

# *Working Paper*

## **Cost Effective Evaluation of Companies' Storytelling on the Web**

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# Cost Effective Evaluation of Companies' Storytelling on the Web

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**Abstract:** *In this paper we present a cost effective and simple procedure for evaluating company web sites. Our assumption is that such sites are places for companies' self-presentation and that customers are readers of these texts. Web site texts with narrative qualities, e.g. scenes, actors, acts, initiate the customers' imagination and narrative mind and hence their decision making. These ideas are investigated in a qualitative study of two companies' self-presentation as future work places for students. The results demonstrate that the students choose the company that has a web site with rich narrative qualities above the company that has a web site with good graphical appearance, but poor narrative qualities. In conclusion, we suggest that user centred evaluation of commercial web sites by using the suggested method can pay attention to deep, narrative structures in both the company's self-presentation and the customers' reading of the web site texts.*

**Keywords:** *Competitive advantage, decision-making, dramas, imagination, narratives, storytelling, web-design.*

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years organizations have discovered the use of web sites as a new touch point or meeting place for communicating with and involving stakeholders. For instance, charitable organizations attempt to attract donations, policy organizations seek legitimacy, companies attempt to sell their products, and they all attempt to attract new employees. In all these different situations organizations face the problem of information asymmetry between themselves and their donors, supporters, customers or potential employees. This information asymmetry may concern the quality of products, the ability to route donations to the right recipients, or the quality of jobs (Akerlof, 1970; Milgrom and Roberts, 1982). Hence, getting the full value of web sites requires that stakeholders imagine themselves collaborating with the organization, i.e. buying products, donating money, or working for the organization.

From this it follows that the design of web sites matters, as some designs of web sites are believed to be superior to others in establishing communication between the organizations and its stakeholders. The observation that the design of web sites matters is not new as it is commonly assumed that the design of web-pages, in terms of form, colour, content, etc., makes a difference in use of web-pages (Dorman, 1997). The new aspect presented here is the claim that “excellent” web-design produces web sites that make an organization more accessible for stakeholder involvement, whereas “bad” web-design makes them less accessible. From “bad” web-design stakeholders are likely to be left in doubt about the organization’s capability to act in the virtual marketplace, e.g. it might not be perceived to be able to secure safe financial transactions over the Internet or to seriously engage in product support activities.

Using these considerations as our point of departure we propose that it makes sense to view organizations as using web-pages to tell stories about themselves, their past, present and future performance and through these making stakeholders imagine future interactions with them. Hence, we want to analyze the relation between companies’ story telling and stakeholders’ imagination (ideas of future interaction with the company).

With this objective for our analysis in mind, we proceed in the following manner. First, we account for both the company-text approach and the customer-text approach to the analysis of company web sites, and we put these in perspective by outlining the relationships between narratives, imaginations and decision making. Second, we design an empirical study of customers’ reading of two company web sites to check the validity of our ideas. Third, we report and analyze the results from the empirical study, in order to both demonstrate the usefulness of the customer-text approach, and check for the proposition that web sites providing for the formation of rich narratives have a positive impact on the reader in terms of trust enhancement. Finally, we discuss the results and provide a closure for the paper.

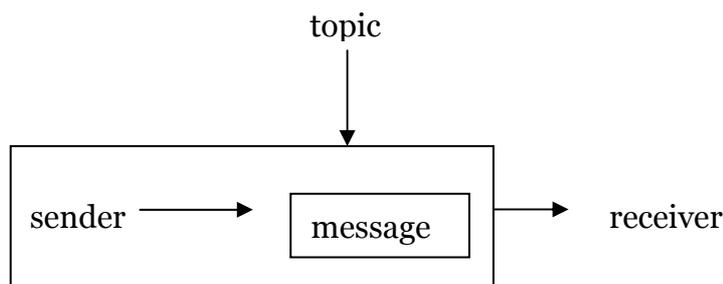
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## 2. Background: Web sites as texts

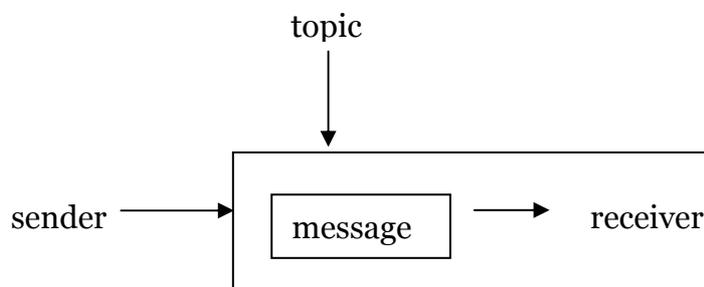
A company's website is there partly for the sake of the customers. A customer reading of a company's website is no different than other human-computer interactions. Perhaps a little less striking is the analogy between company sites and customers as texts and their readers. However, a web site text has readers, and can be judged just as any other text. We suggest that two questions are necessary to identify the website as an "excellent" or "bad" text:

- 1) Is the web site readable as a narrative (yes/no), and
- 2) Does the narrative trigger a rich or poor story in the reader?

The first question relates to the traditional topic for literary text analysis: The relation between the author and his work, in casu the company and the web site. This is illustrated in Figure 1. The second question relates to the topic of more recent text analysis: the relation between a text and its reader, in casu the website and the customer, as illustrated in Figure 2.



**Figure 1.** The Author's Text / The Company's text. (Brandt-Pedersen & Rønn-Poulsen, 1980)



**Figure 2.** The Readers Text / The Customer's Text (Brandt-Pedersen & Rønn-Poulsen, 1980).

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In the following two sections we provide brief accounts for these two positions.

## **2.1 The company's text**

In literary theory, there are biographic and text oriented analytical methods. Biographic methods treat texts as an expression of the author's specific experience and historical background, what the author seeks to express with the text, and as a source of information for historical psychological and sociological investigations. Text oriented methods study the text as such, looking for the topical and thematic structure of the text; the text has an explicit meaning.

Take a company's home page. For a large part, it is in the autobiographical genre. It says probably something about the company's specific history, it has a message that the company seeks to spread and it can be seen as a source of information about the company. The explicit meaning of a company's website is *a factual self-presentation* of the company. The value of this self-presentation can be assessed on basis of knowledge of the company from other sources.

Take again the company's homepage. The combination of fiction and facts place the text as an autonomous unit, a text as such, in the faction genre. In faction, facts are presented as a story, a drama with a narrative grammar of opening, conflict, climax, and fade out. This narrative is the implicit meaning of the text, and it is supposed to convey the facts about the company in a particular effective way. Seen from this perspective, the value of the company's *narrative self-presentation* lies in its narrative grammar being isomorphic with the innate cognitive structures that humans use to frame all experience.

Faction has a narrative structure with actors, scene, etc., as well as certain marks on which we can recognize the genre: use of close shots, strong narrator, use of dialogue, etc. Furthermore, texts in the faction genre has a layout that – similar to montage in a film – is planned for easy access (reading, viewing) on different levels, e.g.: level 1: the collage of text, pictures and illustration, level 2: the text body including headlines, boxes, columns, spaces, etc. and level 3: the message: who, what, where, when, with the most important stuff first. The layout is important, because, as we argue below, the reader of the text does some work to create his or her own story.

Having outlined this theoretical framework for analyzing a company's web site texts, we have suggested that narratives of future performance by companies must observe certain structural and technical features in order to convince their audiences.

## **2.2 The customer's text**

An alternative view from literary theory suggests that the significance of a narrative is solely a product of the readers work with the text. This focus on the reader opens up for a user perspective on the design of a company's web site texts. Put simply, the reader is a co-producer of the text – which is the topic of

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this section of the paper. Thus, a firm is never the sole author of its own narrative, as in every conversation a positioning is accepted, rejected, or improved upon by the partners in the conversation (Czarniawska, 1997).

The assumption we make here is that readers have a narrative consciousness. This narrative consciousness is on one hand a mental structure developed on basis of previous experiences, and on the other hand an artefact that people use when coordinating their behaviour with others. Subscribing to this perspective Polkinghorne (1988) argues that a narrative is "...a scheme by means of which human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions" (ibid, p. 11). He further argues that "...it [the narrative] is the primary scheme by means of which human experience is rendered meaningful" (ibid, p. 11). Elaborating on these ideas Bruner (1990) emphasizes that it is the sequentiality (temporal order of events) in a narrative rather than the truth or falsity of story elements that determines the plot, and thus, the power of the narrative as a story.

In contrast to the literary analysis of genres, having analytical focus on the reader of a text thus means the use of psychological concepts in the analysis. In the context of media theory, the psychological concept of schema has been used to analyze communication. The basic assumption is that "...our minds are made up of schemas, organized into stories, in which the elements are invested with value and emotion, which are about who we are essentially as people." (Sanes, 2002). While the concept of schemata originally was developed as an attempt to identify mental narrative structures humans create when reading a text (see e.g. Bartlett, 1932; Rumelhart, 1975), cultural psychologists have become increasingly aware of the difficulties in assuming any kind of narrative structure without considering the context of the narrative. Cole identifies schemes as "dual entities, one side of which is a mental representation, the other side of which is embodied in talk and action" (Cole, 1996, p. 128) and use this as an argument for a more inclusive account of human action that takes context into the analysis. Cole gives Burke (1945, p. 22) credit for noticing the "inescapable ambiguity of action and context", and he points to how Burke's ideas about the elements of scene, act, and agency may be useful as a language for talking about mediated context (ibid, p. 333).

We now have the constituents of a twofold analysis of a web site text: the text as the company's (the sender's) text and the text as the customer's (the receiver's) text. Before we go on to analyze web site texts and the users' use of them, we will, however, place the whole discussion of narratives in a larger perspective.

### **2.3 Imagination and decision making**

It has for some time been accepted that imaginations of what the future might look like play an important role in individual and organizational decision making (March, 1995; 1996; 1999). The idea that a decision involves a choice among a number of different imaginations of more or less desirable futures was probably first articulated by Shackle (1979, p. 26). These creations, however, do

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not evolve out of blue sky, they partly have their point of departure in input supplied by the outside world that can then be described as 'beginnings among which decision makers choose' (Shackle,1979, p. 23).

The implications of this must be that if company web sites supply rich input to narratives, then these web sites are more likely to trigger the formation of attractive and choosables in the minds of web-viewers, which in turn will make them express a more favourable attitude towards the specific company.

Hence, web-viewers may find that web sites presented to them are functional, informative, satisfying, fancy, etc., but if neither of this trigger their imagination, then they are not likely to take action.

### **3. Methodology**

As an example of web-viewers' actions to be studied, we suggest the situation where a web-viewer is looking for a job, as many companies use their web sites to attract potential employees. Given that several companies in the same industry attempt to attract potential employees in this way there is inevitably an element of competition among them, as job seekers can choose among several potential employers and decide which of them is most attractive. Therefore, the question becomes which web site will most successfully trigger the formation of a compelling narrative (imagination) by the job seeker and thus enrolls the job-seeker. We suggest that the web sites that most successfully provokes the formation of an imagination of the future by the job-seeker, is the one that translates the job-seeker to a particular place in an imaginative world, which the job-seeker finds attractive. Thus, imaginations structured in a narrative manner represent possible beginnings for job-seekers looking for solutions to their job-problem.

In order to gather empirical data to feed the advancement of our propositions, we established a small experiment and invited three senior undergraduate students from a HCI course to participate. Thus, our sample consisted of people presumably looking for a job in the near future.

Building on our theoretical reflections we assumed that rich web sites would trigger the formation of rich narratives and thus of rich imaginations in the mind of the respondents, who would then be more likely to choose employment in companies with such web sites, and less likely to choose employment in companies with poor web sites. Furthermore, we assumed that it would be possible to use the literary analysis of web sites to predict which web sites would trigger the formation of rich narratives by the subjects.

In the experiment we asked the subjects to visit IT-companies web sites, and to imagine themselves being actively searching for a job typically offered by this type of companies. In order to check for the formation of rich narratives by humans, we asked the respondents to provide us with a written description of; how a working day for you would look like in the company. We assumed that

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such accounts for working days would enable us to judge whether a rich or a poor narrative had been produced. In order to check if the narrative had the proposed impact on decision-making, we ask the respondents to rate on a 5 points Likert scale, if they were likely to apply for a job in the company, with 1 being very unlikely and 5 being very likely.

In the experiment we directed the respondents to two company web sites, KMD and CELL Network. We selected these two web sites because KMD was at the time perceived as a large bureaucratic organization that traditionally had been occupied with provision of IT services to institutions in the public sectors, and now has turned into a partly private owned company still serving public institutions. In contrast, CELL Network was a young web-bureau specialized in web design, and with a close association to mass education of multimedia designers. Hence, the two companies somehow represented stereotypes of organizations involved in the old and the new economy.

However, the design of a company's web site should according to our hypothesis make a difference. When we analyzed the two company websites, we found surprisingly that KMD told a drama (a narrative self-presentation) that we wanted to be a part of. The other company's, Cell Network's, web site gave general and scattered facts (a factual self-presentation) and left it to the reader to create coherence. We could not, on basis of what we knew of the company from other sources, predict these companies choice of narrative presentation on their web site. Therefore these web sites added to what we, as customers, knew about these companies (see Appendix A and B for example pages from the websites). Furthermore, as we suggested in the introduction, customer-readers engage more deeply in a narrative self-presentation than in a factual self-presentation. This engagement should lead readers to rate the narrative self-presenting company (in casu KMD) accordingly as the more attractive work place.

After our initial analysis of the narrative structure or the lack thereof in the web sites, we handed the students participants an evaluation scheme (see appendix A).

The procedure was as follows:

1. The participants were asked to enter the website of the two selected companies, KMD and Cell Network, and to
2. write a story of how a working day at that company would be,
3. rate the company's attraction as a working place and
4. provide reasons for their rating and their story (see appendix C for the evaluation scheme the students filled out).
5. Thereafter we analysed the participants written stories as narratives: Is it possible for the participant to tell a coherent story related to the website message, Yes/No?

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6. If the answer was yes, we would expect the participant to make a favourable decision in regard to the company that owned that web site.

Our intention was to develop a web site evaluation method that is cost-effective and simple to perform and that provides an indication of how well formed a story on a website is, compared to other, similar sites.

It should be possible to use such an evaluation method on a large numbers of web sites, in a rather quick, simple and objective manner, looking for conflict, climax and acts, agent, scene, agency, and purpose in text and pictures on web sites and testing the findings against users' ability to create stories. Furthermore, the analysis method eventually may be part of a general web site evaluation method. Thus, we suggest that a company's capability to make a narrative self-presentation is one of the usability parameters on commercial web sites. It may be considered a specification of the more general criteria of layout and design (other usability parameters being e.g. easy navigation, easy accessible site information, catering for a range of users, site map or search engine, and other categories for evaluation being e.g. product/service information, (see e.g. Elliot, Mørup-Petersen, & Bjørn-Andersen, 2000)).

#### **4. Analyzing web sites as the “customer’s text”**

In this section, we look at the data produced by the graduate students. The students we asked were on the verge of becoming full professionals, they had all previous work experience and they were possible future employees of the companies. In our analysis of their accounts, we assumed that the web site pages presenting the two companies as a working place would trigger our students' narratives of a working day of a professional in these companies. We were aware that a student's narrative scheme of a working day is on one hand an organization and a mean of recollection of that students' previous experiences of working days (Bartlett, 1932; Polkinghorne, 1988), and on the other hand a story the student uses when coordinating his or her behaviour with others in the context of his or hers shared history and future life with family, friends and colleagues (Cole, 1996). Thus, the web site texts could ignite many possible narrative structures that are at play in a students' life, and as Polkinghorne (1988) pointed out, a narrative can be real or imaginary without loss of power as a story. Therefore, in each student's story we first looked for the elements in his or her narrative of a working day – was there acts, scene, agents, agency and purpose, was there a story to tell? Secondly, we looked for a plot, some progression in the story that tied events together, e.g. had the story a conflict and a climax? Finally, both in the students' written stories and in their accounts of reasons for their rating of the companies, we looked for embedded stories or themes that could provide us with an intuition of the context for the students' narratives of a working day. Essentially, our analysis should tell us whether the students were able to tell a rich story on basis of the web site text, or not.

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## 4.1 The customer's reading of KMD's web site

The three students had no trouble creating a story on basis of the narrative self-presentation from KMD. As is illustrated by the analysis of the students' stories below, the web site text ignited the students' imagination and storytelling capabilities. All the students' told stories with narrative qualities: Acts, scene, agents, agency and purpose, and these elements were easy to spot in the texts. One of the narrative had a bad ending and looked more like a tragedy than a drama, because the hero could not find his way to the treasure, personal development, in the mess of endless possibilities and he therefore concluded that the treasure, personal development, was not to be found and the story instead goes dark and seems to end in endless, sleeping workdays. Another narrative was a real drama. It had the same theme as the first: personal development, but the conflict was with life outside the scene and a solution was found: meeting at work looking ugly, when it is necessary. The third narrative was also dramatic, but only because the hero worked out his own solution. Furthermore, the students each had their embedded schemas or themes that only was indicated in their stories: One was a theory of the participant's education and the kind of professional identity it provides, another was a theory of the relation between a work place and a person's individuality, and the third embedded theme was about possible phases in life following being a student.

In the following we analyze student A,B and C's written stories, which they made on basis of KMD's web site text.

*KMD has an impressive presentation of how it is to work in the company. Much emphasis is on personal development, which is very positive; this is not a place to sit a sleep, apparently. The web site, however, also seems somewhat overloaded with information, which makes it a very large site, but still very easy to navigate.*

*I imagine a working day that, despite the very positive personnel policy is marked by being in a very large company. The possibilities seem endless, both regarding geographic placements, but also positions. What I do not feel, is, however, a positive attitude towards the cross disciplinarity that one as at student at the IT university represents. This may be a wrong conception, but the company seems like a very streamlined organization, in which one is directly associated to the job, one is trained for, and from there it is then possible to internal redeployment.*

**Figure 3.** Student A's written story on basis of KMD's web site text (presented in Appendix A).

Student A's story of KMD shown in Figure 3 contains the narrative elements: acts (of personal development), scene (web site presentation of KMD as a large company and as a working place), agents (a general KMD employee and the author, a student), agency (navigating the KMD website, finding endless possibilities for geographic and post placement, company internal re-positioning), purpose (becoming a cross disciplinary professional). In the beginning of the story a positive attitude is clear. The conflict is immediately introduced: personal development versus sleeping at work. The climax is reached in the description of KMD as a large company, which unfortunately does not resolve the conflict. Even though the agency is suitable (the web site is

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easy to use to find endless possibilities), the purpose (of becoming a cross disciplinary professional) cannot be met because the author cannot see the hero (himself) performing acts (of personal development) at the scene (the large company). The story fades with the hero (the author) describing how he got caught (in the job you were trained for). In this way the plot has a tragic aspect. In the story there is an embedded theory of what a student from the student's educational institution represents: Cross disciplinarity, and how this cross disciplinarity is related to small companies.

*I am in a company that has changed a lot in recent years, but which is still a public institution in some sense. Much emphasis is on the room I have in my life for other things than work, while at the same time I get the possibilities for constant personal development through new projects and education. The projects works well and are managed well and now and then there are exciting new areas for one to immerse in. Unfortunately, I am now and then fixed in an area, without any obvious possibilities for cross disciplinary work. The management has not really changed from a typical public institution management to a more dynamic and inspiring creative force in the company. On the other hand, I probably have a little more freedom in my work than I would have in a private company. My work areas are also very relevant, because they often ends with products that large part of the Danish population may benefit from.*

**Figure 4.** Student B's written story made on basis of KMD's web site text.

Student B's story (Figure 4) have acts of project work, which takes place in a scene called the project, carried out by the author and a staff of employees with cross disciplinary background. The agency is time buffers allocated to further education of employees, use of cross disciplinarity, deadlines and humour. The purpose with the work is innovations. The plot has dramatic qualities; meeting a deadline requires people being busy, but that conflicts with the understanding that people also have a life outside the work place. The climax, the resolution is that people are allowed meeting at work looking awful. In the story, there is an embedded theory of cross disciplinarity, employees' individual variability, and further education as signs of a tolerance for people as they are, with all their individual differences.

*I work in a long-term project with an expected (and budgeted) duration of 2 years. Within the project, buffers are placed for me and the other project members to have time and possibility for immersion in our professional specialities and for accumulate the knowledge and experience we achieve in the project. And for extensive further education.*

*The staff of employees is a mixed group with many disciplines represented and we emphasize the benefits of working cross disciplinarily. Even though it can be very busy in the time up to deadlines, usually there is an understanding and accept of us having a life outside the work place – and thus it doesn't matter if I now and then meet at work looking ugly.*

**Figure 5.** Student C's written story made on basis of KMD's web site.

Student C's story (Figure 5) have acts (the firm has changed, the employees develop themselves) and a scene (the former public institution that is the firm). There are agents (the author as employee of the company) and agency (participation in new projects and new work). There is a purpose with the acts (cross disciplinary, free and relevant work). The plot has dramatic qualities. The

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conflict is between the company as a public institution with a bureaucratic organization and the new ham of a private firm with dynamic and inspirational management: "...the company management has not yet...". The climax is the deal, the balance that the author find in the more freedom and relevance of work found in public institutions than in private firms. The embedded theory in the author's story is that public companies are good places to work if you need freedom; however as the author writes in his reasons he is not yet ready for such a company because he has not yet a family and actually need some work experience. However, the author is in doubt, because he cannot identify with the person in the web site story, but on the other hand thinks the projects sound innovative.

## 4.2 The customer's reading of Cell Network's web site

The other company was a web design bureau, Cell Network. The three students had considerable trouble creating a story on basis of this company's web site. Only one of the three stories made on basis of Cell network's web site text had all the elements of a narrative. The two other students had melted the scene and the acts. Their stories were not complete, but merely fragment of a story. Furthermore, though there were potential conflicts in all three stories, they all ended badly, and spelled like tragedy. Finally, the lack of story creation was not due to students' lack of attempt to create a story. There were clearly different theories at play in the stories. One student provides a theme about the relation between design and substance, another about the relation between good work place and explicit mechanisms for development, and the third student a theme of the relation between categories of companies and innovative capabilities. We illustrate this in the following analysis of the three students' stories.

*Well, it doesn't invite to staying long. A very light design, perhaps even superficial, which unfortunately gives the impression of a trivial work day. I must honestly admit that it does not seems like a place for me, all I could see was their many offices and many solutions ... but their personnel policy is not exactly in focus. All in all, I don't think you are welcome on the site and therefore I have to say that it was an OK design, but "shit doesn't appear better, because you plant a flag in it".*

**Figure 6.** Student A's written story on basis of Cell Network's web site text (presented in Appendix A).

Student A's story made on basis of Cell Networks web site text shown in Figure 6 has no real acts (except staying on the web site). However, there is a scene (a trivial working day), and agents (the author). Despite the lack of acts, there is agency (many offices, many solutions). There is no purpose, except something like making the something bad look good by nice design. The plot in the participants' story is the conflict between the many offices and solutions and the lack of human resource politics. The ending is bad, the author finding out that the web site design hides a bad substance. In the story, there is an embedded assumption that nice design can hide lack of substance.

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*My work can be varied, as it sometimes involves analysis not solely of the pure digital solutions. We want to encircle the customer and are willing to use untraditional means and want to emphasize soft values in the marketing done for our customers. And it is exactly the field of tension between the hardness of the media and the "soft" that we often tries to achieve, which makes work a challenge.*

*BUT, I am running a bit in the same track and now and then feel I have stalled. Unfortunately no emphasis is put on expanding my knowledge or sharing it. Therefore I seek another job.*

**Figure 7.** Student B's written story on basis of Cell Network's web site text.

Student B's story (Figure 7) has acts (different kinds of analysis, not always with focus on digital solutions). It has no scene. There are agents (the author and an unspecific "we"). There is agency (untraditional means, soft values). There is a purpose (surrounding the customer). The plot is explicitly written as the field of tension between the hardness of the media and the soft values, but the climax does not appear. Instead there is a bad ending, with a conclusion that nothing new happens on the scene, and the hero seeking other scenes. There is an embedded theory that a good job requires mechanisms that ensures development in terms of education or knowledge sharing, knowledge sharing.

*A work day consist of saying hello to each other, and perhaps arrange to play at the soccer table at lunch. Everybody have their small area which they are occupied with and once in a while you meet to arrange the further course of events, eventual initiative towards customers or other. A typical project takes its point of departure in already developed and tested solutions, aesthetics and usability are all-important goals in the development of internet solutions. I am probably somewhat fixed in routines and the attempt to develop standard systems, but, thank god, the American "corporate culture" has not yet quite swallowed the old "Mousehouse" spirit.*

**Figure 8.** Student C's written story on basis of Cell Network's web site text.

Student C's story (Figure 8) has acts (reaching aesthetic and user friendly internet solutions), a scene (small areas of speciality work), agents (everybody at work), agency (saying hello to each other, making arrangements to play at the football table at lunchtime, occasionally meeting to arrange contact with customers, work routines etc.). There is a purpose (making standard systems). The plot begins with difficulties (being locked in work routines etc) and has a somewhat negative conclusion (the pioneer spirit from the original dotcom company is on its way to be replaced by a general superficial corporate culture). Had it instead been a drama, the old spirit had been re-established, now it looks more as a tragedy. The embedded theory is that a module-building firm cannot be innovative but is static. Furthermore, a module building firm is traditional, has a grey and old website and too young employees to fit the story, hence the website must be a left over from the original company.

In sum, the analysis of the web site texts using the framework of "customer's text" requires assumptions of the students' schemes of a working day as well as the historical and future context for their thoughts about a working day. As is illustrated above, as far as the interpretations are not overdone, it is possible to identify elements of a narrative, a plot and the context of the students' narratives.

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The conclusion on the analysis of the companies' websites is straight forward: The interactive media of a web site does not free the designer for task of telling the story in a way that let the customers engage in telling their own story.

## 5. Discussion – the impact of web sites

Having completed the customer text evaluations of the two web sites we can now turn to the employment decisions indicated by the three readers (the students). These results are summarized in table 1 below.

The readers' ratings of the two websites indicate that a 'rich' design with a narrative self-presentation of the company influence positively a potential future employees decision. We find that the web site evaluated as supplying rich input to the formation of narratives about a working day in the company, and thus, triggering a preferable imagination of a future job-situation, is the web site of the company in which the readers are most likely to apply for a job. Whereas the opposite is true for the web site evaluated as supplying poor input to the formation of narratives. Also, we find that the same correlation exists for the company text evaluation of the two web sites. Hence, evidence from our small empirical sample shows that the narrative qualities of web sites matters, as they have an impact on individuals' imaginations, and thereby, on their preferences in a decision situation.

Rating Reader	Rich website design (KMD)	Poor website design (CELL Networks)
Reader A	3	1
Reader B	4	3
Reader C	4	1

**Table 1.** *Employment Decision indicated by the Readers on a Likert scale from 1 (not interested at all) to 5 (very interested) in taking a job in the company.*

Another important observation concerns our selection of company web sites to be included in the empirical study presented in the paper. As described in the Methodology section we selected KMD, because we assumed the web site to be poor, and we selected the Cell Network, because we assumed the web site to be rich. Both our own evaluation of these companies' websites and the customer text evaluation with our students as participants proved that we were wrong in this initial assumption. Whether analyzed from a company text point of view or a customer text point of view, it appears that the KMD website is a fairly rich web site, whereas the Cell Network web site is a not so rich website. We believe that this conclusion adds to the credibility of the suggested perspective on evaluation of web sites, as although we were mistaken in our initial judgment of

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the web site the proposed perspective on web site evaluation proved solid. Based on this observation we suggest that the use of web sites does make a difference, and that it makes sense to distinguish between deep and superficial use of web sites. The superficial use is the typical use by the web-surfer, who visits a web site briefly and may become impressed by the flashy design displayed to him. In contrast, the deep use is the typical use by the web-user, who by purpose stays on a web site for a longer time, because he needs information from that web site, e.g., to make a decision about whether to buy a product from the company. We suggest that the distinction between deep and superficial use of web sites make a difference to the outcome of a web site evaluation, as the choice of evaluation criteria differs depending on the use on focus. However, we believe that to a company the experience and evaluation by the web-surfer is largely irrelevant, as he is not there to make a decision related to the specific company. In contrast, the web-user is there because the company matters to him, and thus, to companies web site evaluations from the perspective of deep use matter.

## **6. Closure**

In this paper we presented two different analytical approaches (company text and customer text) to evaluation of company web sites, suggesting that such evaluations provide solid information about the effectiveness of web sites in attracting customers, donators and employees to organizations. Consequently, we expected that effective web sites would influence humans to make decision in favor of the company in focus, as we subscribe to the idea that human thinking is subject to narrative structuring, and that imaginations by humans are organized in narratives. Finally, we assumed that in decision situations rich imaginations dominate poor imaginations, as the rich ones produce more attractive choosables to the decision maker.

Our results demonstrate that performing a cost effective and simple narrative evaluation of company web sites makes sense, as they enable us to distinguish among web sites based on their narrative qualities. We find that the narrative qualities of web sites influence the choice made by humans in a decision situation. Using these results as our point of departure, we conclude that there is reason to move ahead with this kind of web site analysis, as it produces valuable insights to web site design by companies. Future research on this topic should move in two parallel directions, as we need both more advanced theoretical frameworks to perform narrative evaluation of web site, and more empirical evidence to establish the more exact relations between various web-narratives, and how they influence human decision-making.

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## Appendix A. The 'company as a working place' on KMD's web site. The text is translated from Danish to English in the box below.

Til forside

Søg

Sitemap English

Om KMD Nyheder Job Produkter NetBorger.dk

**Job**

[Ledige job Jylland](#)

[Ledige job Fyn](#)

[Ledige job Sjælland](#)

**KMD som arbejdsplads**

[Mød fire ansatte](#)

[Personalepolitik](#)

[Kort over KMD-steder](#)

[Send ansøgning](#)

KMD som arbejdsplads:  
**Vores medarbejdere vil selv...**

Medarbejderne er nøglen til vores succes. Deres viden og kompetencer er omdrejningspunktet for forretningen KMD. Deres evne til at forstå og efterkomme kundernes behov er helt afgørende for virksomhedens fortsatte vækst på markedet. Derfor er det vores mål at være en attraktiv arbejdsplads for de medarbejdere, som bedst kan løfte vores nuværende og kommende udfordringer.

**...og får lov**

Vi tror på, at medarbejderne fungerer bedst i et miljø, hvor de har stor indflydelse på det daglige arbejde, og hvor der er mangeartede **muligheder for personlig og faglig udvikling**. Vi satser på dem, der synes, det er sjovt at tage ansvar for, at ideerne bliver til virkelighed. Det kan være opgaver, som løses i inspirerende projektmiljøer på tværs af faglige skel, eller opgaver, som giver anledning til faglig fordybelse. Fælles for opgaverne er, at de skal ses som en del af helheden i KMD's forretning.

Et målrettet arbejde med at skabe det potentiale, der skal til for at styrke og udvikle vores forretningsområder, er højt prioriteret.

Derfor skaber vi en entydig ansvarsfordeling i opgaveløsningen. Og vi fremtidssikrer virksomhedens menneskelige ressourcer ved at sætte fokus på den daglige ledelse, nye karriereveje og relevante uddannelsesmuligheder for den enkelte.

Vi sikrer samtidig, at **vores kompetencer bruges optimalt**. At være aktiv sparringspartner, give handlerum og støtte den enkelte medarbejder i at udfolde sine evner, er derfor

**??**

[Få svar på dine spørgsmål om at arbejde for KMD her](#)

[Se den seneste analyse af medarbejdertilfredsheden her](#)

Placering	Arbejdsplads
1.	DIEU
2.	Unimerco A/S
3.	McDonald's Danmark A/S
4.	Cap Gemini Danmark A/S
5.	Novo Nordisk A/S
6.	Jubii A/S
7.	Ericsson Dixx A/S
8.	OMD Denmark A/S
9.	SITICOM Fischer & Lorenz
10.	Novozymes A/S
11.	KMD

[KMD er Danmarks 11. bedste arbejdsplads i 2001. Se her](#)

KMD as a working place:

Our employees take initiatives...

The employees are the key to our success. Their knowledge and competence is the turnkey for the KMD business. Their capability to understand and meet customers' needs is decisive for the company's continuous growth in the market. Therefore it is our goal to be an attractive working place for those employees that best manage to meet our current and future challenges.

### ...and they get the freedom to do so

We believe that our employees work best in an environment in which they are able to influence their everyday work and in which there are a variety of possibilities for personal and professional development. We aim at those who believe in taking responsibility for making ideas become real. It can be assignments that are solved in inspiring project environments that crosses disciplinary lines, or tasks that require professional immersion. The common denominator is that they must be seen as part of the whole of KMD's business.

A determined work with creating the potential, which is needed to strengthen and develop our business areas is highly prioritised.

That is why we create an unequivocal distribution of responsibility in the solution of tasks. And we ensure the company's future human resources by putting focus on the everyday management, new carrier paths and relevant means of education for the individual.

At the same time we ensure that **our competencies are used in an optimal way**. To be an attractive sparring partner, provide room for action and support for the individual employee unfolding his or her abilities, is therefore managers most precious task. And it is done with respect for the individual and to the benefit for the company as a whole. **The values for our employees** are generality, initiative and drive.

The 'company as a working place' on Cell Network's web site. The text is translated from Danish to English in the box below.



cell løsninger

cell karriere

cell kontorer

cell fakta

cell nyheder

- vi arbejder i cell > visit our staff

vi arbejder i cell

Vi er 2.100 kollegaer i Cell Network fordelt på 45 kontorer i 13 lande. I Danmark sidder 70 Cell Network medarbejdere med en mangfoldighed af kompetence. Vi har valgt at præsentere vores kompetencer ud fra den enkelte medarbejders synsvinkel; fra webudviklere til designere og key account managers.



- >> Systemarkitekt
- >> Key Account Manager
- >> Designer
- >> Usability konsulent
- >> Art Director
- >> Projektleder
- >> Researcher
- >> Interface developer
- >> Systemudvikler

### **We work in cell**

We are 2.100 colleagues in Cell Network distributed across 45 offices in 13 countries. In Denmark we have 70 Cell Network employees with a richness of competencies. We have chosen to present our competencies from the perspective of the individual employee; from web developers to designers and key account managers.

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## **Appendix B.**

Evaluation scheme given to student participants.

### **Investigation of companies' web sites**

Dear student.

By participating in this investigation you will contribute to the development of a new method for evaluation of companies' websites.

You must evaluate selected web sites. The address on these sites is given in the following.

For each of the web sites we ask you to:

1. Enter the web site. Imagine that you have just finished your education. You are using the web to look for possible places to work. Write  $\frac{1}{2}$  a page on how a work day for you might look in the company. Write on the background of the company's presentation of itself on the web site.
2. State thereafter on a scale from 1- 5 your interest in taking a job in the company and provide a reason for your statement.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**I want feedback on the investigation: Yes\_\_ No\_\_**

**Answer question 1 and 2 by filling in the attached forms and send them to NN as an attached file.**