COMMUNICATING EUROPE

How new technology can facilitate communication between UEAPME and its member organisations

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between UEAPME and its member organisation

"The establishment of cyber-culture can become a mediator for traditional cultural barriers"

"One can be intercultural competent without having studied specific cultures, but having developed a general intercultural skill"

"In order to communicate Europe, you have to speak several European languages"

SUMMARY

UEAPME (Union Européenne de l'Artisanat et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises) is the European Association of craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and therefore it defends the interests of SMEs (Small and Medium sized Enterprises) in Europe.

UEAPME's mission statement:

- Monitoring the EU policy and legislative process and keep its members informed on all matters of European Union policy of relevance to crafts, trades and SMEs;
- Representing and promoting the interests, needs and opinions of its member organisations to the EU institutions and other international organisations;
- Supporting its members academically, technically and legally on all areas of EU policy;
- Supporting the idea of European integration and contributing to European co-operation.

Communication is UEAPME's bread and butter; their main activities consist out of the representation of SME and craft organisations in Europe, and keep these organisations informed on European policy. UEAPME wants to improve communication in several ways. Firstly it wants better information better adapted to the member organisations, communication better adapted to the member organisations, and more input from the member organisations. The main communication problem is:

- Communication is a-symmetrical;
- There is no clear mission and vision for communication;
- Communication and information is very individual within UEAPME, and therefore difficult to track;
- Messages are not adapted to the needs of the member organisations.

Grunig (1989) has described four theories of Public Relations that are relevant in this case, "press agentry", "public information", "two-way symmetrical" and "two-way a-symmetrical", according to Grunig, two-way symmetrical is the most ethical and effective form of public relation practise, and therefore communication should be developed in such a way that it facilitates this process. In order to try and find the best facilitation for communication the information process has to be divided from the communication process. The information flow matrix shows four dimensions of communication, and research has to show which one is most effective in communicating with the member organisations.

Communicating in Europe means communicating with many different cultures, concerning the nature of the organisations, and the staff members, it is better to rely on an overall intercultural competence rather than specialising in a set of cultures by itself. Staff members can be very intercultural competent without having studied a particular culture.

The Internet is becoming more salient as a form of communication. It is parallel in design and therefore believed as the magical solution to all sorts of communication problems that have been found in the past. Spirals of silence, agenda setting and knowledge gaps have been formulated as barriers for the forming of public opinion, that are supposedly to be completely overcome by the Internet. The Internet is a valid extension of the public sphere, but it is not the magical solution to communication problems. It facilitates in design very well to overcome communication problems and it does a very good job in that respect, but at the same time social structures in society requires channels for communication. Segregated structures do not form the basis of mass communication, but broadcasting channels do. These channels can be found in for example Wikipedia and YouTube that are fortunately very open in nature, but the increasing commercialization of the Internet may result in getting the same communication problems in Computer Mediated Communication as in traditional communication.

UEAPME was set up in the 1980's and after a long evolutionary process became the one SME/craft representative out of 15 small organisations. Nowadays UEAPME represents over 11 million industries in 35 different countries, which employ more than 50 million employees. UEAPME is built up out of five directorates that are managed by a secretary general, which is supported by an accountant and an assistant. UEAPME is also the mother organisation of Academy Avignon and NORMAPME. Each of these two organisations supports UEAPME's activities in their special field of expertise. The staff consists out of 28 employees (together with the daughter organisations) with nine different nationalities.

Currently UEAPME has some established forms of communication. For formal communication they use position papers and circulars on which member organisations can react. For news updates, UEAPME provides press releases and a weekly newsflash.

The main strength of UAPME is its cultural diversity, together with a young ambitious staff combined with experience staff members. The main weakness is the absence of a central information structure, and very individualised communication. Biggest opportunity for UEAPME is the fact that interests in SME activities on a European level grows. The main risk is big industries talking on behalf of SMEs.

The research is done in order to find out how to get communication more symmetrical. There where five main research questions:

- How do the member organisations want to communicate?
- Which media types are valued best?
- What is the attitude of member organisations towards new technology?
- Who is our target group? (i.e. what is their profile)
- What is the best method of making communication more symmetrical?

The overall theme was to find out to which extend new developments in communication can facilitate communication between UEAPME and its member organisations.

The research was conducted in four phases. The preliminary phase gave answers about which forms of communication can be used, and which of the models are more favourable. The research focus phase gave insight in where the actual communication problem lies. The quantitative research phase gave statistical data to test the models on. The qualitative research phase gave the opportunity to test several forms of communication and how member organisations reacted on some of the proposed solutions.

Several new technologies are found that could facilitate communication between UEAPME and the member organisations, examples are video conferencing, internet forums and instant messengers. The questionnaire showed however, that most member organisations prefer to exploit the existing forms of communication and are hesitant towards new technologies. In the interview there was found that member organisations are very curious about new technology, but prefer to wait and see which way the cat jumps. The research focus phase taught that the emphasis should be put on the management of relations with the member organisations and the organisation of information. Therefore, the overall conclusion would be that internal communication should facilitate external communication.

In order to facilitate good internal communication, a six step implementation plan is developed. The first step is to set up a communication department that is responsible for creating the basic communication strategy. This department should standardise certain communication processes and be the gate-keeper of external communication. Step two is managing communication flows and contacts. This can be done by implementing a good Contact Relationship Management system. Step three is categorising policy areas, with this target groups can be segmented, and each segment can receive the right messages. Step four is about centralising information; this can be done by using a knowledge database. Important in this step is that first a communication plan is set up for the knowledge database, then the graphical design, and finally the technical structure. Step five is categorise the target, the policy areas are defined, know it is important to know which target is interested in which policy area. Step six is all about improving the functionality of the web. It is of course ridiculous that the communication department has to do all double work, putting existing documents again on the web when the directorates themselves can do it. Moreover this allows the communication department to automatically generate newsflashes instead of writing one every week. Therefore, a good Content Management system needs to be developed and implemented, and also here it is important to first create a communication plan, then the graphical design and finally the communication structure.

This plan implies that UEAPME has three staff members to spare for the communication department, of course they can be a part of the communication department besides their current activity, but still they need to have this time to spare. Furthermore, the communication department needs to have a sufficient budget in order to fulfil their tasks.

Looking back at the research the conclusion can be made that the communication problem was more present in the internal communication than in the external communication. Nevertheless, this plan will facilitate best external communication with the implantations suggested to improve internal communication. If UEAPME wants to improve communication in the future an internal communication audit is needed in order to facilitate the work of the communication department. Furthermore, if UEAPME wants to break down the hierarchy and reach the individual SME/Craft, research must be done in order to get direct access to these enterprises.

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   SITUATION

UEAPME (Union Européenne de l'Artisanat et des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises) is the European Association of craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, and therefore it defends the interests of SMEs (Small and Medium sized Enterprises) in Europe.

UEAPME's mission statement:

- Monitoring the EU policy and legislative process and keep its members informed on all matters of European Union policy of relevance to crafts, trades and SMEs;
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European Commission

The members as mentioned in the mission statements are the SME organisations in each of the member states, and other areas that lie in the Euro zone. Next to these SME organisations also branch organisations are members that need to be informed about European developments and policy. Not only members need to get information from UEAPME about European developments, but also UEAPME need to receive information from its members about local developments and effects of European policy, in order to take positions relating the EC (**European Commission**). Having read UEAPME's annual report of 2005, I understand that a Communications Working Group has been set up in order to improve communication between UEAPME and its members. Furthermore, the annual report taught me that UEAPME views communication with its members as internal communication. The communication approach of UEAPME with its members, however, is "public information" (Grunig 1989b). They provide their members with a monthly newsflash provided with hyperlinks to the specific topics and their website is regularly updated to contain the relevant news and position papers.

1.2   PROBLEM

Public information

The **"public information"** approach has proven very successful within UEAPME to inform its members. However, it does not provide a framework in which they can monitor the needs of their members. Moreover, UEAPME does not know if the messages sent are fully understood. This "public information" model gives very limited opportunity for communication between members; the only way members can communicate with other members is trough UEAPME, in this model. UEAPME also does not know directly what information is desired by its members. Because in the existing model communication is one way, UEAPME has a deficit on information on how to defend the interests of their members.

UEAPME's members are located in all the countries of Europe spread out over a large geographic distance. Each of the members speak different languages, over 20 languages are represented amongst the members.

Communication problem

The main **communication problem** is that communication is very a-symmetrical. UEAPME gets insufficient information from the member organisations. If information is requested from member organisations, communication is done in a very individual way. Furthermore, there is no track of communication and contact relations. This results in information being segregated within UEAPME, making it difficult to give a clear answer to a question. Also individual contact management and individual communication results in the de absence in a clear vision into the business intelligence.

1.3   SOLUTION

In order to create understanding between UEAPME and its members it is necessarily to implement a "two way symmetrical communication" structure. The means of communication should bridge geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers.

Several technical and sociological trends can help facilitating communication. The Internet is the most salient means of communication for large distances and the existence of the Internet has allowed a cyber culture to develop. Therefore, the Internet should play a leading role as one of facilitating aspects of the communication framework. However, research must be done in order to determine how the Internet can be best used to facilitate communication. Taking communication theory, cultural and linguistic barriers, technological developments in Europe and the development of cyber culture into account. Moreover,

research needs to be done in order to find out how effective the existing communication strategy is and what the members desire from the communication framework. I.e. which information they require and in which way certain information should be presented

1.4   CHAPTER OUTLINE

This research paper is built up out of seven chapters. Chapter one gives an introduction into the research. The assignment is defined in this chapter.

Chapter two is the literature review, the chapter is a detailed investigation of previous findings and it gives a set of hypothesises where the rest of the research is built on.

Chapter three gives the background information of UEAPME. The first paragraph is about the history of UEAPME and how it got the position it has today. The second paragraph shows the organisational structure and the different departments UEAPME is built up of. Paragraph three gives a short presentation of the staff and its ethnicity. Paragraph four gives a small presentation of the current way in which UEAPME communicates. Paragraph five shows the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of UEAPME. Chapter four gives a detailed description of the methodology. Moreover, the research questions and objectives are described in chapter four, and for every research phase there is are the sub research questions.

Chapter five contains all the findings of the research classified per research phase and research questions. Chapter six gives a solution to the problem and a plan how to implement the solutions. Moreover, chapter six provides the implication solutions have for the company. Chapter seven is a general conclusion of the research, looking back at the research questions and the problem setting, and looking forward for new areas to explore.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORIES

Within UEAPME, there is a press-officer active for dealing with PR practices. In order to analyse the activities of the communications by the press officer, I use the four models of Public Relations as defined by Grunig (1989b). Grunig defined four models of public relations all with a set of presuppositions. There are four models are collapsed to two world-views.

In the **a-symmetrical** worldview, the assumptions are made that the organisations knows best. Moreover, they assume that it is of the public's best interest to cooperate with the organisation. When an a-symmetrical worldview is found within an organisation, the organisation tend to look out from the organisation, making it very internal oriented. However, in this worldview the organisation is not aware of how outsiders see it. Other pre-suppositions for this worldview are that it is closed, elite and conservative.

"Press-agentry" is aimed at persuading the public. Public Relations officials that practice this model pre-suppose that attitude and behaviour can be easily changed. The practitioners try to find media attention as much as possible and aim their publications at manipulating the public. However, Hymann and Sheatsly (1947) have shown that it is impossible to influence attitude and behaviour with information campaigns.

"Public information" is a model that is often described as the "journalistic" model. Often a Press Officer fulfils a Public Relations position and acts as a journalist in residence, writing press releases. Information provided in this model is correct and honest, however, Press Officers in this model tend neither to report on negative information, nor on information about other organisations.

"Two-way a-symmetrical" this model is nowadays most popular in organisations. However, it is still aimed at the benefit of the organisation and therefore authoritarian in nature. Most of the segmentation techniques of marketing communication are used to create messages that are mediated best for the audience; there is no aim in changing the organisation itself.

"Two-way symmetrical", in this model the communication contributes to a better understanding between the organisation and it publics, with the aim of harmonising communication and policy. The **"two-way symmetrical"** model aims for an open system, with a free exchange of information and a moving equilibrium. The "two-way symmetrical" model is supposed to be innovative and work towards conflict resolutions.

The all-powerful view is most attractive by Public Relation officials because they want to have the assumption that their publications make a difference in society. The all-powerful worldview lies on the basis of the **"press-agentry"** and "public information" model described by Grunig. Whilst academics rather hold to the limited effects view, because tangible effects can hardly be found when measuring the outcomes of the first two models. Grunig defines two other Public Relation models that fall in the limited effects view of Public Relations, two-way symmetrical.

My presupposition for this research is that at the moment communication between UEAPME and its members is mainly **"public information"**. The press officer releases a weekly news flash providing the current information on hot issues. For formal messages the circular is used, which is basically an extended press release on a detailed important topic. Besides this presupposition, I suppose that two-way communication is used in an asymmetrical fashion. UEAPME investigates the positions of their member organisations and redefines them in their own positions and communications. After the research phase I will aim towards the **"two-way symmetrical"** model for the advice.

In order to facilitate this thesis, I study if the population wants the information process either individual or central, and if they wan the communication process either central or individual, where individual communication aims at decentralising communication and information. This will be done by using the information flow matrix (Table 2.1) (This matrix has been constructed by Mr J.L. Bordewijk, Professor of Telecommunications, and journalist, Mr B. van Kaam.).

a-symmetrical
symmetrical

Press agentry

Public
information

Two way
a-symmetrical

two way
symmetrical

Table 2.1: Information flow matrix

		Information process	
		Individual	*Central*
Communication process	*Individual*	*Conversation*	*Consultation*
	Central	*Registration*	*Allocution*

Conversation

Conversation is essentially interpersonal communication between a member of UEAPME and someone at a member organisation. The communication happens here on an individual basis and there is no central tracking of what is communicated and which information is provided. Therefore, finding back information or setting positions is difficult to realise.

> Example:
> The man of a household is going to do shopping, in order for him to find out what he needs, he talks to his wife. His wife tells him what she needs form the shop. Then he contacts his son using the MSN and asks him what he needs, finally the man asks his daughter on the phone what she wants from the shop. At this point in time, the man of the house is the only one that knows what has to be bought in the shop, and none of the individual parties know exactly what he will buy, they only know what they requested. So in this example the information is stored in the head of the husband, and communication went on a personalised basis. Furthermore, if the husband forgets what to buy he has to consult three different information sources again in order to have the shopping list complete.

Registration

With **registration** the communication is standardised. Every person at a member organisation uses the same form of communication which makes it easier to keep track of positions of individual members and see which information they have received in the past, because email, for example, is easy to archive. The information however, is not centrally stored, and adapted to the individual member. Therefore, it is difficult to keep track of what is the "correct" or "official" information.

> Example:
> In this example the man of the household does not consult every family member in an individual way, but collects small shopping lists of everybody so he knows what to buy. Every family member knows that if the want to get what they want they have to hand in the shopping lists else they get disappointed by the time father/husband comes home and does not have what they want.

Consultation

When **consultation** is concerned, the information is centrally stored in a knowledge centre (or any other kind of database). The members can use their desired form of communication to contact UEAPME, but the information they receive is equal for all member organisations, because this is standardised in the central database.

> Example:
> In this example the husband gets the shopping list by consulting all the members of the household. The wife tells him what she needs from the shop, the son leaves him a message on the MSN and his daughter sends him an SMS with the things she wants from the shop. The father/husband then writes down all the desires of every member of the household on a piece of paper, and puts it on the bulletin board so every member of the household knows what is coming.

Allocution

When **allocution** is used, most communication is essentially parallel. The same information through standardised communication channels to all the members, or vice versa. Allocution can be practised in a two-way symmetrical fashion even, if the right form of communication is used.

> Example:
> In this example there is a list on the bulletin board, where every member of the household can write down what he/she wants from the shop. At the end of the week, when the man of the house is ready to do the shopping, he takes the list from the bulletin board and knows what to buy. In this case, every member of the household knows what is being bought, and who requested what from the shop.

This research will try to find the most desirable form of communication looking at this model.

2.2   CULTURE

To which extend culture plays a role in communication is studied by many authors, Gudykunst & Lee (2002) explain that communication is unique within each culture, and at the same time there are systematic similarities and differences across cultures. In order to identify these similarities and differences, many social scientists developed dimensions of cultural variability.
Gudykunst & Lee wrote in their article how these cultural dimensions influence communication. They have therefore used several dimensions from other social scientists.

Gudykusnt & Lee (2002) review several dimensions and theories on intercultural communication and they conclude that a set of these cultural dimensions and theories must be used in evaluating cross-cultural communication. Therefore, this research takes the Communication Accommodation Theory of Galois et. al. (1995), Conversational Constraints Theory of Kim (1995) and the before mentioned cultural dimension into account. However, the research does not consist in mapping out the cultural dimensions of the member organisations. With all the countries of Europe, the cultural differences are that vast that there cannot be one solid advice written aimed to accommodate all individual cultures. Additionally, the cultural generalisations are used in order to interpret the research results and in order to find an overall strategy to address all member organisations.

So if communication is not directed at one culture in particular, but to an audience that is made up out of several difference cultures, moreover, an audience is supposed to be communicating amongst each other, how can messages be constructed cross these cultural boundaries? Beamer and Varner (2004) explain how messages can be constructed across cultures. Beamer and Varner start with reviewing the communication model, and they provide a model that shows similarities to Bauer's (1964) scientific model.
The sender encodes the messages, and sends it through a channel to the receiver. The receiver decodes the message and becomes the sender, providing feedback.
However, this model of communication is incomplete, as Beamer and Varner also add. Gerbner's (1956) model of communication is more appropriate, because it gives a clear distinction between the information process and the communication process, and it includes the form, context, perception and interpretation.

"For the great majority of mankind are satisfied with appearances as though they were realities; and are often more influenced by things that seem than by those that are."
Nicolo Machiavelli

Beamer and Varner describe two basic ways to organise routine messages, the direct plan and the indirect plan. These approaches are in line with the cultural dimension low-context versus high context cultures. Whilst the direct plan aims at results, and therefore puts the main message in the first paragraph of the correspondence, the indirect plan is aimed at the relation and often uses a symbolical message in the first paragraph.

Beamer and Varner also describe a practical approach towards creating messages for persuasion. Beamer and Varner continue to base their approach on the dimension, low-context versus high-context and they claim that persuasion in low-context cultures is based on factual information.
The assumption is that you can detach facts from the individual, and it gives reason to submit to those facts. Beamer and Varnish utter further that in high-context cultures, the facts are as valid as the person who provides them.
Every culture has their own specific tactic to convey persuasive messages; Beamer and Varner give a few very good examples of this. One of my own examples would be, in low-context cultures, persuasive messages are backed up with objective variables. These variables are observations that tangible and difficult to argue with. In high-context cultures, persuasive messages are often backed up in a relational

sphere, "my friend says that". Often an authority with high status is brought in "Commissioner Kroes also thinks that", who are you to argue with such big authority.

Beamer and Varner describe several practical approaches to convey messages, e.g. unwelcome messages, problem-solving messages, the role and force of words, etc., but they all are a product from looking at communication at the model of Gerbner. Therefore, before conveying a message, keep all the steps in Gerbners model in mind.

Every communication practitioner on a European scale must be aware of the mentioned cultural and communication aspects. However, concerning the political nature of UEAPME in combination with the lack of resources, UEAPME cannot provide cultural specific communication services and therefore it facilitates the research better to focus on aspects of communication with the member organisations that can be improved with the current resources. Looking at Gerbners model (Figure 2.1) of communication, one always has to take the context and prior believes and attitudes into account, hence, staff members can be very intercultural competent without having studied a particular culture.

Figure 2.1 Gerbners standardised model of communication

Looking at figure 2.1 you see that Gerbner makes a very strong distinction between the information and the communication process, similar as the dimensions found in table 2.1.

Recommended reading:
Gerbner G. (1956). Toward a general model of communication. *Audio-Visual Communication Review*, 4, 171-199.

"This 'telephone' has too many shortcomings to be seriously considered as a means of communication. The device is inherently of no value to us."
-- Western Union internal memo, 1876
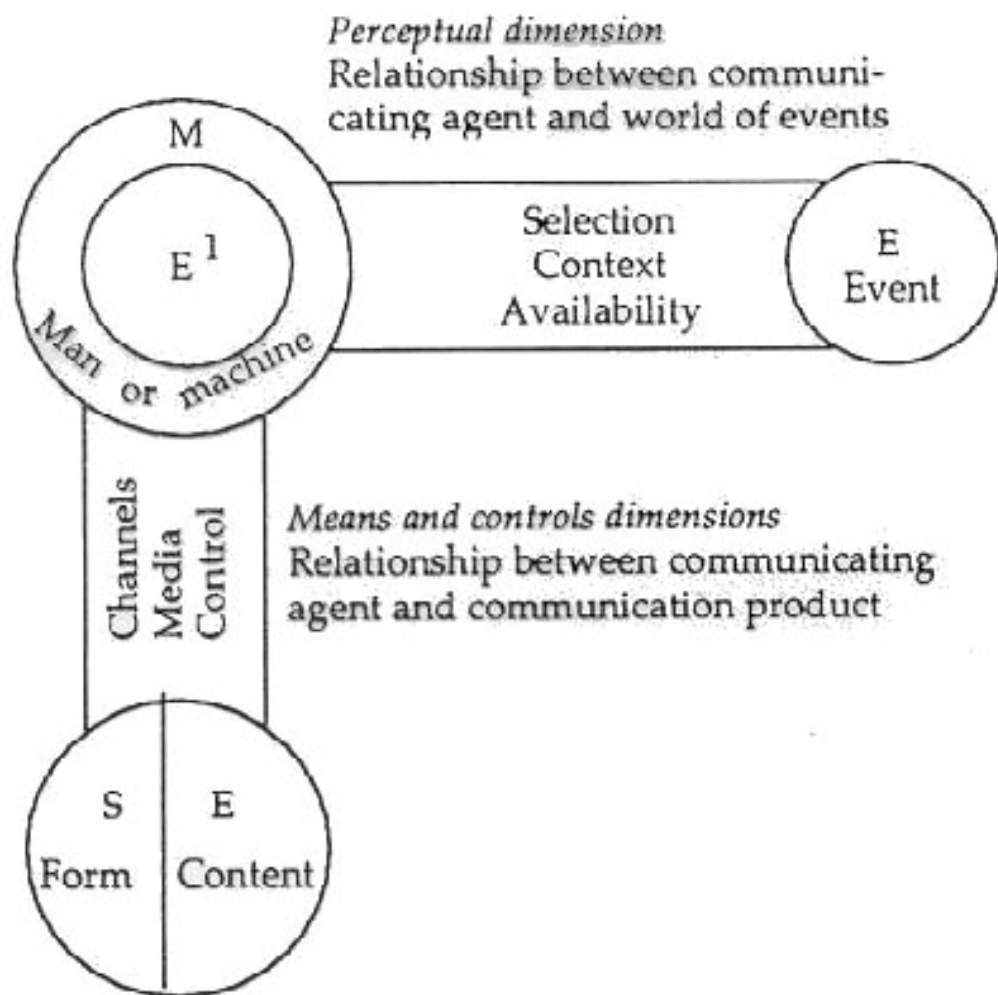
2.3 THE ROLE OF INTERNET COMMUNICATION IN SOCIETY

So what role do new technological developments play in communication? When the telephone was invented people said it would be the end of travel because people can phone rather then meet. However, the telephone made it a lot easier to make appointments, therefore, travel has only increased. The computer would mean the end of using paper, because everyone can read their work from the screen. However, computers made it very easy to duplicate reports and therefore the use of paper has increased. New technologies often have the opposite effect of what we expect from it. Moreover, each new technology that can be used in communication is highly overestimated concerning its effectiveness.

Nevertheless, the Internet has been around for a while now, and it has been the breeding ground for all kinds of new technology that can facilitate communication. However, not much research has been done

Movable type is the system of printing and typography using movable pieces of metal type, made by casting from matrices struck by letter punches.

yet on how it influences society and communication. A newspaper article by North (2007) explains the role Internet technology plays in Iraq.

> "Google is playing an unlikely role in the Iraq war. Its online satellite map of the world, Google Earth, is being used to help people survive sectarian violence in Baghdad."

North also reports that advice-websites are set up explaining how to avoid death squads. Advising Iraqi non-Sunni's how to blend in as Sunni's also is found on these websites. Finally, in Iraq Internet technologies facilitate finding back missing family members. So new technology starts playing a role in communication when existing communication and information channels are disrupted, or when the do not fulfil the information need.

Kluth (2006) gives us a rather progressive view on the role of new technology in communication. The weblog [and other internet technology] is the re-incarnation of the "Movable Type" notes Kluth. This renaissance of the movable type marks the beginning of a new information era, that of the participatory media. Ironically speaking was the internet designed from the perspective of traditional a-symmetrical communication. If you look at the technical specifications of an internet connection, you see that the relation between download speed and upload speed is always a-symmetrical, with the highest value at the download end. This indicates that the big media companies saw the Internet as yet another way to broadcast their message, a-symmetrical and in the best case "public-information".

Looking at the rise of websites such as YouTube, GoogleVideo and Blogspot you see that the Internet is popular as a medium for a-symmetrical communication. Looking at the number of weblogs you can see that there are a steady climbing number of them, surpassing the 25 million in 2005[1].

Wiki: the Hawaiian word for quick, and also used as a backronym for What I Know Is.

Technically a weblog is a web page where a user regularly adds new content. Readers, in addition, often have the chance to comment on contributions of their favourite authors. Nowadays, even small movies or sound fragments are part of weblogs (e.g. www.dumpert.nl).

According to Kluth also journalism is becoming interactive. A great example of this is *Ohmy News,* an online Korean newspaper, where no journalists work. The readers post their own articles and are placed in the online newspaper after the gate keeping of Mr Oh. The channelling of the news items on the web-page itself is done by the readers also, they rate articles and the most popular article is channelled better then less popular articles. However, time has to tell us whether this form of journalism will replace the traditional newspaper.

Dunbar's number, which is 150, represents the maximum number of individuals with whom a set of people can maintain a social relationship, the kind of relationship that goes with knowing who each person is and how each person relates socially to every other person. – Gladwell, Malcolm (2000). *The Tipping Point - How Little Things Make a Big Difference.* Little, Brown and Company.

The wiki principle is a form of communication that is entirely participatory. Every user has the ability to produce or edit any content on a wiki based webpage. Wikipedia, an encyclopaedia based on the wiki principle, and the example of how collaborative thinking can result in a product that is a serious competitor to the encyclopaedia Britannica. Utilising wiki's on a corporate level, one has to have faith in each others contributions. An interesting division can be made when taking wiki's into account. The division is in the number of users using the wiki, the divisional number is the Dunbar number. For communities below the Dunbar amount the gate keeping is done by having close personal relationships with members of the community. Wiki's with a user base larger than the Dunbar number have to get their gate keeping out of the census. The majority of the users correct the mistakes of the individual contributor. Naturally, the Internet grows to be an extension of the public sphere and plays its own role in society. Several technologies helped enhancing interpersonal communication on the Internet. Email and instant messaging reduced the geographical barriers. Online forums and the opportunity of creating your own website that is public for everyone that can access the Internet made mass communication available for the Individual. Without the right channelling an Internet website is just as effective as standing on a soap box at speaker's corner in London.

So many optimistic words are spoken about the Internet as the new, participatory media. This, however, raises critical questions concerning computer mediated communication and the public sphere. Dahlberg (2001) provides a critical analysis on computer mediated communication and the public sphere. The Internet is believed to be the Walhalla for two-way decentralized communication. However, the increased commercialisation of cyberspace and the exclusion of many from online political for a may disrupt this public domain even before the majority of the populous discovered it. Dahlberg compares cyber-communication with the criteria of the public sphere: *Autonomy from state and economic power, Thematisation and critique of criticisable moral-practical validity claims, Reflexivity, Ideal role taking, Sincerity* and *Discursive Equality and Inclusion*

2.3.1   Autonomy from state and economic power

Autonomy from state and economic power is essential for the development of a public sphere. Commercialisation of the Internet has led to more active gate keeping by corporations, and therefore possibly jeopardizing the free flow of information. Dahlberg notes that state and corporate colonisation is an active threat to the characteristics of the Internet that makes it such a unique medium. Therefore, individual initiatives should prevent the Internet from changing into a government controlled corporate manipulated medium. Luckily many web-based initiatives put these basic principles in their mission statements.

2.3.2   Thematisation and critique of criticisable moral-practical validity claims

Dahlberg claims that the "new" medium facilitates the critical exchange required by the public sphere conception and that this exchange is taking place within many online spaces. The right structures exist online; the quality needs to be studied.

2.3.3   Reflexivity

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) provides time for reflexivity. Other than in phone conversations or real life forums, instant messaging and online forums give the respondent time to collect their thoughts. However, CMC also has a lot of characteristics that hinders them from their reflective nature. The small size of the postings often results in the non-linear structure of the conversations and the rapidity of the exchanges. There is pressure to reply quickly on sent messages in CMC, where traditional media can be used as an excuse for delay, in CMC there cannot. Although the medium facilitates instant communication, participants take time and think carefully about their postings. Participants may also learn that the quality of their postings is more important than the quantity. An important task in improving reflexivity is getting participants to listen respectfully to, and thus come to an understanding of their interlocutor's position.

2.3.4   Ideal role taking

Cyberspace is ground to vibrant exchange in opinions. There are many places where people discuss or provide their opinions. In these discussions it is very important to have a good role taking. Comparing it with Bauer's scientific model of communication, senders become receivers and receivers become sender. One requirement for successful CMC is respectful listening. Dahlberg found, however, that very often there is more talk then respectful listening. It is found that people send than receive information on the internet. This becomes a problem when online conversations lead to personal attacks, so called flames. A forum can become breeding ground to flame wars, when a forum is subject to a lot of personal attacks. Therefore, you see that most forums apply active gate keeping, controlling flames and messages that are not carefully drafted.

2.3.5   Sincerity

In order to have public sphere based on honesty and sincerity, every participant must make all their true intentions, interests, needs and desires known. Moreover, his or her profile should reflect ones identity. These identities can be made public through the profile page of a user. Interaction with these identities can result in stable relationships, set interactions or maybe even Internet friendships.
There are several signifiers that give socio-cultural associations with an identity. Fore example, an email address can signify gender (name), ethnicity (.nl / .co.uk), institutional affiliation (@uapme.com / @st.hanze.nl) and many other signifiers. Together with other aspects of online identity, such as, nick names, avatars and personal mission statements, a real online identity can be developed.
This suggests that the sincerity requirement for creating a digital public sphere is created. However, trolls are phenomenon's where people can break in on sincerity by creating a false or double identity. Very often these trolls get detected and true or single identities made public in the concerned society. Verifying online evidence can often be very difficult. Therefore, just as with offline discussions, and as demanded by the deliberative conception, participants in online for a need to remain sceptical of unverifiable claims and information.

2.3.6   Discursive Equality and Inclusion

Dahlberg describes that social inequalities mean that there every member has the same access to CMC, for a similar reason as Tichenor et al. describe. These exclusions are therefore another element in creating a knowledge gap. Moreover, the establishment of a cyber culture with established norms values

and etiquette's can form an equal cultural barrier as between tradition offline cultures. This can create a division, that can already be often found, between young employees and old employees. Although the establishment of cyber culture appears to be a threat, it can also be seen as a great opportunity. The establishment of a cyber culture could be a mediator for traditional cultural barriers.

2.3.7   Conclusion

The Internet is becoming more salient as a form of communication. It is parallel in design and therefore believed as the magical solution to all sorts of communication problems that have been found in the past. Spirals of silence, agenda setting and knowledge gaps have been formulated as barriers for the forming of public opinion, that are supposedly to be completely overcome by the Internet. The Internet is a valid extension of the public sphere, but it is not the magical solution to communication problems. It facilitates in design very well to overcome communication problems and it does a very good job in that respect, but at the same time social structures in society requires channels for communication. Segregated structures do not form the basis of mass communication, but broadcasting channels do. These channels can be found in for example Wikipedia and YouTube that are fortunately very open in nature, but the increasing commercialization of the Internet may result in getting the same communication problems in Computer Mediated Communication as in traditional communication.

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[1] Source: Technorati

3 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

UEAPME is the employer's organisation representing the interests of European crafts, trades and SMEs at EU level. UEAPME is a recognised European Social Partner. It is a non-profit seeking and non-partisan organisation.

As the European SME umbrella organisation, UEAPME incorporates 81 member organisations consisting of national cross-sector SME federations, European branch federations and other associate members, which support the SME family.

UEAPME represents more than 11 million enterprises, which employ around 50 million people across Europe.

3.1 HISTORY

The first creation of an SME organisation at European level took place in 1959. This was according to European tradition a classical construction between the founding members. This organisation was located in Bonn and not before 1989; they decided to move to Brussels. In the 1980s the name changed into UEAPME.

The European Commission started with real SME policy in the end of the 1980s. That was the starting point for the national SME organisations to become more present in Brussels. The European Commission had a budget for these SME organisations which for some of them became their only reason of existence.

These little organisations used these budgets to organise events in the most beautiful places in Europe.

Other organisations that where initially set up to become a part of the political process where sometimes used by former parliamentarians to continue their political career and to have a job.

The ideological differences also let to segregation of the organisations; on one hand you have the conservatives, on the other and the Christians, and also socialists. In 1992 Mr. Müller discovered this segregation and recognised it as being the mean reason from being excluded from the main bodies where organisations can have influence. Each time when UEAPME came to the door of the legislative bodies he got the response *"SMEs? Who are SMES? Who of these 15 organisations represent the opinion of the SMES"*. Mr Müller used his vision to try to set up one European SME organisation. He did this by merging with EUROPMI, and Italian umbrella organisation of crafts and SMEs. Step by step UEAPME acquired more influence, and one of the other SME organisations ceased to exist. Nevertheless, the serious little organisations came aboard UEAPME.

After the merger, the main priority was to get access to the social dialogue. An institution, as described in the Maastricht treaty, of social partners, employers and employees can take decisions and these decisions are turned into a law. This means that these social partners have some legislative rights. In order to have access the consultation bodies in Brussels, you need the status of social partner. In order to defend the interests of SMEs UEAPME needs to become a social partner. However, it was refused. Therefore, UEAPME decided to go to court to get these rights. In itself a very extraordinary way of getting access, because political issues are normally never fought in court. The motivation behind it was to show that UEAPME as an organisation will do their utmost to defend the rights of SMEs. Unfortunately the European court rejected access to the social dialogue.

Jean-Luc de Haene, the prime minister of Belgium, got convinced about the cause of UEAPME and convinced the European Commission about it. The negotiation started, and in December 1998 the first agreement was signed, and of this time UEAPME is a social partner.

3.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

See appendix VI for the organizational structure

UEAPME is built up out of five pillars, the directorates, which are covered by the secretariat. The secretariat consists out of the Secretary General, Hans-Werner Müller, the accountancy, Laurence Moreau, and the assistant secretary general, Doris Rabetge.

The directorates are *Internal Affairs and Communication, Social Policy and Vocational Training, Economic and Financial Policy, Competitiveness of Enterprises and External Relations* and *Sectorial Organisations*. Each directorate covers the policy areas that suit their function. Policy areas are for example, *Environment Affairs* or *Employment and Social Affairs*. There are in total eight policy areas in which UEAPME operates. UEAPME also works in different sectors, next to the policy areas. These sectors are for example, *Construction Sector* or *Health Sector*. UEAPME operates currently in seven of these kinds of sectors. On the head of each directorate there is a director, he or she is the main responsible for the policy areas or sector activities that is assigned to his directorate.

Next to these directorates, UEAPME has two sister organisations, NORMAPME and Academy Avignon. NORMAPME defends the interests of SMEs in the field of standardisation, and has seven employees of seven different nationalities. Academy Avignon is a think tank in order to enhance the actions of UEAPME.

The right to defend SMEs at European level comes from the member organisations of UEAPME. Representing the interests of SMEs, UEAPME has 83 member organisations in 35 countries. The secretary generals of all the member organisations together with UEAPME form the general assembly, member organisations decide for a great deal the agenda and position of UEAPME. Because the main focus of UEAPME is getting the positions of their member organisations and communicating developments at European level, it does not come as a surprise that this is exactly the starting point from which communication policy is developed. Therefore, this study is done in order to find new ways in improving the communication between UEAPME and the member organisations.

3.3   STAFF

UEAPME's staff, together with its sister organisations, consist out of 28 full time employees with nine different nationalities. It is this cultural diversity that gives the organisation the strength to deal with the cultural differences amongst European member states. Most of the staff members are a product from mixed nationality parents, or are married with someone from a different nationality, hence the absence of cultural problems in communication.

3.4   CURRENT COMMUNICATION

Allocution

The current communication of UEAPME is very individualistic. Most communication is done by phone, email or in meetings. UEAPME's staff members and the member organisations feel very comfortable in communicating in this way. Established relations make the boundary to contact UEAPME low, and it also provides those members with the right and accurate information because the know how to get about UEAPME. Formal communication is done with the help of circulars and position papers. Current events and news are provided to the member organisations with the help of press releases or the news-flash is sent out every Friday at 12 o'clock. This is UEAPME's way of providing centralised information in a standardised way, **allocution**. Meetings are another common form of communicating with the member organisation. Meetings are standardised and follow a set of established rituals, agenda, minutes etc. These are the main ways of keeping information standardised an distributed from a central point, but can not all forms of communication provide easy and equal access? The meetings and reactions to the circulars and position papers are currently the only way for member organisations to provide information bottom-up. Additionally individual phone and email is used in order to get information bottom up, but those are very individual and de-centralised.

3.5   INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

Because of its position in Europe, UEAPME is constantly exposed to internal and external factors. UEAPME has some very good strengths, but at the same time there is a need to work on the fields that are not smooth yet. Externally UEAPME should grab opportunities to fulfil its mission statements, and at the same time defend themselves from factors that can for a threat for UEAPME.

The main strength of UEAPME is its cultural diversity, nine different nationalities are active at UEAPME giving a good base for intercultural communication. Most of the staff members speak three or more languages in many different combinations, making sure that there is always a team available for the right conference. The UEAPME staff is made up out of many young ambitious employees that can adapt easily to any new situation, whilst on the other hand there are many experienced staff members providing a stable base of knowledge and experience.

The main item UEAPME has to work on is the management and availability of information. The absence of a centralised structure of information management can lead to confusion if the right information cannot be found. Moreover, if a staff member is not available at a certain moment or unexpectedly leaves the organisation, valuable business intelligence gets lost.

Externally, UEAPME can see the interest for SME policies grow. It is this growth in interest that can, with the right strategy, create a foundation for further development of UEAPME as a social partner. At the same time, there is a risk that because of this interest in SME policies, other organisation, or big industries, start speaking on behalf of European SMEs.

4   METHODOLOGY

The research on how to *"Communicate Europe"* is aimed to give answer, on how new technology can facilitate communication between UEAPME and the member organisations. The core communication problem is that UEAPME does not get enough feedback and information from their member organisations, UEAPME has no centralised communication, and UEAPME does not have a good system of managing their relations. In order to try getting communication more symmetrical, and have good information management, UEAPME needs the following questions answered:

- How do the member organisations want to communicate?
- Which media types are valued best?
- What is the attitude of member organisations towards new technology?
- Who is are target group? (i.e. what is their profile)
- What is the best method of making communication more symmetrical?

In order to get a deep insight in all the separate parts of the research the research is divided into four phases. Each phase gives answer to several sub questions that together lead to the answer to the main research questions. The first phase, the preliminary research phase, consisted of cross checking literature and doing Internet based research. The second phase was the research focus phase, a set of basic interviews with members of staff and member organisations giving the right focus to the problem. The third phase gave quantitative data with the help of a questionnaire. The fourth and final research phase was a short interview where possible solutions where tested.

4.1   PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

This research stage is done with the help of Internet resources, such as, on-line encyclopaedia, search engines and online magazines. The aim at this research phase was to create an inventory of which forms of communication there exist and how the can be used. On the other hand, research was done using the literature provided by specialised journals. This literature list contains research article and essays conducted by recognized researchers and professors. The main two research questions where:

- Which theories in communication and public sphere doe exist?
- Which forms of communication can be used?

The data I received from the preliminary research are collected in report form in this thesis. Because results from Internet sources consist of little stories giving the opinion of the writer's value of the forms of communication, I paraphrased these and provided them as little stories in the results section.

The data from the literature is presented in a different section in this thesis, a separate chapter called literature review (chapter 2).

4.2   RESEARCH FOCUS PHASE

The research focus is done in order to get a detailed insight into the main communication problems and bottlenecks within UEAPME. Moreover, this phase has been used to get an indication of how the communication between UEAPME and its member organisations is organised and evaluated.

I have interviewed all the key people within UEAPME, and I asked them questions on how they evaluate communication and to which extend they know new technologies. Moreover, I interviewed a sample group of the member organisations. The technique used is the so called **ORID** (Objective, Reflective, Interpretative, and Decisional) technique; this technique aims at separating the observational process from the interpretation process, and therefore facilitates looking at the organisation from the right perspective.

When people look at a certain problem, they tend to look at it from the perspective of their own prior believes, this often results in people not looking at the actual situation, but work on the assumptions of the situation. People tend to think from the top of the ladder of inference as shown in figure 4.1. The ORID technique is used in order to let people take every single step of the ladder of inference in order to create a better view of their situation. Their description on their situation gives the focus of the research.

With the results of this research I drafted the questionnaire.

The ORID technique aids in visiting each rung of the inference ladder.

O (Objective). Data they recall seeing or hearing. (Disallow interpretations and opinions.)
R+ (Reflective positive). Responses to positive reactions.
R- (Reflective negative). Responses to negative reactions.
I (Interpretive). What sense they make of data. (Hint: Think about what headline a reporter might write.)
D (Decisional). What decisions they can now make.

Figure 4.1: The ladder of inference
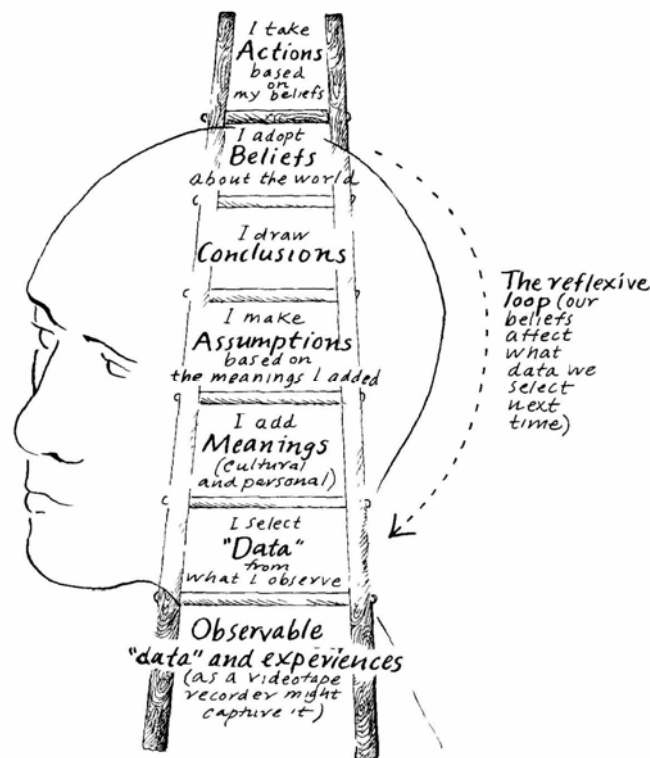
The main research questions where:
- What role in communication does UEAPME play?
- What is the desired form of communicating?
- What are the bottlenecks in communication?

In order to analyse the data, I divided the respondents in several different groups depending their answers in order to find certain trends. I did this by giving a peculiarity a colour, for example conservative answers orange, progressive answers green. One colour for centralised thinking one for decentralised, one for big communication problem, one for a small communication problem. All these colours gave me the opportunity to group all the responses according to their dimension. All the results where grouped according to several criteria, and in several combinations. Each of these combinations gave specific information that is presented in the results section.

4.3 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH PHASE

The main aim of the quantitative research phase was to get data that are statistically testable, and applicable to one of the models form the literature review. The questionnaire tried to find out if the member organisations are willing to contribute in getting the communication more symmetrical, and which forms of communication that allow symmetry they like to use. Furthermore, the most important question of the questionnaire allows me to find out if the member organisations like centralised or decentralised communication, and if they like centralised or decentralised information.

The main research questions for this stage where:
- What is the attitude of the member organisations towards new technology in communication?
- What is the division of languages?
- Which form of communication is most preferable, decentralised versus centralised?
- How is the current communication with UEAPME evaluated?

For the quantitative research I have drafted a questionnaire with initially 13 questions. After one week, however, the response was still zero. Therefore, I reduced the size of the questionnaire significantly and I decided to more aggressively promote my questionnaire. Coincidently there was an SME conference in Stuttgart where a large part of my questionnaire target group was present. This together with an increase email and telephone offensive resulted in finally getting some results.

Because UEAPME communicates for a major part in English, and sometimes in French, I first tried to find out which languages are spoken amongst the members. In the first two questions I respectively

asked their first, second and third language, and their skills in English and French. The language levels the respondents could choose form where, poor/no skill, beginner, advanced and proficient.

In order to map out the attitudes towards several forms of communication, I asked the respondents to give feedback on how they think several media can be used in business communication. Therefore I asked respondents to comment on the following questions: *"How would you evaluate using the following media in business communication"*. The list of media types I provided the respondents was phone, video-conferencing, email, post, internet forum, instant messenger, magazines, annual reports, brochures, circulars, web-page, online-television, online knowledge centres, RSS and weblog. The responses the respondents could give where excellent, good, poor, very poor and don't know.

In order to know if UEAPME uses some forms of communication too much or too little, I asked the respondents if UEAPME uses several media too frequent, just right, not frequent enough or don't know. The forms of communication I used in this scale are phone, fax, video-conferencing, email, post, UEAPME's newsflash, magazines, brochures, circulars, web-page and online-television.

The **Likert-scale** has been used in order to see if I can introduce new technology to people. I used six statements in order to measure the attitude towards new technology. The six statements are respectively *"I keep a close watch on trends and like to keep myself up to date"*, *"I am familiar with using Instant Messengers and Internet Forums"*, *"Email revolutionised business communication"*, *"I like to see technological developments in communication"*, *"New technology is the main facilitator in solving communication problems"*, and *"If a new technology is introduced I will try it"*.

Finally, I used ten statements in a **bi-polar** scale in order to see which dimension of communication is most desirable. I took table 2.1 and developed statements that represented each of the dimensions and placed them in the scale. With this bi-polar scale I can see in which way our members like to see information processed, and in which way they like to receive information.

The results of the questionnaires have been collected in a **MySql** database. I developed my questionnaire with the help of web design techniques and hosted it on my UEAPME research webpage. Respondents where allowed to fill out the questionnaire online, however, most of the questionnaires where filled out by hand and I put them in the database by using my on-line questionnaire form. With the help of **SPSS** I created twelve tables, of which nine cross tables and four sum tables. With the sum tables I basically use the **mode** to see what the most desired results are. The cross tabs I use to see which trends I can find in certain topics. With the bi-polar scales fore example, I chose to create cross tables by combining two times the two dimensional scale, getting a four dimensional trend. This trend I will use in my advice.

4.4   QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PHASE

The qualitative research phase it he final research phase for the thesis. This research phase was aimed at verifying the previous results and come up with a creative solution to problems found. The main objective of the interviews was to get attitudes towards specific solutions from the members. I wanted to know from the members which solutions where interesting for them, and they would use. My aim was to find, together with the members, a form of communication that makes communication more symmetrical. Furthermore, I wanted how the wanted to communicate and how they want to see information stored.

This part of the research also went a bit chaotic, concerning the previous results. The feedback on the questionnaire was very poor and therefore it had to be postponed. At a conference in Stuttgart the opportunity was there to see a large part of the members. So, a sum of ad hoc interviews where held there. Main research questions:

- How do you currently communicate?
- What technologies do you use?
- What do you think happens if UEAPME implements x, y and z?
- Do you prefer personal contact, or quick research?

The data analysis was here similar as the research focus phase, although the data collection was considerably different. Because of the busy schedule in Stuttgart, all the interviews are recorded voice recorder. During the analysis I listened to each interview and noted down interesting remarks from the interviewee, after all the interviewee remarks where collected I tried to discover some patterns. Afterwards, I summarised all the different topics and took some of the most interesting results out.

Likert-scale

Bi-polar

MySQL is a multithreaded, multi-user SQL database management system

In statistics, mode means the most frequent value assumed by a random variable, or occurring in a sampling of a random variable.

SPSS (originally, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was released in its first version in 1968, and is among the most widely used programs for statistical analysis in social science.

5   FINDINGS

5.1   PRELIMENARY RESEARCH RESULTS

In order to find out which forms of communication are at our disposal, here a list of forms of communication are provided. Furthermore, other peculiarities that can be interesting for the research are provided here.

5.1.1   *Languages*

UEAPME's has, according to their annual report of 2005, 83 member organisations in 35 different countries. Each of them represents their own cultural traditions and interests. Needless to say, they all represent their own language. In total, amongst the member organisations 26 different languages are spoken, not taking some minority languages into account that are also spoken in organisations such as Catalan and Luxembourgish.

All these languages represented could form a boundary in the communication between UEAPME and its member organisations. Therefore, during the questionnaire round a map is made of what are the primary and secondary, and in some cases even, tertiary languages spoken. Getting information about the tertiary language is particularly important because people that speak minority languages would answer that as their primary language, e.g. Catalan, and as their secondary language the national language of the country they live in, e.g. Spanish. Moreover, it is necessary to map out the knowledge of the two official languages of UEAPME, English and French, amongst the member organisations.

5.1.2   *Internet*

"The Internet is like alcohol in some sense. It accentuates what you would do anyway. If you want to be a loner, you can be more alone. If you want to connect, it makes it easier to connect." --- Esther Dyson, Interview in Time Magazine, October 2005

The Internet is the technical term for the world wide physical connection between interconnected computer networks and computers. However, in everyday life, Internet is synonymous to communication, web-pages and direct communication. Nowadays the Internet facilitates communication between businesses, organisations and individuals. Like many new developments the social role the Internet plays is changing rapidly and is an uncontrolled ad hoc development. In the further research in this report, the socio-cultural and communication role is investigated amongst the member organisations of UEAPME. With the help of secondary research I have assembled a list of technologies that are often used on the Internet and that play a role in the everyday life of many people; with this list I have a small description and definition of the particular technology. These technologies come back in the questionnaires and in the dept interviews.

5.1.3   *Internet Forums*

Every serious news provider nowadays provides a discussion forum underneath their news paper articles. The main function of these forums here is to get a discussion going on the subject, give people the opportunity to ask questions about certain subjects in the news paper article in order to close their knowledge gap (Tichenor et. al.).

Initially, Internet forums started as on-line location where people can read and post messages. People can react and interact through a so called 'thread'; some forums even provide scoring system using the census to act as a gatekeeper on the quality and relevance of the posting.

Within the questionnaires and interviews I evaluate the way people look towards internet forums and to which extent they use it, trying to find out if the Internet forum is a useful tool for UEAPME to facilitate communication.

5.1.4   *WIKI*

"There are no facts, only interpretations" – Friedrich Nietzsche

"What I Know Is"; WIKIs are similar to but not quite an Internet forum. Where an Internet forum is the arena for discussion leading to the ultimate truth, a WIKI is a place where more users can collaboratively report 'facts' in the same way an encyclopaedia does. "Wikipedia" is the most well known variant of a WIKI. "Wikipedia" is an online collaborative free encyclopaedia. The idea behind the WIKIs is that the census is used in order to prevent 'false' information to slip in. WIKIs could provide an essential knowledge base for member organisations in order to close the knowledge gap, and therefore I evaluate the attitude towards WIKIs in my questionnaires and interviews.

5.1.5 Instant messaging

A text based form of real-time communication between one or more people. Instant messaging became very popular in the 1990s when ICQ launched an instant messenger in 1996, followed by AOL a year later. The biggest benefit of instant messaging above email is the instant response mechanism, a user can directly see if its target is responding. Moreover, an individual can see if someone is available to receive messages or not. The main advantage over the telephone is the freedom for the recipient to attend to the message whenever he is ready for it.

The role of instant messaging society grew when Microsoft launched its MSN messenger in 1999.

Although instant messaging is a popular form of communication between individuals, it is not widely incorporated in business communication yet. Therefore, in questionnaires and interviews I evaluate the use of instant messaging.

5.1.6 Skype

Other than instant messaging, Skype is a way to have online phone calls. Although it therefore appears that Skype is not much different from conventional phone, the cost reduction aspect could be of interest for some of the member organisations. Moreover, the status aspect, described at instant messaging, is included in using Skype.

5.1.7 RSS

RSS (an acronym for Really Simple Syndication) is a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated digital content, such as blogs, news feeds or podcasts.

"Really Simple Syndication", could provide UEAPME with more focussed way of providing news releases. With RSS, news feeds can be created which can be constantly monitored with a news reader application. Such application can filter the desired types of information.

It provides several advantages over sending news through normal email, the public gets its information directly from the server, so it knows where the news comes from, and which of the subjects it wants to receive. Moreover, the press-officer does not have to send weekly assembled news articles via email, but it can provide the public with the articles at the moment they are edited.

5.1.8 Polls

Polls can be a successful tool to evaluate the opinion amongst the members, provided that the correct form of statistical analysis is done. A poll about a certain topic can be easily placed on the website, either in a member's only section or on the front-page.

5.1.9 Pod- and Video- casts

The sister organisation NORMAPME already started to use video-casts in their communication strategy. NORMAPME provides the audience with small movies that tell stories of effects of standards on Small and Medium-sized Enterprises.

Pod- and video- casts are series of electronic media files that are distributed periodically through web feeds (RSS etc.). Pod- and video- casts can be an addition to the media scheme of UEAPME and therefore I evaluate their use.

5.1.10 Weblog or blog

The economist, amongst others, defines a weblog as a personal on-line journal. However, most webloggers find that definition not entirely right. Weblogs provide journals in a reverse chronological order and can be used to keep audiences informed on what the author finds important. In American companies you often see that key-players keep a weblog as a PR aid. A weblog can also fulfil a role within UEAPME, however, the value of the weblog is evaluated during the questionnaires and interviews.

5.1.11 Website

Ab initio, websites are nothing more than an on line brochure, that get read once, and never again. Luckily, however, that soon changed and nowadays most websites are a combination of the before mentioned technologies. Moreover, they often provide a members section where people can get their personalised version of the website, leave comments etc. Nevertheless, there are still many organisations that operate their website in this traditional, public information fashion. Therefore, I evaluate the current website of UEAPME and evaluate how the member organisations view it.

5.1.12   Other

The following communication methods have been around long enough that they do not need any further explanation. Nevertheless, I evaluate the use of these methods in the questionnaires and interviews.
Other findings are, Email, phone, fax, post mail and press releases.

5.1.13   Conclusions

Looking at the results of the preliminary research, we see that there are many forms of communication to choose from, and each of the forms of communication has its own pro's and cons. Most of them are very useful, and they all have a specific way of facilitating the information/communication matrix (table 2.1). However, further research needs to be done in order to see which forms of communication are most desirable to use, and where the bottlenecks are.

5.2   FOCUS INTERVIEW RESULTS

The results of the focus interview are very useful in this research because they signify what the critical control points and bottlenecks in communication are. It, therefore, facilitates the further research and lays the foundation for the final advice.

5.2.1   Role of communication

The main aim of UEAPME is to inform member organisations about everything that is going on at European level. The main objective is to follow the ongoing European legislative process and then especially in the field of SMEs. Furthermore, UEAPME informs the member organisations on the agenda of the European Commission. At the same time UEAPME receives information from the member organisations on what is going on at national level. In order to position themselves UEAPME receives responses on their questionnaires and position papers. UEAPME's position can be therefore identified as the mediating partner between the national organisations and the European legislator.

5.2.2   Desired form of communicating

Internet is in the same way a form of communication, as a road is a form of transportation

When analysing the results of the focus interviews you can see a clear distinction in how people can look at forms of communication. Eleven out of the 17 respondents mentioned media types when they where asked about forms of communication. The other respondents talked more empirically about communication, they spoke about verbal versus written communication or sharing information as a communication.
There were also few respondents that named the Internet as a form of communication, which is interesting because the Internet is in the same way a form of communication, as a road is a form of transportation. One of the respondents mentioned Internet platforms as a form of communication. Within the group that mentioned media types as forms of communication, new(er) technology to facilitate communication are not in the top of mind awareness.
When asking which forms of communication they liked best, phone and email where the most prevalent answer, also life contact in communication was valued. Moreover, lots of respondents indicated that they adapt their form of communication best to the circumstances, which indicates that new forms of communication can be introduced if they facilitate the circumstances better.
When asking the respondents what forms of communication is actually used between UEAPME and the member organisations you see that as a medium Email is often used. According to the respondents mainly circulars, position papers and newsflashes are send from UEAPME to the member organisations, and comments, answers to questions mainly from member organisations to UEAPME. Although the communication shows here to have a two way tendency, it is very **a-symmetrical**. That a-symmetrical tendency can be found back when looking at the types of information that is sent. Information from UEAPME to its member organisations is mainly position papers, developments on EU level, or requests for comments, whilst information coming from the member organisations usually manifest in reactions to information sent by UEAPME.

a-symmetrical

The most prevalent answer to the preferred form of communication is phone and Email. An interesting finding also is that the a third of the respondents like to have personal contact in their communication, personal meeting and interaction is highly valued. Moreover, a third of the respondents mentioned to adapt their form of communication to the situation. One of the respondents stated:

> *"It depends on the circumstances, in the past I used the fax a lot; that is nowadays replaced by email; that goes a lot quicker"*

So this finding shows that the respondents are flexible in their form of communication depending on their mission. Moreover, forms of communication is formed by group conformity, forms of communication that are used by the majority are often seen as the most preferred form of communication.

5.2.3   Bottlenecks in communication

When evaluating the current communication of UEAPME, respondents gave answers that show the presence of a "Public Information" model. Respondents from within UEAPME often replied that the messages sent are not focused enough on the target group. Also there is a general consensus that messages sent to the member organisations are not based on their information need. At the same time respondents from within UEAPME reply that they are not aware enough of the information need of the member organisations because they get little feedback from the member organisations. One respondent stated:

> *"It is a bit a chicken and the egg questions. If we don't know what information we need, we don't know what to send them"*

Interestingly enough the respondents from the member organisations stated that the quantity of information from UEAPME is enough, although it is difficult to get an assessment on their perceived quality of the information.

a-symmetrical

The presence of feedback shows that the communication model is two way, but the types of feedback also shows that it is a-symmetrical.

So how do respondents think communication can be improved? Most of the respondents looked at improving the public information model when improving the communication between UEAPME and its member organisations. Of the 17 focus interviews nine respondents where focussed at improving the

Public information

"public information". Their interpretation on how to improve communication is to improve the focus of the messages. Most solutions found are to make the emails sexier from a design perspective and headings better suited to the message.

Additionally, messages sent should be recognisable on what their purpose is said some of the respondents. Some communications require feedback or actions, which should be recognisable.

Another focus point according to one of the respondents is the management of existing knowledge and information.

> *"Better information management is important, a database should be set up for the organisational structures, and also to manage information"*

The last finding within the scope of improving the "Public information" is creating a good Contact Relationship Management system, keeping a track of all the individual needs and communication history with each individual target group.

Line-communication is communication according to the hierarchical lines

Seven of the 17 respondents of the focus interview looked at improving the symmetry of the communication. Although nearly every respondent of the focus interview thought improving the two-way communication was important only seven of the respondents really had remarks that would make the communication also symmetrical. Most of these suggestions manifest themselves in creating personal direct relationships, preferably in real life, alternatively, with the use of video conferencing. Also some suggest facilitating communication amongst members, and a stimulation of **line-communication**. Moreover, improving the internal communication is believed to facilitate external communication. Establishing a common vision and strategy in communication is often mentioned in the focus interview. Furthermore, most respondents believe communication and PR is a management function rather than an executive function as it is practiced now.

The respondents often value new technology in a way that it can facilitate communication. Moreover, they acknowledge the fact that new technology cannot solve communication problems:

> *"Word doesn't write your position paper, you do!"*

However, their awareness of the existing new technology is often limited. Nevertheless, new technology is believed to be a focus point for lowering boundaries and geographical distances that make the communication in an organisation like UEAPME difficult. Moreover, believed is that new technology can provide tools in trying to break communication problems.

<div style="float:left; color:gray;">Two-way symmetrical</div>

Looking at these responses, the conclusion can be made that implementing fully two-way symmetrical communication is going to be difficult, mainly because the internal and external parties are less focussed on this issue and less used to practicing this model of communication.

When asking to look to the future almost all respondents replied that they want to improve the quality of communication. Some respondents said that they would like to get a clear vision on the communication strategy.

> *"Communication happened as an accident, without [real] strategy"*

New technology is seen as one of the facilitators in improving the communication for the future, but it only works if there is a structural communication strategy. There is also the need to be able to reflect on communication in the past. In order to do this, there need to be a tracking system developed for communication.

One of the respondents replied that he wants, in order to improve the communication, to *improve the website, use good Customer Relationship management and improve internal communication to facilitate external communication.*

5.2.4 Conclusions

So UEAPME's role in communication is an important one, UEAPME is the voice for SMEs and Crafts in Europe. UEAPME is the mediator between the national organisations and the European legislator.

The preferred communication within UEAPME is the established traditional forms of communicating. It is shown that forms of communication follow a fashion process. Where staff members used the fax in the past, they are now using email. Although the staff members are hesitant in adopting new forms of communication, they are open to change when the circumstances are right, this means that if there is the desire to implement new forms of communication it has to be in a slow transition phase.

The bottleneck in communication is the management of information and contacts. Many respondents replied that they would like to have a transparent system that allows them to become directly into contact with them member organisations, and allow them to find quickly information. Another focus point was developing a common mission and vision for communication, and communicate this within UEAPME. The last important point is getting accurate information from the member organisations on-time.

5.3 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

The final response of the questionnaire is 21. Out of a population of 83 that is just over 25% and therefore a representative score. Furthermore, table 5.1 shows also that the represented diversity among the respondents is high enough to give valid results. The results are divided into four categories, each giving a response to a specific research question, attitudes to media types, evaluation of the current communication, spoken languages and which form of communication is best for the future.

Table 5.1: Countries and respondents

N = 21	*Respondents*
Austria	3
Belgium	2
Czech Republic	2
Estonia	1
Finland	1
France	2
Germany	2
Italy	2
Latvia	1
Netherlands	1
Pan European	2
Poland	1
Slovenia	1

5.3.1 Languages amongst the members

UEAPME provides all its communications in English, and additionally some in French. The website is entirely available in French. News publications, however, are only published in English. Therefore I investigated the languages spoken. Among the respondents, 15 languages are spoken (that is almost one language per respondents).Nevertheless, the results show that 100% of the respondents speak English; German is spoken by 67% of the respondents and French by 62% of the respondents. So the choice of UEAPME to choose English as the lingua franca is logical. If you compare the spoken languages with the level of English and French amongst the members you see the same parallel (see tables 5.2 and 5.3).

Table 5.2: Languages amongst the member organisations

N = 21	1st	2nd	3rd	*Tot.*
Catalan	1	0	0	1
Czech	2	0	0	2
Dutch	3	0	0	3
English	1	12	8	21
Finnish	1	0	0	1
French	2	4	7	13
German	6	2	6	14
Italian	2	0	1	3
Latvian	1	0	0	1
Polish	1	0	0	1
Russian	0	0	3	3
Slovak	0	1	0	1
Slovenian	1	0	0	1
Spanish	0	1	2	3
Swedish	0	1	0	1
Tot.	21	21	27	69

Table 5.3: Evaluation of language skills

N = 21		French				Tot.
		Proficient	Advanced	Beginner	Poor	
English	Proficient	2	4	1	1	8
	Advanced	2	5	1	5	13
	Beginner	0	0	0	0	0
	Poor	0	0	0	0	0
Tot.		4	9	2	6	42

5.3.2 Evaluation of communication

Looking at the evaluation of the use of traditional media in business communication, it is shown the the media that are around already for more than two decades are most favourable. Of the newer technologies, only the ones that are an enhancement of the traditional media get some positive evaluation, for example video-conferencing. Strangely enough, on-line television is not valued that much, but integration in the website of NORMAPME showed that their video has been watched 168 times in March 2007 and 106 times in April 2007. Thus, if new technology is incorporated, it should naturally blend in the traditional forms of communication.

Table 5.4: Evaluation of media in business communication

How would you evaluate using the following media in business communication? N = 21	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very Poor	Don't know	Tot.
Phone	9	10	2	0	0	21
Video-conferencing	4	5	5	2	5	21
Email	17	4	0	0	0	21
Post (traditional mail)	3	10	5	3	0	21
Internet Forum	1	8	5	4	3	21
Instant messenger (e.g. MSN, Yahoo)	1	5	6	5	4	21
Magazines	3	10	4	3	1	21
Annual Reports	3	11	6	1	0	21
Brochures	4	14	2	1	0	21
Circulars	2	11	5	2	1	21
Web-page	15	5	0	1	0	21
On-line television (e.g. GoogleVideo, YouTube)	0	3	9	2	7	21
Online Knowledge centres (e.g. Wikipedia)	2	11	4	0	4	21
RSS	1	1	3	0	16	21
Weblog	1	5	7	0	8	21

Table 5.5 shows an interesting anomaly, new technology that is already in use in UEAPME got a very high "*don't know*" response. You also see that media that are more traditional and nowadays largely replaced by computer mediated versions are sometimes missed by the member organisation. Looking at magazines and brochures you see that six of the 21 respondents want more of those. However, it is good to keep track over time how this develops, it could be very possible that the demand decreases over time, when people get more used to Computer Mediated Communication.

a-symmetrical Looking at the media used by UEAPME, looking at table 5.5, you see that most media are either very individually oriented in a communication and information perspective. The few forms of communication that are centralised, however, are forms that are mainly used for **a-symmetrical** communication, such as the current web-page, brochures and magazines.

Table 5.5: Evaluation of the use of media by UEAPME

How would you evaluate the frequency UEAPME uses these forms of communication? N = 21	Too frequent	Just Right	Not frequent enough	Don't Know	Tot.
Phone	0	14	4	3	21
Fax	0	13	0	8	21
Video-conferencing	0	1	10	10	21
Email	4	16	0	1	21
Post (traditional mail)	1	12	3	5	21
UEAPME's Newsflash	0	15	2	4	21
Magazines	0	5	5	11	21
Brochures	0	8	6	7	21
Circulars	3	13	2	3	21
Web-page	0	12	4	5	21
On-line television (e.g. GoogleVideo, YouTube)	0	2	3	16	21

5.3.3 Attitude towards new technology

Almost all respondents replied to be trend watchers when it comes to new technology. Looking at how many people actually use the most common new technologies gives us a different image of their attitude towards new technology. Of the 21 respondents just over half of them really has experience with instant messaging and forums, whilst this is not really a new technology.

Table 5.6: Watching trends, and using new technology

N = 21	I keep a close watch on trends and like to keep myself up to date					
I am familiar with using instant messengers and Internet forums	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Tot.
Strongly agree	2	1	0	0	0	3
Agree	3	5	1	0	0	9
Neither agree nor disagree	0	1	0	0	0	1
Disagree	1	3	2	1	0	7
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	1	0	1
Tot.	6	10	3	2	0	42

So if UEAPME introduces new technology, it will be used by little over half of the respondents. There are only few respondents that replied that they think that new technology is the main facilitator in communication, nevertheless, half of them is in doubt and therefore, the adaptation of new technology could go well, table 5.7.

When the respondents where asked about the role of email in business communication, all the respondents agreed that it has been a revolution in business communication. If you link those responses to their general attitude of new technology in communication it is shown that it is very positive, table 5.8. Therefore, all the opportunities must be there to introduce new technology.

Table 5.7: Adoption of new technology

N = 21	New technology is the main facilitator in Communication					
If a new technology is used I will try it	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	*Tot.*
Strongly agree	1	1	0	1	0	3
Agree	0	6	3	0	0	9
Neither agree nor disagree	0	0	7	1	0	8
Disagree	0	0	0	1	0	1
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tot.	1	7	10	3	0	42

Table 5.8: Attitude towards impact of new technology

N = 21	Email revolutionised business communication					
I like to see technological developments in communication	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	*Tot.*
Strongly agree	2	1	0	0	0	3
Agree	10	3	0	0	0	13
Neither agree nor disagree	0	5	0	0	0	5
Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tot.	12	9	0	0	0	42

5.3.4 Most preferable form of communicating

In order to get to know in which dimension of table 2.1 the respondents think, I provided them with a bi-polar scale with ten statements (appendix V). The results of this are drafted in three cross tables. Looking back at table 2.1, you can see a four dimensional scale, this four dimensional scale can be set out into several different variables. The bi-polar scale used gives us, however, a two dimensional test of what the respondents think. Therefore, table 5.9, 5.10 and 5.11 are cross tables setting those two dimensions out in three, or in de case of table 5.11 even four, different dimensions.

The number of dimensions is simply the number of independent variables in a system. Therefore, a four dimensional system would simply be one with four independent variables. An example might be $f(x, y, z, w) = x^2 + y^2 + z^2 + w^2$.

Table 5.9: Conversation, consultation and registration

N = 21	Conversation					Consultation
						Tot.
Consultation	3	0	0	0	0	3
	3	2	2	0	0	7
	1	3	0	0	0	4
	2	2	1	1	0	6
Registration	1	0	0	0	0	1
Tot.	10	7	3	1	0	42

Horizontal: I would like to discuss my problem directly - I would like to be able to consult a central partner that mediates amongst stakeholders
Vertical: In order to acquire information I like to discuss openly with large groups of people - In order to acquire information I like to read articles or watch documentaries
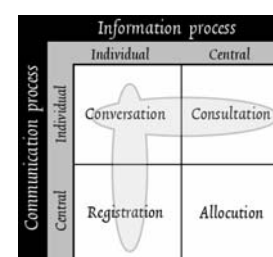
The horizontal scale, in table 5.9, represents the balance between individual and centralised information, whilst the vertical scale here represents the balance between individual and central communication.
The mode for the horizontal scale is ten at the individual side of the information process. On the vertical scale you see that the mode is seven, but at the same time on the other extend of the scale you see a result of six. Thus, the respondents where very divided in their reply. Moreover, you can see that

the two highest values of the vertical scale do not lie in the extremes. That means that the communication process is valued both central and individual. In the dimension information, it is shown that most respondents replied in favour of the statement that represents individual information. This would suggest that most respondents would like to receive information that is adapted to their individual needs. Interesting to see is that the mode of the two individual scales is nowhere to be found in the cross-tabulated numbers.

Table 5.10: Conversation, consultation and allocution

N = 21	Conversation					Consultation	
						Tot.	
Conversation	2	0	0	0	0	2	
	5	3	1	0	0	9	
	1	2	1	1	0	5	
	2	2	0	0	0	4	
Allocution	0	0	1	0	0	1	
Tot.	10	7	3	1	0	42	
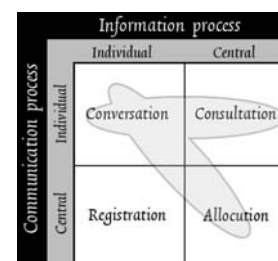
Horizontal: If I have something to say I like to contact all the stakeholders - If I have something to say I like to contact someone at UEAPME, which then mediates the messages along the stakeholders
Vertical: I like to receive information upon request - I like to get messages about several different topics on a regular basis (e.g. news flash)

The horizontal scale in table 5.10 is the same as table 5.9. At the vertical scale the most extreme distinction is made, conversation represents individual information and individual communication whilst allocution represents centralised communication and information. Looking at the results, you can see that most respondents chose for an individual approach, very strongly for the information process, and with a little majority in the communication process. What then is interesting to know is to compare how people want to communicate, with information in a centralised setting, and information in an individualised setting. Therefore, table 5.11 shows a cross-table that shows the balance between individual and central communication in a centralised information structure, and individual and central communication in an individualised information structure.
Looking at the individual results of the scale you see that there is no consensus on the desired form of communication. Looking at the horizontal scale you see that most people did not choose between either one of the statements but where undecided. Whilst, looking at the vertical scale you can see that the answers lie more in the extreme, with a bit more to the centralised communication side.

Table 5.11: Conversation, registration, consultation and allocution

N = 21	Conversation					Registration	
						Tot.	
Consultation	1	2	1	0	1	5	
	1	0	1	0	0	2	
	1	0	2	1	0	4	
	0	1	3	2	1	7	
Allocution	0	0	1	1	1	3	
Tot.	3	3	8	4	3	42	
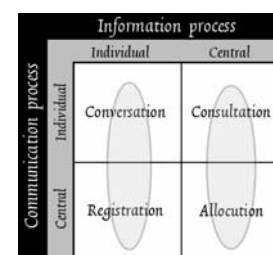
Horizontal: I like to provide information when it is desired from me to provide it - As soon as I have information that seems relevant I like to register it
Vertical: I like to receive information upon request - I like to get messages about several different topics on a regular basis (e.g. news flash)

Determining the mode for each of the four dimensions, a divided result can be found. In total the modus fell one time at consultation, one time at allocution, one time at registration and two times at conversation. Thus, strictly spoken, if I make a scorecard of the respondents' answers in tables 5.9, 5.10, and 5.11 I get the results as shown in table 5.12. This approves the previous assumption that the member organisations like their individual way of communicating, but also recognise the necessity of centralising parts of the communication.

Table 5.12: Scorecard Information, Communication - Individual, Central

		Information process	
		Individual	**Central**
Communication process	**Individual**	*2* **Conversation**	*1* **Consultation**
	Central	*1* **Registration**	*1* **Allocution**

5.3.5 Conclusion

Looking at the spoken languages, 100% of the population speaks [or claims to speak] English, the score's on languages where in every response advanced or proficient. Therefore it can stay the lingua franca of UEAPME. Furthermore, there is no direct necessity to support other language's, but from a political perspective.

If UEAPME wants to incorporate new technology it has to be very careful, looking at the results, people are only positive towards new technology that has already more or less proven itself, such as the knowledge centre, weblog or the website. Other technologies that are in their growth phase are subject to more scepticism or are unknown, such as the internet forum. Very advanced technologies are unknown, such as RSS. Technologies that are associated with leisure got a very low evaluation, such as online television or instant messaging. So if UEAPME wants to incorporate new technology it has to look at the image of such a technology. Nevertheless, the respondents said to be very curious about new technologies which could mean an opportunity for UEAPME.

The overall communication should look individual to the member organisation because they like their acquired **customer intimacy**. The member organisations, however, understand the relevance of centralised communication, looking at the results of table 5.12. Therefore internal communication and information can be centralised, whilst the communication with the members is customised.

Customer intimacy: A marketing definition that is used to describe a strategy that is completely adapted to the individual needs of the consumer

5.4 INTERVIEW RESULTS

There was a very strong distinction found between the interviewees concerning their location. The three groups are members working in Brussels, in the same building as UEAPME, members working in Brussels, but outside the UEAPME building and members that work outside of Brussels.

5.4.1 Current communication

Maybe respondents are being polite, but most of them responded to be really happy with communicating with UEAPME. Nevertheless, most common feedback was that there where too many emails sent, too many circulars used, and in general respondents did not know why certain people get certain emails. This suggests that communication in some respect is a bit unfocused. Most of the respondents have well-established relations with people within UEAPME and like to use these personal contacts to communicate in their individual way. Most of the respondents use the website or email as a starting point for their communication, however, if they cannot quickly find what they need they do not hesitate to pick up the phone. Nevertheless, respondents value the idea of email because they can use that to archive and find back information. Moreover, when asking about the newsflash, respondents said they like the fact that it was easy to archive and to send forward to their member organisations. Thus, although people like their individual communication, they value standardised forms of communicating. The top three of common forms of communication mentioned where:

1. Phone;
2. Email;
3. Circulars.

5.4.2 Attitude towards technology and change

Working in the same building, some respondents have very strong established relationships with staff members of UEAPME, and communicate in a very personalised and individual way. They opposed most change in communication, almost as if these interviewees tried to defend their acquired rights. Some members have lots of scepticism towards new technology.

> *It would be very time consuming on the side of UEAPME, they would have to put a lot of effort in such a database, and I don't know if the balance between the effort and what you get from it [..] at least from our side [..] I think it is a lot more easy to seek the direct approach and talk to someone [..].*

Nevertheless, there are members located in the building that recognize the use of new technologies and would use some of the options I provided them, most of which was about more carefully channelling the information. Ironically there was one member organisation in the same building that was very progressive towards using technology and this member wanted a very parallel and transparent system.

5.4.3 Central knowledge base vs. individual contact

Members located in Brussels, but in a different building also have very personal contacts with UEAPME members. However, these members see often more need in the use of centralised communication methods and standardised systems. The general attitude towards online knowledge centres and even forums was good.

> *I have the advantage that I know most of the directors of UEAPME, for someone else that is of course different, and then there is indeed a necessity for a forum on which in fact the question gets asked directly and that it gets answered directly by the person who can manage it at that moment.*

For general information an online database could be a solution, however, when it becomes more specific, the interaction with UEAPME becomes really important.

There are also member organisations that want certain things truly more centralised. They replied to get too many emails and circulars and do sometimes not understand why certain people get these emails.
Respondents also replied that they prefer the content directly into the emails rather than as an attachment. In this way, the respondents replied, it becomes directly clear what the email is about.
Information should not come available just on the internet the respondents replied; because one has to take the initiative to watch it, there should be a trigger to go to the website.
In general respondents claimed not like posting on news driven forums whilst the do like reading other peoples opinions.

An online knowledge base would become the first stop before going to contact someone at UEAPME some respondents replied, and information about other member organisations is also welcome in that respect.

The most progressive respondents would like to see more transparency in UEAPME, this by creating a weblog or video cast of Mr. Müller. Moreover, this respondent likes to see forms of communication that allows surpassing the messages directly down the hierarchy creating full parallel communication. However, after he was asked about the language difficulties he concluded that it is not quite possible.

5.4.4   Conclusion

Although most people like the current form of communication they have suggestions to improve it. These suggestions are mainly aimed at the quality of the communication and the focus of the communication. Respondents like their individual way of communicating and are not very willing to give that up, but they do, however, acknowledge the advantage of centrally stored information in a standardised way in order to quickly find back specific topics.
Respondents are often hesitant to new technology if it is to take a dominant place in their communication. As mentioned before, respondents like their acquired privileges in communication and are not willing to give that up, therefore, new technology can only be implemented if it follows natural evolutionary steps. Thus, if UEAPME is to implement new technology it has to go parallel to the traditional forms of communication, and if it is facilitating enough it could replace some of the traditional forms. Most respondents prefer persona contacts, but are not opposed to quick search possibilities.

5.5   OVERALL CONCLUSION

The member organisations of UEAPME are the national representations of SMEs and Crafts in the European member states. Most of the people working there dealing with UEAPME are people that speak several languages, and supposedly they have experience working internationally. It does not take big research to conclude that member organisations want to communicate in the way they are used to. However, these findings show that the member organisations of UEAPME want to communicate in a very individualistic way with traditional, well-established forms of communication, such as phone and email, also the website is valued as a comfortable form of communicating. Looking at the quantitative and qualitative research results, media types are most valued when they are an enhancement of previous forms of communication. Looking at media types you can see for example, MSN is not valued as a good form of communication but Skype is. In general the member organisations are very pleased with the communication between UEAPME and the member organisations, and improvements should be done according to them in the quality of the information and the focus. Most respondents said to be very informed of new technology, and most of them like to see new developments. Nevertheless, because of the general attitude most changes of making communication more symmetrical should be done "under water", i.e. UEAPME should implement technologies that not directly change the forms of communication, but the way it is targeted and archived. Furthermore, it should be an enhancement of existing forms of communication creating a transition towards forms of communication (if adopted) that creates more symmetry.

6 SOLUTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Because the member organisations want to have information and communication in a very individual way, the solution is aimed at improving internal communication to facilitate external communication. Member organisations wanting information and communication individualised does not mean that information and communication should be done ad hoc. Getting internal information organised in a way that everyone can find the right information at any given moment will help communicating with the member organisations. Creating a common mission and vision can also help creating a transparent organisation from the perspective of the member organisation, making it accessible for the member organisations that do not have established relationships.

6.1 SOLUTION

Internet's interactive spaces are enhancing and extending the public sphere of rational-critical discourse as conceived by advocates of deliberative democracy.

The Internet is facilitating discourse that replicates the basic structure of rational-critical debate and that in various ways approximates the requirements of the public sphere. As such, we can say that the Internet facilitates an expansion of the public sphere that is constituted whenever people enter into deliberation on political questions. However, as can be expected given the critical nature of the analysis, observations of cyber-discourse also show that the quality of such discourse falls short of the requirements of public sphere model. First, the increasing commoditization of cyberspace threatens the autonomy of public interaction online. Second, reflexivity is often a very minimal part of cyber-deliberations. Third, many online fora experience a lack of respectful listening to others and minimal commitment to working with difference. Fourth, there is difficulty verifying identity claims and information put forward. Fifth, extensive exclusions from online forums result from social inequalities. Finally, discourse tends to be quantitatively and qualitatively dominated by certain individuals and groups.

Two-way symmetrical

Thus, **two-way symmetrical** communication is from the literature point of view the most ethical and successful form of communicating with the member organizations. The preliminary research results show also that there are nowadays plenty of technologies available to reach this. Some technologies focus on improving the quality of the one way structure, like RSS and online video, whilst other technologies really focus on getting true symmetrical communication, such as internet forums and instant messaging. So that gives us some options to choose from in the respect of forms of communication.

UEAPME aims their communication at the member organisations. Their role is to pass down news about European developments in the field of legislation and or standards. Defending the interests of SMEs is also one of the major activities of UEAPME. In order to fulfil this role UEAPME needs lots of information from the member organisations, and that is exactly where the bottleneck is. For the staff at UEAPME it is often very difficult to get sufficient information in order to set a well balanced position. Emails sent out to member organisations take a while before they get reply and often deadlines for positions are passed this way.

Internal communication

Internal communication is one of the main facilitators of good external communication. A well communicated shared mission and vision will help external communication. Good information management keeps both everyone equally informed and business intelligence within the organisations even if someone leaves the organisation. Finally, a good customer relationship program prevents redundant messages to be sent out.

Information management

Good **information management** can be done with the help of knowledge centre software. All new information about a certain subject should be added to such a knowledge centre and maintained. The management of contacts with the member organisations can be done with a Customer Relationship Management system. Concerning the background and the context of UEAPME, this CRM system should not be too complicated and extensive, because then it will not be used.

In principle UEAPMEs communications are in English and French. In practice however, most communications are English only. The website is at this point still bi-lingual, but the English version has more content than the French. Looking at the languages spoken among the member organisations you see that English, German and French make out respectively the top three of spoken languages.

English is moreover, spoke by 100% of the population, and therefore, having communications in English is sufficient.

Member organisations like to communicate in a very individual way, individual contacts and direct communication is valued very much. If the member organisations are given the choice most of them would take the phone in order to get information from UEAPME. Additionally a lot of member organisations acquired positions and status that allow them to maintain these individual contacts, and there is nothing wrong with that. It makes it only very difficult to track and maintain information. Therefore, a system needs to be developed that gives the member organisation the freedom to communicate in their preferred way, but that internally there is a same policy for communication, thus central information management, good tracking of communication so no redundant information is sent out and a common mission and vision. These tools developed to facilitate internal communication and information can latter be transformed to facilitate external communication.

The member organisations interviewed recognise the fact that not everybody has this strong position in communicating with UEAPME. They, therefore, acknowledge the need of centralised communication and information management systems in the form of Wiki's and forums.

Also the fact that members say to get too many emails need to be solved, this can be done by making a clear distinction in the different policy areas, on which members can subscribe themselves. Parallel to these subscriptions an RSS system can be set up for every policy area, and we can train our members to use that instead, in this way email are only used for the real essential topics and have therefore a better impact.

6.2   SIX STEP IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The steps in this plan are concrete and easy steps to implement in a company. The best way to implement it is to do so in ascending order. Nevertheless, some tasks can be executed parallel, going further down the process.

6.2.1   *Step one: Communication Department*

Communication is UEAPME's bread and butter, and needs therefore to be played on a management level. The establishment of a communication department is the first pillar in laying the foundation for good internal and external communication. This communication department should form an umbrella over all the directorates, and should operate as a supportive organ to the secretary general.

The first task of this communication department is creating a communication plan. This plan should establish a common mission and vision for external communication, and this vision should be communicated among all the staff members.

The key is to have internal communication to facilitate external communication. Standardising processes among the staff members helps preventing confusion. Thus, the main task for the communication department is to create the policy for communication, and the development of it.

The most important continuing task for the communication department is deal with the press planning and setting the agenda for external communication.

In the past two decades there has been a lot bigger focus on specialising on communication as a strategic business unit. Therefore, it is not so strange that in the advice there is chosen to create a communication department at management level. Nowadays, thanks to the development of communication studies various distinct areas of communication have been defined and it is necessary to have people in the communication department that cover all those areas. Furthermore, the communication department should function as a team. The communication department should look like one organ. When selecting the members for the communication department, the CVs combined should cover the following aspects:

- Internal Communication;
- Information management;
- External communication and PR;
- Computer Skills;
- Marketing;
- Event management;
- Language skills
- Crisis communication;

- Graphical design;
- Change management.

Moreover, the communication department should consist of no more and no less than three people, in this way a majority decision can always be made, and a small department keeps the advise- and decision making process quick.

6.2.2   Step two: Managing communication flows

Finding the right email address, knowing who received which email, is very difficult to track in a large and growing organisation. The result often is that some member organisations get redundant information, whilst others get no information at all. Therefore, a good tracking and management system needs to be implemented for the communication between UEAPME and the member organisation, a Customer Relationship Management system (CRM).

CRM:
Customer
Relationship
Management

A CRM is a database of all the contact details for every member organisations. In this database the history of communications can be tracked therefore, you know who in the organisation is responsible for specific topics. Also other peculiarities can be defined, for example language or cultural aspects. Most importantly a good CRM system keeps business intelligence within the organisation, and does not get lost if someone unexpectedly leaves the organisation.

For the CRM systems there is a lot of choice. However, most CRM systems are either too complex or too simple. Also the price range is rather big, from free software to very expensive business solutions, and oddly enough price has no relation towards quality or functionality. For this advice I limited the possibilities for implementing CRM solutions to three products.

An example of a CRM system that is very complex is Microsoft Dynamics CRM. This product is aimed at businesses that work mostly profit based, using keywords as sales, service and marketing. However, if you look through the marketing buzz of the product it shows that it is just a management system that has all the desired functionality. Microsoft chose to define their three aspects of the product into sales, service and marketing. The "sales" option is the contact database that allows staff members to maintain contacts and categorise them, being able to send messages to the specific member organisations that need specific attention. So called campaigns can be built with the help of Dynamics CRM, in order to send messages or maintain interaction with a specific group of people. The option that keeps track of requests of the member organisation is in this case called the "service" option. The service option allows a staff member to create portfolios; also tasks can be divided among the staff members so that every staff member handles the right portfolio. The "marketing" option is an extension to the "sales" option, making it possible to segment the contacts in the database. Additionally, the marketing option provides statistics on communications and provided services. Next to the web-interface of Microsoft Dynamics, it also provides full integration into the existing Microsoft Exchange environment and Outlook. With a price of €24,175.83 (2007 est.) it is the most expensive product compared.

SAP CRM, utilizes the same approach as Microsoft by dividing their CRM system into several essential functions. SAP CRM hast next to the sales, marketing and service function also partner channel management, interaction centre and web channel. The "web channel" allows integration of the eBusiness solutions into the CRM system. It is for example possible to keep track of business to consumer selling records, of internet sales. Moreover, it makes it possible to track online behaviour and set trends accordingly and analyse service tasks. The partner channel is aimed at business partners, and the interaction centre provides interaction with the human resources department and other interactions between departments. Options that are a bit too advance for the application within UEAPME. Getting SAP CRM can only go through a business partner that host the solution for you, and is priced around €880.00 (est.) per year.

OpenGroupware.org is a complete business solution that extends far outside the scope of this thesis. However, concerning its completeness and low price range, it is a very interesting product to consider. OpenGroupware.org consists of a full featured CMS system similar to Dynamics and SAP. It also has features that can replace a Microsoft Exchange server, i.e. calendar and email server. The integration with client software makes that the interaction with the OpenGroupware.org server is completely platform independent. Supported clients are for example, Outlook, iCal, Thunderbird or through a web interface. The most interesting part about the price is, it is essentially for free. If installed on a Linux server, by an experienced system operator the CRM software is essentially free of charge. For the lesser experienced

system administrator there is an auto installation server, that turns any computer into an OpenGroupware.org server and this package costs € 850.00 (2007 est.)

Concerning the price and the open structure, the OpenGroupware.org is the best choice here.

6.2.3   Step three: Categorise policy areas

All the policy areas should be segmented strongly, in order to create better transparency of UEAPME. Every message that is to be sent should be categorised according to the right policy area. All messages received should be also categorised to the right policy area.

Someone in the communication department collects all the messages and publications and sends them to the right member organisations, in order to keep the correct tracking (strong gate-keeping). This, however, should not undermine the necessary individual communication directors have with the member organisations.

6.2.4   Step four: Centralising information

Knowledge centre

In order to keep everyone in UEAPME informed about all the topics, information should be stored and managed correctly and centrally. An intra- or Internet **knowledge centre** (e.g. Wikipedia) can facilitate the central storage and search for information, can be directly accessible for the members or upon request depending on the desired policy.

Getting information a knowledge centre can be a very time consuming job if it has to be done straight. Therefore, the system should be open and accessible so every employee can add information to the database the moment it handles it. If someone sends an email to a member organisation with some specific information, it should be also placed in the knowledge centre. In this way getting information in the knowledge centre is not a labour intensive task.

The information should be categorised thoroughly, e.g. according to the in step three defined policy areas, and someone at directorate communication should be responsible for the maintenance and quality control of the knowledge centre. Information should be stored in plain text only, no binary document formats such as .pdf or .doc, because of the search facilities. Of course pictures and little movies could be added in order to support the written text.

With a good information management system, business intelligence stays within the company, even if someone leaves the organisation unexpectedly.
The online knowledge centre should initially facilitate internal communication, as the research results show, but could over time be promoted as an external communication tool. In essence setting up the knowledge centre has a lot in common with setting up the new website. Setting up the knowledge centre required the same three steps to go through, communication plan, graphical design and technical structure.

6.2.4.1   Communication plan

In the planning phase for the knowledge centre a few strategic decisions have to be made. The communication department should ask themselves to which extend the members should get access to the knowledge centre, and to which extend they can contribute knowledge. The research results show that member organisation rather contact someone at UEAPME and request them personalised information, therefore, the knowledge centre is mainly to facilitate internal communication. Nevertheless, the knowledge centre could be promoted amongst member organisations with less well established relations. Concerning the sensitivity of some information it has to be clear at the beginning if members get access to the knowledge centre and to which extend.
The communication department should next think of a way to best structure the information for the knowledge centre. Of course the different policy areas are also here the main pillars to rest on, but better the structure at planning level, the better the end result. Further categorisation can be done for example by defining the member organisations involved in specific policy etc. Moreover, there should be thought of default templates to present different information in. Finally, the communication department should make someone responsible for gate-keeping the information in the knowledge centre. Because, the idea behind a knowledge centre is that every staff member provides their information in the knowledge centre.

6.2.4.2   Graphical design

Because most knowledge centres have a similar lay-out it is essential that UEAPME's knowledge centre is designed with a clear distinction from the others. It should be the same standard house style with the correct fonts etc., especially when it is integrated in the web-site.

6.2.4.3   Technical structure

The knowledge centre is an easy choice to make. Mediawiki is the main engine behind Wikipedia and is easy to install and maintain. Mediawiki supports all the function required to categorise and track changes. Moreover, it gives also the possibility to keep the knowledge centre for registered users only. Mediawiki is very easy to install, the only requirements are a MySQL database, and a server that supports PHP. Once installed there is absolutely no technical knowledge required to operate and maintain the knowledge centre, the gate-keeper of the knowledge centre is advised however, to get himself acquainted with the Wiki mark-up codes. Furthermore, the gate-keeper should create quickly templates that can simplify the use of Mediawiki for the common user.

6.2.5   Step five: Categorise the target

In step three the policy areas are categorised, in this step individuals in the members can subscribe to different policy areas, and they will get information about these policy areas. If member organisations do not register themselves, the CRM system can be used to see which fields the members are interested in, and with it adapt the information to the member organisation. The subscribers get a maximum of one email a day per policy area with all the information of that policy area.

6.2.6   Step six: The power of the web

CMS:
Content
Management
System

Internet technology has allowed a lot more automation in websites. These new technologies should be used to facilitate the information supply on the website. A website should never be the same each time you visit it. This does not mean layout, it means each time you go the website, the website as substantially more information. Making the analogy with a newspaper, newspapers are not sold if they have the same news every day. A **Content Management System** can facilitate this process. Every staff member can get the opportunity to post news items on the website that are placed after the approval of someone at the communication department. Instead of writing articles, the responsible at the communication department would do what his job is gate-keep and editing.

Each segment for communication, each policy area, should get it's own very distinctive place in the website, and it should be clear in which policy area a member of the public is at any given moment. This can be done, for example, by giving every policy area a colour. On the main page it should be very quickly clear how to get to the individual policy areas. Each policy area has information and news articles specifically for that policy area. News articles should be updated regularly (read daily).
The news articles should be supported by a moderated forum, facilitating discussion and reactions on news items. UEAPME can condense the opinion of the member organisation on this particular topic.
One benefit of having a well managed CMS system is that the information is saved standardised in a relational database. Therefore, it becomes very easy to create out of the same source RSS feeds and the news flash. A CMS can be programmed in such a way that member organisations that subscribed to the policy area news get every Friday the newsflash with the articles of the past week.
The knowledge centre used for internal communication can without much difficulty be integrated into the website.

Concerning the sensitivity of some of the content, the website can be, using the right CMS, easily set up to secure pages for members only.

Deploying a good website consists of three very distinct angles that should not be confused and be executed in the right order. One, create a communication plan for the website, i.e. what is the purpose of the website, who is the target group what role in communication does the website play. Two, create a graphical design for the website, i.e. what is the corporate house style. Three, create the technical website, i.e. which techniques suit best the communication plan and the graphical design. Although the website should be organised in this order, no one step is inferior to the other, i.e. a particular graphical design should not impose an inconsistent technical structure.

6.2.6.1 Communication plan

The communication department should develop a solid communication plan for the website. First the communication department has to get a situation analysis, by asking themselves the question what the main role for the website is. Possible answers could be, providing information, creating interaction. The research has shown that the member organisations want an independent way of communicating, and information adapted to their needs. Therefore, the communication department should apply step three of the communication here, and create a good way in which the website can be divided according to these policy areas. The second step should be naming all the parties involved and how they relate to the material. The research showed how the member organisations relate to the website, but it should be also formulated which other parties are there and how they relate to the material. Internally the communication department has to define roles and responsibilities for the website. Fore example, having defined the different categories allows the director of each policy area to provide the articles online. Finally in the communication department, the gate-keeper (editor), should edit the text and publish it. The main idea is to distribute the responsibility among the directors, improving the quality of the news on the website whilst remaining central gate keeping. This gate-keeper also has to be responsible for the forum postings.

6.2.6.2 Graphical design

A website is the business card of an organisation. In the case of Brussels based NGOs the website is mostly the first, and often the only thing they see of an organisation. Therefore, a good graphical design has to be made incorporating the house style, and creating rules and regulations on fonts and headings. Furthermore, every policy area should have its own distinction in from this basic design, but still recognisable that it belongs to UEAPME, creating a form of line extension.

6.2.6.3 Technical structure

Nowadays, there are many CMS systems available and it would be very redundant for UEAPME to develop an own CMS. With so many CMS to choose from it is however, a bit difficult to decide which one serves the requirements as stated in the six step communication plan best. Looking at experience within the organisation, and the possibility to freely implement the CMS, the best advice would be "spip". Spip allows a combination of several requirements from the six step communication plan. It allows fully automated websites to be created in an individual way. Moreover, automatic assembly of the newsflash, article based moderated forum and it automatically creates RSS feeds. Spip allows for each policy area a new recognisable layout to be developed. Furthermore, Spip allows easy multi-lingual design. As soon as the CMS is fully deployed it does not need much technical maintenance, the only thing it needs is active reporting, new information. Therefore, creating the CMS is a job that can be very well out-sourced, if the knowledge is not in house. Making a transition to a new website is always a tricky business. The visitors of a website have created brand awareness with it. Moreover, search engines often have the website already indexed, and removing a website from an address means that all the links become faulty. Therefore, the first step in replacing the website is making a list of error 301 pages. Error 301 is an HTML error code that indicates a permanent redirect. UEAPME has the benefit that it recently registered the .eu domain, and that gives them the opportunity to completely develop the new website on this address and as soon as it is finished and tested, UEAPME can start promoting the new website, whilst they create redirects for the old one.

6.3   IMPLICATIONS OF SOLUTIONS FOR THE ORGANISATION

Several implications need to be made, in order to successfully implement the six steps of the plan. These apply on the organisation, finance and human resources. The implications are a factor of success together with the requirements described in the past paragraph.

6.3.1   *Communication department*

A communication department made up out of three people would imply the recruiting of new staff members. This, however, does not at all have to be the case. The communication department can be set up by taking three elite members of the current staff.

The setting up of the communication department also implies the development of an organ that is above the directorates, and plays an advisory role towards the secretary general.

Finally the communication department needs to get a budget to work with. This does not imply that the overall spending on communication increase, if you reallocate budget for communication from the directorates to the communication department, and you also reallocate the responsibility the gross expenditures should stay the same. Having set up a communication department could even mean a reduction in expenditures, because it decreases redundancy, and more carefully thinks about producing communications.

6.3.2   *Managed communication flows*

Managing communication flows, i.e. setting up a CRM system, takes some time to develop. There has to be budget for the CRM systems, a specialist has to implement the CRM system, and the staff members have to be trained in using the system. The key success elements in this step are the user and the structure. The communication department has to develop a thorough structure that is logical and easy to use, and they have to then train the staff members so they are able to get the full potential out of the CRM system. The cost of the CRM system depends a lot on which CRM system is chosen, having enough ICT knowledge in house means that the CRM system could be implemented at no cost at all.

6.3.3   *Knowledge centre*

The knowledge centre implies that every staff member puts his or her knowledge in the knowledge centre. This means, if a staff member has information on, for example, the packaging of food products, this staff member has to go to the knowledge centre and place it there. Financially setting up a knowledge centre is very attractive; the software available to do so is for free, the only costs UEAPME will have is in the hosting.

6.3.4   *Website*

The website has more or less the same implications as the knowledge centre, with the main difference the gate-keeping role of the communication department. This gate keeping role is a lot stronger than for example in the knowledge centre. Also the implementation costs are very low, if there is in house knowledge the implementation is essentially gratis, because software used is for free. Nevertheless, also here counts that there is a cost increased in the web hosting, because more advanced server technology is needed compared with the traditional website.

6.3.5   *Conclusion*

In essence the six step implementation plan is feasible with the current staff. The key success elements can be found in the communication department. If he communication department is set up with staff members having all the required skills, most steps can be done at low cost.

7 GENERAL CONCLUSION

7.1 LOOKING BACK

Trying to find means to improve communication with the help of communication is in itself a contradictory occupation. Nevertheless, findings show to be valid, and supported by good research. The research in itself did not go as smooth as it should be, but entrepreneurial spirit, opportunism and pioneering skills kept the process going. It required revising the schedule a bit, postponing the deadline for the questionnaire results, and starting with the interviews before the scheduled period. The biggest opportunity during the research was the SME convention in Stuttgart, organised by the presidency of the EU. Without this conference, there probably would not have been a thesis on improving communication between UEAPME and the member organisations.

The stages of the research where very well defined and they complemented each other. Especially the research focus phase gave the insight in how to organise the rest of the research. It gave insight in the position of UEAPME within the European landscape. It also showed where the bottlenecks of communication are, and what the desired form of communication is. Staff members of UEAPME wanted more information from their member organisations and believed that increasing the quality of communication was the best way of doing so.

The preliminary research phase was done parallel to the development of the rest of the research. This was a very good decision because the preliminary research was very low in load, and could be done independently from external factors.

The quantitative research phase was in essence the most labour intensive, in both data collection and analysis. This combined with the fact that member organisations where kind of reluctant to respond made this the part of the research that bites the head of the researcher. Thanks to the quick responses to opportunities and the good support of UEAPME, this research phase came to a success. There was a point in this phase however where certain questions where removed form the questionnaire keeping the focus on the most important ones. Respondents said to be open to new technology, but want to keep their individual way of communicating. Nevertheless, the populous acknowledges the fact that some processes need to be centralised and a not reluctant to them. Overall UEAPME was evaluated as doing a good job in communication and any development in this field is welcomed.

The qualitative research phase required a bit more skill from the researcher. Although the questionnaire showed that 100% from the population speaks English does not abolish the fact that some of the interviews needed to be done in Spanish and German. My personal skills in both languages are not very high, but the data collection method (recording) facilitated the repeatedly listening if the interviews. This experience made me develop the following statement:

"In order to communicate Europe, you have to speak several European languages"

The beauty of this is that it does not matter which language is learnt. Of course, English is a must, since it became the most standardised language. It is amazing how much one can utilise one language by making it a reference point for another.

Solutions found for the communication problems are not very unique. There are many organisations that have CMSes implemented, CRM products also became common good, the originality and creativity lies in the way how different techniques are used to facilitate one goal, improving communication. Therefore, the implementation should facilitate this goal, and not make the development of a CMS a goal in itself. If all the steps in the implementation plan are implemented with care, keeping the goal in mind, this implementation plan will be a good solution for a range of the communication problems.

7.2 LOOKING FORWARD

In many organisations ICT (Information and Communication Technology) solutions are a goal in itself. This often results in implementations that are not adapted to corporate communication, or aimed at solving communication problems. At the same time many communication researchers fight with finding the means to solve communication problems they found. This thesis combines two expertises and provides a thorough implementation plan. Because of this combination, this research is a relevant basis for more integration between the two disciplines. Future research, however, has to be aimed at developing this field further, aspects that are not a part of this research is for example how new technologies are developed, and are they in design aimed at solving communication problems. Nevertheless the most relevant research for UEAPME would be evaluating the effects of the implementation plan.

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APPENDIX I: PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD MEMBERS

A

A

Mission Statements

- Supporting its members academically, technically and legally on all areaas of EU policy;

- Supporting the idea of European integration and contributing to European co-operation.

Objective

- To find a fitting solution for the Communication between UEAPME and its members, with the help of new technology, in order to facilitate the mission statements

B

Research Objectives

1. Define our target group.

2. Research the current evaluation of the Communication Strategy of UEAPME;

3. Research which information is required by the members of UEAPME;

4. Research which means of communication is most appropriate;

Result

- Communication Strategy – "How can New Technology Facilitate Communication Between UEAPME and its Members?"

C

Methodology: Research Questions

- Who is our targetgroup (target-group analysis – Cultural dimensions)?

- How does our target group evaluate the current communication strategy?

- What information would they like to recieve – and we from them – ?

- How do they want to communicate?

Methodology: Approach

- Telephone Interviews (20)

- Questionnaires (all)

- Personal Interviews (10)

- Focus Group (5)

D

Planning

- 12 - 16 Feb. Initiation Phase - Literature review, tune planning define scope, facilitate research
- 19 - 23 Feb. Development of the Methodology
- 26 Feb. - 8 March Phone Interview
- 12 - 16 March Drafting Questionnaire

Planning

- 19 March Send Questionnaires;
- 27 March Reminder;
- 2 Apr. Closure Questionnaire;
- 10 - 20 Apr. Dept Interviews;
- 23 Apr. - 4 May Focus Group
- 4 May - 4 June Interpretation and Report

E

Necessary Support

- Resources: Desk, Phone etc.

- Support in Foreign Languages (e.g. Questionnaires in French/Italian/ Spanish)

- Support in Literature

Questions?

F

Next Step!

"How can new technology facilitate communication between UEAPME and individual SMEs in Europe?"

APPENDIX II: FOCUS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – INTERNAL

OBJECTIVE
1. Can you name 6 forms of communication?
2. Who are the member organisations of UEAPME?
3. How does UEAPME currently communicate with its member organisations?
4. What information does UEAPME get from its member organisations?
5. What information does UEAPME provide its member organisations?

REFLECTIVE
1. Which of the 6 types of communication do you like best?
2. What do you think of the communication with the members?
3. Do you think UEAPME gets sufficient, and the right information from the member organisations?
4. Do you think member organisations get enough information from UEAPME?

INTERPRETATIVE
1. Is it important to improve communication between UEAPME and its members?
2. If there would be a strategic plan to improve the communication between UEAPME and its members, do you think it will improve the way UEAPME can represent SMEs in Europe?
3. Do you think new technology can facilitate communication between UEAPME and its members?

DECISIONAL
1. Which options would you consider to improve communication between UEAPME and its members?
2. How would you see the communication between UEAPME and its members in 3 years from now?

APPENDIX III: FOCUS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS – EXTERNAL

OBJECTIVE
1. Can you name 6 forms of communication?
2. How does your organisation currently communicate with UEAPME?
3. What information does UEAPME provide you?
4. What information do you provide UEAPME?

REFLECTIVE
1. Which of the 6 types of communication do you like best?
2. What do you think of the communication with UEAPME?
3. Do you think UEAPME gets sufficient, and the right information from your organisation?
4. Do you think your organisation gets enough information from UEAPME?

INTERPRETATIVE
1. Is it important to improve communication between UEAPME and your organisation?
2. If there would be a strategic plan to improve the communication between UEAPME and your organisation, do you think it will improve the way UEAPME can represent SMEs in Europe?
3. Do you think new technology can facilitate communication between UEAPME and your organisation?

DECISIONAL
1. Which options would you consider to improve communication between UEAPME and your organisation?
2. How would you see the communication between UEAPME and your organisation in 3 years from now?

APPENDIX IV: INTERVIEW QUESITONS

1. Which role in communication should UEAPME play at a European level and what expectations do you have with that communication?
2. How would you evaluate the use of existing forms of communication by UEAPME?
   a. How do you think UEAPME uses their forms of communication?
   b. Does UEAPME fulfil your expectations in their communication role?
3. In which way would you like to communicate with UEAPME:
   a. Direct vs. Indirect: If you have a question about a certain topic, how do you find it?
   b. Centralized vs. Decentralised: Would you like to have information centrally stored, or is it sufficient for you to contact the responsible and ask him for the information you need, or provide information you think is relevant?
   c. Access to information: Is it important for you to be able to receive information on demand?
   d. Self controlled vs. Moderate: Do you communicate with other member organisations of UEAPME? Does that go well? Do you have sufficient access to information of other members?
4. Which of the technologies would you like to use, and in which way?
   a. Weblogs, Wiki's, RSS: Do you think an online knowledge centre with all the information provided by UEAPME would be a valuable addition to their communication strategy? How would you use it?
   b. Online Forums: Do you often react on forum postings? Do you read forum postings? Do you think online forums can improve the interaction amongst member organisations?
   c. Instant messengers: Do you think instant messaging can play a role in communication between UEAPME and the member organisations?
   d. Email
   e. Website: How do you currently get information from UEAPMEs website? Would you like to see something change?
   f. Online television
   g. Video conferencing: Do you use video conferencing? Do you think it is an added value to the way they communicate?
5. How would you like to see communication between UEAPME and your organisation in 10 years from now?

APPENDIX V: QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1: You are answering this questionnaire on behalf of which member organisation of UEAPME?

Q2: Which languages do you speak?

first	
second	
third	

Q3: How would you evaluate your language skills concerning the following languages?

	Poor/No skill	Beginner	Advanced	Proficient
English	☐	☐	☐	☐
French	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q4: For which / or in which country do you work?

Choose your country ▾

K

Q5: How would you evaluate using the following media in business communication?

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Phone	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fax	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Video-conferencing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Email	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Post (traditional mail)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internet Forum	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Instant messenger (e.g. MSN, Yahoo)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Radio	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Television	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Magazines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Annual Reports	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brochures	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Circulars	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Web-page	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
On-line television (e.g. GoogleVideo, YouTube)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Online Knowledge centres (e.g. Wikipedia)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
RSS	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Weblog	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

L

Q6: How would you evaluate the communication between UEAPME and your organisation?

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Quantity of information received	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quality of information received	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Timing of the information received	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quantity of information sent to UEAPME	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Quality of information sent to UEAPME	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Timing of the information sent to UEAPME	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Q7: How would you evaluate the way UEAPME uses several forms of communication?

There are three angles measured here:
Frequency (does UEAPME use this medium too often or to little)
Content (The evaluation of the content UEAPME sends with the help of the evaluated medium)
Context (the form of media used suits the message that is to be send)

Question 7a: Frequency	Too frequent	Just right	not frequent enough	Don't know
Phone	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fax	☐	☐	☐	☐
Video-conferencing	☐	☐	☐	☐
Email	☐	☐	☐	☐
Post (traditional mail)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internet Forum	☐	☐	☐	☐
Instant messenger (e.g. MSN, Yahoo)	☐	☐	☐	☐
UAPME's Newsflash	☐	☐	☐	☐
Magazines	☐	☐	☐	☐

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	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Brochures	☐	☐		☐	☐
Circulars	☐	☐		☐	☐
Web-page	☐	☐		☐	☐
On-line television (e.g. GoogleVideo, YouTube)	☐	☐		☐	☐
Online Knowledge centres (e.g. Wikipedia)	☐	☐		☐	☐
RSS	☐	☐		☐	☐
Weblog	☐	☐		☐	☐

Question 7b: Content and Context		Excellent	Good	Poor	Very poor	Don't know
Phone						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Fax						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Video-conferencing						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Email						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Post (traditional mail)						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Internet Forum						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
UAPME's Newsflash						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Magazines						
	Content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Context	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Brochures						

N

		Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Content	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
	Context	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
Circulars											
	Content	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
	Context	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
Web-page											
	Content	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
	Context	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
On-line television (e.g. GoogleVideo, YouTube)											
	Content	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	
	Context	☐		☐		☐		☐		☐	

Q8: How open are you to new technology?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I keep a close watch on trends and like to keep myself up to date	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am familiar with using Instant Messengers and Internet Forums	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Email revolutionised business communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like to see technological developments in communication	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
New technology is the main facilitator in solving communication problems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
If a new technology is introduced I will try it	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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Q9: How do you like to receive, acquire and process information?

This question is asked in the form of statements, please choose which statement best fits your opinion by clicking at the round closest to your preferred statement

Left statement						Right statement
I would like to discuss my problem directly	○	○	○	○	○	I would like to be able to consult a central partner that mediates amongst stakeholders
In order to acquire information I like to discuss openly with large groups of people	○	○	○	○	○	In order to acquire information I like to read articles or watch documentaries
If I have something to say I like to contact all the stakeholders	○	○	○	○	○	If I have something to say I like to contact someone at UEAPME, which then mediates the messages along the stakeholders
I like to receive information upon request	○	○	○	○	○	I like to get messages about several different topics on a regular basis (e.g. news flash)
I like to provide information when it is desired from me to provide it	○	○	○	○	○	As soon as I have information that seems relevant I like to register it

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Q10: In order to facilitate this research further, I am looking for volunteers to interview.

☐ Yes, I would like to particpate in a depth interview about this topic

☐ No, I am not interested in participating in depth interview about this topic

Contact details:

Name
Email
Phone nu

Q11: Any other comments?

APPENDIX VI: STRUCTURE OF UEAPME'S SECRETARIAT

Structure of UEAPME's Secretariat

(May 2007)

UEAPME

Secretary General
Hans-Werner Müller, Tel. 02 285.07.22

Accountancy:	Assistant to Secretary General:
Laurence Moreau, Tel. 02 285.07.15	Doris Rabetge, Tel. 02 285.07.14

Directorate « Internal Affairs and Communication"

Director :
Guido Lena, Tel. 02 285.07.13
⇨ *Environment*
⇨ *Internal co-ordination and organisation*
⇨ *Functioning of UEAPME's organs*
⇨ *Relations with members, new members and other organisations*

Cristina Marongiu,
Tel. 02 285.07.08
⇨ *Assistant Environment*

Lucia Zucchi, Tel. 02 285.07.10
⇨ *Secretariat*

Brigitte Dubois, Tel. 02 285.07.11
⇨ *Secretariat*

Directorate « Social Policy and Vocational Training »

Director :
Liliane Volozinskis,
Tel. 02 285.07.20
⇨ *Social Affairs*
⇨ *Social Dialogue*
⇨ *Employment Policy*
⇨ *Culture*

Ralf Drachenberg,
Tel. 02 285.07.21
⇨ *Industrial Relations*
⇨ *Vocational Training*
⇨ *Health and Safety*
⇨ *Equal Opportunities between women and men*

Directorate «Economic and Financial Policy »

Director :
Gerhard Huemer,
Tel. 02 285.07.19
⇨ *Economic Policy*
⇨ *Fiscal Policy*
⇨ *Public Procurement*
⇨ *Financing and Banks*

Francesco Longu;
Tel. 02 285.07.18
⇨ *Press Officer*

Directorate « Competitiveness of Enterprises and External Relations »

Director :
Luc Hendrickx, Tel. 02 285.07.17
⇨ *Enterprise Policy*
⇨ *Internal Market, EMU*
⇨ *Retail, Textil*
⇨ *Trade Policy, TABD*
⇨ *Tourism*
⇨ *External relations (Co-ordination)*
⇨ *CSR*
Stefanie Steyrer, Tel. 02 2850701
⇨ *Internal Market*
⇨ *Transport*
⇨ *BSP III Project*
Maria Cimaglia., Tel. 02 285.07.23
⇨ *Legal Affairs*
⇨ *External Relations*
⇨ *JEUNE*
Rosa Solanes ; Tel. 02 285.07.16
International Relations
⇨ *JEUNE*
Ullrich Schröder, Tel. 02 230.72.90
⇨ *Research and Development*
Cristina Murciano., Tel. 02 285.07.25
⇨ *Structural Funds*

Directorate « Sectorial Organisations »

Director :
Oliver Loebel, Tel. 02 285.07.26
⇨ *Sectorial Organisations*
⇨ *Sector Forum 'Health Care'*

Ludger Fischer,
Tel. 02 285.07.24
⇨ *Food*
⇨ *UNIEP*

Anne Marie Noel
Tel. 02 285.07.27
⇨ *Sectorial Organisations' Secretariat*

Avignon Academy	*NORMAPME*
Blando Palmieri: Tel. 02 285.07.09 Project Manager **Dieter-Michael Grohmann**: Tel: 02 285.07.07 Creative Director + International Relations	**Loucas Gourtsoyannis** Tel. 02 282.05.31 **Anne Marie Noel**, Tel. 02 282.05.30 N.N., Tel. 02 282.05.32 **Freek Posthumus**, Tel. 02 282 05 33 **Karine Iffour**, Tel. 02 282 05 34 **Sebastiano Toffaletti**, Tel. 02 282.05.38 **Birte Day**, Tel. 02 282 05 39

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