

Using narratives in institutional and cultural change

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‘Yindyamarra Winhanganha’

A Wiradjuri phrase meaning, ‘the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in’.

This is the ethos at the heart of everything we stand for, the belief that we can create a world worth living in.



Why is an organisational narrative important?



What is a narrative?

- There is no single definition or standard structure
- Often used interchangeably with 'story', but is more complex
- Develops from a range of stories and messages
- The meaning changes with the context
- Collectively convey a common worldview or meaning
- Provide an interpretation of the world and how it works (Frank 2010; Fisher 1984)
- Reflected within cultural products, such as language and other forms of representation (Bruner, 1991)
- Narratives operate at an emotional as well as cognitive level

A narrative consists of a collection or body of stories of characters, joined in some common problem as fixers (heroes), causes (villains) or the harmed (victims) in a temporal trajectory (plot) leading towards resolution within a particular setting or context.

(Jones & McBeth 2010; Frank 2010)

Why are narratives central to bringing about change?

- A narrative reflects a shared interpretation of how the world works.
- A narrative is how we share our interpretation with others.
- Who holds power and how they use it is both embedded in and supported by dominant narratives.
- Successful narrative changes shift power as well as dominant narratives.
- An ambitious scale is inherent in the strategy of narrative change.

Narrative change rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative, and that in order to bring about change in the world we need to pay attention to the ways in which this takes place.

(Davidson, 2016)

Narratives are more than a term or phrase

“There is always a danger when a term becomes a trend, because it starts to become a shortcut for thinking—a term without precision—where everybody thinks they know what it means, but nobody really does for sure”.

Brett Davidson, Open Society Foundations

Why use narratives/storytelling in organisations?

- Sub-cultures can exist in organisations which cause dysfunction by actively or passively challenging official organisational practices (Kondra and Hurst, 2009; Czarniawska and Kunda, 2010; Strandberg and Vigsø, 2015).
- Communication between employees and employee groups can oppose management and the organisation (Harris and Ogbonna, 2012).
- Communicating corporate strategy to employees is critical, in order to guide their behaviour and drive organisational performance (Gill, 2011; Marshall and Adamic, 2010; Chen, 2012; Dolan and Bao, 2012; Iglesias and Bonet, 2012).



Narratives/storytelling in organisations by leaders

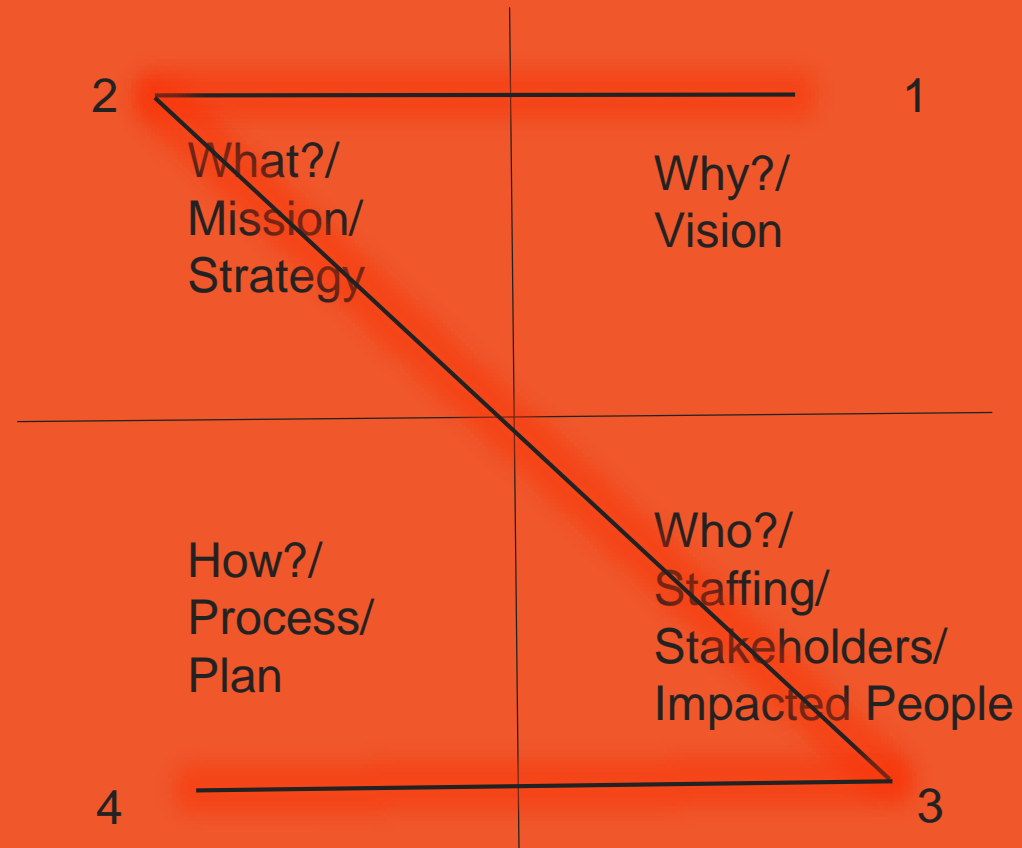
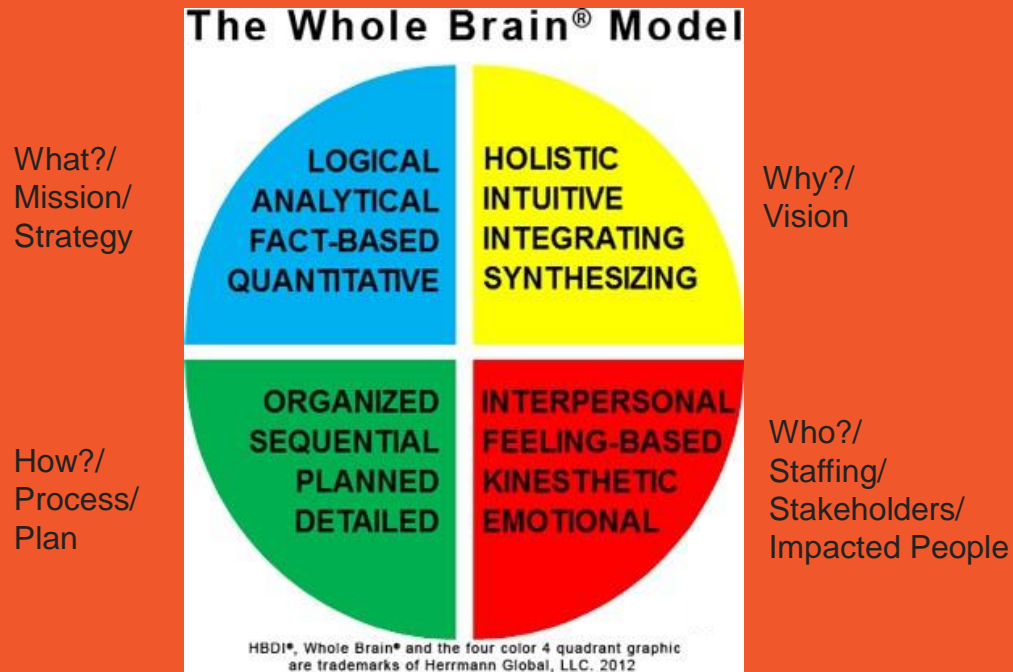
- A strategic narrative centres on a leader's ability to articulate a clear and compelling vision and strategy for the future of the organisation.
- Research suggests that sharing experiences through narrative builds trust, cultivates norms, transfers tacit knowledge, facilitates unlearning, and generates emotional connections (Soule, Deborah & Wilson, Gray., 2002).
- Stories told by managers can enhance employees' understanding of corporate strategy, particularly an organisation's vision, goals, and values (Baker and Boyle, 2009; Marshall and Adamic, 2010; Ohara and Cherniss, 2010; Volker et al., 2011; Chen, 2012; Dolan and Bao, 2012; Iglesias and Bonet, 2012; Auvinen et al., 2013).
- Communicating vision and values in corporate stories can give organisation members a sense of purpose and helps staff to understand their role in achieving the strategy (Baker and Boyle, 2009; Marzec, 2007).



Narratives/storytelling in organisations

- Stories can be a powerful tool in communicating corporate strategy

(for example, Marshall and Adamic, 2010; Ohara and Cherniss, 2010; Volker et al., 2011; Chen, 2012; Dolan and Bao, 2012; Auvinen et al., 2013)



Organisational example:

Picture an organisation with a lot of people in it.

It has been around for a long time.

It has certain ways of doing things, traditions and values.

Membership has always been limited to those accepted if they meet the required criteria and there is a vacancy for the particular role they want.

There is a history of expected (implicit and explicit) behaviour and ways of doing things.

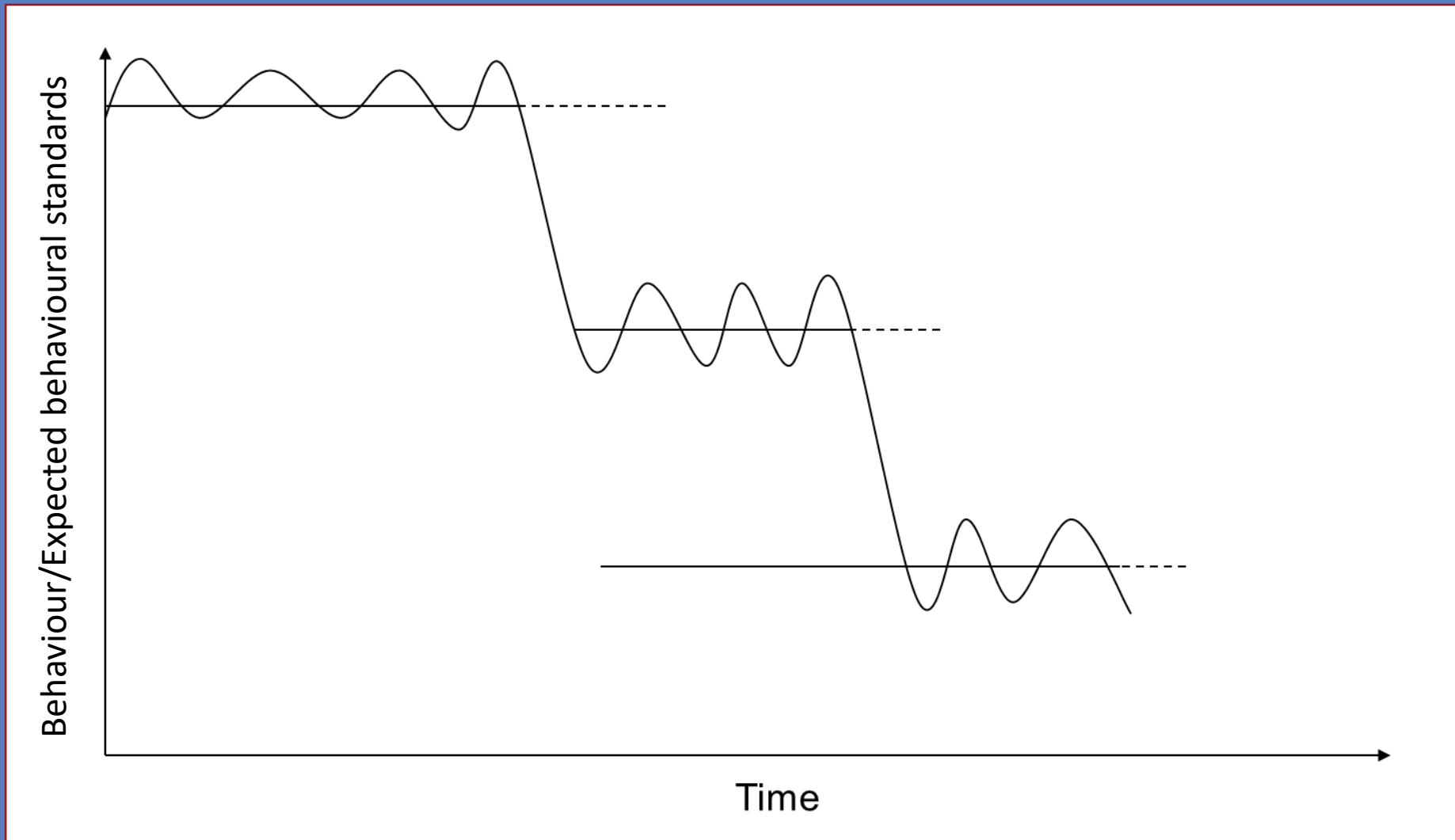
Some individuals have acted against the expectations of the organisation.

This has come to the attention of the leaders of the organisation and people outside of the organisation.

The leaders of the organisation want behaviour to change to ensure the organisation is safe, the environment is respectful, the organisation is performing well and is an attractive employer.

Narrative = uphold the expected standards and be an active bystander

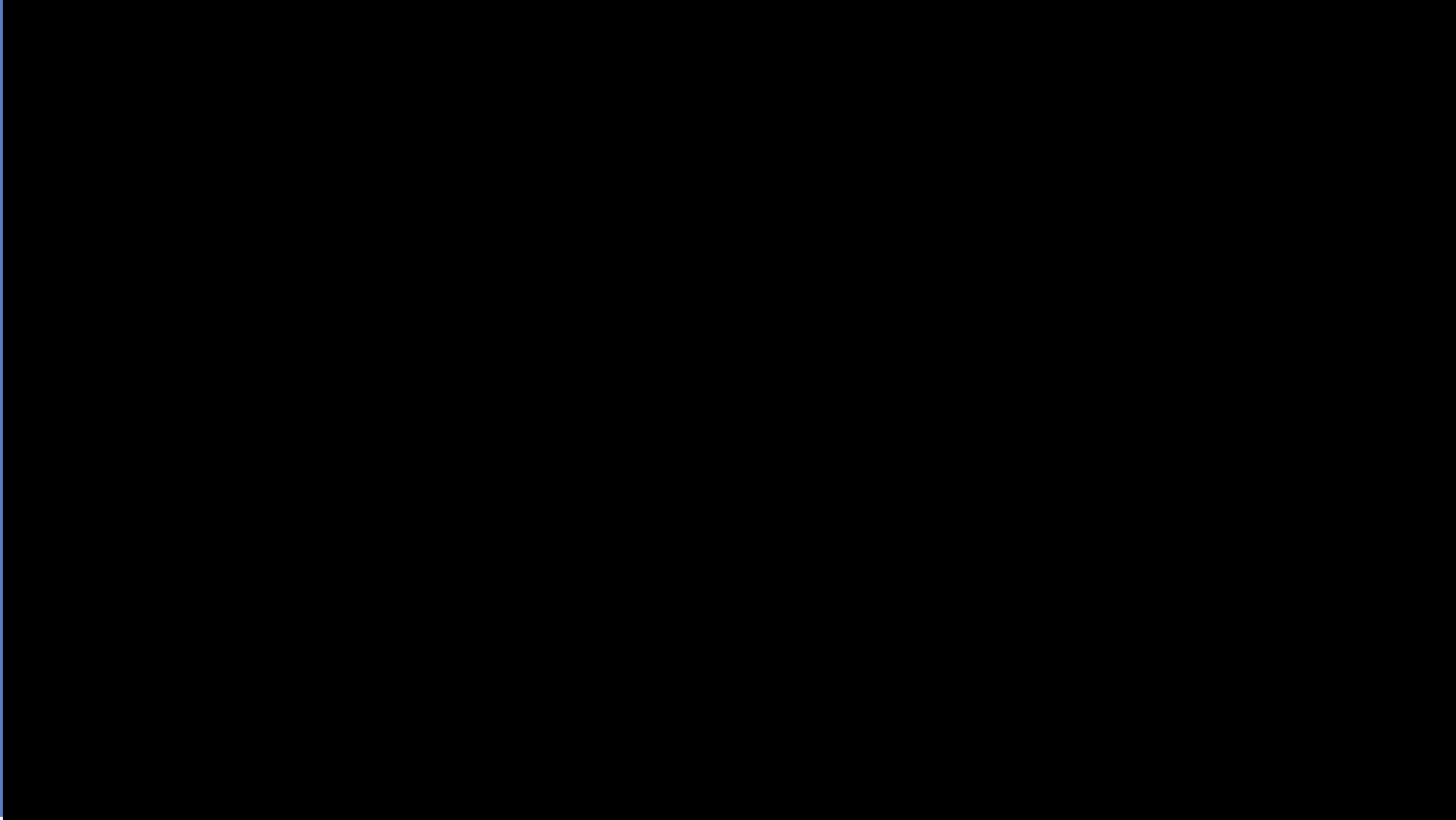
The standard you walk past is the standard you accept



The link between behavioural escalation, addressing visible issues, bystander intervention and reporting/help seeking in an organisational context



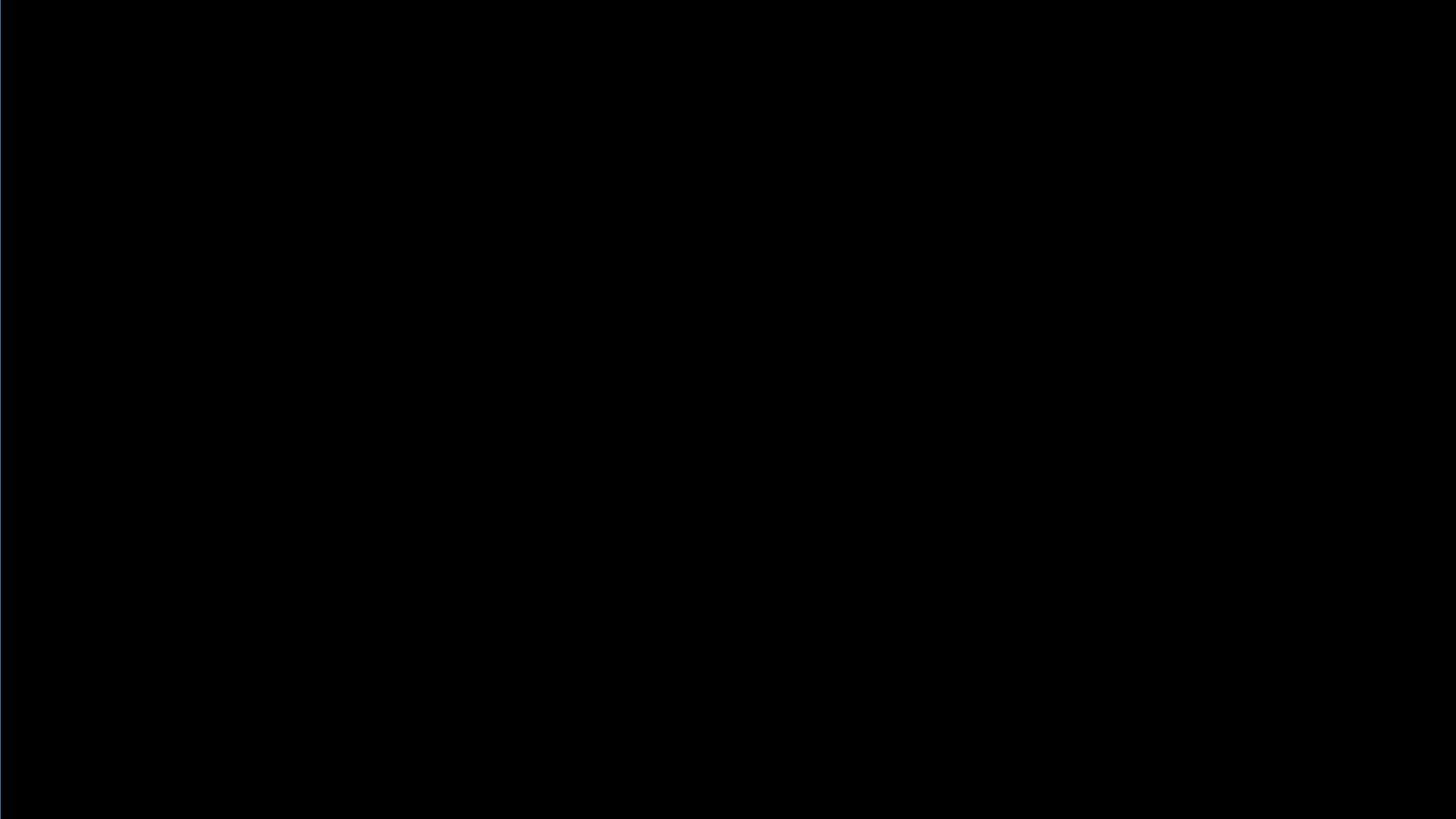
Narratives may change as a result of any number of activities not explicitly labelled as 'narrative change' efforts.



No matter how complicated the problem or the change is, the narrative has to be simple, identifiable and achievable.



Using organisational narratives to explain expected how to address complicated issues: Charles Sturt supports 16 Days of Activism





Charles Sturt
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Celebrating
30 years in 2019

Thank you

