

# *Telling a different story: how nonprofit organizations reveal strategic purpose through storytelling*

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## **Telling a different story: How non-profit organisations reveal strategic purpose through storytelling.**

### **Abstract**

Responding to a call for research into storytelling within the non-profit context, the paper contributes to an emerging research conversation about communicating organisational strategy through storytelling. The research analyses one hundred stories across ten leading organisations to identify how they are being deployed and what that tells us about the underpinning strategy. Through bringing story character, classification, and content together for the first time, the paper presents a holistic perspective on the story construct. It identifies that, when viewed as a whole, the stories told by organisations can be a powerful communication tool for reaching external audiences. However, the research also identifies that their ability to convey strategic purpose through storytelling is moderated by storytelling capability. It finds that organisations with stronger storytelling capability use this craft to differentiate themselves more effectively. It concludes with contributing a new conceptual model for understanding organisational storytelling and a roadmap for practitioners to strengthen storytelling capability.

### **Key words:**

Brand story, Emotional brand attachment, Engagement, Marketing, Charity appeals.

## **Telling a different story: How non-profit organisations reveal strategic purpose through storytelling.**

### **1. Introduction**

The stories that organisations tell us are revealing. What they share about themselves, and the way in which it happens, is rarely an accident. What we read and watch is the result of a series of conscious communication decisions, anchored in their strategic purpose. The result is that stories are seen as *“devices through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others”* (Lawler, 2002, p242). In this way, organisations can be viewed as narrative entities, achieved through the telling of stories (Boje, 2003).

Storytelling enables a cognitive and emotional transfer from the organisation to the consumer (Brown & Patterson, 2010). How each consumer decodes that story is at the heart of what is essentially a co-created, social phenomenon (van Laer, Feiereisen, & Visconti, 2019), particularly present in the tourism (Pera, 2017; Pera, Viglia, & Furlan, 2016) and luxury goods (Hughes, Bandoni, & Pehlivan, 2016; Kim, Lloyd, & Cervellon, 2016) sectors where stories about particular places or brands become part of a narrative people tell about themselves. A transformation occurs when the consumer is absorbed into the narrative, becoming part of the story (Green & Brock, 2000). In this way, the stories organisations choose to tell about themselves have potential to be adapted, adopted, or ignored by each consumer in their own way (Allcorn & Stein, 2016; Gabriel, 1999).

However, it is equally interesting to turn the spotlight back to the organisation. Storytelling has been identified as an important way to understand corporate strategy (Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Woodside, Sood, & Miller, 2008), including signalling differentiation (Janssen, Van Dalssen, Van Hoof, & Van Vuuren, 2012) to external stakeholders (Dowling, 2006; Van

Riel, 2000). It is strategy-as-practice (de La Ville & Mounoud, 2010; Rouleau, 2010), with the specific stories organisations decide to share with external stakeholders “*the lived, embodied experience*” (Küpers, Mantere, & Statler, 2013, p1) of that strategy. However, research to date has focused on understanding story structure and layout (Pera et al., 2016; Janssen et al., 2012; Woodside, 2010), the gap between story theory and practice (Spear & Roper, 2013), and unintended consequences (Nguyen, 2015). Through understanding the stories that organisations carefully select to engage these vital audiences, the strategic purpose of the organisation is revealed (Spear & Roper, 2013, 2016). This paper contributes to this growing body of knowledge.

The paper responds to a call for research into storytelling within the non-profit context (Merchant, Ford, & Sargeant, 2010) and contributes to a research conversation about communicating organisational strategy through storytelling (Spear & Roper, 2016). The purpose of the research was to understand the relationship between the conscious choice of the story constructed by an organisation and the strategic purpose driving that storytelling. Building on an extensive literature review, seven research objectives were identified, encompassing the character, classification, content, and capability of the storytelling organisation to enable a more holistic understanding of the story construct. It also identifies a gap in the literature around the impact of storytelling capability on the ability of the organisation to communicate effectively. Based on the findings from a large sample of stories told by leading non-profit organisations (NPOs), the paper identifies two different strategic approaches, using storytelling to signal differentiation or typicality within sector, and presents a new conceptual framework for understanding organisational storytelling. The paper concludes with implications for theory and practice from understanding of organisational strategy through storytelling. In particular, it offers practitioners a clear definition of what

constitutes a story, identifies the need to view the story construct holistically, recommends three tests for effective storytelling capability across the external output, and concludes by outlining the role of story in revealing the strategic purpose of the organisation.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Storytelling in the Non-profit Context**

Since Merchant et al. (2010) identified *“academic research in the area of storytelling ... in the context of charitable organizations is almost non-existent”* (p760), there has been a gradually emerging research conversation about storytelling building non-profit brands (Fetscherin & Usunier, 2012), co-creating brands with stakeholders (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2018), and influencing emotions (Merchant et al., 2010). To date, this work has primarily focused on understanding the impact of stories on the target audience (Pera & Viglia, 2016; van Laer et al., 2019; Woodside et al., 2008). For NPOs, the very sustainability of the organisation is dependent on reaching and engaging with their multivalent external stakeholders (Mitchell & Clark, 2019), such as donors, volunteers, beneficiaries, and advocates. Given the increasing role of NPOs to support the most vulnerable in our society (Bromley & Meyer, 2014; Halsall, Cook, & Wankhade, 2016; Valenzuela-Garcia, Lubbers, & Rice, 2019), it is vital their strategic purpose involves *“taking action that is oriented towards fulfilling the organization's social mission”* (Bucher, Jäger, & Cardoza, 2016, p4497). Storytelling, as a tool for engagement, is a mechanism for doing this (Nguyen, 2015). On the practitioner side, as many as 94% of NPOs see stories as central to their communications (Dixon, 2014). Done well, it enables the NPO to create ‘signature stories’ which come to define their brand in a way that is intriguing, involving, and authentic (D. Aaker & Aaker, 2016).

## 2.2 Story Purpose

In the non-profit context, storytelling has the potential to shed light on the way the organisation believes will best achieve their social mission, their reason for being. Essentially, they have two potential paths: stand out from the crowd (differentiation strategic purpose) or aim to be 'best in class' (typicality strategic purpose) (Mitchell, 2016).

The case for building brand differentiation has been well made (Högström, Gustafsson, & Tronvoll, 2015), including for NPOs (Merchant et al., 2010) where competition for resources is increasingly fierce (Michaelidou, Micevski, & Cadogan, 2015). Being remarkable, defined as being distinctive, has been found to be a core part of non-profit brand strength (Wymer, Gross, & Helmig, 2016). In the absence of products, with their inherent physical differences, developing a strong brand is seen as crucial to building differentiation and trust in the 'invisible purchase' (McDonald, Weerawardena, Madhavaram, & Sullivan Mort, 2015). In particular, the brand enables stakeholders to make choices between non-profit brands with similar missions (Mitchell & Clark, 2020b; Venable, Rose, Bush, & Gilbert, 2005).

However, evidence points convincingly towards the fact that a significant proportion of donations of time and money are explained by a non-profit being 'typical': one that personifies what is expected of a charity (Michaelidou et al., 2015; Michel & Rieunier, 2012). This resonates with the work of Barwise and Meehan (2004) who argue brands win through being 'simply better', not different. In the non-profit context this works at two levels: behaviour typical for a charitable organisation and behaviour typical for mission sector. At a generic level, typical behaviour might include favouring collaboration over competition (Laidler-Kylander & Simonin, 2009), demonstrating impact achieved with donations (Sargeant & Lee, 2004), and being a values-driven organisation (Lloyd & Woodside, 2015). At a sector specific level, for example overseas development, typical behaviour might include the balance

between victim imagery showing the need and solution imagery showing the impact the NPO makes (West & Sargeant, 2004) or anchoring work-stream priorities in the UN's sustainable development goals.

Loken and Ward (1990) define typicality as *"the degree to which an item is perceived to represent the category"* (p112). They identify that consumers judge typicality less by 'family resemblance', that is attributes in common, and more whether the organisation has salient attributes related to the goals of the category. Speilmann (2016) identifies the importance of schema fit within a particular category and Keller et al. (2002) discuss how points of parity, so important for consumers, depend on how the brand is framed, for example as a health charity, cancer charity, or breast cancer charity. Brands that are seen as prototypical are perceived by consumers as less of a risk (Goedertier, Dawar, Geuens, & Weijters, 2015). Whether the NPO positions themselves as differentiated or typical in relation to their cause sector is a strategic choice; there are advantages to both paths. However, this has the potential to create a dilemma for the organisation as any attempt to achieve both runs the risk of confusing their stakeholders such as donors and volunteers. This study explores this inherent tension between achieving the charitable mission with typicality or differentiation strategies through an analysis of the stories NPOs tell.

## **2.3 Story Construct**

To understand organisational strategy, a broad construct of story must be embraced: this considers the choice of storyteller, 'the who' (Escalas, 2004), labelled here as 'character'. It explores the way the story is told, 'the how' (Boje, 2003), labelled here as 'classification'. The third element of the story construct identified in literature is the attributes of the stories told, 'the what' (Spear & Roper, 2016), labelled here as 'content'. Traditionally researched



separately, it is only through bringing these three components of the story construct together that a more holistic understanding of strategic purpose can be explored. In addition, the review of existing literature identifies a gap in knowledge around 'how well' the story is told, considered here as storytelling 'capability'.

### **a) Who: Story Character**

Haven (2007) defines a story as *"a detailed, character-based narration of a character's struggles to overcome obstacles and reach an important goal"* (p79). It is the central role of the character, real or fictional, telling the story that is a core component of the story structure (Escalas, 2004; Visconti, 2016) and is what characterises it as story, as opposed to a vignette (Stern, 1994). Practitioner-based research on best practice in storytelling (Dixon, 2014) identifies the importance of using a single character as a focal point for each story, one who is relatable to the audience thus enabling the self-brand connection. The character brings a three-dimensional aspect to information being shared and is a conscious story construct choice by the organisation (Chew & Osborne, 2009). It reveals which source angle the NPO believes will be most effective at reaching one or more of their stakeholder groups. Bublitz et al. (2016) argue that a good story has a character the audience cares about – that they can build a bridge between the cause and the audience in an authentic and motivating way.

The storyteller can range from a person within the organisation, an external celebrity, or a fictional creation. Brand personification through fictional characters, such as Tony the Tiger or the Marlborough Man (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2014), is less common in the non-profit context. However, the use of a founder/organisational leader as spokesperson can build trustworthiness when the target audience perceives them to be honest and credible. They act as an 'internal endorser' (Fleck, Michel, & Zeitoun, 2014). Likewise, endorsement by external

celebrities as ambassadors for the brand, can bring awareness and endorsement but can also be perceived as fiction (Fleck et al., 2014), in contrast to brands that use a range of 'real people' storytellers, effectively a cast of characters who are seen as ordinary and realistic; for example, volunteers can inspire a feeling 'that could be me', a sense of empathy. They humanise the brand as one that cares about people. Hoeken et al. (2016) argued that identification with a character is an important mechanism of narrative persuasion. Perceiving the character as similar to you, someone that you can relate to, has been found to be a driver of identification (Brown & Patterson, 2010; Cohen, 2014) and enables a relationship to be built with the brand (Fournier, 1998).

Non-profits are defined by their multivalent stakeholder relationships (Mitchell & Clark, 2019). Through employing different voices as storyteller, the NPO is enabling these various audiences such as potential service users, donors, or volunteers to relate to the narrative and make a connection between themselves and the brand (Bublitz et al., 2016). The choice of leading role in each story enables those audiences to listen, process, and remember information, to build that persuasion, empathy, and behavioural response (Schank, 2000).

This is particularly relevant within the non-profit context where measures of NPO brand image include anthropomorphic qualities such as being warm, friendly, engaging, and generous (Michel & Rieunier, 2012). Indeed, it is this warmth that Aaker et al. (2010) argue is at the heart of what makes NPOs distinct from for-profit brands. It is through understanding the feelings of the story character that emotions are transmitted and empathy generated (van Laer et al., 2019). Not all these stories will be happy ones. What is more important is that they are meaningful for the audience which in turn generates a positive response towards the brand (Carnevale, Yucel-Aybat, & Kachersky, 2018). In this way, storytelling enables a

relationship experience with the brand when the audience is not only rationally and emotionally engaged by the story, but also moved to action (Pera & Viglia, 2016). For NPOs, this emotion is vital in stimulating supportive behavioural responses such as donating or volunteering (Merchant et al., 2010; Mitchell & Clark, 2020b).

Therefore, there is strong academic momentum behind the importance of character. What remains to be understood is the rationale behind choice of character, particularly in the non-profit context.

*RO1: Identify the choice of character/s employed by NPOs to engage their external stakeholders.*

*RO2: Identify areas of similarity and difference in use of story characters within and between non-profit mission sectors.*

## **b) How: Story Classification**

How a story is structured has potential to play a significant role in how effective that story is as a way of communicating with the audience. Little has been written on the structure of stories employed within the non-profit context. However, drawing on a wider body of literature reveals a focus on plot (Bublitz et al., 2016), anchored on the original Hero's Journey by Campbell (1949), but also the seven story types presented by Shakespeare (Papadatos, 2006). Within creative writing and production, genres include romantic, epic, myth, fable, legend, fantasy, and science fiction (Pearson & Mark, 2001). Holt (2003) identifies how famous brands access common cultural myths, particularly in advertising storylines, such as Nike's use of 'individual achievement through perseverance' and Mountain Dew tapping into 'rebels against conformity'. Booker (2004) expanded plot analysis, identifying seven basic plots – rags to riches, rebirth, the question, overcoming the monster, tragedy, comedy, and

voyage and return. Brown and Pattensen (2010) argue that these are open to question, with the distinction between quest and voyage/return, in particular, being blurred. They focus on alternative story types such as the author's story, the movie story, and the merchandise story in their exploration of the Harry Potter phenomenon.

However, within the brand and organisation literature, eight distinct archetypes of narrative structure emerge: traditional genres of fairy-tale (Gurzki, Schlatter, & Woisetschläger, 2019), legend (Tree & Weldon, 2007), comedy (Holt, 2016), parable (Strick & Volbeda, 2018), heroic (Boje, 2003), and tragedy (Lawler, 2002), combined with the increasingly popular formats of reality (Caswell & Dörr, 2018; Gerard, 2017), and game (Ferguson, van den Broek, & van Oostendorp, 2020; Sim & Mitchell, 2017). Like Brown and Pattensen's work (2010), these are classifications of structure rather than analysis of plots (Pera et al. 2016; Booker, 2004; Lien & Chen, 2013; Stern, 1994; Woodside, 2010); effectively story typology rather than creative arc. The importance of these story archetypes is that they present a familiar frame to the reader, enabling the unconscious processing of the content and making connections to emotions and events stored within the memory (Campbell & Moyers, 2011; Wertime, 2003). Identifying whether there is a 'tried and tested' form of story structure adopted by non-profits, or common within one cause, or whether a breadth of structure is being employed, informs our understanding of the strategic use of storytelling by NPOs.

*RO3: Identify the choice of story structure employed by NPOs to engage their external stakeholders*

*RO4: Identify areas of similarity and difference in use of story structure within and between non-profit mission sectors*

### c) What: Story Content

The content of each story represents 'what' the story is about and has been variously and interchangeably described as themes, elements, or attributes (Spear & Roper, 2013; Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). These attributes can be functional or emotional, positive or negative. Janssen (2012) identifies that stories which are rich in content give meaning and serve as sense-making frameworks for the stakeholders. Woodside (2010) conceptualises story content as a series of indices, touchpoints to the lives of the readers *"that cause implicit and/or explicit awareness and emotional connection/understanding in the minds of listeners/viewers"* (p532). The more there are within a story, the greater the opportunity to resonate.

Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) identify three themes within corporate stories: activities, benefits, and emotions. The activity theme includes the key abilities, competencies, and accomplishments of the organisation (Janssen et al., 2012). The benefits theme includes internal benefits (staff and volunteers) and external benefits (beneficiaries, donors, volunteers) (Dowling, 2006). The emotion theme includes areas of potential conflict that have been overcome, often used to build an empathetic connection with external audiences (Woodside et al., 2008). Finally, Spear and Roper (2013) extend this work through introducing a strategy component of corporate stories, including the vision, mission, and values of the organisation (Bech-Larsen & Nielsen, 1999). Through analysing the presence of these four themes (activities, benefits, emotion, and strategy) within the stories selected to be shared externally, we gain an insight into the underpinning strategic approach of the organisation.

The choice of content within each story, and across the stories told by each organisation, reveal the key messages they are trying to communicate to stakeholders such as donors or beneficiaries. Potentially, each story could cover all of the four themes, or focus on one specific message, such as the impact the organisation made last year (achievement) or how

to access more help (benefit). Mapping content is particularly important for understanding how organisations signal typicality or differentiation, whether leading organisations have story attributes in common (Loken & Ward, 1990), whether they bear a ‘family resemblance’ to each other (Mervis & Rosch, 1975). This enables the reader to understand if the brand is being framed within the context of a particular mission/cause or within the broader context on non-profit sector (Keller et al., 2002). Therefore, this research seeks to:

*RO5: Identify the component parts of NPO story content.*

*RO6: Identify areas of similarity and difference in use of story content within and between non-profit mission sectors.*

#### **d) How Well: Story Capability**

Through the development of a more holistic perspective on story construct, rather than the single-issue focus of much of the extant literature, a gap in knowledge has been identified: that of understanding storytelling capability.

The ability of an organisation to engage effectively with its external stakeholders, and in turn our ability to understand what the conscious choice of those story constructs reveal about their organisational strategy, is potentially impacted by their capability to select and employ those stories effectively. Whether the required skill and experience resides with the NPO itself or within its partner marketing agencies is immaterial. What matters is the result – the effective use of storytelling to reach and engage stakeholders through choices around the story construct. Various authors identify the importance of being able to tell stories well (D. Aaker & Aaker, 2016; Gurzki et al., 2019; Lien & Chen, 2013; Lin & Chen, 2015). What is less well known is how to judge an organisation’s storytelling capability.

However, there are indicators of capability within existing research. For example, from the discussion of content, Woodside (2008) identifies that the more indices there are in a story, the greater chance of it resonating and being remembered by the audience. Put another way, the richer the story is in content attributes (either depth or breadth), the harder it is working for the organisation, implying a strong storytelling craft. Secondly, Dixon (2014), in her practitioner research, identified the importance of employing a range of story classifications, arguing that diversity of story type enabled non-profits to appeal to a wider range of people. Finally, there is a significant body of research on brand saliency, ensuring the audience clearly knows, and remembers, who the story was told by (Lambert-Pandraud, Laurent, & Gourvennec, 2018; Laurent, Kapferer, & Roussel, 1995; Mitchell & Clark, 2020a; Smith, 2011). Complementing this, an organisation that clearly identifies itself within each story, stands a greater chance of being found through on-line searches (Ward & Ostrom, 2003). Together, designing in brand ownership of the story can be seen as a third indicator of storytelling capability.

*RO7: Identify whether there is a discernible difference between NPOs in storytelling capability.*

The literature review has identified the growing research conversation on the importance of storytelling to organisational strategy, including within the non-profit context. It identified two pathways for story purpose as a way for the NPO to achieve their social mission, being differentiated or typical. It gathered insight on the key elements of story construct: character, content, and classification. It also identified a gap in understanding storytelling capability and also the relationship between story purpose, construct, and outcome with the multivalent

stakeholders (Mitchell & Clark, 2019) of the NPO such as donors and volunteers. A summary of the key papers is presented in Table 1.

## **Method**

### **3.1 Research Purpose**

The purpose of the research was to explore the stories told by NPOs to identify insights into the underpinning strategic positioning of the organisations. Building on an extensive literature review, seven research objectives were identified, encompassing the character, content, classification, and capability of the storytelling organisation.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The study focused on the stories shared externally with audiences such as donors, volunteers, and service beneficiaries. As the research probed what was being said/shown, rather than where it was said, Content Analysis based on thematic coding was selected as the primary method of data analysis, rather than Narrative Analysis (Ben Youssef, Leicht, & Marongiu, 2019; Boje, 2003; Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007). In this way, the study builds upon the research of Spear and Roper (2013) and Janssen et al. (2012) in using a Content Analysis methodology to understand organisational storytelling. In addition, the data was analysed through Comparative Keyword Analysis (CKA) to validate the identified themes (Seale, Ziebland, & Charteris-Black, 2006; Silverman, 2011).

### **3.3 Organisation Sample**

The two largest UK charity causes (Charities-Aid-Foundation, 2019), cancer and animal welfare, were selected as their share of audience implies the strongest possible reach for the stories. This ensures practitioner implications from the research are anchored on the causes with the greatest potential impact. In addition, brands within these sectors compete directly



for resources such as donations, volunteer time, and media coverage. Finally, selecting two sectors enables both inter-cause and intra-cause cause comparison.

The leading five brands from each sector were chosen for the sample, as defined by the Charity Brand Index (Harris-Interactive, 2018), as larger charities tend to employ substantial marketing budgets to enable storytelling. Table 2 describes these ten charities in the sample in terms of income and brand index.

### **3.4 Story Sample**

Ten stories were selected from each of the ten charities, and found purely on 'owned', online sources. This was for three reasons: brand-controlled on-line sources offer the most recent representation of the brand, show considerable content replication with offline material due to integrated campaign execution, and are also easily accessible for data collection.

The data collection phase was critically important as it determined the quality of stories collected for analysis (Rooney, Lawlor, & Rohan, 2016). Therefore, a protocol was developed to enable clarity and consistency of story selection for this research. This story selection protocol, summarised in Table 3, defined what had to be present in order for each piece to be judged as story and therefore included in the research. It also clarified the practicalities of story selection such as what counted as one story and whether the sample could include similar formats from the same organisation. Building on the metanarrative definition of story (Escalas, 2004), a story was defined as having a beginning, a middle, and an end (BME) (chronology), and having a central storyteller (character), and having something happen as a result of something else (causality). This protocol was identified as offering a more comprehensive definition of story than a pure BME approach (Bublitz et al., 2016). The one hundred stories selected for this research met all three of these criteria. In addition, the story

protocol also defined story format, selecting one whole story which could be spread across several web pages, or be taken from one web page that also contained other stories. Format repetition was permitted, enabling selection of different types of story even if told in the same story format by one particular organisation: that is, not requiring a spread of formats for the sake of diversity.

### **3.5 Content Analysis**

The research analysed three pillars in the construct of the NPO brand story: character, classification, and content, that had been identified in the literature review. The Journey of Qualitative Inquiry (Netolicky & Barnes, 2018), is shown in Figure 1.

In addition, three explorations were introduced to understand the storytelling capability of the NPOs. As there was limited literature on storytelling capability to build upon, three proxies were identified: density of attributes evoked within each story (how hard each story is working), diversity of story type used (to appeal to a range of people), and explicit brand ownership (to reinforce brand awareness and enable search engine optimisation).

This analytical journey was developed specifically to avoid the danger of 'data wallow' within such a rich sample. Data was collected over a one-week snapshot period per brand. A thematic coding approach was taken, using NVivo 12 Pro which enables video and web capture as well as document capture. The Codebook is shown in Table 4.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Character**

The voice of each story, the character at the centre of each narrative, is a conscious story construct choice by the organisation. It reveals which source angle the NPO believes will be most effective at reaching one or more of their stakeholder groups. Drawing on the character

theme from the metanarrative literature (Escalas, 2004), four distinct storytelling voices were identified, ranging from an internal perspective of placing the charity at the centre of the story (Us) or discussion of the cause (It), to the external focus of engaging the beneficiary/stakeholder (You) or the story of an individual person/character (Them). A mapping device, described as a 'Character Petal', was then developed to enable inter-sector and intra-sector comparison, as shown in Figure 2. Each of the four petals in the flower visually represents the nature of the voice playing the leading role within each story.

Using Content Analysis (Waters & Wang, 2011), the one hundred stories in the sample were then analysed to identify which of these four leading characters was at the heart of each narrative (Pera & Viglia, 2016). The coding was enabled by the simple story structure adopted by the NPOs within the sample, with each story tending to be anchored on one character (Dixon, 2014). The only exception was Battersea Dogs Home with its 'two pets as narrators' format (*ref: BDH10*).

The data revealed clear differences in how non-profit brands use character within storytelling. Firstly, choice of voice reflects the underlying objective for each story. For example, the outward reaching "*Don't ignore your mammogram*" (You) story from Breast Cancer Now (*ref: BCN7*) directly builds self-brand connection through a call to action. In contrast, "*Our six big wins*" (Us) story by WWF builds brand credibility through demonstrating achievement in areas of importance to their members and donors (*ref: WWF3*). The storyteller enables difficult subjects to be shared in a sensitive way, such as a person's final hours told through the story of the Marie Curie nurse caring for them (*ref: MC2*) or the challenge of chemotherapy told through the story of still being a mum (*ref: Mac6*). Secondly, differences in overall brand

positioning were revealed through choice of voice. For example, within the cancer sector, humanising through a third person storyteller (Them) was led by Macmillan:

*“When Amrik was diagnosed with Hodgkin Lymphoma at 18 he felt like he’d lost control of his life” (ref: Mac3).*

whereas demonstrating authority on the subject (It) was led by CRUK:

*“Most cancers are caused by gene faults that develop during our lifetime” (ref: CRUK3).*

In contrast, the animal charities focused on introspection - talking about what they did (Us), for example being a *“Unique animal welfare charity” (ref: RSPCA3)* or *“Our mission” (ref: RSPB3)*. Strategically, the emphasis appears to be on explaining and justifying their programme of activity. The mapping from the animal sector is shown in Figure 3 and the cancer sector shown in Figure 4. Like Figure 2, each of the four petals visualises the character playing the leading role within each story (Us/You/It/Them). Each story has been coded for this leading character and the count for each organisation is shown as a histogram within each character petal. Where organisations do not have a particular ‘voice’ leading any of the stories in the sample, they are ‘greyed’ out in the relevant petal for that character type.

Within the sample of fifty animal stories, only one spoke directly through a third ‘person’ (Them), *“Hero dog Finn to receive the PDSA Gold Medal” (ref: PDSA2)*, although many of the stories about the effectiveness of the organisations (Us) utilised named individual animals to exemplify their work. The coding of character focused on the content and message of the story rather than simply the headline, for example *“Bud’s story” (ref: BDH3)* talked about the work of Battersea Dogs Home but through the character of a dog they had helped. In addition, this was an example of overt use of story terminology, also present in the cancer sector, including *“The story of cancer” (ref: Mac8)*, and *“Lorraine’s fundraising success story”*

(ref: CRUK2). However, as Dixon (2014) points out, just because it is called a story, doesn't automatically make it a story, so care was taken with coding.

## 4.2 Classification

The data was then explored to classify how non-profit brands were telling their stories, drawing on literature that identifies distinct narrative typologies (Boje, 2003; Lawler, 2002). These are classifications of structure rather than analysis of plots (Boje, 2003). Adopting an inter-disciplinary approach to literature (Booker, 2004; Brown & Patterson, 2010; Lien & Chen, 2013; Stern, 1994; Woodside et al., 2008), eight distinct narrative typologies were identified across the sample: parable, heroic, fairy-tale, tragedy, game, comedy, legend, and reality. Building on Woodside et al.'s (2008) paper, a story 'gist' was then developed for each classification to enable accurate coding of the individual stories into type, as shown in Table 5. The choice of story type is a deliberate choice by the organisation. In some cases, the mission might limit the potential story structure options, such as Marie Curie telling stories about people at the end of life. They focus on balancing the tragedy with heroic stories of palliative care provided by their nurses. However, for others, the choice of story structure is surprising, such as the focus by the Battersea Dogs Home on the positive format of humour, reality ("*Sue's story of adopting a dog*", ref: BDH8), and fairy-tale ("*Bud's story*", ref: BDH3), only occasionally dipping into tragic format ("*not funny*", ref: BDH4). Overall, through their storytelling Battersea Dogs Home achieves a light, upbeat tone through their choice of story classification. Table 6 summarises the story classifications chosen by each organisation, one structure choice per story.

Research has shown that employing diversity of story structure has two different effects (Dixon, 2014; Escalas, 2004). For an individual, hearing a range of story types creates different

reference points in the brain that collectively make the organisation more memorable (Schank, 1990; Woodside, 2010). For the organisation, varying the story type enables their message to resonate with a wider range of people (Dixon, 2014). In this research, clear evidence was found for category leaders deploying a wide range of storytelling typologies, for example Cancer Research UK used:

- Tragedy: *Roisin's story* – The story of someone living with terminal cancer
- Fairy-tale: *Our strategy to beat cancer sooner* – Research will increase survival rates
- Parable: *Obesity risk doubles for teens* - If teens are exposed to junk-food they are more likely to get cancer.
- Game: *Citizen science* - Interactive game that encourages mass participation in analysing data to build research knowledge.
- Legend: *Our research history* - Amazing scientists making the difference.

The research identifies that story classification, how the story is told, is an important element of the construct of storytelling and reveals clear differences in the way organisations employ story typology to engage with a wide range of audiences.

### 4.3 Content

The third component of story construct analysed within this research was the content - 'what' was being consciously shared externally by the NPO. Coding utilised Spear and Roper's (2013) four narrative themes (benefit, emotion, ability, and strategy) and revealed a clear organisational focus on benefits, present in 42% of cancer stories,

*"I have a renewed appreciation for life, I am thankful for a lot more and my pace of life has slowed down so I can enjoy every precious minute of it"* (Benefit, ref: BCC4).

and 38% of animal charity stories.

*“Pet Fit Club, has helped 124 overweight and obese pets (79 dogs, 37 cats and 8 rabbits) lose an incredible 450kg (71 stone): equivalent to a grand piano or 160,000 doughnuts!” (Benefit, ref: PDSA4).*

The importance of emotion in non-profit storytelling was also evident, with 2/3 of stories clearly demonstrating emotional attributes, particularly by PDSA and RSPCA.

*“I have always been passionate about animal welfare and I feel very lucky that I have been doing this job for twenty years now and it is something that I really do enjoy doing” (Emotion, ref: RSPCA6).*

Finally, there was a focus on stories demonstrating ‘what they do’ – revealing competencies, accomplishments, and abilities at the expense of talking about organisational strategy, particularly present within the stories from Battersea Dogs Home and the RSPB.

*“In 2001 The Big Garden Birdwatch was opened up to everyone meaning you could take part even if you weren’t a member of the RSPB. This doubled participants to 50,000 and numbers have continued to grow to 500,000” (Accomplishment, ref: RSPB6).*

The density of content is shown in Table 7. Each of the ten stories per charity were coded for content, summarised as benefit, emotion, ability, and strategy. For example, for CRUK, nine out of the total of ten stories sampled presented benefits as a key message. The exploration was then extended through using a Comparative Keyword Analysis (CKA) to examine content similarity. This revealed differences in mission foci and the existence of sub-sectors within the wider cause. For example, despite distinct missions, both WWF and RSPB had significant content in common on themes such as ‘nature under threat’, ‘climate’ and ‘global issues’.

Likewise, within the cancer sector, one over-arching theme was ‘research is the answer’, for example:

*“Thanks to research, more people are beating cancer than ever before. In the 1970s, only a quarter of people survived. Today, more than half will survive for at least ten years” (ref: CRUK4).*

*“We’re funding almost £24 million worth of cutting-edge research, supporting nearly 450 of the brightest scientists make the discoveries we need to stop women dying from breast cancer” (ref: BCN4).*

Within the cancer sector, the second over-arching theme, was ‘people are the answer’, for example:

*“Shez is a specialist Macmillan nurse who works with brain cancer patients. She sees herself as an advocate for her patients, somebody who can help them through every stage of their cancer journey” (ref: Mac4).*

*“Marie Curie Nurses like Annie support for people living with a terminal illness, caring for them through the night in their own homes. Every night of care is different, but as Annie explains - some families stay with you” (ref: MC3).*

Therefore, it is not only through the strategic choice of character and classification that connects the various audiences to the organisation but also the choice of subject matter. What is interesting is what this conscious selection of content by the organisation reveals about their strategic purpose (Ben Youssef et al., 2019), in particular whether they are building a differentiated platform, exhibiting sector typicality through talking about common topics, or hedging by using a combination of both.



## 4.4 Capability

The extensive review of inter-disciplinary storytelling literature highlighted the limited discussion of storytelling capability (Bublitz et al., 2016; Dixon, 2014; Spear & Roper, 2016). Given the owned nature of organisational websites and Facebook pages, it is relatively straightforward to share a story with external audiences, even considering limited marketing investment available for some brands in this sample (although not the category leaders). The challenge is to do so in a way that is effective: where the craft around choice story genre/type, character telling the story and content of the story cuts through and engages the target audiences.

What was missing from the literature was a way to measure that capability. Therefore, three proxy indicators for storytelling capability were developed, based on ideas in extant research. These were explored through Research Objective 7 and illustrated in the Journey of Qualitative Enquiry, shown in Figure 1. The first proxy builds on the work of Spear and Roper (2013) on attribute density. It considers the ability of a charity to tell stories rich in content, measured through density of the attributes of benefit, emotion, ability, and strategy contained within a single story. This revealed both the depth and breadth of messages the brand was able to convey within each story. Within the cancer sector the coding density analysis found that the leading two brands (CRUK, Macmillan), as well as Marie Curie, had similar profiles. Within the animal charity sector, from a message density perspective (proxy 1), PDSA exhibited the strongest story capability, as shown in Table 7.

The second proxy for storytelling efficacy was the capability of the brand to tell stories through a range of story classifications. A breadth of story structures used by a charity not only signals organisational storytelling capability, either internally or through marketing agencies, but also an explicit communication strategy to appeal to a range of external target

audiences using different techniques (Booker, 2004). This echoes the practitioner research from Dixon (2014) that identified the importance of diversity of story type and character choice. The choice of story structure by each organisation and across each cause sector is shown in Table 6.

The third proxy explored the perceived need for story ownership through clear brand identification within each story (Janssen et al., 2012), using Comparative Keyword Analysis (CKA) to identify frequency of brand name mention within each story. Given all the data was collected from 'owned' media such as websites and Facebook sites, the considerable variation in the perceived need to brand stories, as shown in Table 8, was surprising.

Macmillan clearly demonstrated their perceived importance of story ownership, even within the context of their clearly branded website and social media sites, with 91 explicit brand name mentions across ten stories. Within the animal sector, RSPB stated ownership 54 times, more than double RPCA for example. The perceived need for story ownership in owned media was found to be a clear differentiator.

## **5. Discussion**

The paper responds to a call for research into storytelling within the non-profit context (Merchant et al., 2010) and contributes to an emerging research conversation about communicating organisational strategy through storytelling (Spear & Roper, 2016). Against this background, the research focused on understanding how these mega brands use storytelling to signal differentiation or typicality.

The research built on story attribute mapping to identify content as a key variable (Spear & Roper, 2013). It extends this work to also consider the metanarrative structure approach (Escalas, 2004), identifying character as a story variable as well as drawing on narrative

structures (Boje, 2003) to understand the classification type for the way the information is shared. Together, these three components offered a more holistic perspective of the story construct.

Analysis of the story construct revealed the story purpose, specifically whether the NPO was trying to differentiate themselves or signal their typicality to other NPOs in their sector. For example, significant differences were found between the characters used by the two cause sectors. Within cancer, the two leading brands differentiated themselves from each other through their use of voice – who was at the centre of the story, whether it was the people within the organisation (Us) or the cause (It). Within animal charities, there was little use of storytelling through an external character (Them); instead, it was more typical to focus on talking about themselves (Us).

The research identified story content as the primary construct used to demonstrate an organisational typicality strategy, with clear common themes within each mission sector. Surprisingly, this was true even where the brands are 'famous' for different sub-causes, for example protecting birds (RSPB) and endangered animals (WWF). Likewise, despite the mission difference between end of life cancer support (Marie Curie) and early recognition of symptoms (Macmillan, Breast Cancer Care), these three brands all had typical content under the theme of 'people are the answer'. Strategically, these organisations used story content to signal that they represented, and were typical of, cancer charities. Through personifying what the public expects from a cancer charity, these organisations are signalling they are simply better (Barwise & Meehan, 2004), not different. However, the two leading cancer charities (Macmillan and CRUK) clearly differentiate themselves through story content (people theme vs. research theme).

However, the analysis also identified that the impact of the three components of the story construct was moderated by the organisation's storytelling capability. Through the analysis of content, character, and classification of one hundred charity stories, what particularly emerged was the range in storytelling capability, even within these leading brands. NPOs that exhibited strong story capability used this to clearly differentiate themselves from their competitors. The sector brand leaders employed denser stories in terms of content, wider diversity of story genre, and revealed a clear perception that brand ownership within each story was important. Those with weaker attribute density, dependence on one or two voices, limited range of story types and lack of brand ownership within stories, were less differentiated. Therefore, in addition to reflecting the story purpose, the outcome of the story was moderated by the storytelling capability of the organisation.

Based on these findings, a conceptual model of non-profit organisational storytelling has been developed and is presented in Figure 5, connecting the strategic intent of the brand, the strategic purpose underpinning the use of storytelling, the conscious choice of story construct, the outcome of the story and subsequent impact.

The contribution of this paper is highlighted in the centre of the model in the relationship between story construct, story purpose, and the moderator, story capability. The consequence of story construct can be seen as the story outcome – the affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses the charity is aiming to stimulate, which in turn creates brand impact. The desired response of an effective story can be through a combination of salience, relevance, distinctiveness, credibility, and stakeholder engagement. What directs the story construct is the story purpose, whether the brand is actively aiming to differentiate itself from its competitors or signal credibility and authority with the cause through being typical. Given

the explicit storytelling used by these major brands, the assumption is that the story purpose is deliberate not an accident. Therefore, story purpose is driven by strategic intent of the brand, including its level of ambition, resources available, and organisational capability.

## **6. Conclusion**

### **6.1 Theoretical Contribution**

The findings contribute to a growing academic conversation about the purpose of corporate storytelling. Through adopting a holistic perspective to the storytelling phenomena, the research identifies and brings together the three elements of the story construct for the first time: content, classification, and character. It is through adopting this wider theoretical perspective that the significance of storytelling for organisations is understood. The research builds on literature to develop a single view of the definition of story, described in the story protocol, to act as a base for future research. The exploration of story content, classification, and character extends extant literature. The story content builds on work of Van Riel and Fombrum (2007) in adopting three themes of corporate stories as activities, benefits and emotions. It also adopts the additional strategy component, introduced by Spear and Roper (2013). The classification of structure builds on the seven plots of Booker (2004) and the narrative typologies such as comedy, parable, and heroic discussed by Boje (2003) and Lawler (2002). The paper builds on the extensive body of research on story character, both academic (Bublitz et al., 2016; Escalas, 2004; Visconti, 2016) and practitioner (Dixon, 2014).

The research identifies a gap in literature, that of the storytelling capability of the organisation, which acts a moderator of their ability to communicate with external stakeholders through storytelling. It develops a new proxy for assessing story capability, encompassing the density of attribute presence, diversity in story classification, and explicit

brand ownership. The research also contributes a new method for visualising story character, the Character Petal, enabling simple within-sector and cross-sector comparisons.

Based on Content Analysis of one hundred stories taken from ten leading organisations, the research identifies that the story construct is driven by the story purpose, including whether the NPO is aiming to differentiated from or typical to other NPOs, particularly within their mission sector. The research builds on these findings to contribute a new conceptual model of organisational storytelling which identifies where the story fits between the strategic intent of the organisation and final impact of the brand on their external audiences.

## **6.2 Practitioner Contribution**

The organisations selected for this research were the five leading brands in the two largest non-profit cause sectors in the country. The smallest annual income was £40 million and the highest more than £630 million. Across the board, their reach and impact are significant. Through owned media, such as websites, YouTube sites and Facebook pages, they all use storytelling as a communication tool to engage their multiple external stakeholder groups, so vital to the future effectiveness of their organisations.

The research identifies clear differences not only in how storytelling is being used, but also how well. It demonstrates the importance of considering all three elements of the story construct - so the character and classification of story being used, not just the content. The differences in choice of character employed across the NPOs, for example, were significant, reflecting an emphasis on justifying impact (Us) or engaging with 'customers' (You/Them). The dependency on one or two story classifications might be driven by mission, as in the case of Marie Curie, where game and humour might be less appropriate for discussions of the end of life care. It also might be driven by a conscious choice to focus on the positive, as in the use

of humour formats and positive content by Battersea Dogs Home. However, given the different needs and types of people the organisation needs to engage, a breadth of character choice, content, and story structure enables the organisation to reach more widely.

The research identifies that in order to be effective as method of communication, the story output needs to be seen as a whole, a combined message about the organisation. In part this is about consistency of capability, not simply the brilliant Christmas advert created by an agency, but also the everyday stories of impact and engagement. This holistic perspective also clarifies the importance of storytelling as a window into the corporate strategy of the organisation. Put another way, stories reveal a great deal about the strategy of the organisation. The question is whether that is deliberate or accidental.

For smaller and medium sized organisations who might lack the storytelling firepower of the category leaders, the research presents a roadmap of issues to be considered. It clarifies the connection between the strategic intent and purpose of the organisation and the impact that can be made through storytelling. It defines what constitutes a story and presents useful tools to enable organisations to judge their own storytelling capability. Finally, it raises the strategic question of whether the organisation is using storytelling to signal typicality or differentiation. In this research, the stronger the storytelling capability, the more likely it was to reveal a differentiation strategy.

### **6.3 Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the rich sample, the data collection time period is a limitation of the study. As NPOs introduce new stories, perhaps using different voices or formats, analysis at another time might present a different perspective. This limitation can be mitigated through replication studies with the same charities in this sample but using a different moment in time and

therefore different stories. The research is also limited through its focus on one organisational type, large service-delivery charities, and on two mission sectors only. This also presents an opportunity for replication studies within other non-profit causes, smaller non-profits, and also for-profit brands. Finally, the contribution of this paper focuses on the relationship between the story purpose, the story construct, and the moderating role of storytelling capability. However, the conceptual model also presents an opportunity for future research on other relationships within the model, such as between story construct and story outcome in terms of affective, cognitive, and behavioural responses.



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Table 1: Summary of Key Literature.

Construct		Key Literature
Story Purpose	Overall	Herskovitz & Crystal (2010), Woodside et al. (2008), Janssen et al. (2012), Dowling (2006), Van Riel (2000), Küpers et al. (2013).
	Typicality	Michaelidou et al. (2015), Michel & Rieunier (2012), Barwise & Meehan (2004), Loken & Ward (1990), Spielmann (2016), Goedertier et al. (2015).
	Differentiation	Högström et al. (2015), Merchant et al. (2010) , Venable et al. (2005), Wymer et al. (2016), McDonald et al. (2015).
Story Construct	Character	Haven (2007), Escalas (2004), Visconti (2016), Dixon (2014), Chew & Osbourne (2009), Bublitz et al. (2016), Aguiree-Rodriguez (2014), Hoeken et al. (2016), Schank (2000), Van Laer (2019), Pera et al. (2016).
	Classification	Booker (2004), Brown & Patterson (2010), Boje (2003), Lawler (2002), Stern (1994), Woodside (2010), Pera et al. (2016).
	Content	Van Riel & Fombrun (2007), Spear & Roper (2013), Janssen et al. (2012), Dowling (2006), Bech-Larsen & Nielsen (1999).

Table 2: Organisation Sample Profile

Sector	Brand	Full name	Reference	Scale	Income <sup>†</sup>	Brand Index (rank/score) <sup>‡</sup>
Cancer support	Cancer Research UK	Cancer Research UK	CRUK	National	£634 M	2/344
	Macmillan	Macmillan Cancer Support	Mac	National	£295.7 M	1/350
	Breast Cancer Now	Breast Cancer Now	BCN	National	£28.3 M	39/149 <sup>§</sup>
	Breast Cancer Care	Breast Cancer Care	BCC	National	£16.9 M	25/220
	Marie Curie	Marie Curie Cancer Care	MC	National	£159.1 M	8/291
Animal welfare	RSPCA	Royal Society of the Protection and Cure of Animals	RSPCA	National base but works overseas through RSPCA International.	£140.9 M	4/307
	PDSA	People's Dispensary for Sick Animals	PDSA	National	£101.8 M	26/214
	RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	RSPB	National but part of Birdlife International network	£139.3 M	28/197
	Battersea	Battersea Dogs and Cats Home	BDH	London focused	£40.1 M	23/222
	WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature	WWF	International	£67.6 M	22/227

<sup>†</sup> Latest available income from NPO published annual reports, usually year ending 2017.

<sup>‡</sup> Source: Charity Brand Index, produced by Harris International on behalf of Third Sector Magazine. Latest detailed data 2009.

<sup>§</sup> Figures for Breakthrough Breast Cancer which merged with Breast Cancer Now in 2015.

Table 3: Story Selection Protocol

Factor	Focus	Features
Definition of a story	Metanarrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronology – contains a beginning, middle and end (BME).</li><li>• Character – can also be the mission e.g. the story of cancer.</li><li>• Causality – something happens as a result of something else.</li></ul>
Content	Branded content and owned media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes TV adverts, YouTube films and blogs also featured on non-profit organisation (NPO) website.</li></ul>
Diversity	Avoid recycling and repetition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes: different story type in similar formats.</li><li>• Excludes: collecting a spread of format simply for structure diversity sake.</li></ul>
Location	One whole story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes: one story content spread across 1-3 pages ('click-throughs').</li><li>• Excludes: selection of whole page if it includes several stories: only one-story focus.</li></ul>

Table 4: Thematic Codebook

Theoretical References	Theme	Sub-theme	Description	Example from data
Spear and Roper (2013)	Attributes	Ability	What the NPO does	<i>Our diagnostic work leads us to potential solutions that we can test – wherever possible with field experiments. (RSPB8)</i>
		Accomplishment	What the NPO has achieved	<i>129,602 animals were rescued and collected. (RSPCA2)</i>
		Competency	What the NPO is good at	<i>Only dogs and cats that have had their full assessment completed can meet potential new owners. (BDH7)</i>
	Benefit	Internal benefit	Something that helps the NPO	<i>We know we can't transform things alone. We need lots of support if we're to achieve positive changes at the speed and scale necessary. (WWF2)</i>
		External benefit	Something that helps stakeholders	<i>Thanks to their incredible campaigning work, drugs like Kadcylla can now extend the lives of thousands of other women too. (BCN9)</i>
	Emotions	Emotion	Evoking of emotional language	<i>I am bursting with pride that Finn is receiving this award. (PDSA2)</i>
		Conflict	Description of challenges	<i>His diagnosis came soon after he started a new job, so he was worried about telling his employer. (Mac2)</i>
	Strategy	Vision	Where the NPO sees the future	<i>We have a single, simple aim: to stop women dying of breast cancer. (BCN10)</i>
		Mission	The purpose of the NPO	<i>But at Battersea we have always believed that animals deserve to be treated with kindness and respect. (BDH6)</i>
		Values	Explicit culture of the NPO	<i>Our new charity will be filled with strength, purpose, collaboration, hope. (BCN10)</i>
Escalas (2004)	Character		Who tells the story	<i>Marie Curie Nurses like Annie. (MC3)</i>

Aaker & Aaker (2016)	Signature story	Authentic	<i>It takes the women who calls and says she is not sure how the cat is next door. (RSPCA8)</i>
Janssen et al. (2012)	Different	Explicit brand ownership	<i>Guest blog by Howard Jones, RSPB Investigations Officer. (RSPB1)</i>
		Explicit brand differentiation	<i>Our scale and impact on saving pets' lives in the region and right across the UK, is bigger than any other animal charity in the UK today. (PDSA1)</i>
		Innovative	<i>We've proven than citizens can analyse huge datasets with great accuracy. (CRUK6)</i>
		Progressive	<i>Our scientists discover an unexpected connection. (CRUK4)</i>
Michel & Reunier (2012)	Typical	Sector generalisations & networks	<i>We're proud of our role in the State of Nature report, and together with the other 49 organisations involved, we will be a powerful partnership to react to the threats it identified. (RSPB3)</i>

**Table 4 Legend:** NPO – Nonprofit Organisation, BDH – Battersea Dogs and Cats Home /PDSA – People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals/ RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/ RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals /WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature/ BCC – Breast Cancer Care/ BCN – Breast Cancer Now/ CRUK - Cancer Research UK/ MC – Marie Curie Cancer Care/ Macmillan – Macmillan Cancer Relief.

Table 5: Examples of Classification by Story Genre

Genre	Example within sample	Data source	Story gist
<b>Fairy-tale</b>	<i>Time machine</i>	BCN6	Story about wishing to travel to 2050 when cancer will be cured.
	<i>Our strategy to beat cancer sooner</i>	CRUK5	Research will increase survival rates.
<b>Game</b>	<i>Citizen Science</i>	CRUK6	Story about interactive game that encourages mass participation in analysing data to build research knowledge.
<b>Tragedy</b>	<i>Cancer Right Now: Roisin's story</i>	CRUK8	Story of someone living with terminal cancer.
	<i>Bringing light in the darkest hours</i>	MC1	How MC nurses work through the night to support families when someone is dying.
<b>Heroic</b>	<i>Dear Nurse</i>	MC8	Aural montage of thank you letters sent to nurses about the difference they made.
	<i>Shez on being a Macmillan nurse</i>	Mac4	Story about how Macmillan nurses help.
<b>Legend</b>	<i>Our founder</i>	BCN	One person's passion and drive having a huge impact.
	<i>Our research history</i>	CRUK4	Amazing scientists making the difference.
<b>Reality</b>	<i>A dad with cancer is still a dad</i>	Mac10	It could be you - and family life has to go on.
	<i>Juan on work and cancer</i>	Mac2	Story about the importance of telling employers.
<b>Parable</b>	<i>Lisa's story - mammograms</i>	BCN8	Moral of story is important to catch it early – in memory of Lisa's mum.
	<i>Obesity risk doubles for teens</i>	CRUK10	If teens are exposed to junk food they are more likely to get cancer.

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Table 6: Storytelling Capability Revealed through Classification choice (one per story)

Charity	Fairy-Tale	Game	Tragedy	Heroic	Legend	Reality	Parable	Comedy
CRUK	3	1	1	1	1	1	2	0
Macmillan	2	0	0	5	0	1	2	0
MC	1	0	3	6	0	0	0	0
BCC	2	0	0	1	1	4	2	0
BCN	3	0	2	1	1	1	2	0
<b>Cancer sector</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>
BDH	3	0	2	1	0	1	0	3
PDSA	3	0	3	1	0	1	0	3
RSPB	3	0	2	1	0	1	3	0
RSPCA	3	0	2	3	1	0	0	0
WWF	1	0	5	0	0	2	1	1
<b>Animal sector</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>

**Table 6 Legend:** BDH – Battersea Dogs and Cats Home /PDSA – People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals/ RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/ RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals /WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature/ BCC – Breast Cancer Care/ BCN – Breast Cancer Now/ CRUK - Cancer Research UK/ MC – Marie Curie Cancer Care/ Macmillan – Macmillan Cancer Relief.



**Table 7: Storytelling Capability Revealed through Attribute Density (based on 10 stories per brand)**

<b>Charity</b>	<b>Benefit</b>	<b>Emotion</b>	<b>Ability</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Brand Attribute total</b>
CRUK	9	7	8	3	27
Macmillan	9	8	9	3	29
MC	10	9	9	2	30
BCC	5	5	0	1	11
BCN	9	4	4	6	22
<b>Cancer sector</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>110</b>
BDH	5	8	8	4	25
PDSA	9	9	6	4	28
RSPB	8	3	5	6	22
RSPCA	8	7	8	2	25
WWF	8	6	8	7	29
<b>Animal sector</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>97</b>

**Table 7 Legend:** BDH – Battersea Dogs and Cats Home /PDSA – People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals/ RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/ RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals /WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature/ BCC – Breast Cancer Care/ BCN – Breast Cancer Now/ CRUK - Cancer Research UK/ MC – Marie Curie Cancer Care/ Macmillan – Macmillan Cancer Relief.

Table 8: Storytelling Capability Revealed Through Branded Mentions

	<b>BDH</b>	<b>PDSA</b>	<b>RSPB</b>	<b>RSPCA</b>	<b>WWF</b>	<b>BCC</b>	<b>BCN</b>	<b>CRUK</b>	<b>MC</b>	<b>Mac</b>
Frequency of explicit brand mention or presence	35	37	54	22	24	9	13	11	33	91

**Sample:** 100 stories (10 per organisation)

**Table 8 Legend:** BDH – Battersea Dogs and Cats Home /PDSA – People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals/ RSPB - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/ RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals /WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature/ BCC – Breast Cancer Care/ BCN – Breast Cancer Now/ CRUK - Cancer Research UK/ MC – Marie Curie Cancer Care/ Macmillan – Macmillan Cancer Relief.

### Figure Legends

**1:** No figure legend.

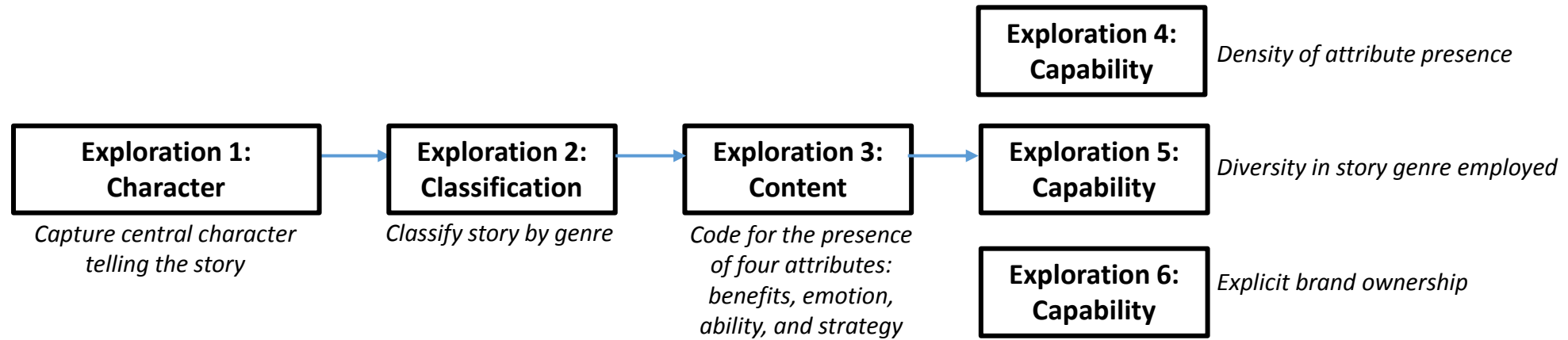
**2:** No figure legend.

**3:** BDH – Battersea Dogs and Cats Home /PDSA – People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals/ RSPB  
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds/ RSPCA – Royal Society for the Prevention of  
Cruelty to Animals /WWF – World Wide Fund for Nature.

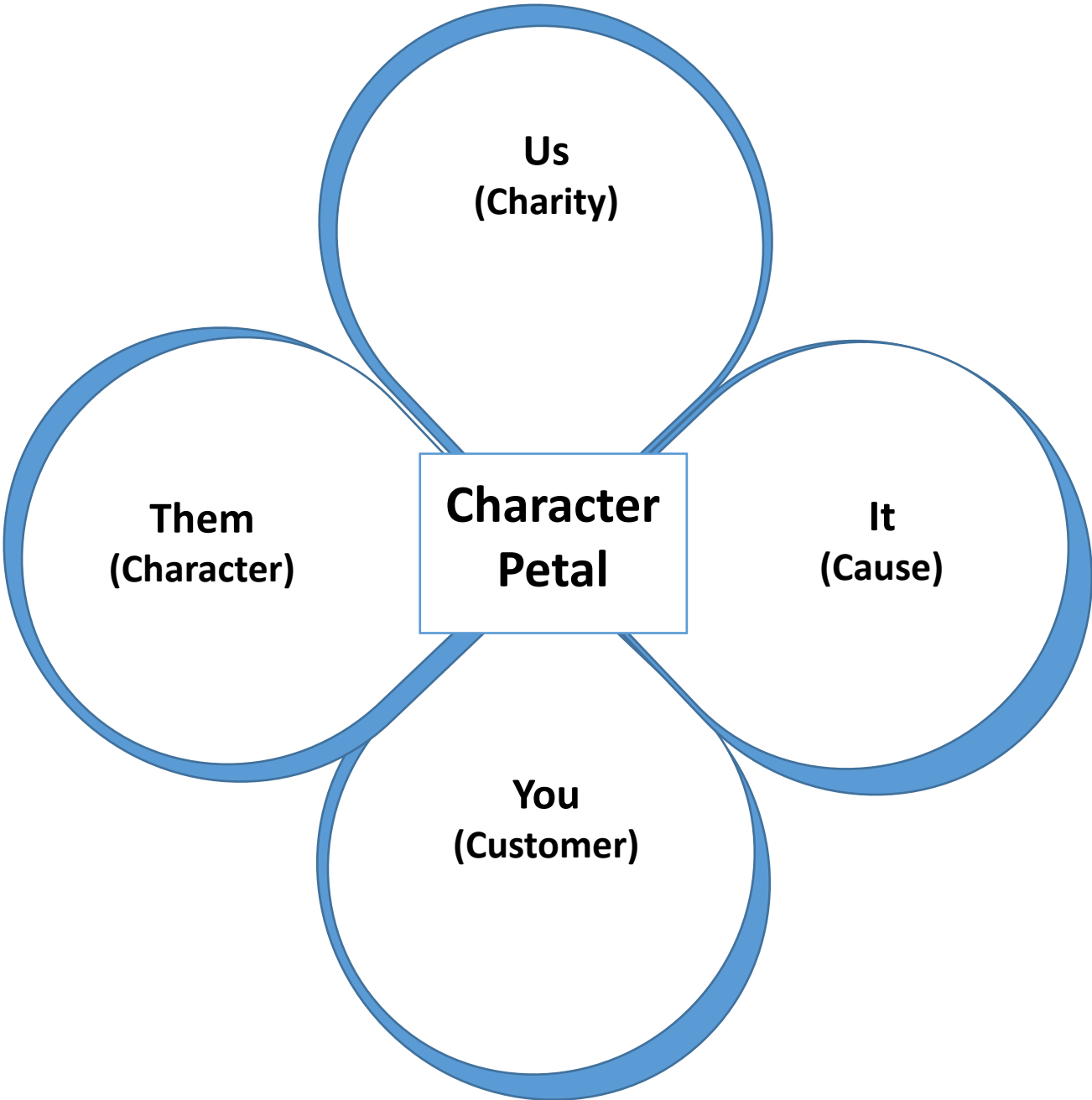
**4:** BCC – Breast Cancer Care/ BCN – Breast Cancer Now/ CRUK - Cancer Research UK/ MC –  
Marie Curie Cancer Care/ Macmillan – Macmillan Cancer Relief.

**5:** No figure legend.

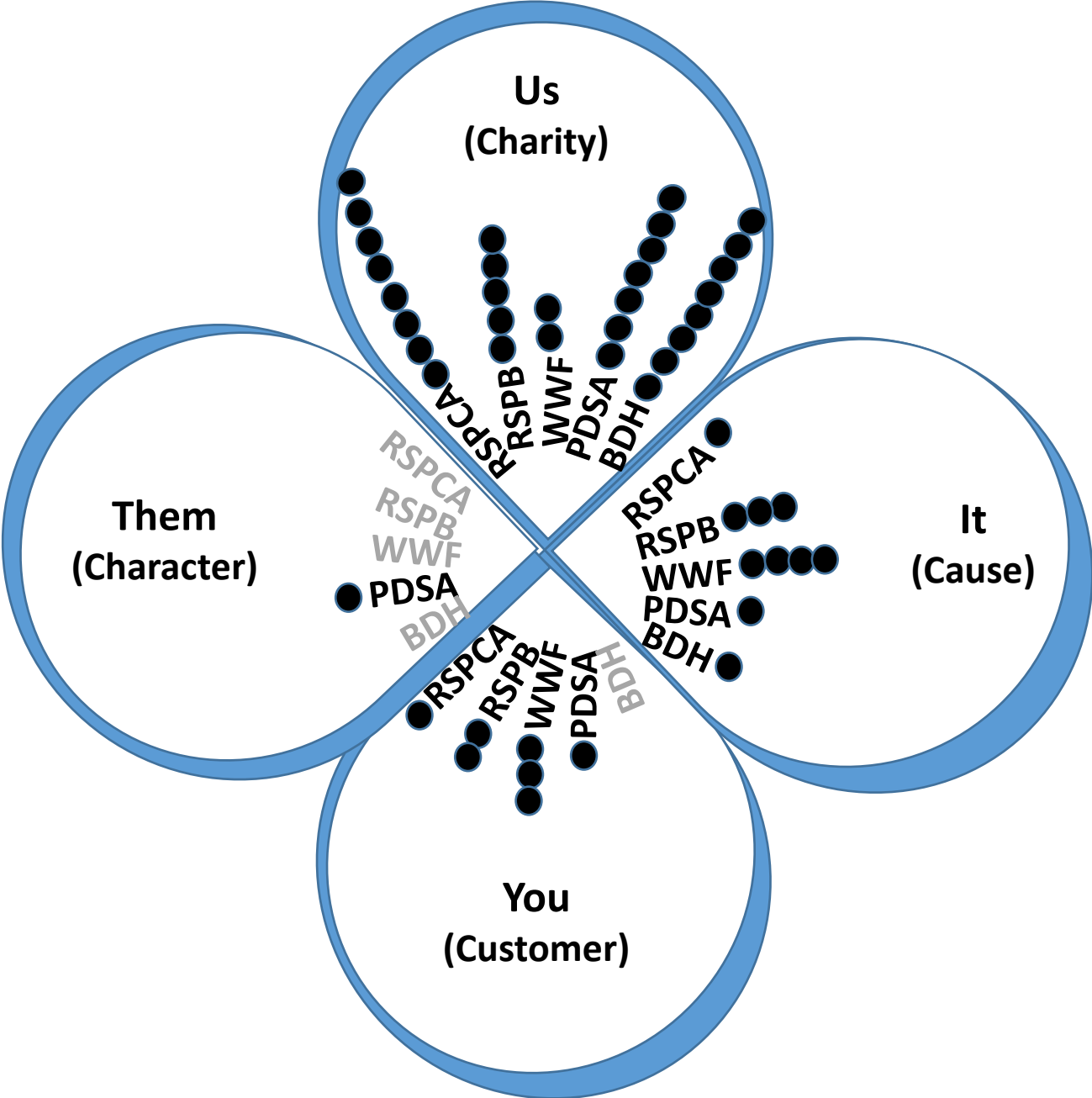
**Figure 1: Journey of Qualitative Enquiry**



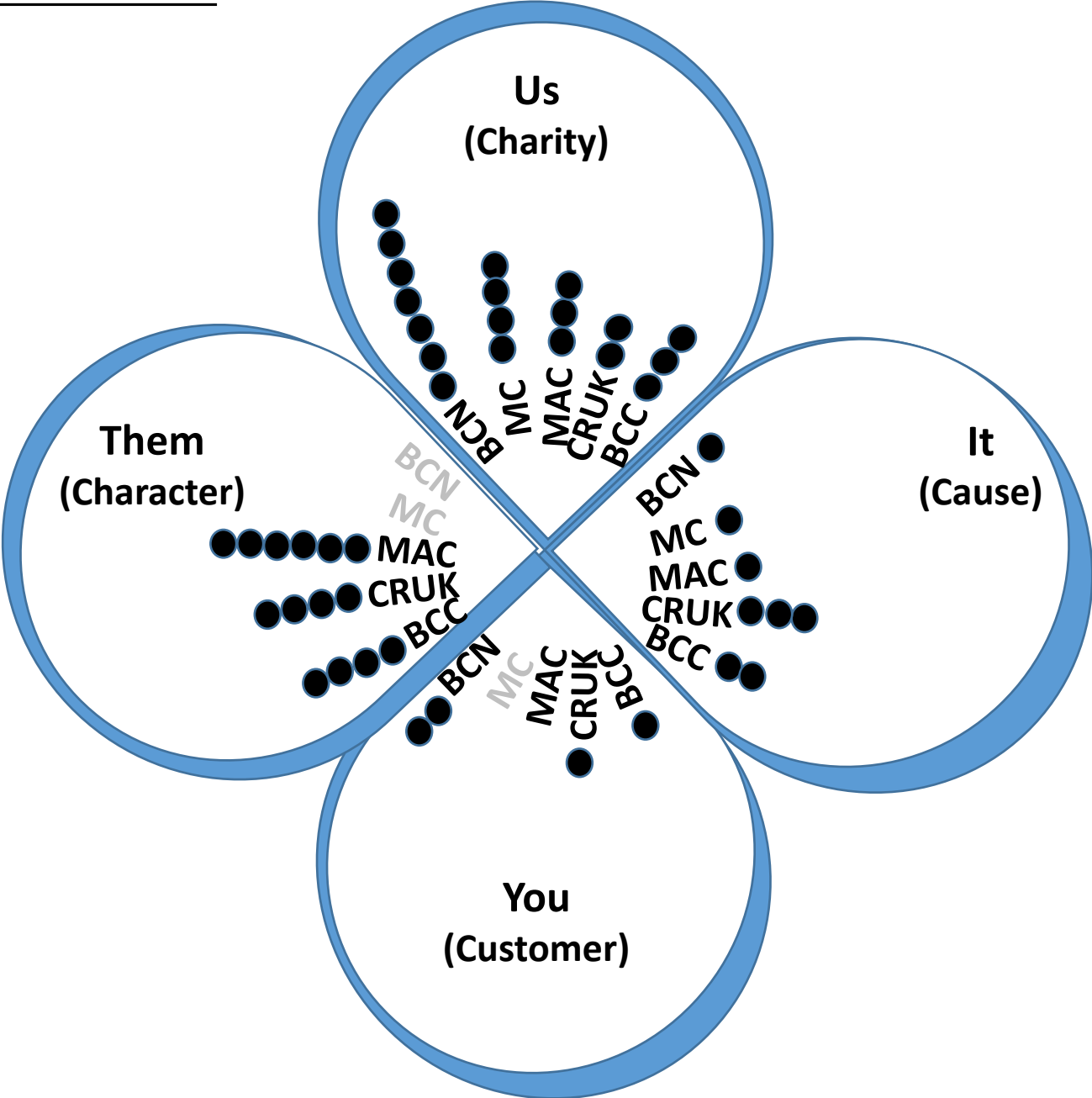
**Figure 2: Character Petal**



**Figure 3: Character Petal – Animal Sector**



**Figure 4: Character Petal – Cancer Sector**



**Figure 5: Conceptual Model**