Using narratives in institutional and cultural change
Kim Copeland, Charles Sturt University

People have always used narratives to make meaning of the world. Narratives help us in our work lives too. They explain our organisation’s vision and goals, history, accomplishments and changes. In increasingly time pressured and under-resourced work environments it is easy to slip into focusing on actions, timelines, milestones and outcomes. This approach risks losing the importance of meaning in the narratives we tell at work, and can ultimately undermine change or cultural recalibration processes.

Leaders can use the power of narratives to motivate people and increase their understanding of the need for change and the future vision of an organisation. Using stories effectively is a direct route to people’s emotions and therefore an important factor in decision making. It is essential for leaders to understand and apply the use of narratives in their role. To do this effectively, leaders need to consciously move the conversation to a different level – when it comes to changing values, mindsets, systems or rules, people need the foundation of a story to understand why.

Leaders can use narratives to describe compelling visions and build motivation for desired change. Models for this are emerging from numerous sectors and recent large organisational change processes provide examples to draw upon. In addition, therapeutic models can be adapted for this purpose enabling practitioners to use existing skills and frameworks more broadly within their organisations.

This session will provide an outline of models which can be applied to use narratives to influence institutional and cultural change.

Learning outcomes
− An understanding of what narrative change means, and why narratives are central to bringing about change.
− An understanding of models which can be applied when using narratives to influence institutional and cultural change.
− Examples of how leaders in organisations can use narratives to motivate staff to become change enthusiasts.

Presenter
Kim Copeland, Charles Sturt University

Kim Copeland joined Charles Sturt University as Director Student Safety and Wellbeing in January 2019.

Kim is a social worker with 20 years’ experience throughout Australia and the UK in government and non-government organisations. Kim spent 11 years at the Department of Defence providing and managing support services to Defence families, critical incident responses to battle casualties in Afghanistan and those resulting in death or serious injury of Defence personnel within Australia and overseas. In recent years Kim led clinical teams and large scale cultural change initiatives as Director Response, Support and Research in the Department of Defence Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response Office.

In 2018 Kim undertook an independent review into factors which contribute to student sexual assault and sexual harassment at Charles Sturt. Her current appointment focuses on implementing the review recommendations and leading four teams: Student Conduct, Disability and Access, Counselling and Safer Communities and Student Initiatives.