent was the ability to adapt their style to the context faced. As a consequence the leadership demonstrated could vary over time between the two extremes of style observed by Taylor.

Comparisons between individuals indicated that higher commitment in organisations was normally associated with more prolonged and consistent action. The higher performing cases had an increased incidence of functional collaboration, not only within their business but externally within the community, government agencies,

industry associations and the supply chain. Active involvement of key decision makers in steering committees and cross-functional teams in championing reforms was also highly evident. This included senior management leadership in steering committees, participation in staff education, engagement and work redesign programs, and the incorporation of objectives in business planning processes.

Participants who appeared best at securing lasting change were able to access and activate institutional and personal power. Change agents were not timid creatures but were willing and able to call people to account. This included establishing protocols for accountability and for tracking progress over time. They used a combination of compliance measures such as key performance indicators that held people to account for their actions, as well as engagement processes that inspired and rewarded contribution. As the senior engineer within heavy metals manufacturing plant said:

*...if there are any non-performers they are pointed out and brought to the attention of the supervisor, so that whoever is responsible for mixing up the waste- he has been told not to do. So that way, it is working well.*

These mechanisms provided impetus and institutional power in shifting workplace attitudes and behaviours as well as reducing the levels of powerlessness and isolation associated with being unsupported and unconnected. These empirical observations appear to be supported by Roome and Wigen in a study of stakeholder power and organisational learning. They state:

Certainly, we observed that the power (or influence) to fulfil roles crucial to learning is important but that power can come from many sources: personal skills, knowledge and networks, formal authority and operational capacity. (2005:257-258)

The analysis also provides vital clues about how change agents managed the opposing demands of generating change. On the one hand, change agents needed to be able to wield sufficient clout and formal power to oblige people to comply with and obey important rules, norms and rituals. On the other hand they could also encourage and stimulate engagement by providing people with the freedom to express themselves without fear of retribution. Maintaining a balance between wielding clout and stimulating engagement is a fragile and subtle skill, as expressed by Keith and Carol.

As Keith, the operations manager at the boutique bathroom appliance manufacture, candidly said:

*I think you can manage people without being an arsehole and yelling at them all day and a better bloke, a nicer way of encouraging them.*

Alternatively, Carol, the facilitator of the Regional cluster, said:

*I guess, companies and key people see straight through you if you try to get up on your high horse or order them around or have ulterior motives; they see straight through it.*

In completing this discussion of the final capability of successful change it is imperative to understand that the three capabilities were perceived as highly interdependent. The intention was to highlight those capabilities that presented more often in higher performing change agents than in those people who appeared to be struggling to gain the momentum for lasting and worthwhile changes in environmentally friendly practices. It is suggested that these three capabilities could be worthy of further reflection. Could the capabilities of taking responsibility for resolving difficulties, articulating compelling scripts for change and ensuring accountability over time be considered in contexts other than those pertaining to ecological sustainability?

#### ***4.7 Chapter conclusion***

This chapter has analysed many of the external complexities that individuals faced and brought to the context of ecological sustainability. The analysis within this chapter provides an important contribution to the field of organisation studies by highlighting the twists and turns, ebbs and flows of commitment within an unpredictable and emerging phenomenon. This thesis provides an empirical context illustrating why commitment fluctuates and also provides commentary as to what leaders, managers and educators can do to support change over time. These issues were contained within the broader challenges of how businesses and society could become more sustainable. The analysis also provided linkages between individual

responsibility, accountability and self-efficacy and processes of meaning making associated with power and resistance.

It became clear in this study that commitment over time is not a deterministic phenomenon, and therein lies a major contribution of this study. Individuals had unique relationships to complexity and uncertainty and, depending on the pressures and challenges they faced, a variety of social constructions of commitment could be experienced over time. The analysis strongly indicated that commitment varies over time in relationship to how each individual socially constructs and responds to what is being experienced. In the examination of the push towards and away from sustainability, it was evident that many tensions and contradictions made the challenge of sustainability demanding to implement.

Observations also provided a vivid picture of why individuals struggled to maintain their commitment to ecological sustainability within a complex array of business pressures and political forces which existed not just within organisations but in society overall. Discussions also advanced the current literature by providing an empirical context in which individual commitment was exhibited over time. The Australian context of this study meant that individuals were influenced by global conversations on climate change and the local impacts of water shortages and increased electricity prices, and were enthusiastic about becoming socially and environmentally responsible. The tensions generated a multitude of individual responses, including the desire to reduce water and energy use and to minimise waste. The initiatives increased confidence that individuals and their businesses could not only save costs but also benefit from being perceived as ethically and morally responsible. It was evident from these examinations how commitment over time to one issue such as ecological sustainability is surrounded in complexity and conflicting interests.

Empirical data demonstrated that personal commitment was heavily influenced by the intricacies of power, by business pressures, and by the ways that individuals made sense of complexity. Commitment over time ranged from whimsical and fickle responses to moments of stability. Implementation within ecological sustainability was particularly challenging because it was surrounded by ambiguity and confusion.

Commitments were commonly based on incomplete and emergent understandings and personal motives and motivation. Three capabilities were seen to differentiate high and low performing change agents: taking responsibility for resolving difficult challenges, articulating compelling narratives and ensuring accountability over time. This empirical analysis of capabilities has provided a deeper examination of the leadership required to facilitate change within unpredictability, uncertainty and emergence. Next, the second analytical chapter examines the inner workings of individual commitment over time by exploring how personal organising and self-identity influence the way people relate and respond to change.

## CHAPTER 5 – THE NATURE OF COMMITMENT

In this chapter, attention shifts to how individuals make sense of their own commitment, by exploring how their organising frameworks and self-identity influence responses to change. The research presents a deeper knowledge of the individual processes, frameworks and structures that shape and influence plausibility and enactment over time. The analysis investigates how individuals make meaning within in their own commitments and fluctuations in plausibility due to changes in relationships, workload and job latitude. Cases are drawn from a number of individuals to assist understanding and should be of interest to scholars and practitioners regarding issues pertaining not only to implementing environmentally friendly practices but to how individuals undergo transition and change. In the management and organisation literature, various writers have made assumptions about these exchanges (Foreman & Whetten 2002; Gautam, Dick & Wagner 2004; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005) but none of these understandings have been explored within an empirical context of individual commitment over time.

As revealed in the last chapter, among the influences on social construction and in turn commitment are the various meanings associated with external complexities. The analysis in this chapter now shifts focus to the personal processes related to cognitive and emotional reasoning, which also appear to shape commitment. Despite this intention, separating external and internal influences of commitment is somewhat problematic, as the research indicates that both are intimately interconnected. However, to better understand the nature of commitment it is useful to contemplate what arises from these two areas separately.

A notable focus of interest in this chapter is the exploration of how self-identity is constituted and how it may influence social construction and the manifestation of commitment. These discoveries are consistent with literature on identity, containing examination of fragmented (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas 2008) and alternative selves (Ibarra & Petriglieri 2010). As Tracy (2002) declares, identity is a term rich in meaning; depending on one's perspective identity can be viewed as stable and fixed or as subject to fragmentation and flux. This study presents data that supports the view that individuals have the capacity to experience both dimensions of selfhood. In

this chapter, specific theorising occurs as to the co-existence of ‘stable’ and ‘becoming’ selves, which appear to be catalysts for social construction and change over time. Adding to the complexities of understanding is that individuals appear to make plausible assessments based on what is deemed possible at a fixed moment in time.

For some participants, determining plausibility was a conscious and deliberate act, whereas for others it arose from no apparent logic and appeared to stem from a ‘gut feeling’. Depending on each individual’s commitment, identity fluctuated between inertia and resistance, to being a passionate advocate and champion of change. All these dynamics appeared idiosyncratic to each participant. Depending on their make-up and history, individuals’ choice making and commitments would vary significantly. The data suggests that individuals interpreted meaning from a variety of sources when determining what latitudes existed for them to execute their duties and functions while also trying to gauge what was changing around them. Personal accounts suggest that individual commitment was heavily influenced by how one was perceived to be performing and contributing in an area of interest in comparison to others.

This research presents the view that the tensions and questioning of ‘self’ are recognised in the literature (Alvesson 2010; Beech 2010; Reissner 2010) and occur where individual identity undergoes a constant process of change over time. This study suggests that both ‘stable’ and ‘becoming’ selves co-existed in the quest for meaning over time. The stable self is more protective of the status quo, whereas the becoming self is more receptive to experiment and to engaging in the possibility of the evolving self (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). The data also demonstrates that individuals make meaning by observing, comparing and imitating others as a way of organising oneself. These views appear to be supported by Gergen, who discussed the notion of the ‘relational being’, where people can change from situation to situation depending on the relationships they encounter.

For the relational being there is no inside versus outside; there is only embodied action with others. (2009b:138)

Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) also argue that these relational processes are heavily informed by exchanges of power and resistance. In this study when commitment was observed over a longer period of time it fluctuated between instances of relative stability and instability. The research suggests that people often struggled to make choices within the ongoing confusion and ambiguity, readily apparent in the observations of individual commitment with the context of ecological sustainability. Specifically, for some individuals their commitment remained unchanged, but for others there were substantial shifts in their beliefs, opinions and actions.

The study also points to the view that some individuals are more reflexive and as a result more aware of the influences that might sway their resistance and receptivity to new commitments. For others this potential remains largely hidden and unexplored. To make a commitment at any point of time requires many considerations before choosing what action to take.

### ***5.1 Vignette - Janet's journey of green commitment***

To provide an overview of what informs individual commitment, a vignette of *Janet's journey of green commitment* presents some understandings of how meaning making unfolded over time, as well as painting a picture of a complex and multi-factorial phenomenon in action. Meanings associated with Janet's past, together with her perception of what was currently happening, provide data indicating how her social construction influenced the nature of her commitment to ecological sustainability. The vignette also provides insights as to the nature of her commitment more generally. Janet's stories of family upbringing and her recent role in an industry association provide some evidence that individual commitment can be informed by a variety of sources and inspirations in life. It is evident that the nature of Janet's commitment could also be due in part to her professional role, social status, gender, and use of authority. Together these events and moments provide some partial justification for her high level of engagement and support for environmentally friendly practices.

*Janet is a senior manager for a state-based industry association responsible for the recreational and gaming industry. The industry association provides important advice*

*for its members on business challenges as well as providing public relations and lobbying for the industry with government and other important stakeholders. Many businesses in this industry have chosen to be members of this association. Janet was acknowledged both by the Department of Environment project officer and members of the Recreational and Gaming cluster as a vital change agent in improving the level of environmentally friendly practices within her industry. Interviews with Janet revealed someone who approached her challenges with zeal and optimism and was very confident in her belief that by employing the right strategies she could facilitate the desired change. She also wielded significant formal authority and power in her industry.*

*Janet's interest in environmentally friendly practices had been present for much of her life and was not just symbolised by her recent work responsibilities. When I first met with her she shared with great pride her story of growing up as the eldest of five siblings. Saving money and reducing waste were learned at an early age and became second nature to her. As a parent she had been keen to emulate this behaviour with her own family. When she decided to renovate her house, Janet gained the support of her family for introducing waste recycling and water saving devices. As Janet said:*

*I mean I'm pretty green. I haven't been doing this in the last 5 minutes; it's sort of been second nature to me for a while.*

*I remember vividly how Janet recalled with delight how her own daughters were keen supporters of environmentally friendly practices. As Janet understood:*

*I see my own daughters, you know, living this stuff out and caring about where they put their rubbish and caring about you know what they do with a whole range of different things and recycle and little things like running garage sales and reselling stuff and making a buck and seeing it used by someone else- and just stuff like that, which might seem really you know so mundane- but that's how you change behaviour - and that's what I'd like to see (recreational and gaming businesses) do more of in terms of their impact with their wider communities.*

*Having experienced changes in her own children's attitudes at home Janet was equally confident that behaviours at work could also change. She was an advocate for driving reform in environmentally friendly practices in the state-based recreational and gaming industry. Starting with her personal participation in and facilitation of*

*the Recreational and Gaming cluster, her actions have led to a number of initiatives. These included organising and holding industry conferences where issues of environmental responsibility and sustainability were discussed, as well as publishing information on best practices in green businesses. In 2008 the peak organisation in which Janet was employed as member services and marketing manager established a new category of industry award for outstanding achievement in environmental performance. Towards the end of this study, Janet worked closely with the Department of Environment to establish a new cluster-based arrangement that superseded the cluster that took part in this research.*

*Janet's personal connection to environmental practices was matched by a strong loyalty to her industry and the thousands of businesses it contained. In both the meetings with Janet she took every opportunity to sing the praises of her industry and how it benefited and serviced the community. In our discussions she was quick to dismiss any perception that her industry was interested only in gaming and poker machine revenue. It appeared to me that her professional status was a powerful force in how she operated in her role. It gave her opportunities to leverage compelling narratives within the institutional framework of her highly respected association. She felt strongly that her industry could contribute significantly to reducing its ecological footprint. This was reinforced by her other roles such as eldest child in her family and being a mother. Janet's multiple identities helped build an individual who was prepared to back initiatives such as those pertaining to environmentally friendly practices or anything else that helped in the sustainability of her industry.*

As in the case of *Janet*, other individuals in this study shared accounts of what influenced their commitment. Although each story was unique there was some uniformity in what promoted and sustained pro-environmental behaviours. Consistent with the literature in environmental psychology (Davis, Le & Coy 2011; Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2010) and organisation and management studies (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Obodaru 2012), life experiences appeared to be a significant influence on the motivation and nature of commitment.

Like Janet, other individuals indicated the past experiences including upbringing were vitally important. Examples included responding to family situations where there was

a need to team together to save money and reduce waste. Individuals also spoke deeply about the values they had learned as children and how they had been mentored to be caring and respectful of the environment. Many individuals had been involved in political and community campaigns on environmental issues; others were involved in sustainable practices at home. These other experiences appeared to complement their interest in ecological sustainability. For others, the actions and commitment to environmentally friendly practices were more reflective of the obligations of their current role and business priorities rather than any personal desire to be an advocate for pro-environment behaviours.

Consistent across all individuals was the realisation that job role must authorise and legitimise action. Like Janet, people were more prepared to make commitments when they were rewarded and recognised for their efforts. This was also evident in the case of Brent in the previous chapter, where he had clear responsibility for environmental issues in his business. Commitment to a desired target was also assisted by the close relationship between professional identity and self-identity. When individuals talked about fulfilling their professional status, it provided a stronger rationale and motivation to facilitate change. However, having a clear job role and displaying positive aspirations did not always translate into a predictable path of supportive commitment. As this study constantly reinforces, the nature of commitment is far too complex for that deterministic outcome to be assumed.

To deepen these explorations further, the remainder of the chapter focuses on the aspects that appeared to be influential in shaping the nature of commitment. The first is how organising frameworks can be a powerful catalyst for commitment. These initial discussions then lead and inform observations and analysis of stable and becoming selves, commitment over time, social construction of stakeholder relationships, plausibility and self-identity. The investigations together provide a better understanding of how commitment over time exhibits itself.

## ***5.2 Establishing a helpful organising framework***

This study strongly supports the view that people use an array of personal organising frameworks to shape their commitment over time. Organising frameworks can act as a conduit between sensemaking and sensegiving, as well as providing a means to assist reasoning and reflexivity about what is required. These observations are consistent with the sensemaking literature (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005) in which organising is seen as an integral part of making meaning, particularly when faced with disruptive situations where there has been an interruption to the flow of action they are undertaking or contemplating. My empirical findings are also comparable with statements of theorists (Czarniawska 2008; Luscher & Lewis 2008; Snowden 2005; Weick 2008) who assert that people crave order, control and comfort in their lives and do not enjoy ambiguity and unresolvable paradoxes. People faced with such uncertainties become anxious until they can find a method or approach to help them take plausible action and consider new choices.

This research suggests that people take opportunities to dismantle and build new organising frameworks to assist their understanding and make progress on what they are confronting. To be successful in bringing about change individuals needed to learn and unlearn frameworks that generated opportunities for them to embed new structures, procedures or scripts into their thinking and provided motivation and inspiration for change. Conversely, without helpful organising frameworks, people struggled to implement change and to keep track of their commitments. As outlined in the previous chapter, the development and articulation of scripts is helpful in enabling individuals to organise their thinking for commitment by providing the motivation and logic for change.

Here lies the complexity of this study: it is very hard to predict what a person will or will not do next. Personal organising does not guarantee that a person will carry out a prescribed action; the person may in fact decide not to support or agree to action in the area of interest. Part of the explanation for these complexities is that personal organising can originate from many sources including social context, readings associated with identity, retrospective recall of past experiences and data, extraction of salient clues, relationship to on-going projects, determinations of plausible actions

and accounts (Weick 2001). What people do or do not do is largely determined by their social construction of changing roles and relationships in their life (Colville, Brown & Pye 2012; Luscher & Lewis 2008), which in turn leads to the generation of multiple and highly personalised frameworks that are created and dismantled over time to best meet the challenges they face. This study also strongly claims that the inspirations for organising can come from sources that have nothing to do with the occupation of people's employment within organisations. These views are expanded in Chapter Six, where sensegiving in cluster-based arrangements is examined in more detail.

All these avenues of organising can inform new subjectivities that can include an infinite number of beliefs, espoused theories and pragmatic suggestions which together provide the rationale, justification and cognition for addressing emerging challenges. It is apparent that individuals appear to maintain organising frameworks until there is a realisation that their existing ways of coping are no longer useful, helpful or plausible. It is then that new organising frameworks are explored. What appears to spark these realisations is a jolt of surprise or an increased awareness of harm or embarrassment from not taking a new course of action. It is argued that personal organising helps people to make meaning (antecedent), but if their social construction deems so, processes of learning and meaning will be deployed to help generate different frameworks or organising structures to adapt to what is emerging. These actions may lead to a change in the nature of commitment.

To sustain commitment, participants needed clarity on the way forward as well as a structure, method or script to express their commitment. To achieve this outcome each individual needed to be reflexive and accepting enough to remain open to new possibilities when faced with views that could disturb or question existing norms, beliefs and thinking. Possessing static views meant that it was less likely that individuals were prepared to question and explore new scripts for change. When individuals were faced with ambiguity and uncertainty there was increased venting of sadness, anger or ambivalence.

Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfield suggest that individuals in organisations pull together organising frameworks from a variety of areas including 'institutional constraints,

organizational premises, plans, expectations, acceptable justifications and traditions inherited from predecessors' (2005:409). A well-formulated organising framework can also act as a boundary object that assists collaboration, discourse and inquiry by providing sufficient detail to help individuals to build meaning and shared understanding. Benn and Martin (2010:399) define boundary objects in the context of sustainability:

Boundary objects are “artifacts, documents, terms, concepts and other forms of reification around which communities of practice can organize their interconnections” (Wenger 1998:105). They can be artifacts in the form of made things, such as tools or visual representations, or discourses, terms, concepts, processes, or technologies (Star & Griesemer 1989; Wenger 2000).

Organising frameworks for the individuals taking part in this research ranged from diagnostic tools that monitored and tracked current environmental tools, the observation of current management practices and case studies or the introduction of new systems and technologies. What appeared to assist the process of meaning making was the dismantling and reforming of personal organising driven by fresh opportunities to question existing ways of thinking. Examples observed in on-site visits included the deployment of energy efficient appliances such as air conditioners, lighting, and the use of computer software that enabled close surveillance of cleaner production and resource efficiency. When correctly installed, these applications helped to re-organise individual thinking and routine to support improved environmental awareness. The study also suggests that once participants learned and applied a supportive organising framework for change, it was easier and more convenient for them to commit to activities. Central to changes in commitment is the realisation that individuals are personally accountable for change and there are avenues to measure change and justify one's existence over time. Diagnosis and measurement and having a coherent plan, combined with an easy-to-understand framework, assist people to be somewhat in control. These views indicate the linkage between personalised accountability with easy-to-follow organising frameworks:

*I think what it needs to be when it's rolled out to other companies is it needs to be a pretty much a step by step practical, fast, quick, simple. Small tasks to sort of- to achieve a big goal. And um yeah just keep it really practical and really simple.*

*the key successes and people are very surprised at- that the [BUSINESS] could save money simply by changing its light bulbs and recover the costs of that within months and then save money year after year from doing that.*

*Yep that structure behind it- to keep you on track.... Ok there's a couple of things. One is- it was a structured format- so we were basically forced to meet deadlines- and we were like anyone else- we knew there was a meeting coming up next week so we would rush around to the last minute but we would do it. It forces us to do things.*

It was also apparent that language (Ricketts & Galloway Seiling 2003) was a powerful means to communicate both individual and collective sensemaking (Choo 1998). Analysis in this study suggests that when participants were facing new situations they needed new and compelling scripts to reconfigure sensemaking with new organising frameworks. People appeared to have a natural preference to continue with existing sensemaking until they received sufficient evidence or inspiration to take new action. As discussed, these experiences were often accompanied by jolts of surprise and shame. Personal resistance to new commitments may be centred on the premise of protecting continuance (Meyer & Allen 1991) unless there is a compelling reason or moral obligation to do otherwise. In making these observations it is asserted that these findings are highly consistent with the reflections on higher performing change agents and the power of self-interest in making commitments to environmental friendly practices (Bamberg & Moser 2007).

Weick (2001) considers that emotions are an effect of events, not the reverse. The data in this study would suggest that the alternative perspective has merit. In making these assertions it is imperative to accept that surprise and shame do not occur in isolation but are connected either sequentially or simultaneously with other emotions such as sadness, anger, fear and joy (Brown 2006; Ekman 2003; Russell & Griffiths 2008). When shame and surprise displayed within the analysis it appeared to awaken a person from possible ambivalence or addictive behaviour. As Miller and Rollnick suggest:

Motivation is a state of readiness or eagerness to change, which may fluctuate from one time or situation to another. This state can be influenced. (1991:14)

As well as providing an avenue to examine personal sensemaking, the production and use of an organising framework also provides but a means to make comparisons. Sensemaking was also derived from comparisons between similar and dissimilar qualities and attributes. This study demonstrates that learning could help individuals to socially construct how they performed in relation to others. As Gergen argues, comparison is a fundamental process of social construction. He states:

When any cluster of people- great or small- becomes bonded, there is a simultaneous creation of an outsider. To sustain the specialness of “our group” those outside will necessarily be ‘less than great’ or ‘second rate’. (2009b:318)

Given the thoughts on the dynamics of comparison, this study presented data suggesting that the need for comparison can include both the desire to be the best as well as addressing fears and risks of being substandard. Apart from business profitability, one of the main drivers for comparison was the desire to avoid risk and to enhance reputation and image. An innate desire for acceptance, recognition and control fuelled a passion for comparison between self and others (Nicholson 1998; O’Keeffe 2011). Interpretations and assessments can often be generated if people feel surprised, ashamed or embarrassed by what they are observing. The need to be accepted was a recurring message within these inter-relationships. This led to a wide range of behavioural responses among participants, including reassurance that they were performing well; or it fuelled a sudden realisation that change was required, particularly if they felt they were falling behind or losing respect, competitiveness or reputation in comparison to others. Closely associated with these observations are those processes used by individuals to socially construct what was unfolding in their world, and this means in part ‘making sense’ of nature and the existence of stakeholder relationships.

### ***5.3 Social construction of stakeholders relationships***

Participants frequently examined plausibility based on their interpretation of how others were perceived. This involved making determinations regarding the social construction of stakeholder relationships. Data again indicates that people needed a personal organising framework of what was unfolding among key relationships for them to contribute constructively in their work as well as providing a means to make

sense of might be emerging. The data supported a view that the stakeholder literature could be enhanced by exploring the peculiarities of individual social construction (Laplume & Sonpar 2008), in particular, how an individual's interpretations of relationships leads to new insights or commitments.

In these examinations, sensemaking was highly variable and subject to change, and even participants who were heavily influenced by the desire to maintain the status quo would update their interpretations of others on a regular basis. In the context of sustainability this was viewed as a sensemaking process associated with stakeholder relationships. Sharma (2005:1) points out that in making sense of sustainability, 'understanding requires an integration of perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders'. When constructive relationships are built, individuals can experience healthy levels of goodwill and exchange of information. Yet this study demonstrates that there is no guarantee that benefits will always outweigh the risks; even when strong bonds are built there is potential for stakeholders to become insular and isolated in their thinking as they respond to issues pertaining to power and resistance within the relationships (Edelman et al. 2004; Spicer & Bohm 2007).

Depending on the updated interpretation and judgements of these relationships and the reflexivity of the individual, there may be changes to the nature of commitment. These changes may lead to some re-prioritisation of levels of engagement and compliance. Research indicates that commitment can be influenced by observations well beyond the frontiers of an individual's immediate organisational relationship. If an industry was facing a compelling business or societal issue it is quite likely that individuals would be considering these challenges within their decision-making. These considerations assist understanding not only of commitment but also of plausibility. Investigation strongly suggests that individuals make plausible choices based on their reading of the needs and priorities of external stakeholders, and this often involves a complex examination of these relationships.

As highlighted at various points, one of the contributions of this thesis is that it has increased understanding of the range and diversity of meaningful relationships that influence social construction over time (Bjorkeng & Clegg 2009; Gergen 2009b; Hatch & Schultz 2004; Laplume & Sonpar 2008; Santana 2012) and in turn the nature

of commitment. Participants interpreted their own unique combination of professional networks, social ties and power relationships to facilitate their understanding of the situations and scenarios that were unfolding. Sources of understanding could include colleagues, friends, industry groups and community representatives. Entities such as clusters, partnerships and alliances could also be included for consideration. Media bulletins, research publications and social networks generated by the Internet also influenced personal sensemaking.

These considerations were also contingent on how participants socially constructed the dynamics and characteristics of their arrangements. If an individual could build credibility and trust within relationships there was an increased likelihood that they would achieve expanded levels of job permission and freedom to execute new ideas. Janet, for instance, was influenced by her acknowledgment of the increased enthusiasm and political acceptance of her stakeholders about this challenge, and as a consequence became more confident about the level of commitment to environmentally friendly practices in her industry over a 12-month period.

The participants who most regularly communicated views about industry identity were members of the Recreational and Gaming cluster. These individuals could connect to a shared history of common challenges involving collaboration and exchange of knowledge. There seemed to be an acceptance that business survival was in part due to the level of networking and cooperation in the industry. They were able to talk about occasions when their industry had needed to mobilise energy and collective goodwill to argue for or against government legislation or initiatives. On reflection, what was particularly helpful in this industry was the existence of a strong and vocal professional association that worked hard to maintain good lines of communication involving member education and advocacy. The following are examples of sensemaking pertaining to industry identity within the Recreational and Gaming cluster. Grant, a senior manager in a rural recreation and gaming business, stated:

*You know like industry contacts is a huge plus- because if you've got a problem you know who to ring up- and it's very important in the club industry.*

In a similar vein Frank, another manager in the same cluster, said:

*(businesses) have always sort of worked well together even though we are competitors we do share lots of – we've got lots of common interests – we tend to get together on common goals- fighting, you know the gaming taxes, the smoking bans.*

The data also suggests that an absence of understanding of organisational identity and culture led to greater levels of uncertainty and anxiety. There was also evidence that the ability to make sense and articulate a view on organisational and industry identity greatly assisted participants in determining the boundaries of what was possible or acceptable within their job. Commonly expressed views that stimulated interest in innovation in ecological sustainability included the importance of maintaining long-term viability, cost effectiveness, compliance with government legislation, and being smarter and more competitive. All these views point to the conclusion that that commitment over time was heavily influenced by how each individual made sense and responded to the culture embedded within stakeholder relationships.

Observations of confusion and ambiguity were reflected in personal accounts about the Department of Environment. Many participants appeared to be struggling to reach clarity about the role of the department. It should be highlighted that the lack of clarity was influenced by a number of restructures of the department. Some saw the department as a regulator or enforcer of regulations, whereas others recognised and accepted that some parts of the organisation had become educators, and several participants acknowledged that these different roles co-existed. John, a project officer for the Manufacturing cluster from the Department of Environment, explained the ongoing struggle in building trust and co-operation within industry in the area of improving environmental performance and compliance:

*It's a difficult path to tread because as well as that, you've got to deal with the expectations of the community and sometimes they think, we are a regulator and our job is to go there and crack heads, and it isn't that, you know? It's yeah- it's a difficult path to tread but I guess I've been doing it a long time.*

As a result of these determinations it is theorised that participants developed plausible accounts about what they felt might be disappearing, remaining and/or emerging in

their world. Depending on their social construction, participants made judgements based on what was observed or learned at a particular time. Yet moments later they might come to a different realisation or a change of perspective. Heightened awareness of the changes and transitions in the nature of stakeholder relationships increased the opportunity to adapt to the constitution and thinking of alliances and factions, and the nature of power within these exchanges.

#### ***5.4 Discourses of stable and becoming selves***

Personal accounts presented data supporting the view that individuals juggle and make sense by trying to reconcile their various tensions in order to determine what is achievable and possible. The identity literature has become more accepting of individuals as ‘becoming’ rather than the ‘being’ and, in so doing, likely to ‘recognize a fundamental reorientation in theorizing where there is greater acceptance of flux over time’ (Alvesson, Ashcraft & Thomas 2008; Beech 2010; Harding 2007; Simpson & Carroll 2008). These viewpoints have increased the embracing of the ‘possibilities of emergence, plurality, discontinuity, polyphony and the social embeddedness of identity processes’ (Simpson & Carroll 2008:31). These views on ‘becoming’ are much different from the determinism and stability of a functionalist view. These theoretical contributions helped inform the analysis and understanding of commitment over time.

To help capture discourses of stable and becoming selves being discursively produced, we return to Janet and capture some of her accounts on her commitment to environmentally friendly practices over time. Her accounts at the beginning of this research study reflect a long-held view that commitment to environmentally friendly practice was a moral obligation. Twelve months latter her level of enthusiasm had increased in response to greater industry acceptance of these initiatives. Janet’s accounts in 2007:

*I haven’t been doing it in the last 5 minutes, it’s sort of second nature to me for a while.*

*I suppose having lived through personal examples and what have you- but you save a buck and you feel good about it and you think you are just doing a small part to reduce the footprint and um, then.*

*I've personally enjoyed and have gained I guess another reason to talk with and communicate with our own membership and it's important for me in my capacity as an executive manager here.*

Janet's accounts in 2008:

*So you are doing it at an interesting time aren't you? Because just in the last, since we spoke, the whole topic about caring for the environment and people taking personal responsibility- I mean you know it's a bit of a fad at the moment and what have you- but in the last 12 months it's just so mainstream and it's really hit people at a personal level. You know and I think that business can't ignore that fact. They are being pushed by the consumer very very much. And that's increased substantially since we spoke last year, hasn't it?*

*Um, well I've, the thing that surprised me most was I guess to get um, 155-60 delegates at our eco clubs conference- I was very confident we could get more than 100, but what did surprise me was the number that came from rural NSW into the city.*

*And so it's incumbent on us as an organisation to look for every opportunity and angle to ensure that clubs succeed in what they do.*

Janet's accounts and my observation of her in interviews indicated some interesting changes in her commitment over time. These changes were in part in a response to different interpretations based on new and unfolding phenomena. Although it appeared that Janet had not shifted her stable and long-lasting commitment to environmentally friendly practices (Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2010) she had increased her belief that real change could occur in her industry. Janet's becoming self appeared to be fuelled by evidence of successful implementation in her industry and her surprise at the level of enthusiasm of others to these initiatives. Janet highlighted a strong personal attachment to her organisation. These findings are consistent with literature on organisational identification (Gautam, Dick & Wagner 2004; Ravasi & Van Rekom 2003). Her organisation had become more supportive of such initiatives over a 12-month period, while also Janet had seen the political opportunity to gain recognition for her efforts. Empirical observations in the case of Janet are consistent with the concept of emergent qualities of identity (Pullen 2008) and how social construction responds in relationship to others (Gergen 2009b). Pullen, Beech and Sims (2007) also highlight the emergence and leverage that can be associated with these dynamics of fragmentation. Janet's story also reinforces that making of meaning

operates within a political and social context and that meaning making is heavily influenced by perceptions and actions pertaining to power (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006). Janet's discursive elements also offer glimpses of retrospective, here and now and prospective elements (Boje 2008).

I argue that the data from Janet is consistent with a person who has increased her level of commitment towards ecological sustainability during the time of this study. Her statements also suggest that fragments of both stability and becoming have had some influence on her meaning making for some time before the study was undertaken. As represented in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter, Janet's values appear to have been heavily influenced by her upbringing as well as by her response to what emerged. Each of these factors led to an act of commitment that involved the protection of her 'stable self' reflected by her ongoing dedication to environmental stewardship. Equally, she was willing to experiment with innovations that steered her into new directions which she might not have considered in the past. The 'becoming self' appeared to be driven by her openness to experiment with new frontiers of personal exploration. As a result this created the possibility for her to become and evolve, with a new and expanded form of self-identity.

Again, Janet's was not an isolated case; others in the study presented data that indicated changes in their commitment. Among the other individuals in the study there were many expressions of self-identity and the possible existence of stability and becoming within the 12-month period of focused attention of this research. Here are accounts from other individuals in this study, which also indicate the possible existence of stability and becoming.

*Tony - Facilities manager in recreation and gaming business, indicating a transition from self-interest to being socially motivated (first interview)*

*Yeah. Well when you're a teenager I don't think you think of anything other than yourself, so um you know that would've been the case- probably yeah in the last 10 years I've been thinking a little bit more about it- certainly in the last 4 years it's been a focus so*

*Simon - Project manager for the Regional based cluster discussing his coping with the frustrations in his job and how professional identity has shaped his self-identity (second interview)*

*at the worst case I'm a public servant and you just live with what's being thrown at you*

*Zandy – Production operator responsible for environmental improvements in a manufacturing plant, expressing some understandings of her need to learn new skills in her job (first and only interview)*

*Oh no- I've always done an area of environmental and safety and quality assurance in my previous company. And um, my role on this side- when I started with this company I started as a safety manager- from then on I went onto compliance system manager which then looks at all the compliance issues in our area- on our site with regards to safety environmental and and um, OHS and quality assurance. And then obviously the environment side was a bit lacking behind compared to our other area and that's where now I came into that particular role just to solely deal with the environment side and try and bring the environmental up to the same level as the others*

This research provides some weight to the argument that individuals can see the world from either one or both of these ontologies. However, it is theorised that 'stable' and 'becoming' selves co-exist within the processes of individual social construction which influences how commitment displays over time. Depending on the situation and the nature of these iterative exchanges, emotional and cognitive reactions can be spawned leading to an array of stable and becoming discourses. The consequence of these exchanges is the generation of tensions, insecurities and vulnerabilities (Beck, Bonss & Lau 2003; Collinson 2003) which are highly represented within the complex and ephemeral world of sustainability.

As a consequence of these iterative exchanges individuals are constantly forming and dismantling internal organising systems to make sense of their world at a point of time. Yet depending on their social construction it is quite feasible that a totally different rationalisation or impulsive reaction could be generated. As well as making sense through the filters of stability and becoming, individuals look for plausible avenues for securing legitimacy and power over time (Galinsky, Rus & Lammers

2011; Myllykangas, Kujala & Lehtimäki 2010; Roome & Wijen 2005; Thomas & Pullen 2002). It is argued that these tensions have a dramatic influence on the nature of commitment and plausibility.

### ***5.5 Plausibility and job latitude***

As outlined in Chapter One, an element of the meaning making process associated with commitment is that of plausibility. Here individuals consider what is possible and not possible given their current levels of commitment and their social construction of the pressures, demands and constraints they face. Analysis of the empirical data indicated that participants made plausible choices based on what was best required at any point of time, involving 'best guesses' of known, knowable and unknown scenarios as well as events, episodes and fragments of multiple experiences. To do this they need to make sense of that what was possible and what freedom and authority existed in their job. These thoughts suggest that one's job role acts a boundary object to assist individuals make sense of what is deemed plausible in the contexts they face (Simpson & Carroll 2008). In the study, most participants appeared to rationalise and justify plausibility based on these considerations.

It is clear from the research that how participants made sense of their plausibility and job latitude was fundamentally important in how their commitment over time was demonstrated. These examinations also helped to explore the relationship between plausibility and sensemaking, which is currently under-theorised in the management and organisation literature (Mills & Helms Mills 2004; Weick 2006, 2008). As discussed in the literature review, the traditional view is (Weick 2008) that social construction arises from a sensemaking process of retrospective glancing (Schutz 1967). However, the research also supports the contention that personal accounts of social construction can also come from 'here and now' and the 'prospective' elements (Boje 2008). In making these observations it is important to acknowledge that plausibility, by its very nature, is highly subjective and interpretive. Participants' perceptions of their job role and profile provided an important means for them to express their motivation and their personal and professional identity. The research also suggests that the study of commitment cannot be completed unless one examines

plausibility as a foundational component of the phenomena, events and experiences that inform their levels of engagement and resistance.

Some participants appeared to be operating within job profiles that clearly supported the implementation of environmentally friendly practices, and they felt they been given the authority to act. For others the opposite seemed to be true, and in these cases participants regularly exhibited frustration as well as lack of clarity about their job role. A common complaint was that they had neither the time nor the resources to execute meaningful action. When participants found that frustrating they experienced greater levels of sadness, ambivalence and anger. These observations were mirrored by the data pertaining to ambiguity. It was observed that there was a common link between the need to resolve ambiguity, skill in clarifying roles, juggling responsibilities and managing expectations. When confusion or uncertainty existed about the level of permission or freedom in their jobs participants became more withdrawn and disengaged. However, when individuals had the freedom to express themselves in their job role more positive feelings and emotions were expressed. As outlined in Chapter Three, higher levels of self-efficacy would increase the likelihood that individuals will cope better with the challenges they face (Herold, Fedor & Calwell 2007).

Robert and John illustrate how individuals made sense of job roles and how this social construction influenced their perception of boundaries for personal latitude. Robert, an engineer in a manufacturing plant, described how his job was to mobilise action and keep people on track, but he also expressed frustration about bringing about lasting change. He pointed out:

*No that's basically my job. Yeah- so I've got the sheep dogs and the whip out at the moment- having trouble rounding them up.*

John, a project officer with the Department of Environment, shared his thoughts about how he mobilised the commitment of others based on his perception of people's job roles and associated formal authority. He said:

*Sometimes you'll be dealing with like an engineering manager or an operations manager who understands that there is a problem, but the bean counters- the accountants, won't put their hand in their pocket to*

*pay for it. So we'll quietly go to the side and say listen mate, we've already agreed it needs to be done, if I write you a legal notice, just to formalise what we've agreed, will that help you get the money to do the job? And they say 'Oh yeah'. You know, once there is a legal framework around it we've got no choice. So I'll just go to the accountants and say 'Listen, you've got to give me the money to spend on this job'.*

It was observed that for people to contribute to environmentally friendly practices in their business their job roles must provide sufficient scope for commitment to occur. Where individuals were multi-tasking or juggling too many conflicting responsibilities they found it difficult to invest time and take action that could inspire the desired change. If their role had enough scope or clarity for them to achieve their goals it was more likely that they would invest the time and effort to commit. What made high performing change agents stand apart from others was their innate ability to negotiate more expansive and powerful job profiles that increased their capacity to generate meaningful outcomes. Much of this enhancement was built on perceived credibility and goodwill. As a consequence, plausibility and individual accounts of commitment could appear to be fickle, whimsical and impulsive, while at other times they created the impression of being highly logical, rational and consequential.

To help illustrate this observation vignettes are provided from Asif and Rodney, who both underwent dramatic changes in commitment to environmentally friendly practices as a direct consequence of a change of job role. We begin with Asif, who decreased his commitment during the study and finish with Rodney, whose level of engagement increased.

*When I first met Asif he was an environmental co-ordinator who developed a work plan for the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. His firm specialised in building heavy duty pumps for the mining industry. In 2007 I asked Asif whether he enjoyed his role. When he responded he came alive, very animated and excited. I remember him leaning forward on his chair in anticipation and then smiling before his voice lifted and he fixed his eyes on me and said he loved bringing order to chaos. He proceeded to talk about his work history as an engineer, of how he brought order to chaos in a variety of former jobs. When I contacted him in 2008 to ask for a re-interview, he had moved to a different position in the company and he was no longer involved in the project. He had submitted his plans for implementation in 2007*

*and had moved onto other things. He stated there was no point in seeing him again and discussing his views on environmentally friendly practices as it was no longer his responsibility.*

Rodney's account was spectacularly different as he undertook the senior role in a regional airport. This vignette includes the views of Carol, the facilitator of the Regional cluster.

*In 2007 Rodney was performing the role of commercial property manager for a rapidly growing regional airport. At the time he had a marginal interest in the topic of business sustainability but it must be said that he appeared not very interested in the challenges that lay ahead. When I re-interviewed Rodney in 2008, there had been a major increase in his level of commitment. The primary reason was that he had taken over the senior leadership role of the total airport operations.*

*In his new role Rodney demonstrated a renewed vigour and interest in issues pertaining to environmentally friendly practices. This position had given him the institutional power and influence to bring about reform. He made no apologies for using a top-down approach to driving change within his business. Environmental considerations were increasingly being integrated into his business processes. His understanding and motivation had shifted significantly and he was fast becoming a passionate advocate for reducing water, energy and waste. He also saw an economic benefit in being a champion of environmentally friendly practices. In his 2008 interview Rodney also demonstrated an increased interest in using networks to keep up to date and informed on key trends affecting the airline industry. This included a better understanding of environmental sustainability.*

*Later on the same day, I met the facilitator of the Regional cluster. I expressed my surprise at how Rodney and the regional airport had become more engaged. The facilitator, who had been observing the environmental performance of the airport, was also deeply surprised. In response to my observation she said:*

*That's interesting, because when this started (Rodney) wasn't on board. It was the two other employees. And then um, they left early last year. Yeah- so he's taken it.*

Asif and Rodney's stories are both reflective of the findings that individual perceptions of job role and levels of formal and informal authority either inhibit or foster enactment (Aigner 2011; Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009b). Janet's role in an industry body provided a wonderful vehicle for bringing about desired change. Her enthusiasm was in many ways only possible because her job role enabled her to perform and express herself in a way that she found engaging. If, however, a person's perception of job or authority was not aligned with the expectations of a system or others it could create tensions and contradictions. If a person was perceived as acting outside established boundaries, role or function it could have led to direct and indirect pressures to conform to structures, processes and protocols. For individuals who choose to ignore such pressures there is a danger of being labelled in a variety of ways that hurt their career or image. These situations can lead to peer and group dynamics that seek to 'rein in' or modify behaviour into what is perceived as more inappropriate or necessary.

The dynamic of 'role suction' is also seen as important in determining how roles are performed and how this may influence levels of job latitude and ultimately the considerations regarding plausibility. Role suction refers to individuals becoming typecast in what they should do in the job. Moxnes suggests that one of the outcomes of role suction is that 'you gradually acquire the competence which others believe you to possess – as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy' (2006:222). Role suction can also generate a situation where individuals have difficulty shifting public, stakeholder or individual opinion. For example, Keith, an operations manager in small manufacturing plant, was perceived as an autocratic manager, but suddenly in implementing environmentally friendly practices he began to employ a more consultative approach. It took time for others in the plant to adjust to the 'new person' who was emerging. As Heifetz and Linsky (2002) state, leaders need to be prepared for the backlash and heat if they want to disturb established systems, structures and processes. These tensions were discussed frequently in the research as participants tried to make sense of the authority they had and the leadership they needed to use to assist initiatives pertaining to compliance and engagement in change.

Finally, analysis suggests that multiple pathways of thinking and feeling generate plausibility. When participants experienced doubt as to the benefits of ecologically sustainable practices they were less likely to take action. The more fearful people became, the more likely they were to be interested in compliance, competitive intelligence, meeting legal obligations and ensuring that costs were minimised. Higher levels of fear were often associated with a greater concern for adequate risk management strategies and the increased likelihood that they would take steps to minimise risks. When individuals felt powerless about making changes in their lives they were more fatalistic about what they could and could not control. Here are four personal accounts highlighting how fear and joy can influence plausibility differently:

*And it's very much around risk management. You know what are the risks- it's not only risk management about the bad things, but it's well, what's the risk to us if we fail to take up this opportunity and our competitors do? So you know it's all this fear about how quickly are- and certainly how quickly are consumers moving? (fear)*

*You know at some point, people are going to look at businesses and not give them their patronage based on the fact that they are not doing anything environmentally (fear)*

*In fact there is very little risk at all. There's really only up-side (joy)*

*Yeah personally very engaged now. Because I can see that there's a scope (joy)*

These observations are consistent with empirical studies which indicate that when feelings of sadness, fear and anger are present people are more likely to undertake risk avoidance strategies, whereas those with feelings of happiness are more likely to take an optimistic view of what can be implemented (Foo 2010). However, what distinguishes my research from Foo's scholarly study is that fear, rather than sadness or anger, appeared to be the most potent force in driving risk avoidance.

## ***5.6 Observing the commitment of other individuals***

Attention now shifts to the examination of how individuals observed and made judgements about the commitment of others. These accounts are important as such judgements can stimulate a wide range of emotions depending on the analysis and the personal reaction. As discussed, personal comparison is used as a central element of

personal organising (Thurlow & Helms Mills 2009; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005) and identity construction (Beech 2010; Watson 2009; Wieland 2010). Analysis was made possible by asking people to share their thoughts and feelings about how they determined the commitment of others. It is important to highlight that these inquiries into commitment elicited individual critiques of what constituted such behaviour, as well as appraisals as a researcher. These dual tracks of investigation generated a number of discoveries that are now shared.

When asked about what constituted commitment, participants had their own opinions. It seemed that each participant was perfectly capable of making assertions and determinations of others. Making assumptions about what constituted high, low and satisfactory commitment appeared to be a natural aspect of personal organising and the making of meaning. Whatever conclusions were generated appeared to be used as a marker by which to compare oneself against others and to determine the levels of commitment of others. Depending on the social construction these realisations could influence an individual's commitment level. Individuals who discovered they were underperforming in relationship to others could respond by adjusting their level accordingly.

Critiques of individual commitment not only provided clues to the nature of personal enthusiasm and engagement; they also informed about the organisational challenges and the culture faced by others. Argyris and Schon (2010) point out that people regularly do not share their true intentions and agendas, and as a result exchanges can include a long list of 'non-discussables'. Schein (2010) argues that revealing people's basic underlying assumptions is very difficult to determine by observation, whereas cultural artefacts such as business plans and corporate policy are much easier to discern. In acknowledging the difficulties in making and interpreting observations of others, this study strongly suggests that it remains an important influence on personal commitment.

When participants heard claims of success, personal accounts would suggest that they appeared to have healthy scepticism about claims and espoused values and wanted to 'peel back the mask' to look for tangible signals about the truth and integrity of commitment. Aspects queried included the level of commitment and the tangible

evidence of action. People were also keen to register the level of enthusiasm and interest as well the intensity of emotions (Frijda 2007) as evidence of the depth and durability of their commitment. In undertaking observation, participants drew on a vast array of accumulated experiences over time, including various group, cluster and team-based experiences. Facilitators and project managers of the clusters appeared to be more seasoned people watchers and were more attentive and skilled in extracting meaning out of body language and talk. Others who were less interested in people watching were more sharply focused on cultural artefacts and signs of action as the prime indicators of commitment. In making their observations, seasoned people watchers did not disregard observation of artefacts or symbols of action but were able to combine this with scrutiny of body language and talk.

Assembling cultural artefacts included noticing the status of people attending meetings and the associated level of senior management support, funding levels, and cross-functional collaboration. These features, together with clarity of vision, were perceived as symbolic of embedded commitment. As *Janet* said, regarding the businesses within her industry:

*I suppose what really shows commitment is there where they really see that there's a business case for implementing a lot of what is done there-and that's one of the challenges.*

Closely associated with the assessment of cultural artefacts was consideration of symbols and clues of action, including assessing how individuals espoused their values. Qualities such as being proactive, showing keenness, pride and enthusiasm was considered reliable indicators of commitment. As well, more practical indicators such as frequency of meeting attendance and numbers of people attending decision-making processes were seen as indicative of higher intentions for a call to action. The desire to share vision and willingness to be transparent about challenges were perceived as important indicators of high commitment. Carol, the facilitator for the Regional cluster, provided this frank assessment:

*What tells me they are committed? They turn up to the meetings. They respond to emails. Actions speak louder than words basically.*

When it came to assessing the authenticity of espoused values in comparison with reality, people relied on the minute examination of body, talk and action to try to find some clues about unstated assumptions that might exist and that could affect the level and nature of commitment. Here are several observations from participants:

*I think it's the way they sit around the table- it's their body language for a start. They're interested in it.*

*Um, I think there's a lot to be um, nuanced in their language. Um, where they're sort of talking about things that they can do.*

*To see that people actually listen and make changes and take notes.*

Observations of commitment appeared to support the findings of Meyer and Allen (Meyer & Allen 1991; Meyer et al. 2002), who undertook many quantitative studies of employee commitment. The data supports the view that moral obligation and duty involve lower levels of emotional engagement than found in individuals who have a strong desire to make a difference in something they passionately believe in (Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova 2012). When people felt constrained or stifled from being themselves there was an increased likelihood of resistance. This was particularly evident when individuals felt marginalised or isolated.

The lowest levels and frequency of enjoyment were found when individuals were preoccupied with ensuring that their current work conditions were protected. In some situations protecting the status quo might be observed in the form of people feeling quite comfortable with current pace and direction of change, even though there might be good reason for a new direction in policy or action. Less helpful to the process of facilitating change was when individual needs for predictability and stability were perceived as more important than making necessary changes or improvements. When such participants were requested or demanded to make changes or to be more accountable, they commonly experienced higher levels of fear, anxiety and ambivalence about making fresh commitments. Not surprisingly, apprehension or resistance to change was typically associated with work avoidance (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009b; Heifetz & Linsky 2002), where individuals were more likely to blame others for their difficulties or to ignore repeated requests for increased involvement or participation.

It should be stated that the assessments made by individuals within this study largely mirrored the organising structure I used to make sense of other people's commitment. As discussed, this included observing artefacts and clues, noticing espoused values and being curious about basic underlying assumptions. It is important to acknowledge that observations of other individuals were 'fixed in time'. Thus, what was seen as conclusive might change at a moment's notice, particularly if seeds of doubt started to appear.

### ***5.7 The pivotal influence of self-identity***

Self-identity presented as a pivotal influence on the nature and manifestation of individual commitment. Empirical observations support the literature which argues that identity is central both to personal organising and to social construction. It also provided a powerful means for people to communicate their understandings and the complexities of selfhood during discursive exchanges within the research process. Reference to one's sense of identity was often used as a means to justify or explain current commitments. It also provided an organising framework to express both positive and negative views of oneself. The sense of selfhood could come from a variety of sources including family, cultural and industry background.

Perception of one's identity and the social construction of others made a strong impression on plausibility and choice making. Empirical data also suggested that individuals become more engaged and committed over time when they are able to maintain and affirm a sense of self. It is argued that affirming a sense of self also reinforces one's personal identity, but individuals achieve this in a myriad of ways. Tensions of 'existence' or 'being' generate a multiplicity of fragmented selves that seek to gain, claim, and maintain clarity and/or confidence over time. As has been explained, in times of ambiguity, indicative of the uncertainties and complexities related to adaptive change, these tensions increased. These observations associated with identity are consistent with the literature that examines the existence of alternative selves as part of self-concept (Alvesson 2010; Obodaru 2012).

Data also suggests that when people feel there is an opportunity to volunteer their strengths (Buckingham 2007; Peterson & Seligman 2004; Seligman 2011) to a

purpose, such as that pertaining to ecological sustainability, they are more likely to make choices that assist the required action. Where there was a good fit between the view of oneself and the commitment that was required, there was a higher likelihood that a participant would take action. As detailed in the environmental psychology literature (Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2010), if there is congruence between self-identity and pro-environmental behaviours it is more likely that helpful commitments will be generated. However, those findings derived from the general population do not factor in the complexities of business and paradoxes of power, which can either help or hinder the expression and manifestation of commitment. When complexities steer people away from their natural strengths they are more likely to feel resistance and a wide range of negative emotions including fear, sadness, ambivalence, shame and anger.

Individual accounts indicated that how participants perceived and expressed their self-identity was important to decision making. If individuals were to be swayed towards an action in conflict with their current perception of themselves they required significant proof or a major surprise to fuel a new perspective. It was rare to see participants take action that was in conflict with who they were or what they perceived they were becoming as a person. When this did eventuate, people were confronted with compelling scripts that overtook their innate desire to protect their identity or how they saw themselves. Such individuals, then, were convinced beyond reasonable doubt that it was within their self-interest to commit to a new pathway of action outside their comfort zone. One example of a change in thinking was when individuals realised that politically they needed to rethink their current strategy or approach in order to gain acceptance.

This study highlights that participants used self-selected labels such as being a 'greeny'; being a 'mover and shaker'; or being a 'person who loves fixing things' to define themselves, as well as a means of making sense of others. These labels provided indication of how individuals were experiencing themselves as well as affording to others an opportunity to question and explore their own social construction. These practices, although helpful to making meaning, are prone to error or misrepresentation. The effect is to minimise and over-simplify the complexities and

paradoxes of both self and personal identity, as well as trivialising the many nuances of social construction.

Understandings of self-identity provided a more robust foundation for exploring commitment over time. If people become more curious about the inner tensions, workings and expressions of self-identity there may be greater leeway and potential to facilitate change. Analysis has consolidated the view that self-identity is not a static phenomenon. Depending on the pressures at play and the nature of social construction, individuals will choose a path of either resistance or openness to change. These considerations are fundamental to how people grow and develop. Outlined below are specific aspects of self-identity that appeared to be highly influential to the nature of meaning and commitment over time.

### **5.7.1 Exposes our messy selves**

This research focused a magnifying glass on the ‘messiness’ that at times generated dilemmas, contradictions and paradoxes. Self-identity can create an impression of a static and unmovable object; but the data yielded a view that participants experienced a coexistence of stable and becoming selves that generated a variety of tensions associated with these exchanges. The curiosity about ‘messy selves’ arose from discursive exchanges like those with Janet, who displayed in her talk a commitment comprised of multiple roles and pressures. Each of these roles required a different sense of self to be enacted, in her case, identities associated with being a mother, a change agent, an advocate and networker. Further, there were the identifications with her family, her organisation and industry. In the organisation and management literature much of the attention has been focused on just the relationship of employee to employer (Hatch & Schultz 2002; Hogg & Terry 2000), but more recently there has been some questioning of thinking (Brown 2009) to include theorising of relationships with other stakeholders (Brickson 2005, 2007; Freeman et al. 2010).

The creative tension of ‘messy selves’ was exhibited in many ways in the observation of individual commitment over time. The data on personal identity provided an interesting and unique avenue by which to explore change. Participants who disclosed information pertaining to change over time often used personal identity as a means of

expressing their making of meaning. They also used talk to communicate the transitions associated with a questioning of new identities. For example, Keith, a senior manager in a boutique bathroom appliance manufacturer, pointed out the range of ‘selves’ in action, each in its own way contributing to this social construction of self. As his account a number of inner voices, critics and expectations are revealed. In the first interview in 2007 Keith said:

*Ah yeah. Because you know I was one of those people that were overall worried about what the planet was going to look like when my kids grow up- but I never really cared about it to be honest with you. I never really took it that seriously. I never, I never thought um, I never really thought the full picture sort of thing. Well now I probably do. I walk past lights and look at 'em being on and that sort of thing. For two reasons, now I know how much money it's costing us- but the other reason is- I've kind of started to develop this underlying um, concern about the environment or compassion about the environment. Um, that I never really had and that I never really looked for. I wouldn't consider myself a tree hugger by a long shot, but I'm a hell of a lot greener than what I was.*

Such perspectives of ‘messy selves’ are firmly centred on the tensions of emergence, where participants tried to anticipate and make sense of their plausible futures. The measure of the level of discomfort or inertia a person could accept or tolerate would depend on the answers to a series of questions, such as: What level of disturbance and experimentation are you prepared to accept? How long can you sit with unpleasant emotions and feelings? What safeguards do you need to cope with any vulnerability and uncertainty that may unfold? What other factors or commitment are reducing your capacity to take action at this time?

The messy self, as discussed in the discourses of stable and becoming selves, includes a polarised array of different perspectives as to what is possible and suitable at any point of time. Deploying a ‘stable’ governing personal account is more cemented in the past, and is less prone to let go and try something different. A strong preference for stability can also build acceptance of the status quo and inertia, as well as providing a means to disengage from unpleasant or undesired situations.

When the ‘becoming self’ is more energised, a different set of standards and expectations are activated. That self appears to be more accepting and tolerant of the ambiguity and conflict associated with complexity. When people have a natural

preference for becoming they do not like to wait for things to happen; they will take the initiative, stimulate or take action to better adapt to emerging circumstances. If people are more involved in 'becoming', they are less likely to accept the routines and rituals of the status quo and are more uncomfortable remaining unmoved or stuck on issues. Where possible, the becoming self will explore new avenues or possibilities to take control.

For some participants the relationship between self and context was viewed as a dynamic and emerging process. At times, facing new contexts served to heighten anxiety, fear and struggle, and in such times moving beyond the status quo took too much energy and time. At other times participants could be more willing to commit to changing themselves. When individuals operated from an ontology of 'becoming' they could appear hard to read and unpredictable, unless they justified themselves with narratives that clearly explained their language and motivations. People confined to the 'stable self' could be judged as inflexible and obstinate unless they explained their rationale for remaining consistent and unwavering.

In outlining the dimensions of messy selves it interesting to note that much of the tension and paradox revolves around how individuals cope with ambiguity, confusion and messiness in messages and intentions. Some participants were more able to rationalise and make judgements when faced with lack of clarity and mixed messages while others found this nearly impossible to live with and needed to move on and take action to progress into another context or approach. It is important to acknowledge that confronting tensions and paradoxes need not result in an unpleasant experience; it could stimulate joy and anticipation as well as fear, anxiety or sadness. The reaction is heavily conditioned by the social construction and reflexivity of the individual. It should also be said that, for some people, reflexive explorations of self-identity and what action to take next were clearly not their priority.

### **5.7.2 Reveals the sacred and precious**

Discussion of or revealing aspects of self-identity generated a higher level of intimacy between my role as researcher and the person being interviewed. Participants often chose their words carefully and reflected deeply on how they saw themselves. In these

situations both men and women experienced a wide range of insecurities, vulnerabilities and emotions ranging from joy to sadness. When people shared stories about their self-identity it was often sacred and precious, and also provided important insights about their perceptions of power and context (Coupland et al. 2008). My observations also supported research (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar 2010) that individuals who appeared to be more engaged and confident in their job often felt that their work provided the means and flexibility through which they could express their uniqueness. Others, who were experiencing a sense of failure in their work, felt they were losing a sense of self.

What drives this research observation is that individuals became animated as they talked about themselves during the interviews. It became increasingly apparent that to fully engage with an individual I needed to develop a deeper understanding of how people defined and viewed themselves (Gabriel 2004). As I listened to people's accounts of their self-identity, my feeling was that it aided a deep and respectful understanding of what drove or motivated them. It was difficult to ignore that the conversation had moved into a sacred place where full respect needed to be shown, regardless of what was being said. Take the example of Justin, an engineer working for a manufacturer of household cleaners, who shared his fearlessness in raising controversial issues in the workplace. He pointed out how his upbringing as a child and teenager was the springboard for this expression of self.

*I've never encountered a corporate situation or discussion- and that includes being made redundant- that was anywhere near as what I would call vigorous and open as the debates we used to have- or arguments or fights around the kitchen table with my father and brothers and mother.*

In another exchange Justin shared his hurt and vulnerability about how he felt in comparison to other family members.

*That's fine- because I'm the dumb arse in my family- I'm the only child that doesn't have a PhD.*

Here are further two examples of discursive exchanges that provide some evidence of the sacred and precious qualities of personal identity. First, Kristina, a third party

provider of facilitation and training, explained what motivated her in her work. She said:

*I'm an ideas person and a communicator. I like to plant ideas in other people's heads and not necessarily have to be the person that then you know consistently follows up with them. Um the stuff I enjoy is getting up and talking, and teaching and training and getting people tools so they can go off and do things.*

Glen, the senior manager of a medium sized recreational and gaming business, described what enabled him to persevere when things got tough. He talked about his relationship with his father, which in some way helped to provide a powerful lens to self-identity:

*Oh I think- it could even go back as far as family- my family- especially my Dad- he's a very hard working man. He works in the building industry as well- not only the fact that he's done long hours, but of a weekend he's always, you know, building an extension or ripping a kitchen out or putting a new kitchen in and for me working with my father you get the same sort of work ethic. So you realise that nothing's too hard, if you want to do it you can- you've just got to get stuck in and um- just converting that sort of work ethic into management and showing that- first of all, leading by example- not just sitting in the chair and pointing your finger around. Actually getting stuck in, and I don't mind getting my hands dirty and sort of cleaning up if I was available to help clean up and show that I am committed to making sure, that like it's something that I care about.*

These extracts of the more 'sacred' qualities of self provided another layer of understanding which reached well beyond the conversations of cognition, rationality and organising which has been a dominant topic of exploration in the field of organisation and management. These insights provided some legitimacy for continued exploration of emotions with discussions in identity and other forms of meaning making. In making this observation, it is recognised that taking a social construction approach provided more data to consider but the interpretation of emotion may not be factually correct (Rhodes & Brown 2005).

### 5.7.3 Opens a window to personal values

As the pivotal influence of self-identity became apparent, it also emerged that personal values appeared to be shaping the level and nature of commitment over time. There is significant evidence in the literature (Hall 1995; Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield 2012; Schwartz & Boehnke 2004; Taylor 2010) that individuals are more attracted to performing activities that are aligned to their personal values. As Schwartz points out about human values:

When we think of our values we think of what is important to us in life. ...A particular value may be very important to one person but unimportant to another.

Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect. When values are activated, they become infused with feeling. People for whom independence is an important value become aroused if their independence is threatened, despair when they are helpless to protect it, and are happy when they can enjoy it.

Values refer to desirable goals that motivate action. People for whom social order, justice and helpfulness are important values are motivated to pursue these goals.

Values transcend specific actions and situations. ...This feature distinguishes values from narrower concepts like norms and attitudes that usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations. (2009:2)

In this study, human values appeared to be an important motivational component that remained relatively stable over time unless there was some significant jolt or surprise to thinking and self-perception. As I became curious about the attributes of human values further angles were revealed to help understand and explore commitment over time. As Keith, a senior manager in the boutique manufacturing of bathroom appliances, pointed out in relation to his personal assessment of the human values of his young workers:

*Basically you know, young guys don't want to be here- they want to be off at the beach surfing with their mates whatever- so nobody really um cares about not doing overtime.*

Keith's opinion of his workers' values and/or motivations brought him closer to a social construction of what might be unfolding around him. He also saw personal

values as somehow linked to his analysis of his workers. These examinations might not be accurate but they do provide another window for making sense of how others interpreted and displayed their commitment.

It was apparent in this research that some individuals were more comfortable in sharing their values or personal feelings whereas others were guarded. For example, when I asked Betty, the manager of a small recreational and gaming business, what she had learned in her implementation of environmentally friendly practices, she became frustrated and was unwilling or unable to share how she felt:

*I don't think there's any from a personal level- no. there was no personal gain or loss.*

In this case Betty either did not feel safe or she found it inappropriate and/or difficult to remove her mask and share deeply held values (Czarniawska-Joerges & Jacobsson 1995). These observations do not devalue the importance and legitimacy of human values. It appeared, however, that participants sometime felt hamstrung in communicating their beliefs and motivations. It was felt that there was often a clash between what one might hold as sacred and what could be expressed within a given situation. To more accurately explore human values a different methodological approach might be needed. It could have involved using the work of Schwartz (1996) to explore relationships between human values and commitment. Cohen (2010) is one researcher who has made an exploration of commitment and values, and did so by undertaking a quantitative analysis at a point of time to develop understanding. This study does not attempt a longitudinal (Van de Van & Huber 1990) or processual analysis (Dawson 2003). Studies of this kind are yet to be undertaken in the current literature. This discussion of the potential intersection between human values and commitment brings to the end the analysis of the nature of commitment.

## *5.8 Chapter conclusion*

Individual commitment over time is heavily influenced by plausible accounts of what is socially constructed at a point of time. It is theorised that the prime reason why human commitment is so idiosyncratic is that it is driven by a complex array of multiple organising frameworks that are constantly being created and dismantled on the basis of what is interpreted by individuals. Building on earlier findings in this thesis, individuals were further observed as undertaking meaning making processes which informed their comparisons with others and associated readings of their powers, legitimacy and commitment. All these considerations were demonstrated in a context of complex adaptation characterised by ephemeral changes and uncertainty about sustainability.

It is suggested that individuals choose action based on the inner tensions of 'becoming' and 'stable' selves that are hypothesised to exist in each one of us. These inner tensions are highly subjective and are influenced by the history and evolution of self-identity. Empirical examinations also yielded interconnections between individual commitment, sensemaking and self-identity that have been under-theorised in the management and organisational studies literature. Self-identity acts as a conduit and filtering device for the way commitment exhibits over time, while personal values appear to provide a motivational framework for these considerations. For people to take action they need to be convinced beyond reasonable doubt that it is within their interest, role or authority to commit to a new pathway of action. Even though individuals may at an intrinsic level be interested in change, their perceived job latitudes and power relations can create conditions where implementing systems, structures and processes may be difficult to navigate. All of these explorations therefore built a deeper understanding of what drives both personal change and resistance. These discoveries are in stark contrast to much of the literature on organisational commitment, which is largely deterministic and positivist in nature.

## **CHAPTER 6 – CLUSTERS AS AN AGENT OF SENSEMAKING AND SENSEGIVING**

The final analysis of this thesis examines the different elements and interconnections between sensemaking and sensegiving and how they may have influenced individual commitment over time. This supports many of the previous examinations of how individual commitment manifests within the ‘push towards’ and ‘away’ from sustainability, while demonstrating how individuals endeavoured to make meaning within these exchanges. This exploration continues the examination of the making of meaning that was introduced as a conceptual model in Chapter One. It also builds on the reflections outlined in the previous chapter on the nature of commitment.

As in previous analytical chapters, the empirical research here combines analysis of specific individuals with broader interpretations from wider data sets. The data again reinforced the nuances of individual commitment as well as advanced thinking in the field of organisation and management studies on the qualities of sensemaking and sensegiving. To assist understanding, investigations were drawn from the accounts of participants or observers in cluster-based activities organised and presented by the Department of Environment to improve the level and quality of environmentally friendly practices in industry. Cluster-based sensegiving provided an avenue to examine the discursive elements and the meaning making processes which appeared to influence the nature of individual commitment. As Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) propose, sensemaking unfolds in complex environments, where there are divergent interests amongst numerous stakeholders attempting to construct and articulate persuasive accounts of the world.

One of the contributions of this thesis lies in understanding how individual sensemaking is influenced by sensegiving from a variety of sources within complex political and social contexts, as demonstrated by the implementation of environmentally friendly practices. This analysis was made possible by the processual approach, where the interest lay in how individuals undergo transitions and how this may influence the nature of their commitment over time. The research moves well beyond viewing sensegiving as confined to individual meaning making within organisational settings, to a view which explores individual commitments in society at

large and how social constructions of reality are informed by many sources not connected to organisational settings. The explorations sought to address a gap in the literature by improving understanding of the role that relationships of power play within sensegiving (Huzzard 2004) and sensemaking (Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips 2006).

Before moving to observation of the empirical data, it is important to acknowledge the findings of Gioia and Chittipeddi that have provided a foundation stone for much of the literature on sensegiving in the last two decades. Their observations were generated from an ethnographic study of a CEO of a large public university, focusing on the leadership behaviour in the journey of implementing strategic changes, and as a result the study was quite narrow in its investigation. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991:442) defined sensegiving as a 'process of attempting to influence sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality'. Subsequent studies of sensegiving continued the trend of examining sensegiving within an organisational context, in the case of Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) interviewing a number of individuals within an orchestral company. Both sets of authors argue that, as a field of study, sensegiving needs more investigation of the inconsistencies and effectiveness of its mechanisms and devices.

Sensegiving is presented in this study as much more than the linear, sequential and one-way process that has been the traditionally accepted view in the literature. Historically, the sensemaking and sensegiving literature argues, 'if sensemaking is about how people come to construct meaning, then sensemaking is intentionally trying to influence how other people attribute meaning' (Smerek 2011:81). Such understandings do not adequately cover the range of sensegiving experiences and relationships that influence individual sensemaking within the complexities of the modern challenge of sustainability. Therefore the deterministic claims of the sensegiving literature are questioned within this study.

Empirical observation in this analysis is consistent with the arguments of some scholars that the relationship between sensemaking and sensegiving is a non-linear process and involves micro-practices (Corvellec & Risberg 2007) outside the reach of individuals who are trying to orchestrate the 'negotiation of meaning and production

of knowledge' (Rouleau 2005). As concluded by Smerek (2011), even if the goal of sensemaking is an attempt to alter how people attribute meaning, there can be no assurance that the intended meaning will be adopted.

On reflection, questioning of the deterministic attributes of sensegiving and sensemaking is not surprising given the complexities of commitment outlined in the first two analytical chapters. Individual commitment has been portrayed as idiosyncratic and heavily dependent upon the personal nature of social constructions, driven by multiple interpretations of believability, plausibility and achievability. As outlined, the social construction of meaning derives from a great number of clues, and can lead to the dismantling of old and generation of new organising frameworks to cope with and adapt to change. Some of these sources of inspiration and wisdom come from within organisations but often they do not, emanating instead from a host of other external and internal considerations like those associated with changes in relationships, social context and self-identity.

This study demonstrates that at times there appears to be a good relationship between cluster sensegiving and individual sensemaking, but on other occasions the reverse was true. For example, some participants might not have been natural believers in environmentally friendly practices but because of business pressures or political pressures became supportive and compliant with what was required. Depending on the context of their experiences others had quite different reactions, ranging from being highly supportive and inspired to remaining largely ambivalent or unaffected. It is here where most of the analysis directs its attention.

These investigations provided a different view of sensemaking, which was observed as fleeting moments of insight rather than a logical and coherent pathway of wisdom creation. It was evident that sensegiving could generate lasting effects on sensemaking, but this would not necessarily lead to new commitments. For that to occur, much supportive evidence had to be presented to sway a person into action. Sensegiving would only lead to a new commitment if the conditions were right and the individual felt safe and informed to carry out the action. In the clusters, tension existed caused by inter-organisational relationships where individuals were required to make sense of unaccustomed operating arrangements, structures and cultures.

To reiterate, the data was used to compare and contrast accounts from individuals with quite different experiences, depending on their interest and motivation to improve their understanding of ecological sustainability and on their history of involvement in cluster-based activities. Cluster-based sensegiving initiatives included formal design elements such as on-site visits, training modules, coaching by industry consultants and the completion of diagnostic tools. 'Informal' activities involved spontaneous collaboration and networking between participants in conjunction with outside formally organised experiences. As the study unfolded it became apparent that sensegiving activities unrelated to cluster-based activities were a major influence on sensemaking and commitment to environmentally friendly practices. These included previous work experiences, professional development courses undertaken and personal learning.

In describing the construct of clusters, it should be noted that there was no universal understanding amongst participants of what the term 'cluster' actually meant. As stated earlier in the thesis, my conceptualisation of clusters is that they are 'formally established collaboration arrangements between businesses to support the levels of performance, governance and innovation over time'. The research indicated varying degrees of understanding of how clusters should operate. Individuals believed that inter-organisational collaboration was a worthwhile pursuit. Many of these thoughts were consistent with the views of Porter (1998), who argued the economic benefits of collaboration between industry and regional clusters. Porter explained that clusters could affect competition in three broad ways. These were increasing the productivity of companies based in the area, driving the direction and pace of innovation, and stimulating the formation of new businesses through collaboration within clusters. In the ensuing two decades research has grown, leading to many other benefits being proposed, including stimulation and circulation of knowledge (Inkpen & Tsang 2005; Tallman et al. 2004) and enhancement of social ties by encouraging higher levels of goodwill, transparency and exchange (Adler & Kwon 2002; Hongseok, Myung-Ho & Labianca 2004). When participants in the study explained the benefits of a cluster they also described closer cooperation and information sharing (Keui-Hsien 2009).

This chapter proceeds with the vignettes of George and Adam, illustrating some of the complexities and paradoxes of sensegiving and sensemaking and their influence on the making of meaning. It then undertakes exploration of the catalysts for exceptional sensemaking, followed by enumeration of what worked and what failed pertaining to cluster sensegiving. The chapter ends with a shift in emphasis to a more prescriptive and definitive guide on cluster governance. A number of practical suggestions are made as to useful protocols and procedures for increasing the chances of success in similar ventures in the future. Recommendations for cluster governance are also presented, to assist the quality of sensegiving and sensemaking within a context heavily influenced by uncertainty and ambiguity.

### ***6.1 Vignettes – George’s and Adam’s journeys of discovery***

George and Adam are foremen employed in businesses that participated in the regional based cluster over an 18-month time frame involving five small and medium sized enterprises, a cluster facilitator and project manager from the Department of Environment. The sensegiving activities conducted with this cluster included a diverse range of formal assessment, training and consulting initiatives, and informal networking and collaboration. Neither George nor Adam had received any previous training or advice on environmentally friendly practices or ecological sustainability before the cluster program commenced. As with all cluster members, George and Adam were able to invite interested colleagues from their businesses to attend meetings and discuss implementation successes and challenges. Meetings were organised on a monthly basis. In both cases, senior management secured the opportunity for cluster involvement with the Department of Environment and nominated representatives, in this instance George and Adam, for their businesses.

George was a foreman in a regional printing business that in recent years had become accountable to a large media conglomerate. George’s was an individual who underwent significant change during his participation in the cluster. Among all the participants, George was one of the most vivid examples of increased commitment during the 12 months of the study. Adam worked in a small manufacturing plant making concrete reinforced beams for building construction. Adam’s role was to supervise the manufacture of the beams. Both Adam and George supervised shift

workers in an all-male blue-collar workforce. Some distinctions between the two participants were that George was aged in his late forties and Adam in his early thirties. George was far more positive and upbeat about a number of the activities that were designed for the cluster. George also took the initiative and enrolled in an external further education program on environmentally sustainability. For Adam, on the other hand, it was difficult at times to find the energy and motivation to attend several of the organised activities.

### **6.1.1 George becomes a ‘sustainabilityist’<sup>7</sup>**

*George’s work desk was located in an office in the middle of a noisy modern newspaper printing business. George was someone who was keen to improve himself. He showed this in his pursuit of gaining a ‘brown belt’ in martial arts, having conversations with his daughter about sustainability, and enrolling in an external course. In fact George was one of the first people to complete his qualifications in his state of Australia in the area of business sustainability. He recognised that his decision to enrol in external studies was influenced by his active involvement in cluster-based activities.*

*George was very proud of his achievements, not only in his course but in the significant savings he had generated for the business. Without a doubt George had grown in confidence over time and he had developed a better understanding of sustainability-related issues. He felt that the program helped give him a language with which to communicate results and to explain why change was important. George summarised his enthusiasm and commitment to the cluster program in various ways:*

*At the first interview George said:*

*When we first started I wouldn’t have cared about, but now I see it as-it’s nearly like I’ve rolled over to the greenie side (laughs)*

*Me personally (sigh) it’s just been a good experience for my personal growth*

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<sup>7</sup> The term ‘sustainabilityist’ was used by George in an interview. I recognise that it is not an English word but I wanted to give integrity to sensemaking expressed by George. Also he pronounced ‘suppose’ as ‘spose’ during discussions.

*In the second interview, 12 months after our previous interaction, he said:*

*Yeah I spose it's at a different level, like from getting into it- like I said in the last interview, once I actually started um, had a more understanding. I wouldn't say I was an environmentalist – they should make up something called a sustainabilityist or something.*

*It's like a soccer team, doesn't matter who scores the goal – the team still gets the goal and everyone's got to help you know.*

*George also gave an example of how an on-site consultation by an environmental management consultant was a key moment in his personal sensemaking:*

*They did an energy audit, they did a water audit- like they just walked around looked at our air-conditioning and how efficient it was- they actually got our garbages and for a 24 hour period we empty every garbage and they come back 24 hours later and this area out here- they put all our garbage on the floor and went –phhe- ugly job- but broke it up and gave us a chart saying you know- of the – I'll just pick a number out of my head – I've got it up there- so out of the tonne of garbage created- 70% of it was recyclable. So they showed us- really showed us and gave us areas to then work in.*

*Each time I met George he gave reasons why the sensegiving of the cluster appealed to him – and left me feeling charmed by his amiability and resilience. He also enjoyed the informality and bonding when meeting other cluster members at their group gatherings and training programs. George at first was a little intimidated by the status and seniority of others attending the cluster meetings, but over time as rapport and mateship developed he felt much more at ease. George claimed that much of his inspiration for making a difference came from his father who had taught him to persevere when things got tough. As George recalled;*

*Yeah, yeah, yeah. He's had a pretty hard life sort of thing and he's stuck with it so. Cos he grew up in Germany during the war and they're not German, so they were refugees so they got hammered. And then (laughs) come to Australia and everything and then he had a motor bike accident when I was 11. And he's been in a wheelchair ever since sort of thing. So but he's still- he doesn't sort of, 'oh poor me'- he just goes 'oh well this is where I'm at now, I'll just keep on going forward'.*

*An on-going frustration for George was the ambiguity of roles and reporting structures, as evidenced in the second year of the research when his responsibility for*

*the implementation of environmentally friendly practices was taken out of his hands and given to a more senior person. This action led to a slowdown in the rollout of initiatives with the business as the new person found his feet and decided on what to do. George was irritated and angry about this decision. Part of his sadness was fuelled by the view that companies like his were trying to jump on the green bandwagon as a way of enhancing their reputation. However, as his grief and disappointment subsided he became more willing to help and lend support to the organisation.*

In contrast to George, the second vignette highlights Adam, a person who needed more reassurance before he was prepared to take action. When I first met Adam in his manufacturing plant he came across as a quiet and somewhat apprehensive individual, but over the following year he appeared to grow in confidence. His cold and unpleasant work environment struck me as the researcher. The production process was undertaken at the rear of the site and the building was subject to fluctuations of heat and cold. Even though the workplace appeared unpleasant, employees remained loyal to the business primarily because local employment opportunities were limited.

### **6.1.2 Adam looks for reassurance and assistance**

*During the first year of the study Adam was struggling to find answers to basic questions on implementing environmentally friendly practices. At the first interview he appeared to be alone in trying to resolve many of his challenges and he appeared to have little motivation and initiative to find answers. Even searching on the Internet for answers was not on his radar. As the foreman he supervised a number of crews on the production line. Morale was low and there was a distinct mistrust of management. His annoyance was driven by workers' resistance to change and an apparent lack of interest from senior management in driving improvements in environmentally friendly practices.*

*Adam spoke with some frustration about how it was not possible to implement the advice on staff engagement provided by trainers in the cluster meetings. It was apparent that it would take tremendous courage to bring about reforms to current practices, particularly with a workforce consisting of long-term established*

employees. Adam showed some shame in being a poor performer in the Regional cluster. He said:

*It is fairly embarrassing turning up and being the poor – the poor cousin in the group.*

On the return visit to interview in 2008, Adam had become much positive and upbeat about his capacity to implement change. He shared that he had received direct assistance from the cluster program to help him overcome some of his difficulties. A key moment for Adam was learning first-hand how to dramatically improve costs associated with water, energy and waste by modifying production procedures and control. The major outcome was the generation of a spread sheet that enabled him to control and monitor energy use during production. As Adam stated in the last interview:

*Um, I'm not sure if it just – if it sort of clicked for me or whether it really was sort of resource efficiency that led us- the other ones seemed a little bit vague and a little bit airy fairy- like the commitment and planning – at the time it seemed- but I do understand now that it is important and probably more experience in my- in the factory manager's job has helped me in the staff engagement- to drag people along with me instead of imposing stuff.*

This simple change shifted his mental attitude, as what had been deemed 'impossible' or 'too hard' became achievable and measurable. Instead of being ashamed and sad he felt in control and positive. Developing a way to organise his thoughts increased his capacity to manage and supervise the work on the shop floor. He was then able to ask better questions regarding work practices and in doing so improve his job security. As he expressed in the final interview:

*Um, we're still sort of collecting a bit of data, and we collect the data a lot more efficiently now.*

*Um, so it looks good for me and it looks good for the company because we are showing that we can contribute – can do something- and it's good for the company because we can make more money.*

The vignettes of both George and Adam illustrate the fragile nature of sensemaking and the conditional influence of sensegiving. It was particularly interesting how two foremen in the same cluster had quite different journeys. This observation is

consistent with other individual cases where expressions of vulnerability and insecurity were often associated with a quest for greater authority, and with the recognition that changing culture and behaviour takes time. It appears that George benefited from a positive role model (his father), whereas clearly Adam did not have such a memory to draw upon. It was not until Adam received the relevant direction and practical support from a third party consultant that he began to benefit from the sensegiving associated with the cluster-based program. Certainly George was a more seasoned older worker, but also he had the confidence and resilience to move forward, and in my view was a higher performing change agent. In saying this, there is no reason to think that with the right development and self-awareness Adam could not improve his capabilities further.

Both George and Adam were heavily swayed by their judgements and comparisons with others. Feelings such as inferiority, pride and belonging were influenced by how they perceived themselves connected to others. Both their stories highlight the twists and turns of commitment over time. Adam did not start to benefit from the cluster program until he eventually received on-site consulting advice on improving the usage of water, electricity and waste. George also received similar advice, but this occurred much earlier in the time line of the cluster. It is therefore apparent that the timing and delivery of sensegiving, combined with an understanding of confidence and self-efficacy, are important influences in assisting sensemaking. The next discussion explores the catalysts for exceptional sensemaking.

## ***6.2 Catalysts for exceptional sensemaking***

Accounts from participants offered an array of perspectives about how sensemaking is evoked and cemented over time. During the study it became evident that sensemaking and self-identity were highly influential on commitment. Extraordinary sensemaking is much more than cognition; it is an embodied experience involving an array of emotions, memories and senses. These understandings came from two sources. First, there was critique and interpretation of the individuals' emotions, memories and predictions expressed in the study. Second, journals were kept of my sensemaking as the study was undertaken. These dual avenues of exploration helped in developing an appreciation of the catalysts for exceptional sensemaking.

Exceptional sensemaking appeared to unfold when participants were able to apply different personal organising systems to enable new actions and behaviours to emerge by questioning existing views of self and the social construction of others, and by making new interpretations of the context faced. These new interpretations required the generation of methods, reasoning and or reflexivity that supported enactment. Over time, these adjustments and changes became integrated and coherent within perceptions of self-identity. Individual accounts of personal change indicated that new meaning not only transformed thinking and new ways of relating and being but it created new connections between the mind, body, and spirit. In time, new connections became what I would call a 'naturally performative act', one that appeared to be undertaken seamlessly with little or no observable resistance or self-questioning.

Many examples of extraordinary sensemaking leading to 'automatic' and 'resistant free' responses were observed or shared during on-site visits. These included individuals operating new technology, becoming advocates for change, or simply changing behaviour by flicking a power switch off to save electricity when leaving a room. This study found that sensemaking was normally assisted by initiatives and design that reduced the levels of ambiguity and resistance about what was required. The design elements of the cluster programs comprised helpful protocols, tips and guidance to assist environmentally sustainable initiatives. Findings support the need to focus attention and actively participate in processes that aid deliberation and reflection on what is emerging. When greater effort was expended in negotiating involvement in the program, developing greater consistency in language and enforcing attendance at regular meetings, there was an increased level of sensemaking. These observations reinforce the view that there needs to be some level of formalisation within collaborative arrangements to assist sensemaking between participants who come from different businesses and social contexts (Vlaar et al. 2006). In two cases, namely the Regional and Manufacturing Clusters, there were sufficient levels of formalisation to sustain on-going collaborative exchanges. In the Recreational and Gaming cluster, however, there was little or no enforcement of the need to keep collaborating between businesses. Consequently this cluster did not meet the standard of 'being a formally established collaboration arrangement between

businesses in assisting the levels of performance, governance and innovation over time’.

One of the enduring challenges in maintaining commitment was how to galvanise and sustain curiosity. Extraordinary sensemaking must involve some degree of stimulation and irritation. Without this, people can easily become indifferent, confused or ambivalent (Fong 2006; Miller & Rollnick 1991; White 1992). It is argued that curiosity can unfold somewhat naturally through the morphing of language, design and relationships. However, for sensegiving to be successful people need to be stirred from existing patterns of cognitive reasoning into different patterns of sensemaking. Analysis in the cluster-based programs indicated that participants could easily become side-tracked if there was no compelling reason to remain focused and attentive.

Maitlis (2005) argued that sensemaking includes two elements, ‘animation’ and ‘control’. Animation conveys the importance of having an adequate flow and rhythm of information by change agents or change recipients. Control refers to the mechanisms used to have power over the process. Other research indicates that a third characteristic is ‘sequence’, which refers to the order in which the sensemaking is attempted: either through ‘thinking then acting’ or through ‘acting then thinking’ (Stensaker, Falkenberg & Gronhaug 2008). In supporting these views this study suggests that much greater emphasis should be placed on what jolts personal change and transition. In the context of change this is often associated with a disturbance or shock to organisational systems (Dougerty & Drumheller 2006), which can lead to new personal organising systems being established.

A healthy disturbance involves a process that not only startles and surprises people to pay closer attention to what is unfolding but entails developing strategies to sustain and support desired change over time. The data suggests that there were at least three catalysts that increased the chances of sparking and sustaining sensemaking through healthy disturbance. These were (a) the stirring of supportive emotions for action; (b) drawing on resourcefulness, personal wisdom and self-belief; and (c) the encouragement of individual immersion. Without these catalysts it was less likely that a person’s existing sensemaking would be changed, questioned or modified enough to sustain change.

### 6.2.1 Stirring supportive emotions into action

The research suggests that before any cognition can occur within sensemaking, individuals need to have their emotions stirred. In other words, unless the stirring of emotions that promote curiosity disrupts experience, people are unlikely to experiment or try new ways of operating or existing. These observations are consistent with the argument of Weick (1995) that emotions are involved in the commencement and outcomes of sensemaking. As Weick suggests:

An interruption to a flow typically induces an emotional response, which then paves the way for emotion to influence sensemaking. It is precisely because ongoing flows are subject to interruption that sensemaking is infused with feeling. (1995:45)

This study also suggests that emotions provide a disruptive element to sensemaking, and if this does not occur sensegiving activities will have minimal impact. These views are consistent with the argument of Vuori and Virtaharju that sensegivers need to give more attention ‘on increasing the sense-receivers’ emotional arousal and only then focus on delivering their actual message’ (2012:48).

George and Adam provided some insight into the role emotions play and how they can influence the journey of sensemaking. In their cases, shame, anger and joy were evident at various times. Some of the emotions and associated feelings could be linked to their social construction of organisational factors; others were likely caused by their self-identity. This research on commitment over time suggests that the role of emotions in sensemaking is much more than just about disruption to flow. Emotions also appear to be an important channel to refine personal organising systems over time.

Moments of disturbance and questioning can occur in times of uncertainty and ambiguity (Weick 2008), but this study suggests that sensemaking can occur in instances of relative stability when an individual is jolted or alarmed by what is unfolding. Emotions such as shame and surprise can be aroused without any logical thought or reasoning. It appeared that some participants could make plausible explanations for how they were feeling while others struggled or were unable to

communicate their emotions. Although it appeared that all emotions played their part in the flow and transition of sense making, depending on the strength and depth of feeling the influence could vary. As Frijda states:

Emotions differ in intensity. Some whisper, others are passions. There are wishes and cravings. There is passing anger, as when you overhear a mean joke in the streetcar, and there is rage that seeks to destroy the target. 'Intensity' is a bleak term to refer to these differences. It biases attention towards heartbeat and feeling only. Better call it the strength of an emotion, as Spinoza (Parkinson 1989) did. The strength of an emotion is its degree of being a passion. It is what makes emotions socially relevant, and what calls for self control. (2007:153)

The empirical data also implied that sensemaking could be stimulated by both pleasant and unpleasant feelings and is often associated with symbolism, events and artefacts (Rafaeli & Vilnai-Yavetz 2004). Depending on participants' experiences and their social construction, the meaning that is generated could also be unpleasant, if feelings of sadness, fear and shame were evoked. There were also times when ambivalence was expressed.

These embodied experiences provided emotional information that could assist or confuse rationale thought. Considering emotional strength, it seemed that it was easier to recall memories associated with being startled or shocked. In the data, surprises were associated with discoveries of how improvements could be made in the areas of waste management and how these changes could generate economic benefit. When it came to memories that stimulated joy, the most commonly recalled experiences were those that helped build confidence when confronting new contexts.

To provide further context to these conclusions a number of snapshots give insights into how emotions can arise during the change process. We commence with Amy, the Department of Environment Project Manager for the Manufacturing cluster. She recalls her initial meeting with the participants. She became animated when recollecting her memory of the surprising level of goodwill and collaboration at the first meeting of the cluster:

*That was really, um, positive. It was ah remarkably ah enthusiastic and open. It kick started um, it was held at one of the companies gave a presentation to sort of start with, after a brief introduction from myself*

*and (name of facilitator) um, to give a- to give the participants- the other companies an overview of what they were doing. And how they saw the program and where they saw their next steps in terms of sustainability. And that really set the tone.*

Tony proudly disclosed his on-going satisfaction with the return on investment he had achieved by implementing environmentally friendly practices over several years.

Tony was the facilities manager for a Recreational and Gaming cluster business. A quietly spoken person, he carefully and methodically kept track of performance levels over time. He particularly enjoyed sharing results and good news with stakeholders.

Tony stated:

*...don't get me wrong, we have leveraged through our marketing and media a lot off what we've done, you know we are quite proud to stand up and say this is what we've done and this is what we've saved and ah-you know part of that is to stand up and say to everybody you know what a great job we've done. And the other part of that is that to make people aware that as a big business or as a community leader you can do that. Um, and it's ok to do that- and trying to get people to follow our lead.*

These observations suggest that emotion has an important and rightful place within the sensemaking process, which is certainly more than the battle over rationality that is often portrayed in the organisation and management sciences (Fineman 1996). As Dougerty and Drumheller write:

*Ironically, organizational members would be far (more) successful at producing rational outcomes if they spent less time and effort trying to shove their emotions into rational norms—this can only happen if the duality is closed and organizations are recognized as both emotional and rational locations for sensemaking. (2006:235)*

The empirical data in this research supports the view of the neurosciences that the process of sensemaking and, in fact, commitment is highly embedded in emotional arousal and not just cognitive analysis. These findings support the view that the plausibility contained within sensemaking involves an array of both conscious and subconscious mental processes.

### **6.2.2 Drawing on resourcefulness, personal wisdom and self-belief**

All participants drew on their sensemaking from an accumulation of experiences, memorable events and episodes in their lives. It is contended that sensemaking through discursive exchanges (Shotter 2008; Tracy 2002) was highly influenced by the levels and nature of reflexivity of each individual. Some individuals appeared to be more naturally reflexive than others and as a result were able to hypothesise or consider plausible accounts in their reasoning. Expressions pertaining to how sensemaking had arisen were often linked to their interpretation of self (Holstein & Gubrium 2000; Pullen, Beech & Sims 2007) and how their social construction (Gergen 2009a) might or might not have changed.

Processes that helped people to reflect on their experience and to build confidence and self-belief that change was indeed possible are considered vitally important. For embedded change to occur, individuals need to undergo a meaningful experience that convinces them of the merits of change. In the case of Adam it was not until he understood and applied the management tool on his computer that he believed he could benefit from the claims of improved resource efficiency in his business. What assisted these processes was undertaking changes in small steps and then celebrating successes. Unless this eventuates people can quickly lose interest and enthusiasm.

Participants needed to be jolted into an attentive state that increased their capacity at least for a fleeting moment to be interested or curious about what was being expressed or communicated. If this initial jolt ended up being a false alarm or of little consequence individuals would most likely direct their attention elsewhere. Some individuals found it notably difficult to identify the source or inspiration for their sensemaking. The struggle observed during those interviews could be due to the fact that these individuals had never thought about such issues in the past, or that they were just unable at that time to verbalise their thinking.

### **6.2.3 Encouragement of individual immersion**

‘Individual immersion’ refers to a person becoming fully embodied in what is unfolding. In simple terms it is seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. When

people are required to come face to face with a situation and are required to use their full repertoire of senses to make meaning out of what is being discussed, they are much more likely to be active participants and contributors to the sensegiving process. When considering what constituted extraordinary sensemaking, participants recalled to a lesser degree formal training but gave more time to recollecting potent situations when they were fully immersed in what was unfolding.

Examples of immersion within this study involved on-site visits to other businesses, participating in dialogue on best practices, and actively participating in auditing and overseeing waste and resource efficiency in their business. Immersion often involved participants needing to go through their own sensemaking process by trial and error and experimentation (Stensaker, Falkenberg & Gronhaug 2008). These potent moments required individuals to be active players in a real life situation that required their full attention. Key experiences of engagement often arose when people felt higher levels of accountability for their actions and when there was a belief that tangible benefits could be achieved, often exceeding initial expectations. When this occurred there was an increased likelihood that sensemaking would lead to a more lasting change.

During the study, all participants had to face a number of major challenges in Australia, which required them to place a higher value on the likely impact and consequences of climate change. In 2007 there was a major drought, and in 2008 there was a significant increase in the price of electricity. Both these situations required focused attention. The drought provided a stark wake-up call to the potential or actual consequences of climate change. There was an increased acceptance that each individual and business needed to take action in reducing its water usage. A number of businesses deployed water saving devices and technologies to help reduce consumption. In 2008 the price of electricity began to climb, sparking a high level of action to minimising usage. Supporting these changes was a variety of government schemes providing rebates and financial incentives for reducing water and electricity consumption. After the research was completed and while this thesis was being drafted it was noticeable that the interest in climate change declined as matters pertaining to the global economic crisis took precedence.

The next discussion focuses on the failures and successes of specific sensegiving activities within the clusters' activities designed to assist the implementation of environmentally friendly practices.

### ***6.3 Sensegiving – What failed and what worked?***

Empirical data about cluster-based sensegiving within this study revealed that the influences on individual social construction were much more complex and multi-factorial than were previously considered. It is contended that the analysis of multiple individuals and scenarios has contributed advances to the sensegiving literature by identifying a wide range of considerations that influenced commitment over time within a diverse and far-reaching empirical context.

The motivation to undertake this study was in part influenced by the contention of Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) that the conditions associated with sensegiving constituted an under-theorised area. The approach within this thesis has moved beyond their work on the 'triggers' and 'enablers' to include what can impede and halt the processes of sensegiving and sensemaking over time. In undertaking an analysis of clusters as agents of sensegiving and sensemaking the intention was to focus a critical eye on the circumstances that both aided and inhibited these processes. The need for a more balanced inquiry appears to be supported by Czarniawska, who says:

What happens when sensemaking goes sour? What happens when frames disintegrate, when there are no cues (the world seems to have returned to its buzzing and twinkling chaotic state) and when disconnections rule? (Czarniawska 2006:1671)

This exploration includes 'how', 'when' and 'why' individual sensemaking was influenced by such arrangements. A critique of the sensegiving literature indicates that it has been too positivist in its approach, failing to address the complexities of context that stimulate or sour arrangements. In undertaking a less deterministic analysis, light has been shed on why sensegiving assists sensemaking and on what may inhibit and sour sensemaking over time. The research in this thesis strongly indicates that sensegiving has the means and potential to influence sensemaking. The degree of influence of sensegiving varies depending on the characteristics of its

delivery, the receptivity of the individual and the nature of the experience being faced at a point of time. It is also contingent on the capacity of the sensegiving to stimulate the dynamics and characteristics of extraordinary sensemaking, by stirring emotions into action, drawing on inner wisdom and self-belief and encouraging individual immersion.

The data suggested that the influence of sensegiving on individual sensemaking and on time commitment can range from a fleeting experience to one that involves more long-term and lasting effect. Depending on the tensions faced by each individual there needs to be some consideration of whether sensegiving has meaning and value. Predicting what will eventuate from sensegiving is not easy, as many of the filters and pressures that influence its nature have nothing to do with the single sensegiving event or situation. The analysis indicated that individuals were bombarded by multitudinous accounts that made sensemaking over time a full-time occupation.

Here lies one of the great challenges of sensegiving: even with the best intention and design, key messages can struggle to be heard, accepted or integrated into daily life. In earlier discussions of plausibility it was observed that organisationally implemented activities were only a partial influence on the nature of commitment. This research has helped not only to examine what failed and what worked but also to identify interesting dilemmas. Most of all, insight was gained into whether claimed benefits of sensegiving were a result of good design or of chance or good fortune. Thus a clearer picture appeared of sensegiving and sensemaking over time and their relationship with individual commitment. The discussion begins with what failed.

### **6.3.1 What failed – impeters and inhibitors**

Participants believed that a well-designed and managed cluster process could assist the implementation of environmental initiatives. As outlined in previous discussions, however, business pressures, power relationships and nuances social construction can have both helpful and inhibiting influence on such processes. Roome and Wigen draw attention to the complex relationships between business goals, the structure of learning and the influence and power of stakeholders. In their study, which is supported by this research, they wrote:

Power is far from absolute: in part it is possessed by stakeholders, in part it is vested by organizations involved in learning or stakeholder engagement, and in part it is determined by the ambition of organizations and the type of learning and relationships they have with other actors. It is clear that an alignment of powerful interests is supportive of exploitative learning and the implementation of such learning. (2005:257)

Complicating these interconnections is the observation that individuals often assign meanings that are different from what was intended, and the change agent does not understand the impact of the change on the individual. This phenomenon can be partly attributed to the selective listening of individuals to storytelling. According to Sims, Huxham and Beech (2009:386) individuals make meaning by extracting ‘snippets’ of stories and then ‘refabricate them in a new form’ which is then integrated ‘into their ongoing story of self’. Bartunek et al. (2006) suggest that there can often be a mismatch between the aims of change programs and how they are acted upon, a contention that is supported by this research. Humphreys et al. (2012) argue that process of storytelling by its very nature is recursive, reciprocal and interactive and generates infinite meanings, many of which are contestable. All these views are consistent with the observations in this research, particularly when one considers the diversity of social constructions is generated from a shared sensegiving experience. In simple terms, this research confirms the view the people often put their own ‘spin’ on what they hear, see and experience.

Why did some individual sensegiving activities associated with clusters fail to stimulate sensemaking? A number of inhibiting factors were identified. One was that individuals turned their sensemaking somewhere else. An example was in the regional cluster, where original members of the arrangement withdrew their participation halfway through the process. Data indicated that individual sensemaking never stops, but shifts its attention to other priorities. The challenge for sensegiving is to grab the attention and keep it long enough for sensemaking to be directed towards the desired aim. One of the on-going tensions in the sensegiving process was that many participants were craving simple and practical answers to complex challenges. These people were already burdened by high workloads and were seeking a quick fix to complex challenges.

In the area of environmental sustainability, the desire for simplicity led to individuals implementing actions to gain quick fixes. Examples included placing water saving devices on appliances and installing energy efficient light bulbs into buildings. These changes led to an immediate return on investment, but when it came to addressing more complex challenges such as behavioural change in the workplaces, the desire for action dissipated. An enduring challenge was that when facing a complex issue the sensegiving needed to support individuals in coping with the uncertainty and messiness of the process. Further contributing to these challenges was the need to learn new slogans, jargon and terminology, as well as discovering new emerging structures and reporting arrangements. Individuals often found the changes dissatisfying and as a result soured the processes of sensemaking that were being fed by the range of interventions presented within the cluster-based programs.

### **6.3.2 What worked – enablers and triggers**

Numerous triggers for excellent sensemaking existed within the cluster-based sensegiving activities. They contributed to self-confidence and created a fertile ground for comparison and collaboration. The data suggested that sensemaking could help individuals to advance their capacity to explore new horizons and different avenues of thinking. The perceived ingredients of what helped sensegiving were highly consistent with the principles of adult learning (Brookfield 1991; Knowles, Holton & Swanson III 2005; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner 2007) and multi-intelligence (Gardner 1995). Sensemaking generated from sensegiving largely mirrored the classic stepped model of learning.<sup>8</sup> This stepped model involves four steps: unconscious incompetence, conscious incompetence, conscious competence and unconscious competence. Nokaka (1994) proposed a fifth area, reflective competence, when individuals extract meaning about what is unfolding. The research in this study supports the views of Schwandt (2005) that there is a close relationship

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<sup>8</sup> The origins of this are unclear although it appears that the thinking of Maslow (1943) on human motivation, the Gordon Training International, and Howell and Fleishman (1982) were important contributors to evolution of the model over time.

Accessed [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_stages\\_of\\_competence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_stages_of_competence), 28 December 2010.

between critical reflection and the impact of social influences that occurs in sensemaking.

Also important for sensegiving is theorising about how different systems thinking can shape the way people socially construct the complexities of sustainability, as well as influencing how theory, research and action are communicated and understood.

According to Porter and Cordoba, approaches can include the functionalist viewpoint, which sees sustainability as 'self evident and knowable' (2009:327). If this is occurring it is important to encourage individuals to see limitations as being within the confines of predetermined problem analysis in a particular area. They also argue that an 'interpretive' stance, which would see the understanding of sustainability as a discourse requires a better understanding of the mental models of key contributors to the system. That stance focuses particularly on awareness, appreciation and ethical action as a means to enhance understanding of the complexities being faced. Here the challenge lies in helping to build agreement when there is no 'one fits all' approach to sustainability. Finally, there is the viewpoint of seeing sustainability as a 'complex adaptive system' where individuals seek to understand the interconnections between bigger issues behind sustainability, such as climate change, and then make determinations as to how individuals, organisations and communities operate within these broader considerations.

Porter and Cordoba argue that all these perspectives have their place and role in how sustainability education is undertaken and it is therefore important to consider when and where educators and leaders introduce a new lens to examine an issue. Within this study it was apparent that all three avenues of exploration were used at various times. The research demonstrated that when facts pertaining to sustainability become known or accepted there was less anxiety about taking risks as there appeared to be more certainty. In processes where there was a rational economic argument for change people appeared more comfortable in taking action. When interpretive or complex adaptive thinking was required, participants appeared more likely to struggle or appear frustrated. When people were convinced by financial incentives, economic argument, and how a change might serve their self-interest or reputation they were more likely to take an action to assist ecological sustainability. Sensegiving about

resource efficiency might be conducive to a functionalist approach, whereas discussions of stakeholder engagement might require a more interpretive viewpoint. On the other hand, discussions relating to changing culture over time would require a more 'complex adaptive' approach. These thoughts are also consistent with the thinking on exploring the technical and adaptive challenges of leadership (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky 2009b; Heifetz & Linsky 2002). In considering these aspects 'systems thinking' it is apparent that relying on only one approach could generate polarisation of reaction and reduced capacity to adapt to what is required in the experience of sustainability.

As identified, one of the more interesting findings of this research was that individual comparison was an important trigger and enabler for sensemaking. This was evidenced by individuals regularly asking me during the interviews and on-site discussions how they were performing in comparison to others. The need for comparison was a consistent theme through all phases of the research. Sensegiving activities such as on-site visits or diagnostic tools that provided some evidence of current performance against others were highly valued. Cluster-based activities opened the eyes of many of the participants to the risks and opportunities associated with change that would never have been exposed without benchmarking or collaboration being activated. It appeared to heighten the intensity of comparison when individuals felt that others were facing similar challenges to themselves.

Cluster-based sensegiving appeared to fuel a human need to be seen as a worthwhile contributor to a group project. Feelings of belonging and social status are key triggers in sustaining commitment over time. The more individuals perceived that similarities existed between them, the greater was the desire to participate. Cluster history, experience levels, educational levels and job status were also contributing factors in helping to stimulate the environment for sensemaking. Case studies that included comparative elements such as company size, market types and demographics of individuals helped people to make comparisons of what could or could not be applied. In this regard, acknowledging the power of ego or of being a 'star performer' added to this dynamic.

The sensegiving that was most appreciated was information presented in small chunks or that contained easy-to-follow instructions. These findings are consistent with much of the sensemaking literature which argues that integration into personal organising is assisted by logical and structured thinking (Czarniawska 2008; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). The presentation of arithmetical logic in arguing the benefits of change was also observed to be particularly powerful, and was especially appreciated among the males in the study. Sensemaking deepened when supplemented by diagnostic tools and assessment criteria that aided determination of areas of strengths and areas for improvement. Well-facilitated formal discussions at cluster meetings and on-the-job coaching helped the sensemaking process.

A recurring theme of discussion was the importance of relevance to business challenges. The greater the adaptability and flexibility of design in addressing the unique challenges of each participant, the greater the potential for success. Apart from the formal exchanges, individual sensemaking was facilitated by networking and non-orchestrated collaboration around passion and interest in sustainability. Free-flowing conversations outside any formal gatherings not only built social capital but also opened possibilities for new discoveries and enthusiasm for change. According to Shrivastava, passion is a vital agent for change within sustainability. He asserts:

Passion allows managers to have singular focus and extreme dedication to tasks at hand. It provides the mental and emotional energy needed to retain excitement in work over extended periods of time. Passion emanates from authentic work, rewarding work relationships, and the feeling of being engaged in right (socially and ethically anchored) livelihood. (2010:444)

To highlight the power of discursive exchanges and how they can increase levels of passion and accountability, an account is presented of Keith, who used his car journeys after meetings in the Regional cluster to critically review and make sense of what had unfolded.

*Yeah, the other thing is um, us as a management group is a chance to have a chat in the car on the way back- because we're about 40 minutes away from where we usually have the meeting. And um, you know that's where we kind of chewed over a lot of ideas on the way back as well. Cos you're kind of a bit- you know- you've been thinking about it for a couple of hours and you get in the car and have a chance to talk to your*

*colleagues on the way back. So most of your problems or ideas as far as from a management point of view came up in that 40 minutes in the car.*

What is interesting about this story is that these group conversations operated well outside the formal structure of the cluster-based sensegiving. Such accounts are useful, as they highlight that prescribed sensegiving by formal authorities cannot expect to control all the meaning making that is generated by programs and change initiatives (Corvellec & Risberg 2007; Smerek 2011). Keith's story also demonstrates the potential power of the generative dialogue and productive conversation between people within groups and organisations (Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011; Tsoukas 2009). However, taking a more critical perspective, it cannot be assumed that discursive exchanges will lead to collective action which is both synergistic and congruent to the intentions of change. In fact the opposite could be the case, where discursive exchanges could lead to resistance and/or forms of enforced compliance (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant 2005; Hardy & Phillips 1998; Huxham & Vangen 2005) that might not be helpful to the goals and aims of the sensemaking and sensegiving process.

Some individuals also found that refinement of program design stimulated a renewed desire to learn new things. This was evidenced by the morphing of program design, delivery and governance, which necessitated the development of new scripts to assist the rationale for change. To achieve this objective, sensegiving processes needed to adapt to changing circumstances. Most of all, sensegiving needed to be empathetic to the range of emotions experienced and the on-going challenges faced. *Amy*, a project manager for the Manufacturing cluster, acknowledged that morphing was an important enabler to the sensegiving process:

*We are forever amending and improving- and modifying. We start with a concept and it has evolved and evolved and all of these things change- as you learn more.*

There was a view among many of the program designers that without some proof of change and modification the motivation to be actively involved could be lessened. It was therefore seen as important and healthy by some to have a programme that was undergoing constant change.

### 6.3.3 Interesting dilemmas and paradoxes

Given the social and political context of this study it is not surprising that power relationships and self-identity had a profound influence on all aspects of sensemaking. With the paradoxes of masking and self-interest, differentials in power relations power relations were inevitable. Given the intentions of the Department of Environment to create cluster processes designed to assist the promulgation of environmentally friendly practices, there were some individuals who seemed motivated by self-interest and political game-playing rather than being champions of sustainability. The masking of motives (Czarniawska-Joerges & Jacobsson 1995) influenced the nature of learning and commitment relating to both sensegiving and sensemaking. In making these observations, it is argued that the very best that sensegiving can do is to acknowledge the potential sway of emotions and seek a means to steer learning and behaviour into a constructive direction.

As reflected in the thesis, individual commitment over time is influenced by a complex array of contradictions and paradoxes. Personal accounts highlighted the diverse range of experiences of the effectiveness and influence of sensegiving on individual sensemaking. This was in part reflected in the stories of George and Adam, who, although sharing similar sensegiving, had quite different experiences over time. For some participants the cluster sensegiving experience was not only positive but also helped to reshape their thinking and behaviour. For others the impact was less effective and led to minimal change in the nature of their commitment. It should also be noted that changes in program design and reporting relationships were not always received positively. At times when participants might have been craving order, consistency and predictability, unexplained or unjustified changes were frustrating for some, leading to increased sadness, ambivalence and fear.

Exploring the theoretical connection between commitment, sensemaking and personal identity provided a launching pad for enhancing understanding. However, it is evident that a theoretical understanding is by itself not sufficient. There is a need to develop deeper insight into contextual issues. The empirical data strongly suggested that at best, the quality and design of sensegiving was only one potential influence on

individual commitment. Many other issues affected plausibility, the nature of power relationships and personal latitude. Extraordinary sensegiving could inform and colour the nature of sensemaking, possibly influencing the favourability of choices at a certain time. There was, however, no guarantee that an individual would take the desired action. The analysis revealed that sensemaking could sometimes be influenced by excellent design but good luck, chance and just being in the right place at the right time could also generate it.

In exploring cluster-based sensegiving and sensemaking a number of dilemmas and paradoxes became evident, which deepened understanding of the complexities of individual commitment over time. One aspect was self-identity, which by its very nature is hard to shift. It can take a protracted range of memorable and powerful experiences before self-identity can be altered. The primary reason for inertia and resistance seemed to be that there was no information or 'healthy disturbance' to create the dynamics for required new commitments to manifest. New patterns of commitment only unfolded if new sensemaking was supplemented by excellent sensegiving plus the freedom to act. It could also be argued that the dynamics of both 'stable' and 'becoming' selves need compelling evidence before one or both are encouraged into action.

The quality of sensemaking and sensegiving could be enhanced or stifled by the performance and enthusiasm of other cluster members, project officers, facilitators and third party providers. Change was observed when a new participant more motivated to contribute to the cluster replaced a disengaged stakeholder. Barsade (2002) states that it is important to understand the ripple effect of 'emotional contagion' in teams and groups. Emotional contagion describes how the moods and emotions of an individual or group can influence the emotions or behaviour of another person or group. There was evidence within this study where highly motivated individuals inspired others to take action while there were other times where disengaged individuals generated feelings of despondency and inaction to others.

Within clusters, some individuals were more skilled in self-promotion than others. Some saw their participation as an opportunity to 'be a star'. This generated a number of interesting dynamics, including admiration, pride and isolation, depending on the

participants involved. It was particularly noticeable when people were required to document successes or share work in progress. Participants were then under pressure to create a good impression and this was easier for some than others. There were some who were perceived as over-stating their successes in order to create an inflated impression. A highly experienced project officer from the Department of Environment labelled this behaviour as ‘gilding the lily’. John, the project officer of the Manufacturing cluster, supported this by saying:

*Some people are more transparent about their strengths and weaknesses, others are more willing or able to ‘gild the lily’ in order to create a good impression of themselves to others.*

A number of cluster members were sensitive to the varying levels of truthfulness and transparency perceived in meetings. They argued that the sensegiving processes were both competitive and collaborative at the same time. Participants felt superior or inferior on the basis of what was emerging in-group discussions. Indeed for many, offering, giving or asking for help was a very courageous act. These exchanges fuelled the inequalities of power involved in asking for and receiving assistance (Schein 2009).

#### ***6.4 Success factors in cluster governance***

To assist a better understanding of the success factors involved in cluster governance, practical suggestions are shared using a normative and practice-based writing approach. The aim is to provide guidance as to what can be done within clusters to raise individual commitment over time on an identified issue. The recommendations are drawn from individual accounts and interpretations of cluster-based experiences. Each cluster arrangement was driven by political, economic and social agendas. Pressures such as justifying a return on investment were central to the governance process. Some individuals found the pressure to demonstrate tangible results counterproductive. The governance process at times became bureaucratic, driven by multiple funding sources within government.

Benn and Dunphy outlined a number of aspects that need to be addressed to improve the chances of well-functioning cluster-based arrangements, and all those aspects were reinforced within this research. They comprise:

Deciding on whether to use direct or indirect representation of stakeholders, the appointment of a coordinator or coordinating group, choosing appropriate forms of communication within the networks, developing a timeline for the process and anticipated stages, gaining agreement to decision-making methods including how the final decision will be reached, providing for arbitration in case of failure to reach agreement and designing support to overcome relative disadvantages of some stakeholders. (2007:27)

As was the case for sensemaking and sensegiving, commitment over time as analysed was affected by multiple influences including the nature of social construction, power relationships and business pressures. Most of these pressures are likely to be well outside the reach of cluster administrators, managers and facilitators. It is therefore important to state that excellent governance will not guarantee commitment; it is only an enabler. A major challenge of cluster governance was how to secure participants' attention long enough to gain enough traction to improve levels of commitment.

Only two out of the three clusters in this study were observed to exhibit sustained and on-going governance. The cluster-based process was just a small part of each participant's overall job and life responsibilities, and clear realisation was needed that good cluster governance involved transparency, accountability and collaboration (Clarke 2004). Sharing understanding of new practices and skills techniques for dealing with risk issues (Benn & Dunphy 2007) was only one dimension at play in the effort to bring about and sustain individual commitment over time.

The success of each cluster studied is presented before the factors on cluster governance are outlined. The cluster was established as an arrangement between the Department of Environment and an association representing the Recreation and Gaming industry. Its objective was providing funding to businesses to save water, energy and waste. The funding initiative led to improvements in environmentally friendly practices but there was no meeting to discuss the results achieved. Most cluster members felt that they had not operated as a cluster if only because they were only initially participating to receive funding for environmentally friendly practices. When asked about the current performance of the cluster they felt that in some cases the benefits had not materialised. Towards the end of this study the cluster morphed into another arrangement involving more stakeholders. The industry association had

become a keen advocate for improving environmentally friendly practices within their industry and they had several outstanding success.

Individuals perceived the Regional Cluster as a functional and successful example of a cluster in action, involving a broad range of sensegiving over time. Various activities were undertaken and the cluster developed a strong bond as a group through regular meetings, on-site visits and consultations. All individuals, including George and Adam, appeared to benefit on a personal level as well as having an opportunity to implement sustainability and environmentally friendly practices within their businesses. At the conclusion of the trial the Regional cluster was planning to establish a new cluster in the near future.

Finally, the Manufacturing cluster that formed in 2007 had evolved from another arrangement that existed some years earlier. A feature of this group was their shared history of collaboration on cleaner production methods. Most of the participants knew each other and that formed part of their reason for re-joining. The primary focus of the Manufacturing cluster was to share ideas on waste reduction and on the higher-level aims of ecological sustainability involving industrial ecology. By the completion of this study the cluster had met several times and undertaken assessments of current business performance in environmentally friendly practices.

Given these observations and assessments, four success factors that enhance individual and group sensemaking and cluster governance are outlined using a more pragmatic writing style. These are: defining what a cluster is and is not, recruiting people for their capabilities and not their status, noticing and sharing recurring patterns of behaviour, and facilitating cluster momentum. These four factors were important in improving levels of participation and engagement within cluster-based processes.

#### **6.4.1 Defining what a cluster is and is not**

As there is no general agreement on what is meant by a cluster, each arrangement needs to determine its intention and purpose. Cluster governance should clarify participants' understanding of what a cluster means and how it will operate by

defining and answering questions about participants' goals and intentions'. Clusters in this study found that to assist governance, memorandums of understanding helped delineate roles and responsibilities for participants. Making sense of what high commitment means should be explored. To provide better governance and accountability, conversations about what commitment looks like, sounds like and feels like were important. Such understandings will help identify the norms, acceptable practices and values that would assist individual contribution, as well as assisting the broader aims and objectives of the cluster. Incentives such as financial subsidies were useful in forging commitment but did not translate into pragmatic action. Demonstrating enthusiasm and transparency can greatly assist learning and group commitment, providing constant confirmation for participants that their investment of time and effort in the process is worthwhile. Depending on these dynamics and exchanges people can feel inspired and encouraged or, in the worst case, saddened or de-motivated by what is unfolding.

#### **6.4.2 Recruiting people for their capability and not their status**

It was observed that good recruitment of participants for clusters was crucial. It was relatively easy for people to join each of the clusters in the study, and this had both desirable and undesirable consequences. A common strategy used to recruit participants was relying on existing networks to locate suitable businesses. The benefit of this was the compilation of a list of companies generated by word of mouth. Project managers were able to source a variety of departmental records, seasoned facilitators and third parties in recommending suitable contacts. Once contacts were canvassed for their interest, people were nominated to be part of the cluster process. Apart from a small contribution fee and demonstrating compliance with minimum environmental standards, there was no authority to enforce compliance or action. In all clusters the ease of membership led to the presence of some poor contributors.

In most cases the commitment of senior management was assessed in an interview process. Then, on the basis of these conversations, senior management decided who would be the cluster member. In some cases difficulties emerged at this point, when unsuitable individuals without formal authority or capability were directed to

participate. The research indicates that choosing individuals on the basis of their capability as a change agent and not on their job title would better foster the desired outcome of creating a high functioning cluster process with greater likelihood of creating and sustaining commitment. A common trait of high performing participants in the clusters was their thirst for learning and networking. Those who achieved higher personal gains from the cluster-based activities applied training and assessment to the work area, experienced frequent contact with others, and were able to incorporate cluster responsibilities into their work schedule.

#### **6.4.3 Noticing and sharing recurring patterns of behaviour**

The study highlights that there is no absence of advice on what helps or hinders commitment over time, and there are many anecdotes and suggestions as to what can be done to increase and observe commitment over time. Making the effort to share these observations and assumptions builds sensemaking and mutual understanding of what to do better in the future. It is considered that the willingness of the Department of Environment to support the research into these matters is indicative of its desire to improve. Given the richness of the narratives uncovered in the research, any pursuit that encourages knowledge sharing on improved cluster governance should be encouraged. Cluster processes could benefit from discussion of views pertaining to the logic and merits of these observations. A clearer understanding of what it takes to secure and sustain commitment could be obtained. To assist this thinking here are five *common assumptions* which emerged from the research into commitment over time, which could be used to assist cluster governance and associated benefits in the future:.

*Assumption one* – Successful clusters rely on individuals who share a common belief and faith in the cluster process.

*Assumption two* – Clusters should not last forever. A life cycle of around 18 months is a useful time frame to galvanise attention and review progress. Unless there was some degree of change or novelty, participants became bored or complacent.

*Assumption three* – The quality and expertise of facilitation is paramount to success. If designed appropriately, clusters can give rise to increased levels of anticipation, joy and positivity.

*Assumption four* – The cluster process in time needs to shift participants' attention from achieving quick fixes and meeting technical challenges to addressing more lasting, strategic and adaptive objectives. To do this it may be necessary to jointly teach and develop understanding of the basics while also becoming more tolerant and receptive of complexity.

*Assumption five* – In a small cluster of around eight people one can expect two to three people to be higher performers. Three to four people might be struggling.

#### **6.4.4 Facilitating cluster momentum over time**

Excellent facilitation was an important influence on successful cluster governance. A number of qualities seemed to have greater impact in helping to sustain sensegiving over time. In the study, the roles of project sponsor, project manager, cluster member, third party and facilitators all assisted the cluster process. There was confusion at times over the role each person played, but success was contingent on someone being responsible for maintaining enthusiasm and engagement.

A frequently mentioned quality of good facilitation is subtlety. Subtlety in this study included the ability to maintain impetus without being too heavy handed. When subtlety was demonstrated well, clusters were able to balance progress with the space and freedom for participants to act as desired. Subtlety was not unique to cluster governance but was transferable to a variety of change management processes. Cluster members mentioned subtlety in their accounts of how to engage people within their workplaces; this included choosing the right moment and process to celebrate success, contribution and achievement. For example, a number of cluster facilitators were keen to make people feel important and valued. Carol, the facilitator of the regional cluster, was a skilled proponent of celebration; she purchased food for cluster meetings and organised a dinner at a nice restaurant when the group formally ended. Carol was always seeking ways to build and reward positive momentum. When I met

Carol for the last time I shared her delight and pride at the awards night at the conclusion of the regional cluster initiative. She handed out certificates of recognition for each cluster member. At that dinner she felt that there was a realisation among the higher performing companies that the benefits were greater than had been anticipated. When Carol was asked to reflect on good points of the clusters she said:

*Oh there's been lots but probably the most rewarding is when you hear the companies reminisce on the programs they've gone through and you can see the lights when they go on in their head- when they go 'oh actually we have achieved some great savings' or 'we have made significant advances in the way we do things'.*

Finally, it is important to state that maintaining cluster momentum requires strict adherence to time and meeting management. Sustaining momentum was a key indicator that a cluster was tracking well. It was very easy for people to become sidetracked at a moment's notice, to reduce the impact and decrease levels of contribution. Each cluster needs to appoint a person to organise events, chair meetings and ensure opportunities for frequent follow-up.

## ***6.5 Chapter conclusion***

This final analysis chapter of the thesis makes a contribution by presenting data on interconnections between sensemaking and cluster sensegiving designed to improve the level of innovation and commitment to environmentally friendly practices. This research provides a candid and empirically informed discussion of what worked or failed in regard to individual sensemaking within a social and political context that was constantly morphing and re-moulding itself. The empirical data also demonstrates that existing sensemaking and sensegiving literature does not capture the complexities of individual plausibility and enactment. The hesitancy to claim cause-and-effect links between cluster sensegiving and sensemaking comes from the assessment that the foundations of commitment can be generated from a multitude of events and episodes.

It was discovered that even the best design, orchestration of learning, and cluster governance might not be sufficient to secure the desired outcomes. Consistent with earlier theorising in this thesis, analysis of the interconnections between individual sensemaking and cluster sensegiving highlighted that these relationships are not deterministic. Analysis demonstrated that no prescriptive cures or simple remedies exist to guarantee individual sensemaking. Individual accounts indicated that the meanings associated with ecological sustainability come from sources and tensions well outside the boundaries of the cluster process.

Sensegiving appeared to be more successful in generating desired responses when people were jolted into new sensemaking by the skilful use of healthy disturbance combined with the 'right' level and timing of support. Stirring of supportive emotions, drawing on the resourcefulness and self-belief of each person, and encouraging of individual immersion were important catalysts for sensemaking. Vitaly important was the existence of systems, processes and structures to enable the cementing of personal change and the redevelopment of personal organising systems.

Given these observations a number of pragmatic suggestions were made about how cluster governance can assist collaboration, learning and commitment. They are: being clear about intentions, recruiting for capability, being transparent about features that stifle and assist collaboration, and being prepared to celebrate progress. The

benefit of this analysis is that it helps students of organisation and management to become more aware of the nuances required to bring about lasting change. Educators and leaders need to see that meaning making is constantly in flux, and as a result in managing sensegiving processes they need to be mindful that commitment and associated social construction can be subject to change at a moment's notice. The sensegiving processes that stimulate renewal in thinking can range from fleeting and serendipitous instances of enlightenment to highly rational, logical and coherent pathways of wisdom creation.

## **CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION: NAILING JELLY TO THE WALL**

This thesis has enabled new theoretical contributions and practical conclusions to be generated in the area of commitment over time and it has done so by undertaking the investigation within the context of making ecological sustainability improvements in business. Central to these explorations was understanding how individuals make meanings of their commitments, through analysis of the longitudinal data generated by interviewing 31 people over time. The empirical context revealed how individuals explored social construction, plausibility and enactment. A processual view of change (Dawson 2003; Pettigrew 1997) provided a useful lens to explore how individuals make meaning over time, without being restricted to one specific episode or event. The study as a result yielded data on the temporality of commitment while also presenting some viewpoints on why individuals changed their orientation over time.

A number of practical and theoretical insights were developed pertaining to management and organisational studies as well as illustrating the leadership and facilitation of complex adaptive change in business, as represented within the context of individual commitment to environmentally friendly practices in small to medium sized businesses. Bringing the methodological and theoretical contributions together led to the translation of theory and creation of new meaning that resulted in new perspectives on sustainable practice and meeting the challenge of complex change.

The synergies between the making of meaning and ecological sustainability validated the importance of undertaking a processual perspective of individual change, as well as methodologically advancing research in this area. Methodologically, this thesis has contributed to the development of rich, in-depth case studies of individuals within cluster and organisational arrangements. A social constructionist approach deepened understanding of how individuals organised and made sense (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005) of their commitment (Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield 2012; Meyer, Stanley & Parfyonova 2012) within the multiple contexts they faced.

It is acknowledged that commitment by its very nature is difficult to define and study. It could be suggested that investigating the tensions and paradoxes of individual

commitment over time is like attempting to 'nail jelly to the wall'. This analogy was used by Keith, the facilitator for the Manufacturing cluster, in regard to his assessment of the difficulty of understanding sustainability. I suggest that 'nailing jelly to the wall' could equally be used in regard to the defining the complexities of commitment, especially given the range of theories and empirical data presented in this research.

The analysis of commitment over time appeared tangible and manageable for the purposes of presentation but the substantive argument is that commitment is only one fragment within the complexities of individual social construction. Analysis of data allowed the tracking of these fragments, but when considered in the context of organisational and social change, the relationship between meaning making and change is paradoxical and multi-faceted. This study suggests that both the contexts that people face and individual commitment can change if there is sufficient questioning of the appropriateness and usefulness of existing ways of organising. Then, depending on the nature of meaning making, commitment can change incrementally or in some cases morph and/or continuously transform. These explorations engendered greater awareness that change manifests in a multiplicity of forms.

Traditional literature has focused more on static, incremental and predictable forms of change, developing a picture that is not indicative of the chaos, transitions and complexities of modern change (Anderson & Anderson 2010; Palmer, Dunford & Akin 2009; Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011). Observations of individual meaning making and its relationship to commitment indicated that traditional views of organisational commitment and identity are out-dated. This research has demonstrated the vital importance of providing helpful guidance on making sense of ambiguity, disturbance and upheaval, while also accepting that there is a concurrent process of continual emergence of meaning, social construction and commitment. Scholars who argue that individuals can manipulate the commitment of others appear to underestimate the complexities of commitment as evidenced by the individuals in this study.

As discussed in the literature review, most scholarly conversations neglect the

individual as the unit of analysis. Yet individuals are at the forefront of the exploration of ecological sustainability within this thesis. In exploring the dynamics of individuals, new perspectives are provided on the role and influence of self-identity and sensemaking in shaping the display of individual commitment. This thesis concludes that people make sense of complexity in the moment and, depending on their social construction, can either be excited and energised by the opportunities of ephemeral change or find the lack of predictability and order frustrating and unsettling. It is certainly much more than the typical paradigm of employee/employer relationships at a fixed point of time which is commonly explored in the organisation and management literature (Roe, Solinger & Van Olffen 2009). In contrast to past theory, it is proposed here that commitment over time cannot be separated from the wider discourses of social and organisational change.

Complicating this examination is the multi-dimensional nature of commitment, which makes securing lasting improvements to sustainability and corporate social responsibility a complex and on-going challenge. Just because someone has taken action to implement structures, processes and systems that are environmentally friendly, it does not mean that the person is deeply committed to ecological sustainability. Did the person take action out of deep concern about the environment or was it a response to the powers and pressures of a job role? This research provided compelling evidence that multiple commitments and pressures of business can sway the uptake and impact of sensegiving on commitment.

Assisting understanding of these complexities was the observation that individual commitment in the business context can fluctuate based on changes in relationships, workload and job latitude. In fact, individuals often sacrificed their commitment to environmental sustainability for other priorities. The motives for alternative courses of action could in many cases be traced to logical business reasons, but often decision making was more about self-preservation within social and political contexts. The answer again as to whether an individual is committed is highly conditional and situational. For some of the participants, the main focus in being environmentally friendly was to save money, be more productive or enhance reputation, rather than trying to improve the wellbeing and biodiversity of the planet for future generations.

These observations in the context of business and organisations provided a refined understanding of the factors that shape commitment to sustainability, which are not discussed in the environmental psychology literature (Bamberg & Moser 2007; Davis, Le & Coy 2011; Whitmarsh & O'Neill 2010). This research developed an awareness that the commitment of individuals varies between contexts and is influenced by life experiences, past mentoring, and the inner desire to resolve and overcome challenges.

On the completion of this thesis some questions could be asked, including 'How can you tell if a person is committed to ecological sustainability?' and 'How would you know if a person's commitment has changed?' This study supports the view (Roe, Waller & Clegg 2009) that the answers to these questions are related to concept of time and when they are asked. If you take a 'chronos' perspective you could argue that if a person demonstrated a measurable improvement in commitment over time it could be used as evidence of positive change. Savings in water usage and building a waterway regeneration project on a business site are two examples demonstrated within various personal accounts. Given the qualitative nature of this research, however, more conclusions were drawn from a 'kairos' orientation, where it was theorised that individuals make commitments 'moment to moment' and that the processes are highly variable and subject to change, as individuals constantly re-prioritise and review plausibility, based on what is being socially constructed at the time. Thus, when it comes to determining whether a person is committed the answer would include determinations and commentary from both 'chronos' and 'kairos' orientations of time.

The major theoretical contributions of this study are now outlined.

### ***7.1 Theoretical contributions***

Theoretical explanations for these fluctuations were presented by indicating the co-existence of stable and becoming forces, which exist at both micro (personal) and macro (systematic level in groups, organisations and society) levels. These observations were reinforced during the study of individual commitment within the context of ecological sustainability. Personal accounts indicated that individuals were attempting to reconcile and make meaning of what was known or unknown about

climate change. These dynamics manifested in patterns of individual commitment, which was idiosyncratic, non-linear and hard to predict.

How people make meaning is highly relational and is based on their perception of change. This study provided empirical support to the view that significant interrelationships exist between commitment, sensemaking and identity, and this occurs within social, political and economic complexity. The analysis therefore revealed many of the tensions and paradoxes of commitment to ecological sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

The study provided understanding of the interconnections between making meaning and the manifestation of enactment. Observations indicate that how individuals make meaning of power relationships (Thomas & Hardy 2011; Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011) is fundamental to the manifestation of commitment and resistance with organisational business activity. These observations helped to reveal the complexities of social construction, plausibility and action, which helped to shape the nature of commitment. Individuals faced their own unique blend of contexts and priorities. The research supports the view that when economic, social and political conditions are perceived to be favourable (Wilkinson & Reed 2007) individuals are much more willing to make the sacrifices required to make progress on climate change. Comparison and protecting self-interest are major influences on the nature of commitment and people are only willing to make sacrifices when they feel safe or motivated to do so.

The research also brings insights from self-identity theory showing that identity is constructed and reconstructed. As discussed, central to these exchanges is the proposed relationship between 'stable' and 'becoming' selves, leading to the potential reframing of plausibility, self-identity, and relationship with the external world, by constantly creating and dismantling multiple organising frameworks. Empirical study has indicated synergies and interconnections in the way people socially construct, create meaning and develop their identity over time. These interrelationships generate tensions and paradoxes that can make fresh and new commitments both easy and difficult to enact. The research indicated that meaning making is closely associated

with the tensions and questioning of self as detailed in the literature (Alvesson 2010; Beech 2010; Reissner 2010).

To develop some containment of the complex array of tensions and paradoxes pertaining to commitment over time the following discussion provides deeper examination of some key areas of theoretical, methodological and practical contribution. The first is ‘Why do individuals struggle to make meaning of sustainability?’ This is followed by further exploration of ‘Why must “morphing of change” be investigated in order to make progress in the field of organisation and management studies?’ The final question, to be explored before comments are made on methodology, future research and implications for practice, is ‘How do we raise levels of commitment to complex challenges like those pertaining to ecological sustainability?’

### **7.1.1 Why do individuals struggle to make meaning of sustainability?**

The social and political contexts of sustainability involve enormous ambiguity, confusion and debate. Here lies one of the main challenges of securing and maintaining commitment. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the following observation was expressed by Kevin, who said towards the end of his first interview that the definition of the term ‘sustainability’ was unclear: *‘sustainability - you know I like to say it’s a bit like nailing jelly to the wall’*. To clarify his meaning he explained:

*‘La mongh’- jelly to the wall- because you put 20 people around a table and ‘sustainability’- 15 of them are going to give you a blank look- and the other 5 will give you totally different interpretations. There is no grounding as to what sustainability means, so what the diagnostic does in the first instance is to give some structure, give some definition and to give the ability to measure as to what areas you are performing well or under performing in and I think that is very important.*

Kevin’s account gives insight into the challenges of implementing a concept riddled with ambiguity – both in practice and in theory. Part of this is because sustainability has become a language game (Astley & Zammuto 1992; Mauws & Philips 1995) where individuals struggle to find meaning through seeking out and ‘nailing’ clarity and order so that they can manage and provide leadership within processual change.

This study would suggest that, apart from the political and social contexts of ambiguity, which heightened apprehension and uncertainty, participants faced a more difficult roadblock to change. Data indicated that individuals were constantly testing and retesting their plausibility based on social construction of what had occurred and what was unfolding. In this pursuit they constantly sought compelling evidence and clues to assist this inquiry, where the natural tendency was to maintain the status quo unless they were shocked or jolted into new perspectives. To change perspectives or behaviour, individuals needed new data or evidence that could change how they might relate to their world. They seemed to be trying to make reasonable decisions based on the premise that what they were predicting was likely to occur, on many occasions needing “*leaps*” of faith and courage and “*jumps*” into what is unknown’ (Carroll & Levy 2008:85) in order to make progress. Unless people are convinced, or compelled to make commitments, they can easily shift their attention elsewhere. Individuals appeared to make meaning on the ‘razor’s edge’ between hope and despair, where any new insight or social construction could shift moods quite dramatically.

When seeds of doubt or other priorities appeared it was very possible that attention could be diverted elsewhere, resulting in different allocations of time, resources and effort within the total mix of the multiple commitments. Also adding to this disequilibrium in the context of ecological sustainability was the tension of making meaning between the often conflictual needs of immediacy and short-term vision driven by economic rationalism, self-interest and the moral and/or strategy imperatives of addressing the challenges of global warming and climate change. Not only were these tensions clearly evident in individual accounts of commitment over time; they remain visible within the current public discourse on the merits of climate change and also within the academic literature on sustainability.

Sustainability struggles to take hold because people are imprisoned in self-interest or are juggling other commitments. They are often unable to make different commitments because they are busy protecting their existing perception of reality. Participants needed to consider the demands for ecological sustainability within the confines and limitations of personal organising systems that either assisted or inhibited acceptance of change. Tensions and paradoxes could be evoked from

historical as well as social construction of what was evolving in the present. Self-interest and self-preservation are fundamental precepts of self-organising, which is integral to human motivation and innovation. As revealed, there appeared to be ongoing tension between self-interest and social purpose, which displayed not only at the individual level but also within groups and organisations. One could argue that this tension between self-interest and social purpose also exists at a community and country level, where politicians often talk about acting in the ‘national interest’ without due regard to global challenges facing current and future generations.

To crack the code to commitment over time, people need to be shocked into action so that there is enough motivation or desire to either dismantle old assumptions or install new assumptions of their personal organising framework. Analytical arguments are not sufficient to convince people; they need significant ‘healthy disturbance’ combined with motivation and practical reassurance, including being embodied and immersed in a process that provides tangible proof that what they are doing is possible and engaging. This was observed among participants when emotions such as fear and shame overtook the need for stability, leading to a fresh desire for new behaviours and thinking. It is also clear that arguing the merits of climate change from the viewpoint that the natural environment is a primary stakeholder of the business (Haigh & Griffiths 2009; Waddock 2012) is not sufficient to entice new commitments if people have to make trade-offs (Angus-Leppan, Benn & Young 2010; Hahn et al. 2010) and compromises within their social construction of economic, political and social complexity.

### **7.1.2 Why must ‘morphing of change’ be investigated to make progress?**

One of the conclusions of thesis is that study of the management and facilitation of change needs to be more devoted to understanding and exploring ‘morphing’ as a fundamental starting point of further research and study. During the investigation, for example, new language and understandings came into public knowledge in relation to ecological sustainability, and as a result participants were constantly trying to make sense of matters that appeared ill defined and unknown. Elections of new governments, launching of compelling research, introduction of new technologies,

changes in power relationships, and the ebbs and flows of language led to a process of constant re-appraisal, discarding and renewal as the old was replaced with the new. Old initiatives were discontinued or morphed into new ones, or new schemes were created to satisfy new demands and expectations.

In parallel, individuals had to respond to the changing dynamics by modifying their self-identity and commitments. Morphing generated insecurity and vulnerability as people tried to make sense of what to select, discard, or act with, using incomplete information. Participants had to make commitments with little information, organised structure or confidence. Factors that appeared to assist transition were the existence of compelling clear reasons for change, and the provision of restorative elements that nurtured instances of renewal and regeneration, as well as generating episodes of disturbance that sparked innovation and motivation for change.

In this research, much attention was given to the way individuals needed not only to socially construct what was emerging around them but also to reconcile how they themselves might be changing. It is deemed imperative to devote more attention to these explorations if the mechanics of managing change, social construction and personal transition are to be better understood. These observations are not restricted to matters of organisational change and capability; they are also intimately connected with the way individuals make meaning of what is unfolding around them and in turn contemplate plausibility and enactment.

Individual commitment over time within the context of ecological sustainability was observed as a 'morphing phenomenon' in which people constantly moulded and questioned their social construction in relation to their perceptions of the unpredictable world of climate change, and also to numerous other factors and drivers including changes in culture, language and power. These examinations supported the view that there is an ephemeral and iterative relationship between the self and the outside world, generating transitions in the nature of commitment and plausibility. Clearly, there were variations in the way individuals made and executed their commitments ranging from acceptance, resistance or ambivalence.

To my surprise, the literature in organisation and management studies has given little attention to morphing and how individual meaning and commitment evolves over time. This research provides clear recognition that the morphing of change has become an all-consuming concept in modern society and warrants more attention in the organisation and management literature. It has emerged as a characteristic of modern change, where all individuals attempt to remain in rapport with their social constructions of the transformations occurring in society while also building dynamic capabilities to adjust (Barreto 2010) which assist personal and organisational transitions over time (Jarzabkowski, Sillince & Shaw 2010). These tensions generate significant ambiguity and confusion as individuals and organisations struggle to make sense of multiple interests and of expectations that are constantly changing (Jarzabkowski & Sillince 2007; Jarzabkowski, Sillince & Shaw 2010).

These thoughts are supported by Marshak (2004), who argues that organisational change driven by the information age has become fundamentally different and is more typified by change evolving from an episodic process to one of continuous change. Initial academic interest in ‘morphing’ in organisation and management literature can be traced back to empirical case studies of companies such as Yahoo and Excite. In these studies, Rindova and Kotha defined morphing as a ‘continuous process of profound transformation’ (2001:1264). Their study focused attention on renewal of ‘organisational form’ to achieve competitive advantage in a dynamic environment. Where scholars have explored ‘morphing’, they have done so within the context of continuous organisational transformation rather than individual change over time (Stebbing & Braganza 2009). Other theorising has explored the dynamics of transformation of organisational morphing in regard to environmental change (Lengnick- Hall & Beck 2005) but as yet there appears to be little investigation of individual morphing in relation to the changes people perceive occurring around them.

Findings also confirm the view that meaning making is most volatile when people are faced with uncertainty, as there is a realisation that their existing personal organising systems are not sufficient to help them to cope with change. At these moments, individuals need to learn and unlearn frameworks, generating avenues to organise

themselves for what is required. What people do or do not do is largely determined by their social construction of the changing roles and relationships in their life (Colville, Brown & Pye 2012; Luscher & Lewis 2008) and the re-modelling of personal frameworks. Driving the fresh commitments is the realisation that their existing ways of coping are no longer useful, helpful or plausible. What appears to spark such realisations is a jolt of surprise or an increased awareness of harm or embarrassment from not taking a new course of action.

In much of the literature on organisational change there is an implicit assumption that commitment is enacted within some unified form of agreed rationality. As highlighted by Humphreys et al. (2012) and in the personal accounts of this study, the meanings surrounding many of the stories of change were contestable. This was certainly true in the context of sustainability, where individuals shared many perspectives on the merits and motivations of being environmentally friendly. These exchanges often occurred as a result of power and the nature of communication between individuals (Huzzard 2004; Tsoukas 2009).

This thesis also demonstrated that morphing was not restricted to organisational morphing. It was also represented at both personal and group level as individuals socially constructed new meanings and developed new identities. Morphing could be transformational, involving massive leaps in awareness, or it could be more incremental. Meaning making could be contained within one context or could move towards a recognised target; equally, personal curiosity or interest could be drawn to a context involving many targets, goals and intentions.

Just as morphing can stimulate impetus towards change it can also translate into a backlash which can not only stifle change but also trigger a reversal of interest or momentum. Doubts regarding the credibility of the research on climate change, change of government policy, or the fear of an economic downturn, could easily shift public opinion or levels of commitment. Even though the qualities and demonstrations of reflexivity varied among participants there was always potential for some form of change or transformation if the right conditions existed at the right time. However, if a person remains entrenched in a personal organising system that is highly resistant to change, ambivalence and resistance may be the response.

In this age of mass media and virtual information people come under great pressure to make personal judgements within a context of high levels of comparison and disclosure. The focus on participants revealed a change process that never dies or stops but re-forms and evolves. At times the momentum of change can be slowed as individuals try to reconcile the co-existence and messiness of 'stable' and becoming' selves within self-identity. The tensions and paradoxes of stability and becoming are more apparent when people choose their response to what is required. Exchanges can vary between times of resistance and times of acceptance. This study suggests that selfhood can fluctuate from liberation of self, containment and even to withdrawal. To help guide this process, discursive exchange is integral to making sense of what might be ending, beginning or in transition (Bridges 1986, 2009), by deeply exploring how current personal organising might be shaping and influencing social construction (Gergen 2009a). Individuals need to be encouraged to explore and question the assumptions driving current behaviour and immunity to change (Kegan & Lahey 2009).

This research strongly suggests that morphing is central to the social construction process and is integral to the emergence of identity, which is fundamental to personal, group or societal transition. In the context of morphing, people are under constant pressure to juggle the demands of 'becoming-ness', as Harding asserts:

The workplace self, the sense of a unitary 'I', is thus never fully present, never fully achievable, but is always engaged in a complex interactional process of becoming-ness of both self and organization, of organization/self. (2007:1771)

These tensions of morphing are immense and involve never-ending changes and rebranding of structures, power relationship and language. Making commitments is therefore extended into the domain of making plausible guesses about what is emerging. In the context of ecological sustainability, participants appeared to be playing a game of 'catch-up', where they never quite reached where they would like to be. They craved certainty but had to rethink and rebrand what they kept, let go of, and accepted. Then, depending on their social construction and resourcefulness, people responded differently to their perceived constraints and opportunities. Morphing could generate hope and joy but could also stimulate frustration, anxiety

and despair. If the energy for change or morphing dissipated then people felt less obligated to change or, worse still, became disconnected, disillusioned or angry. In this context, messages and scripts which draw into question past thinking or which cast some doubt on existing models and assumptions can disturb people's views of themselves.

Morphing of change can also act as an irritant for those who wish to remain uninvolved or disconnected from what is emerging. Some individuals in this study found the ambiguities generated by the morphing of meaning and relationships somewhat of a distraction rather than an area of importance. It is theorised that the stable elements of self-identity can act as powerful filtering agents for change, as they tend to marginalise and discount patterns of morphing that appear overwhelming or too complex to comprehend, as a consequence providing a trigger for ambivalence, sadness and fear.

### **7.1.3 How do we raise levels of commitment to complex challenges?**

A deeper understanding of meaning making has provided a more robust tolerance of the pressures and contradictions of change. This study presented a number of perspectives as to what can be done to raise individual commitment over time to complex challenges such as those posed by ecological sustainability. Complicating these considerations is the need for people to juggle multiple commitments, obligations and past investments with a world that requires reordering and rethinking. Personal accounts of participants presented data that the natural elements of change include moments of curiosity, engagement, decline and ambivalence. Like a 'product life cycle' (Levitt 1965), change can generate the impression of a natural cycle of evolution and decline, but adding to the complexities is the constant adjustment caused by social construction of what is being experienced and predicted.

These dynamics generate conflicts between what can and what should be done. They can evoke fear and uncertainty but can also generate exhilaration and joy for newness and regeneration. Questions arise about how to manage time, how to learn and get up to speed quickly, how to protect oneself from harm and capitalise on new opportunities. Clashes between individual desires for action and the social

construction of contexts presented a number paradoxes pertaining to the nature of commitment. This iterative relationship has not been theoretically addressed in the past. Analysis also showed that individuals could be bored and ambivalent unless the change processes and programs are rebranded and repositioned. Compelling language and imagery and the clear articulation of successes can help to sustain interest and commitment. If the personal account remains visionary and enticing, people will continue to be attracted to the opportunities provided and will be more likely to commit time and effort to what is required. Legislation and rules can be a powerful means of sustaining levels of action even though at deeper levels there may be resentment.

To better understand commitment over time, the nuances and intricacies of personal and institutional power need to be studied in relationship to these changing viewpoints and assessments (Brown & Humphreys 2006; Humphreys & Brown 2008; Thomas, Sargent & Hardy 2011). In this investigation, commitment was observed as a complex phenomenon where participants were influenced both by internal tensions and by their reading of the outside world. Individuals made choices about what to do next based on past investments, readings of the current situation and opportunities and threats of the future. They also made choices based on internal assessments and emotional reactions founded on their identity and interpretations of external factors.

The research also indicated that individuals analysed their attachment to a wide range of stakeholders, with people having different levels of attraction to entities, slogans and change management pursuits. If that observation is accurate it certainly increases the need for researchers and managers to better understand why individuals choose to tune in and out of what is discussed or articulated. Depending on the identification of what constitutes a stakeholder (Driscoll & Starik 2004; Freeman et al. 2010; Mitchell, Agle & Wood 1997; Waddock 2012) and levels of attachment to others (Hatch & Schultz 2002), individuals make commitments based on their assessments of what is unfolding. At a moment's notice levels of commitment can change from passionate acceptance to hostile resistance.

The study suggests that emotion can be a vital catalyst to change by sparking people into action or resistance. Meaning making is much more than a rational process of

cognition; it is an embodied experience involving a complex array of emotions, past memories and senses. The emotions of surprise and shame can disturb individual perceptions of plausibility. Other emotions such as anger, fear, shame, anxiety, joy and ambivalence each play their part in influencing commitment. Levels of self-confidence and perceived freedom to act are vital agents for change: individuals who feel empowered will act very differently from those who feel isolated, unconnected and unsupported. The data suggests that mentoring, coaching and collaboration, combined with training and development modules, assessment tools and on-site visits, were excellent avenues to help build confidence and hope for change. Individuals needed to be constantly reassured and to feel safe that change would be beneficial and would not adversely affect their need for stability and becoming. When people struggled with change they felt ill equipped or under-resourced for adapting to it. Every opportunity should be taken to encourage individuals to be immersed in the challenges, such as having them experience first-hand what is required and then helping them to develop ways of organising themselves to move forward, not only in the technical know-how aspects of change but also by setting up processes for dialogue and knowledge sharing about steps that can be taken to build understanding of the more difficult and adaptive elements.

What was most clear from these determinations is that individuals' commitment is not a static phenomenon but is subject to change at a moment's notice, based on cognitive-emotional processing (Hayes et al. 2007). These processes of determination also involve both rational and emotional reflexivity (Holmes 2010; Humphreys 2005), where meaning making is complex and smothered in contradictions and tensions. Individuals' decision making generates many synergies and clashes between the values and expectations of others on the one hand and what a person may feel or think on the other. Sometimes this situation results in simple and obvious actions, but on other occasions people are faced with dilemmas impossible to resolve. The data suggests that it is easier to be reflexive when feeling calm, reassured, and when workloads are low; but quite difficult when under pressure, juggling complexity or resolving ambiguity. Individual commitment is constantly challenged, questioned and shaped by a people's reactions to what is affecting them at any point of time. The concepts of 'relational reflexivity' (D'Cruz, Gillingham & Melendez 2007) and

'relational being' (Gergen 2009b) both reflect these influences, while valuing the inherent power of the embedded discursive exchanges, structural power and interpersonal relationships.

The good news is that with the right leadership and management, complex challenges such as ecological sustainability can be supported with clear messaging and frameworks, development of resilience among change agendas, and building a business strategy combining elements of engagement and compliance. This brings hope that leaders can influence the implementation of complex change in business without reverting to simple prescriptive solutions (Linnenluecke & Griffiths 2010). What contributes to individual commitment over time requires an understanding of the interplay between context and action. This inquiry has provided a means to explore the tensions and paradoxes associated with this process, where the major focus is on the individual. What is required is excellent listening skills and transparency about conflicting priorities and pressures that might compete for attention. There are no guarantees, but being in despair is not helpful either; change agents and leaders should not lie dormant, and it is important to provide guidance on how transitions are navigated.

## ***7.2 Reflections on methodology***

This thesis has demonstrated the intimate inner workings of commitment over time by exploring the relationships between sensemaking and identity within a context of ephemeral and morphing change associated with the movement towards ecological sustainability. The social constructionist approach deployed within a longitudinal processual analysis meant that personal accounts could be examined in relation to the interplay between context and action. Moreover, the methodological approach utilised within a case study enabled data points to be described, compared and contrasted, with the view of developing new theory. Study of the empirical data took into account the idiosyncrasies of cluster-based sensegiving within these arrangements, as well as including perspectives from a number of individuals who had observed matters pertaining to cluster sensegiving and commitment over time. Together, all these angles of exploration resulted in a compelling account of how individual commitment unfolded within complex social, political and business change. In total, the collection

and analysis of the empirical data took close to 5 years from start to finish, and it is firmly believed that many of the elements of exemplary research (Frost & Stablein 1992) have been met, including on-going persistence and immersion in a research area for a protracted length of time.

In these explorations, personal reflexivity was an important influence on the research process. As well as making observations of the individuals within my study, I recorded reflexive comments about my relationships to the people in the study and how my commitment had changed. Vignettes provided a useful mechanism for the complexities of commitment to be illustrated, and the semi-structured format of interviews allowed individuals to ask questions and enhance understanding. A number of participants highlighted within the research were given the opportunity to review drafts of vignettes for factual accuracy as well as to provide reassurance that their identity had been protected.

Corley and Gioia (2011) assert that theory is a statement of concepts and their interrelationships while also showing how and/or why a phenomenon occurs. The theory developed within this thesis meets the criteria by demonstrating not only what informed commitment over time but why interrelationships manifested. Personal accounts provided important data on the tensions, paradoxes and contradictions of commitment while avoiding the potential for idealistic claims (Dentchev 2009) to dominate theoretical contributions as to how business people might be interacting with society, community and their environment. The study was embarked upon with a commitment to social science (Crotty 1998) in that investigations were undertaken to build understanding of how people made sense, by allowing their voices to be heard.

Theories of the co-existence of stability and becoming and the dynamics of morphing became an integral element of my personal growth. These explorations changed the way the research was interpreted as deeper immersion in theory and data analysis unfolded. Once ideas were formulated, they often led to a new wave of meaning making and understanding. It was fascinating to observe how capturing my thoughts in writing instantly morphed into another level of understanding or investigation. To me this relationship to knowledge symbolised the emergent qualities of the making of

meaning, illustrating why immersion in intense research is such a powerful means by which to achieve personal transformation, growth and morphing over time.

The methodological approach over two points in time, a year apart, allowed me to observe the ebbs and flows of commitment over time. Ethnography and semi-structured interviews were also helpful in allowing individuals to present their stories, and for me to make some determinations of what was being noticed and felt. It was fascinating to notice the twists and turns of commitment over time as well observing the fluctuations in energy and motivation. The impact of undertaking the study and the discursive exchanges with academics provided a powerful means to re-order my own organising systems as new understandings evolved and took shape. Theoretical contributions were shaped by the dominant discourse of these exchanges, advancing understandings of power, sensemaking, identity and sustainability. These assessments strongly supported the view that commitment over time was indeed relational and heavily influenced by the nature of social construction. In arriving at these views of 7 years of study, I am aware of the likelihood that others will not always share my views.

What assisted inquiry was the ability to compare and contrast social construction from a wide-ranging data set, which helped shape a richer capture of the interaction, thinking and emotion between individuals and the contexts under examination. The methodology generated an opportunity for individuals to tell their story or to explore current issues and to receive some feedback about how they or their business might be faring in regard to others. These exchanges in part contributed to the motivation of individuals to be re-interviewed in the final stage of the data collection process. They also stimulated conversations on ethical and complex issues that might not previously have occurred. A difficult aspect of this analysis was associated with the premise that my role as researcher was not to determine the truthfulness and accuracy of claims but to remain curious and open to the nature of social construction being communicated. It was observed that some individuals clearly wanted to create an impression to me of doing the right thing, but maybe their rhetoric did not match their actions.

The research process did include traces of learning from action (Coghlan & Brannick 2005; Cooke & Wolfram Cox 2005) arising from discursive exchanges. Investigations

provided a bounded context to explore not only the immediate implications for theory but also the effects on the participants. Here are two personal accounts that reflect how the research interacted with those under study. We begin with Janet, who looked forward with anticipation to how the research could assist her in her job within the Recreation and Gaming cluster.

*Um, no but I'm certainly interested in ... yourself, doing part of this commitment building, is that part of this commitment building is that you know this is- part of the association's role is building commitment on a range of different um, issues, um with our industry- so what we were just talking about in environmental sustainability here, I'm certainly interested in what I can take from your project and using in a practical way to continue to build commitment. Um, through the industry.*

Several participants found the questions and exchanges in interviews helpful in reshaping their views and thinking. Danny, the project manager for the Recreational and Gaming cluster, shared his view about the value of reviewing progress. He stated:

*I mean all of the questions were great because they've made me think about how the project has gone, but um, I've been so busy thinking about the answers that I didn't write anything down that I could go and write down.*

Having set the goal of undertaking a valid and justifiable methodological approach it is important for me to acknowledge that this research is not devoid of 'political acts' (Clegg & Hardy 2006). The decision to approve and allow independent research by the Department of Environment could easily be interpreted as a political act designed to assist accountability, action and innovation in regard to environmentally friendly practices. It could be argued that the sample was not representative of the general business population, as participants had already met all legal obligations of environmental law. If this research had been undertaken with individuals in organisations that were not complying with environmental laws, different theories and views could have arisen. These comments are not designed to detract from the findings of the research but are a gentle reminder that research is influenced by the samples chosen and the related social constructions. Another important factor in the high participation rate was the backing of the Department of Environment and the implied expectation that everyone would participate.

Acceptance of the strengths of this research also leads to mention of a number of limitations and constraints of the methodology. First, on a practical level, being self-employed and a part-time PhD student restricted the range and choice of suitable methodologies. Investment of time in ethnographic observations would not have been possible given work responsibilities and travel commitments. As the research process sought only one or two interviews over a one-year period the level of involvement for individuals was not prohibitive. If the methodology had involved more time visiting organisations it would have enhanced the capacity to verify claims and explore other areas of investigation. It would also have allowed me to make more interpretations and hypotheses on what was observed or analysed.

Secondly, the research could have been assisted by better documentation of participant attributes such as age, educational background, and other procedural elements. By taking the opportunity to use quantitative analysis of human values (Schwartz & Boehnke 2004) the research could have provided information on the relationship between commitment over time and motivation. An analysis of this nature would have been invaluable in regard to the 18 participants who were interviewed twice over the 12-month period. During the first phase of the research process two focus groups were conducted, and in retrospect, although that was informative it did not assist longitudinal study of individual commitment over time. When interviews involved only one person it was much easier to track and code individual changes within the data management tool. The many strengths of the NVivo data management program are acknowledged, yet its deployment was not a simple recipe for outstanding research. The quality of analysis was contingent on rigorous content analysis involving cleaning out poor coding while allowing space for non-obvious idiosyncrasies to appear.

Thirdly, if this research had been part of a collaborative process involving peer coding, discursive exchanges about content analysis would have been helpful to reveal any research bias. Reflexivity has the potential for indulgence and narcissism if the research fails to allow the voices of interviewees to be heard. Participants were offered the opportunity to make additional comments and on a number of occasions did indeed follow up discussions, but to a large extent the research process was

contained within the schedule of interviews and on-site visits. It should be noted, however, that most participants were willing to express some reflections. As researcher, I recognised that certain individuals needed significant reassurance before disclosing personal information, and some struggled to articulate their views. Only one individual was hesitant to disclose information about his/her meaning making, preferring instead to share factual accounts of what was undertaken in his/her business. That individual refused to be re-interviewed, even after a number of assurances of confidentiality and information about the aims of the exploration were given. The organising structure within the data management tool provided a means to shift my depth of insight, and having to code transcripts into a computer program raised my levels of immersion and understanding of the data. The tactile task of using my fingers on a keyboard and mouse and replaying digital tapes of interviews also helped to embody the research into my sensemaking.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that as one undertakes a research process over time it is impossible to separate oneself from ongoing life experiences. Although it is easy to intellectualise that you are undertaking a study in a defined area, as a person you are changing in relation to other influences that have nothing directly to do with the investigation. I need to acknowledge that research does not occur in a vacuum. The analysis and interpretation of other people's accounts within the research influenced my own life experiences and the associated meaning making over time. One change in my meaning making occurred in relation to my initial dislike and aversion for participants within the Recreation and Gaming cluster. To me initially, 'gaming machines' symbolised greed and exploitation of society. Remarkably, during the research my preconceived views of the Recreation and Gaming cluster changed. My initial abhorrence dissipated as rapport was built with the individual participants, and I left the research convinced that a number of individuals were doing wonderful things for the environment.

As the research process was undertaken it could not help but be influenced by external factors that affected views of what was emerging in the data. These influences included observing a family member struggling with change, noticing the fluctuations of support for action on climate change, watching a television show which gave

insights into how people overcame challenges. Keeping a journal was helpful in capturing ongoing reflexivity and reflections but it was not always possible to source the origins of everything that was emerging. Part of this difficulty came from the acceptance that learning does not always occur within our awareness. It would be too simplistic to argue that all the findings in the research were directly related to the social construction of 31 people. It would be more accurate to say that the developed theory emerged from a range of various influences, one being the research undertaken within this doctoral thesis. These views are consistent with the previous discussions on morphing, in that individuals change in relation to what is occurring around them.

### ***7.3 Implications for practice***

This study has provided some rationales for the changes in commitment over time, and how such changes can be better facilitated to meet agreed outcomes in the future. It is hoped that these findings can provide leaders and managers with different means to dissect what informs the struggles of learning and adaptability, and can provide an avenue to support the legitimacy and implementation of change. The research also provides a reminder that even the very best in change management and sensegiving may not be sufficient to bring about lasting and sustainable commitment over time. These observations will be of interest not only to students and scholars in organisational and management studies but also to a wider audience concerned with studying sustainability in business and society.

In a world of infinite contexts and expectations it is a complex task to make meaning and determine what commitment is necessary at any point of time. It has also been demonstrated that the morphing of context is a normal phenomenon in society and that individuals make determinations about what is changing. These personal assessments may or may not be accurate but to the individual they may seem plausible and believable. Many of the influences on meaning and enactment of commitment are outside the control and influence of sensegivers and change agents.

Examination of personal accounts and analysis of the data between individuals and clusters has led to a series of implications for managers, leaders and change agents. Within this thesis a number of practical insights have been shared, including

description of the capabilities of change agents and the success factors in cluster governance. Stepping back from these examples of practical contribution, the theoretical commentary and analysis of the data have provided a number of important insights into management, leadership and change management of individual commitment over time. The appendices were also generated to provide contributions, notably a model of change agent competencies, questions to help recruit champions for cluster-based activities, and a coaching framework to explore the nature of commitment over time. These contributions, although helpful, do not capture all of the complexities of the tensions and paradoxes of ecological sustainability in relationship with individual commitment over time. In careful assessment of all the practical outcomes from this research, three implications are now presented as the most pragmatic elements of this research. Each in its own way provides a practical edge for applying the findings of this study in practice.

The first implication for practice arose from reflexivity as a researcher. It was observed that many of the exchanges with the research subjects demonstrated a desire for simplicity and prescriptive results, whereas exchanges with academic contacts showed that they were less interested in these issues and more receptive to tensions and theoretical undertones of complexity. Kieser (2002) suggests that difficulties in such exchanges are often driven by different orders, languages and social systems, which lead to conflict and misunderstanding. The role of a translator between theory and practice is a fragile one: at times key messages can be lost in the clash between practical theory, pragmatic advice and embracing complexity, but on other occasions alignment emerges between these diverse fields. These clashes between theory and practice were constantly experienced as the research was undertaken. A discursive exchange with an academic about this research was very different from a conversation with a business person. At times there was coherence and alignment between theory and practice, but often there was not.

These assessments were noticeable when I prepared and presented feedback from interim results in a seminar to the Department of Environment in August 2010. Even though many of the participants of this session were academically qualified there was a lower tolerance for discussions pertaining to complexity and a greater receptivity for

simple and prescriptive solutions. In undertaking such seminars it became apparent that success in translating theory to practice required a good understanding of the cultural norms and power relations of the target audience, as well being well prepared to invest the time to deliver well-organised frameworks for sensemaking. Metaphors, surprising results and stories are helpful tactics to arouse interest and build credibility as a researcher. These observations have strong parallels to earlier conversations on sensegiving and what it takes to be a high performing change agent, where skilful use of compelling scripts and the use of surprise were important catalysts for understanding and receptivity.

The second implication from practice comes from the clear recognition that commitment over time operates within a dynamic political and social context. Self-interest and self-promotion were powerful influences in the deployment of environmentally friendly practices. On many occasions individuals espoused the values of collaboration and shared interest but those values were often masked by the desire to win and to compete. As highlighted in discussions of the push towards and away from sustainability, the economic and financial demands of business were a major preoccupation for participants, and building reputation and gaining kudos were also enduring motives. Quite simply, people might not be interested in making the personal sacrifices to undertake commitments unless they rewarded for doing so.

On a more positive note, data analysis provided great insight into how people can experience surprising levels of joy from being involved in sustainability. Individuals often talked about higher levels of engagement and higher levels of confidence when involved in projects that had a higher moral purpose. These reflections indicated that although there is a moral justification for improved levels of ecological sustainability, it is the rational economic and self-interest argument that is more likely to sustain commitment in the long term. What makes this observation notable for advocates of sustainability is that many of the challenges that face businesses and society in relation to climate change require a long-term and strategic perspective, well beyond the immediacy and short-termism of business economic cycles and marketplace performance. Individuals who are passionate about ecological sustainability can be torn between their desire to make a positive difference in environmental performance

and the needs of the business, which dictate a greater focus on financial performance and reputation. At times these opposing needs can be aligned and complementary but at other times they can be forged into an unreconciled partnership between opposing factions. In this research the more common outcome was that human self-interest ultimately won the day in the torrid and complex world of modern business, unless there was a process of sensegiving that encouraged transparency and dialogue.

The final implication for practice is the recurring theme ‘no one size fits all’ or ‘there’s no silver bullet’ when it comes to implementing change involving ecological sustainability. Empirical data consistently highlighted that even the very best design and intentions could be soured by a variety of conflicting priorities, pressures and cultural expectations. These observations support a cautious approach to deterministic procedures for the management of change. The research indicates that the relationship between sensegiving and sensemaking is tenuous and difficult to predict. Yes, excellent design and leadership can assist sensemaking, but it can also be generated by circumstance and by just ‘being there at the right time’. It was also apparent that the timing and delivery of sensegiving, combined with sensitivity to levels of confidence and self-efficacy, were important influences in assisting the emergence of new or different sensemaking. In making these assessments it is essential to emphasise the vital importance of senior management in creating a culture that supports sustainability education. To support the achievement of change, coaching and mentoring are important sensegiving enablers for sensemaking. As Bradfield outlines:

A supportive management structure can make or break an effective sustainability program. Success in the basics will lead to the view of sustainability as a key driver of innovation. Sustainability innovation is fundamentally different from classic process improvement, because sustainable innovations force people to change the way they have always done things. Curriculums should therefore teach students how they can function as entrepreneurs inside a large corporation or a small company with limited capital. Good ideas do not win without champions to guide them through the barriers to change, and a champion must earn the respect of the organization to lead. (2009:375)

To explore these dynamics, *Appendix Six* provides suggestions as to how a better understanding can be built on commitment over time. In offering this advice it is

important to understand that it is impossible to truly know the other (Schutz 1967), so the reader is advised to be respectful and curious in discursive exchanges.

#### ***7.4 Future research***

Theories of sensemaking, social construction, identity and commitment would benefit from greater openness on how the worlds connect rather than continuing with disjointed and polarised discussions. In outlining these contributions, separation of the sensemaking, social construction and identity literatures was somewhat problematic. Empirical data presented many interconnections between how people make sense, socially construct and adapt their self-identity, and it is asserted that the separation in the literature of these actions is unjustified. There is a need to reconsider the broader aims and intent of these theoretical fields in the future.

A more inclusive theoretical framework such as ‘meaning making’ might provide the potential for cross-fertilisation between the different literatures. There are clearly some synergies between these areas of theoretical interest that comprise the influence of personal organising and cognition (Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld 2005). However, this thesis suggests that other elements exist in how people generate and make meaning. Individuals are not purely rational and retrospectively informed beings. They are making meaning from a multiplicity of relationships, contexts and felt experiences (Vuori & Virtaharju 2012). This study supports the view that meaning making is embedded in how people make determinations of things, events and relationships (Baumeister 1991; Park 2010). From there, plausible accounts are made on what commitments are possible. Commitment over time can be linked to identity (Beech 2010; Watson 2009) and psychological preferences, but they can also be closely associated with readings and responses to the external pressures of power and changing relationships (Clegg & Courpasson 2009; Myllykangas, Kujala & Lehtimäki 2010; Stebbings & Braganza 2009).

One of the most intriguing questions to come from undertaking in this study is: What could be done to advance understanding of individual commitment over time in the future? Two of the benefits of this research are that it not only assists understanding in the development of theory within the context of sustainability but it also pioneers

different thinking about how individual commitment is evidenced within complex and adaptive change. This study leaves many pathways of examination for the years ahead, including developing a deeper understanding of 'stable' and 'becoming' selves, studying the potential manifestations in individual change, and finally, engaging greater critical enquiry of the positivist assumptions (Willmott 2003) that appear to dominate much of the literature in organisation and management studies.

This study was firmly grounded in an empirical context, which shaped the development of findings, so it is important that I step back and take a more critical view of what has been presented and developed. I contend that there is a need not only to explore the tensions and paradoxes of individual commitment over time but equally to examine what drives practices of 'unsustainability' (Bluhdorn 2011). This new line of enquiry might not only lead to greater understanding of what helps and hinders commitment over time but also may well open up new and exciting avenues for research and practice.

In considering these thoughts there is awareness that new insights will emerge, but at this time, my attention is drawn to three areas. First, I would like to start by re-interviewing participants in this research to see what has evolved since the last discussion was held. No doubt much has happened in the two years since we last spoke. There is potential to test and question some of the general conclusions and findings of this research. In suggesting this inquiry, it is apparent that the motivation remains to continue the focus on the individual. Even if the same people are not available there are many opportunities in personal or collaborative research to explore much more than has been presented in this study.

Secondly, I would be interested to undertake closer examination of how human values (Hall 1995; Schwartz 2010; Schwartz & Boehnke 2004) are influenced by the morphing of social construction and commitment over time. If such a study were to occur it would involve a mixed method approach (Bazeley 2004), combining quantitative analysis of human values with the simultaneous analysis of the discursive elements derived from qualitative data (Shotter 1989; Tracy 2002). This would involve applying the work of Cohen (2010) in which he explores the relationship between individual commitment to human values at a point of time to a more

longitudinal analysis. It is anticipated that these explorations would unmask more of the nuances that occur between the temporal qualities of commitment and the more stable motivational constructs of human values.

Finally, building on recent research, there is interest in how individuals contextualise meaning in organisations and their institutional environments (Suddaby et al. 2010). To me this enquiry, although useful, fails to explore the broader questions of meaning making within the larger context of adaptive change, where people determine plausibility based on a variety of interests, motivations and intentions drawn from a long list of sources other than just ‘organisations and institutional environments’.

As represented in this research, it is surely time to expand our thinking to how individuals make meaning in life, and then we might be better placed to inform organisation and management studies. How do individuals make meaning in life and how does that translate into any target of commitment in life? I argue that this research has provided part of the answer through its exploration of commitment over time, without the constraints and imprisonment of institutional thinking.

### ***7.5 Postscript***

Since I completed the collection of data for analysis the context of this research has changed quite dramatically. In Australia the Federal Government was returned to power in a ‘hung parliament’ in September 2010 and in 2011 the Department of Environment was restructured as a result of a change of State government. The change led to new reporting relationships being established and a general feeling that the importance of programs such as those pertaining to environmentally friendly practices had decreased in comparison to 2007 and 2008 when this study was undertaken.

It has also been fascinating to observe how the debates on climate change and the introduction of a carbon tax have ebbed and flowed in recent years. The impact on me as a person has been very interesting, as someone who believes that there is a moral challenge to do something on climate change. I now better understand the arguments and views of people who are more influenced by immediacy of business and economic pressures. Although not embracing the alternative, at least I am now better

placed to listen to people who hold a different view. This study has increased my resolve to help build the capacity of society for robust and informed dialogue on complex and adaptive challenges. We need also to look for alternatives rather than relying on political systems to resolve our challenges for us. We need to help people to resolve their own problems and help them to get organised. In simple terms, we need to learn to love simplicity and complexity at the same time.

The completion of this doctoral process will signal a new phase of my life involving creative courage (May 1975). As an academic, practitioner and member of society I intend to be more prepared to take risk. As Dennis Gioia reflects on the contribution of Karl Weick in the field of organisation and management studies:

Changing the conversation has become something of an idealistic standard that we like to use to connote high aspirations in counseling PhD students, junior faculty, and even many senior people hoping to leave some legacy. We often say that one's professional goal ought not to be just getting published, but making a difference. That high aspiration has become the hoped for final step in a progressive litany that reads: 'You don't just want to be published, you want to be read. You don't just want to be read, you want to be remembered (and, therefore, cited). You don't just want to be cited, you want to change the conversation. (2006:1710)

To me this leaves an important challenge for the rest of my life.

## APPENDICES

### *Appendix One – Interview questions*

The following questions were used in the semi-structured interviews. A number of questions have been modified in this listing to protect confidentiality.

#### **Phase One – Cluster Members, Project Officer, Cluster Facilitators and Project Sponsor – 24 semi-structured interviews held in 2007**

The aim in Phase One was to collect data for the research requirements of the PhD and the A.R.C. grant. Data collected was then coded and analysed separately. Questions included:

- What was the reason for this cluster?
- What has been one of your most memorable moments in this cluster?
- What reporting structures, policies and procedures were in place and what improvements could have been made?
- How do you see the role of the Department of Environment in this cluster?
- How do you go about identifying and managing key issues?
- What has been the impact of the cluster?
- From your experience in the cluster what tells you that a person and/or stakeholder is committed?
- How would you describe your current commitment to the cluster?
- How has your personal commitment to environmentally friendly practices changed over time?
- Do you feel everyone within the cluster is equally committed?
- What is “achievable hell” or “achievable heaven” for this cluster?
- What did you find interesting or become curious about during this discussion?
- Would you be open to me interviewing you again in 12 months’ time to see what may have changed?

In August 2007, an interview was held with the project sponsor who was responsible for the sustainability program within the Department of Environment. These questions reflected emerging areas of interest arising from completed interviews in Phase One:

- How would you describe the role of the Department of Environment in relation to the three clusters?
- How would you sum up your feedback on the status or progress/impact in each of these three clusters?
- Any memorable moments? Key innovations?
- How do you see activities such as these research studies impacting the cluster activity?
- How do the Department of Environment and you go about selecting potential cluster members?
- What expectations do you have in regard to cluster arrangements?

- What arrangements fast-track shared understanding on environmental opportunities?
- What risks do you need to address?
- How do you find the balance between uncovering ground truth and pressure to market success?
- From your experience what tells you whether a stakeholder is committed?
- How has your personal commitment to environmentally friendly practices changed over time?
- What impact does broader media coverage have on the Department of Environment's capacity to perform its duties?
- In terms of the three clusters, what would you like to see in 12 months' time?
- What did you find interesting or become curious about during this discussion?
- Which questions, tensions or dilemmas still need to be resolved?

### **Phase Two – Third party interviews – six semi-structured interviews**

At the end of Phase One it was decided to interview six third parties to gain a deeper understanding of individual commitment over time. These interviews were conducted in February 2008. These individuals were interviewed only once. Questions comprised:

- What is your primary role in relation to Department of Environment?
- What is the history of your involvement?
- How would you describe the role of Department of Environment in fostering improved environmental performance?
- What factors are important in co-ordinating the relationship between Department of Environment, you and other businesses?
- How do you see yourself contributing to each firm's commitment to environmental performance?
- What helps or hinders you in facilitating this change?
- What would you like more or less of in this regard?
- As you look ahead what would be your recommendations for enhancing or improving the arrangements between Department of Environment, business and yourself?
- Your final comments or views?

### **Phase Three – Second interviews – 18 semi-structured interviews**

Once all the coding had been completed for Phases One and Two, individuals who were interviewed as part of Phase One were asked to be re-interviewed 12 months after the first meeting. Questions asked;

- What would you add or modify to the 2007 summary I have just given you?
- How has the last year been for you in regard to your implementing environmental changes?
- What has been the sequence of events over the last year? Any surprises?

- Was there a difference between what you had hoped for and what actually occurred?
- What has helped and hindered your ability to commit to environmental improvement?
- Has the cluster had any impact on these events and experiences?
- Is there any available reports/evidence that I should see?
- Could you tell me about any organisational learning that has occurred in your organisation as a result of the relationship with Department of Environment?
- Has new knowledge been developed such as in product or process innovation or new ways of organising that you have noticed?
- Are there areas where change did not occur? What would you like to see happen that did not?
- What has been the impact of the cluster on your learning and commitment if any?
- What are you interested or curious about in terms of the research?

## *Appendix Two – Data analysis cue sheet*

### **Aims**

Explore the relationship between analysis and theory.

Observe processual and longitudinal trends.

### **Guiding principles**

- Be confident and assertive in building an inference of best explanation.
- Select five to six areas of deeper analysis per chapter.
- Be patient and read look at the words of the text.
- Slow down and read the depth of what people are saying.
- Trust my ability to read, you do not have to get a neat, black and white response,
- See my analysis as a fishing expedition where I move from pure description of the data to exploring what is more interesting and central.
- What is my relationship to the data and my analysis?

### **Questions to help guide analysis.**

#### *Coaching tips from Pat Bazeley*

- Be prepared to ask: What will give me more information on that?
- Start by describing it (nature of the node).
- Locate evidence to verify blanket observations.
- What they said it was – did they talk about it in the same way or was there difference? What is behind the difference?
- Compare differences in the characteristics across contrasting groups, attributes or variations in context. Are they expressed differently by different groups? Are they more or less frequently occurring for different groups? Who did, or did not talk about it? Who said what? Why is this so? When did it occur? So what? Was there an exception or unusual case? Then ask more questions — does it make a difference if...? Where there any unusual cases?
- In my memos and journals record meaningful associations—doing so will prompt further questions in your mind. Record, also, non-meaningful associations—not only is it important to know if there is no variation across groups or contexts, recording these means you won't need to waste time later re-checking.
- Consider the work of Strauss (1987) to examine under what conditions specific categories or themes arise. What actions, interactions and strategies are involved? What are the consequences and do these vary depending on the particular circumstances or the form in which it is expressed? Record the questions you ask, and the results you find (or don't find).

*Ideas from the work of Patrick Dawson*

Be prepared to explore the messy, complex and multi-authored phenomena of change.

Multi-story analysis and accounts (explores ambiguity, different views and assumptions).

Individuals were self-serving, politically motivated and informed by only partial knowledge of what actually happened.

Examine how individuals tell and script stories to justify their performance in their roles.

What were the politics, context and substance of change over time?

What were the competing narratives, multiple histories, and different views on the substance of change over time?

*My reflections from the work of David Boje*

Look at various prompts, meetings, texts and visual displays. Is there any retrospective sensemaking? Are there any legends, myths and folklore? (Boje 2008:79) What evidence is there of the here and now?

Where are people in the moment of being? Is there an emergent story, reflected by gossip, rumour, fad, propaganda, rebellion, innovation, improvisation and quasi project? (Boje 2008:77)

Does the story turn into representing a new plot or order of thinking? (Boje 2008:190)

Do people attempt to make a best bet for the future? (look at my nodes of achievable hell and heaven).

**Technical prompts on using NVivo**

Explore most and least items coded by node.

Examine codes by source by Right Hand Click on mouse.

Undertake matrix coding by set, attribute, node and individual cases.

Revisit my memos and journals.

Use text searches to find who said what.

Establish sets to combine and connect similar and diverse nodes.

Use sets to help examine change over time.

Queries can be re-run and results are fixed at a moment of time.

Move matrix queries from NVivo to Excel table.

### ***Appendix Three – Classification of emotions***

***Ambivalence*** is defined by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:32) as ‘the coexistence in one person of opposite and conflicting feelings towards someone or something’. In the case of ambivalence, various feelings were expressed including being detached, doubtful, uncertain and uninterested.

***Anger*** is described by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:39) as ‘the strongly felt displeasure aroused by real or supposed wrongs’. My analysis merged feelings of annoyance, frustration and impatience into this category.

***Fear*** is identified by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:431) as ‘a painful feeling of impending change, evil trouble’. Here feelings associated with apprehensive, protected, swamped or vulnerable were grouped.

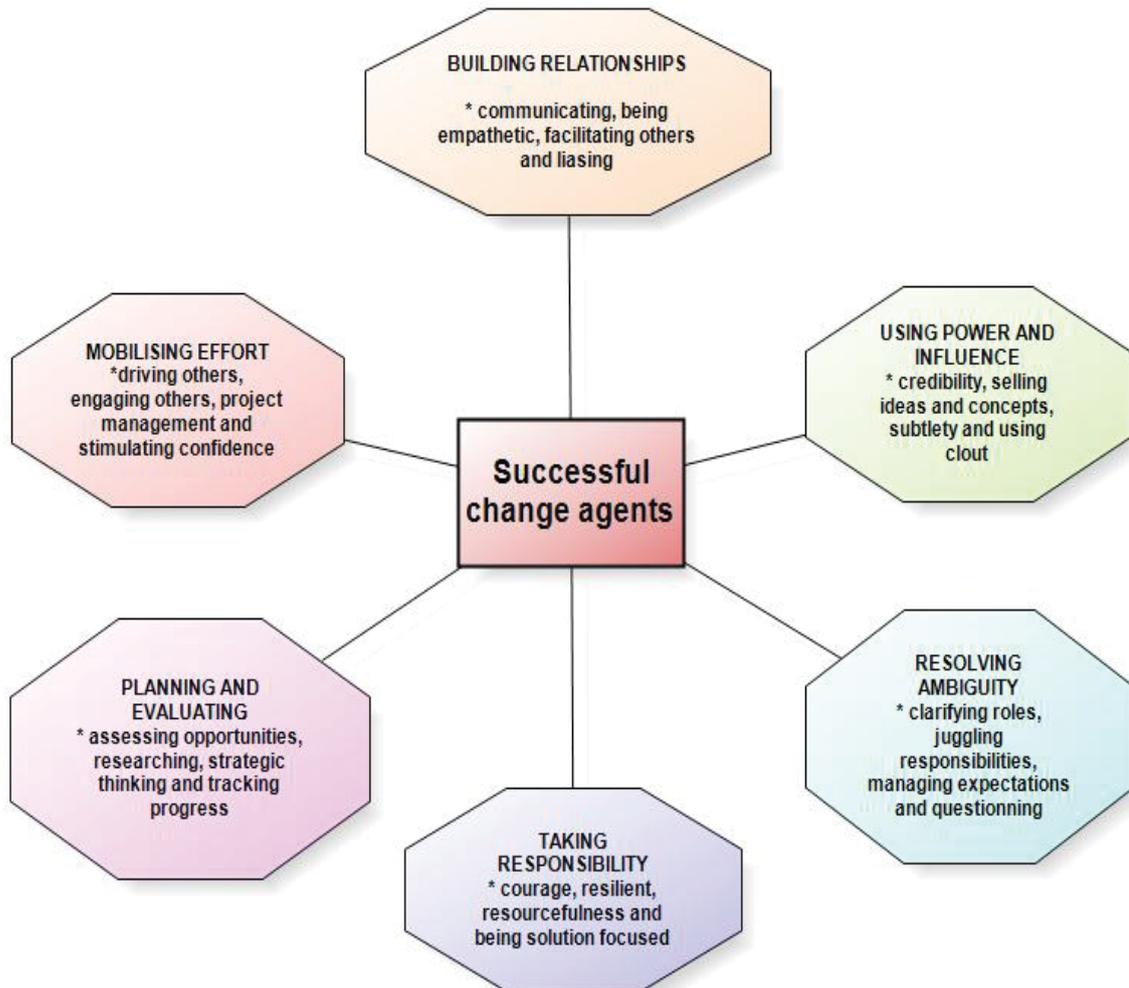
***Joy*** is defined by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:647) as an ‘emotion of keen or lively pleasure arising from present or expected good: exultant satisfaction great gladness and delight’. Here feelings associated with happiness, appreciation, confidence, feeling connected, enthusiasm and being proud were listed.

***Sadness*** according to the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:1074) is described as ‘sorrowful and mournful: to feel sad’. My coding merged feelings of being disappointed, isolated, powerless and struggling.

***Shame*** is identified by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:1117) as the ‘painful feeling arising from consciousness of something dishonourable, improper or ridiculous’. In this regard feelings associated with embarrassment, feeling to inferior and insecure were determined as relevant.

***Surprise*** is defined by the Macquarie Concise Dictionary (2006:1232) as ‘the state or feeling of being surprised as by something unexpected’. Here were grouped empirical data associated with shock, novelty, curiosity, or learning something, being startled.

*Appendix Four – Change agent competency model*



## ***Appendix Five – Cluster champion checklist***

This checklist was offered to the Department of Environment in October 2010 to help identify and develop suitable individuals for participation in cluster-based programs. Three capabilities emerged as important qualities of higher performing change agents. These were taking responsibility for resolving difficult challenges, articulating compelling scripts and ensuring accountability over time.

### **How does the individual take responsibility for resolving difficult challenges?**

- Can you share with me a time when you took responsibility for resolving a difficult challenge? What did you do in this situation? What role did you perform?
- What did you like or dislike the most when you were faced with this difficult challenge?
- Can you give an example of a work challenge you have not been able to resolve? What made resolution or completion difficult? If you had the same experience again what would you do differently?

### **How does the individual articulate compelling scripts for change?**

- What do you believe are the fundamentals of good communication?
- Can you give me an example of how you might adapt your language and delivery to better communicate the benefits or reasons for change?
- What do you consider when confronting resistance to change?
- How do you go about tailoring your message to different audiences and stakeholders?
- How could you use your personal networks and contacts in helping to lead and manage change?

### **Does the individual ensure accountability over time?**

- What have you learned in your life about the best way of engaging others in change? What do you do? And conversely, what do you avoid doing?
- What have you learned about the best way to use power and influence to get things done?
- When do you call on senior management for assistance? When would you avoid talking to senior management?
- In your view what role does compliance play in managing change? Which procedures and methods could be used to reward the desired behavioural outcomes?
- How do you go about organising yourself and others to maintain commitment over time?

## ***Appendix Six – Building conversations on commitment over time***

*The checklist below provides questions to assist personal exploration, conversations on context and action on commitment over time.*

### **Context**

#### ***Understanding social and political context***

What are your major areas of interest at this point of time?

What current obligations and responsibilities do you have?

What makes it hard or easy for you to keep and make fresh commitments?

What pressures do you feel at this time?

Do you see your situation changing in the near future?

In the past what have you done to address similar pressures?

Do you see new challenges in the future?

What are your goals and plans over the next 12 months?

#### ***Exploring our messy selves***

##### Desires for stability

What do you care about?

What don't you want to change?

What could be lost if change unfolds?

What do you want to protect and safeguard from harm?

##### Desires for becoming

What would you like to change?

What do you want to develop and enhance?

What excites and frightens you about making fresh commitments?

If you were successful in making changes what would you see, hear or feel?

## **Action – Developing a personal organising framework**

What has the past told you about your capacity to make changes?

What needs to be kept or needs changing?

What needs to be protected?

How would you rate your chances of making desired changes? What will help or hinder you from succeeding?

What small steps can you take now to make the necessary changes?

What time frames could you set yourself for what is required?

What will you do if you confront roadblocks on the way?

How will you celebrate success along the way?

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