Turning Colleagues into Strangers:

An external communication plan for Stranger Things Have Happened on how to connect with creative and innovative companies in the Netherlands

By Justina Palmileraite
Acknowledgments

I am honored and very grateful for the opportunity I was given to write my graduation thesis for the improvisation group Stranger Things Have Happened. In particular, I would like to thank Kees De Vries for his excellent collaboration, trust and encouragements.

Furthermore, I am grateful to my graduation supervisor Mart Wegman for the valuable feedback, meetings, patience and for his helpful guidance throughout the thesis period. Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to Iekje Smit for her support and time.

With all my love, I would like to thank my parents, who always supported me no matter what, kept me motivated and always have been there for me. I also would like to thank my close friends, especially Chelle, Irene and Elizabeth for their encouragements, inappropriate laughs, patience and positivity.

Many thanks to all of you; without your help, it would not have been possible!

Have a lovely day!

Justina
Executive Summary

This communication advice is intended for Stranger Things Have Happened (further referred to as STHH), one of the impressive English-speaking improvisation groups in the Netherlands. STHH's goal is to commercialize their activities and to generate the income needed to professionalize the organisation. STHH wants to start working with commercial companies and has asked for advice on how to communicate with them (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). Therefore, the main aim of this project is to design an external communication plan for STHH on how to connect with commercial companies. The advice is based on evidence resulting from research.

In order to make this research project manageable, the selected target group is small and medium size companies located in the Netherlands that are internationally oriented, creative and innovative. Since, there is a huge number of companies fitting the criteria, the sample is limited to 65 companies; 21 of which agreed to participate in the research. Additionally, a benchmark example of Progress Events is explored by using a desk research and an in-depth interview. The collected primary data is complementary. The aim is to provide

- relevant PR and professional relationship-building strategies, which are presented in the theoretical framework,
- insights into the interests guiding the target group in their choice regarding possible workshops and their communication preferences.

The research highlights the importance of relationship building. It shows that a personal approach and direct communication are preferred. Also, it is essential for STHH to be either recommended by a person from the own circle of the potential client, or actually be in their network. That increases the likelihood of being hired. As a result, the external communication plan includes action plans for STHH to approach selected commercial companies personally and directly with tailor-made proposals. Additionally, according to the research, networking is fundamental, so two different strategies are created. Firstly, it is important to identify all existing connections with commercial companies (past and present) including the connections that STHH members have individually and to reconnect with those companies by using a personal approach. Secondly, it is vital to create new connections with people who might be interested in what STHH has to offer. STHH can use tactics such as performing and networking at different events attended by potential clients. This will increase the visibility of STHH. All this is meant to initiate communication, because in order to build relationships, it is important first to meet people.

Another outcome is the research participants' struggle to give an opinion about the benefits of improvisation workshops. There is a discrepancy between the skills they perceive as the most important in their work and the soft skills that they identity with the improvisation workshops. Because of this discrepancy, it is logical to think that commercial companies who want to improve crucial soft skills
would not search for improvisation workshops. Based on this, two strategies are developed. The keywords connected STHH, have to be adjusted and simplified, because findability and ranking of the website are crucial. Secondly, the benefits of improvisation workshops have to be communicated clearly in the tailor-made proposals and on their owned media. It must be made clear how the workshops stimulate skills that are perceived as most important by the target group.

Lastly, the research indicates that people tend not to trust owned media, but on the other hand, experience and expertise have to be communicated very well, because that increases the perceived reliability of the organisation. As a result, an action plan is focussed on the owned media including the website and LinkedIn profile. It is important to communicate the values of STHH, the offered services, third-party endorsements, to present the portfolio in one space intended for commercial companies. The information should be communicated in a lively and interactive way by using storytelling techniques and different formats of messages.

The external communication plan is designed with multi-layered activities. The primary strategies are meant for establishing communication and building professional relationships. Other activities and tactics support this and increase the visibility of STHH. Finally, the external communication plan is time-consuming, especially because in order to succeed it requires constant scanning and monitoring the external environment, evaluating every action taken by STHH and adapting the strategies if needed. Therefore, it is strongly recommended to hire a communication professional that can manage the implementation of the external communication plan.
# Table of Contents

**Research Report** .................................................................................................................. 1  
1. Project Context ......................................................................................................................... 1  
2. Organizational Context ............................................................................................................. 2  
   2.1 Values, Vision & Strengths ................................................................................................. 3  
3. Research Objective .................................................................................................................. 4  
   3.1 Intervention Cycle ............................................................................................................... 4  
   3.2 Objective .......................................................................................................................... 5  
Research Design .......................................................................................................................... 6  
   4.1 Theoretical Framework ...................................................................................................... 6  
      4.1.1 PR Concepts & Strategies ......................................................................................... 6  
      4.1.2 Theories & Strategies Regarding Professional Relationship Building .......... 10  
   4.2 Conceptual Model ............................................................................................................. 13  
   4.3 Research Framework ......................................................................................................... 14  
   4.4 Research Questions .......................................................................................................... 15  
   4.5 Research Strategy & Methodology .................................................................................... 17  
      4.5.1 Research Steps ........................................................................................................... 19  
   4.6 Limitations ......................................................................................................................... 20  
      4.6.1 Activity modification ................................................................................................. 20  
Research Findings & Analysis ..................................................................................................... 21  
   5.1 Research Outcomes: Communication Preferences and Interests .............................. 21  
      5.1.1 Communication preferences of the research participants .................................... 23  
      5.1.2 Interests of the research participants ......................................................................... 30  
   5.2 Research Outcomes: Progress Events – benchmark ...................................................... 33  
   5.3 Data Analysis & Interpretation ......................................................................................... 34  
      5.3.1 Visibility ....................................................................................................................... 35  
      5.3.2 Framing & Messages .................................................................................................... 35  
      5.3.3 Up-Close Relationship Building: Networking .............................................................. 36  
   5.4 Conclusion & Recommendations ..................................................................................... 37  
External Communication Plan .................................................................................................... 40  
6.1 Building Professional Relationships .................................................................................. 41  
   6.1.1 Personal Approach Communication ........................................................................... 42
Research Report
The research presented in the following report is conducted with the aim to design an external communication plan for the project client, the improvisation group called Stranger Things Have Happened (further referred to as STHH). The research contributes towards improving STHH’s communication strategies and tactics with commercial companies in order to get hired. Start working for the commercial companies is a fundamental step for the organisation since it contributes towards achieving their long-term goals (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016); therefore, this research project is focused on advising STHH on how better to connect with the commercial companies.

This report includes a research design where research framework, objective, research questions and methodology are precisely explained. Additionally, this research report presents a theoretical framework, which explains the main concepts, and the relationship between those main concepts are illustrated in the conceptual model. It presents a theoretical model how to connect STHH with the target group, which was selected as small and medium size international, creative and innovative companies located in the Netherlands. These main concepts and their relevance were challenged by collecting primary data providing insights into the interests guiding the target group in their choice of possible workshops and their communication preferences and by exploring a benchmark example. Finally, the research findings are summarized, and based on the analysis and interpretations, the recommendations are created for the client.

1. Project Context
STHH is a Groningen-based improvisation group that performs nationally and internationally. They also produce theatrical plays, as well as workshops based on soft communication such as “team building, presentation, and thinking outside the box skills” (Stranger Things Have Happened: workshops, 2016). Since they perform and offer the workshops in English, STHH attracts mostly international students, who are currently their main target group. However, the organisation would like to start working with commercial companies. As the founder of the organisation, Dr. Kees De Vries, stated: “[...] the biggest sense of priority is our ability to reach commercial companies. It’s a standard practise for bigger improvisation groups all around the world to have part of their income from corporate workshops. [...] but we are just not succeeding in getting these people to connect with us, to who we are, and to consider hiring us for workshops, events and gigs [...] I think that is a bit where we also do not know how to do that [...]” (personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). The motivation for this aim lies within their long term-goals:

- STHH would like to have their own space, where they could run shows, workshops, and events independently from other parties.
- They would like to hire people to work for them, because at the moment, the organisation is built on a voluntary basis, which means that the
members work in their own free time beside their full-time jobs and personal lives. Furthermore, they run the organisation on self-gathered knowledge and skills, so the client identified the organisational work as a vulnerable spot of STHH (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016).

Achieving these interrelated goals would contribute towards professionalising the organisation, but in order to accomplish them, a stable financial income is needed. Consequently, working with commercial companies is vital. It has to be acknowledged that STHH tried to contact few large Groningen based companies by email, but the efforts were not successful. Since STHH is an international organisation and they offer the workshops in English, they seek to work with international companies based in the Netherlands (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016), therefore this project has an international aspect.

STHH has a lot to offer to the commercial companies, because as De Vries emphasised, they offer high quality services, professional teachers and tailor-made workshops which address more than the standardised soft skills. The main problem is their inability to communicate who they are, what they can do for companies and to attract commercial companies (personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). Simply put, the main communication problem is that lack of (effective) communication, which means that the organisation is unable to start to establish communication with the commercial companies. Hence, the goal of this project is to design an external communication plan for STHH by analysing PR and professional relationship building theories and strategies, by providing a benchmark example, and insights into interests and communication preferences of the target group.

2. Organizational Context

STHH is a non-profit organisation. The group consists of 12 members from all around the world and has existed over six years (Stranger Things Have Happened, 2016). The main decision-making body is the board with three positions: secretary, chair, and treasurer. Their meetings are held every three/four months. The board carries out responsibilities of being the main representative of STHH, deciding on general direction, and on the organisation’s activities. They make decisions by consensus, which helps to decide in the interests of the organisation as a whole. Additionally, other executive positions, with a decision-making power within their operational area, are present, incl. head trainer, creative manager, booking manager, accounting manager, and PR manager. The executives take decisions, and carry out activities and responsibilities in their own field (Stranger Things Have Happened, 2015).
2.1 Values, Vision & Strengths
Contributing to English language theatre in the Netherlands is not the only thing STHH strives for. According to De Vries, the organisation stands for inclusive improvisation, which means that everyone should enjoy it. The members of STHH are driven by passion and they believe in what they are doing. They are certain that everyone can improvise and it is a perfect tool for improving listening, communicating and team-work oriented skills. The organisation’s vision is to become the best English language improvisation group in the Netherlands (personal communication, 18th of January, 2016).

The strengths of STHH that appear to be important within this project context, have to be highlighted. Firstly, their unique selling points consist of their high-quality performances in English, their international team and intercultural experience. Therefore, they are more oriented towards international target groups. Secondly, the team is very flexible in the services they provide. They can offer a variety of courses, where the employers can choose the skills to be taught and the length of the workshops. The workshops can be tailor-made for every company depending on their needs and interests. STHH can also adapt the workshops to the Dutch language, if necessary. Also, as the client stated, STHH is all about the quality. It is “the best training programme at least in the north of the Netherlands” (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). Finally, due to their ability to connect with the public, the dynamics of the team and their amiability, STHH has created a community, who loves to laugh and enjoys good humour, who comes to a pub several hours before the show just to get a spot. An opportunity and a challenge for STHH are to communicate their value and their products to the commercial companies.
3. Research Objective

3.1 Intervention Cycle

The intervention cycle is used exclusively in practically oriented research projects and identifies certain steps that contribute towards finding the correct goal of the research: problem analysis, diagnosis, design, intervention/change, and evaluation. The main goal of the research depends on the stage of the intervention cycle. Understanding in which step the research is carried out helps to create a specific and well-defined research objective. It is important to note that certain steps can be carried out only if the steps preceding it are completed (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

This project is carried out in the design stage, because the steps before, which are the problem analysis and diagnosis steps have been completed by the client.

The Problem analysis includes following factors, which have already been identified by STHH:

- STHH would like to establish communication with commercial companies. The problem is clear: it is the lack of communication.
- It is a problem, because without effective communication it is impossible to start working with commercial companies and working with commercial companies would contribute towards achieving STHH’s long-term goals of professionalising the organisation.
- It is a problem and an opportunity that can benefit the whole organisation (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016).

The Diagnosis stage is about understanding the underlying reasons behind the problem (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010) that are identified by STHH. The main reason for this problem was affirmed by De Vries when he pointed out that there is a lack of knowledge regarding effective communication with the commercial companies: STHH is not sure how to communicate who they are and how to offer their services (=improvisation workshops). STHH has tried to reach and engage with a few large companies located in Groningen. The effort was limited – both in number of companies approached as in ways of communicating. The effort was fruitless (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016).

Since the problem analysis and diagnosis stages are completed in this project context, this research is carried out in the design stage of the intervention cycle, which means that the main outcome is going to be to design an external communication plan for STHH.
3.2 Objective
The research objective indicates two important aspects: the main outcome of the project and ‘the road map’, which shows how the outcome is going to be achieved, in other words it identifies what is going to be researched in order to achieve the main external goal.

The objective of this research is to design an external communication plan for Stranger Things Have Happened in order to help them to communicate who they are and to be able to offer their services to small and medium size internationally oriented companies located in the Netherlands; this objective is reached by analysing secondary data that help to explore PR theories and strategies enabling an increase in visibility of STHH and their services (specifically improvisation workshops), and that give information into how to build professional relationships and connect with the target group; furthermore, the collection of primary data provides insight into the interests guiding the target group in their choice regarding possible workshops and their communication preferences; finally, the analysis of a benchmark example explores the possibilities regarding communication and PR strategies.

The external goal of this project is an external communication plan that helps for STHH to communicate who they are and what they can offer for commercial companies. Since, ‘commercial companies’ that are referred in the project context can be any company located in the Netherlands, the main target group has to be limited in order to make the project manageable. As a result, in agreement with the client, the objective states that the main target group is small and medium size internationally oriented companies located in the Netherlands. Firstly, the internationally oriented companies were chosen, due to the international aspects that are perceived as an advantage of STHH, the members of which come from different countries. Secondly, ‘internationally oriented companies’ here means that the companies actually operate in more than one country, they have an international team or/and they deal with international clients. Small and medium size companies are defined by the number of people that work in offices located in the Netherlands. They cannot exceed more than 250 people (European Commission: SME, 2016). However, even then, there are thousands of companies fitting these criteria; thus, in order to have a realistic research process by taking into account the project time limitations, two representative groups were selected:

1) Creative companies
2) Innovative companies
These two groups are selected, due to the fact that usually creativity, team work and communication are very important skills in these fields, and it can be therefore assumed that the improvisation workshops would be very beneficial for them. In this project context, a creative/innovative companies are the one that defines themselves as such on their websites or/and LinkedIn or are defined as such by third parties, such as Founded in Holland that provides a list of ‘the most innovative start-ups in the Netherlands’ (Founded in Holland, n.d.). More about the selection of the companies can be found in the methodology section 4.5.

In order to make sure that the objective is well-defined, it has to fulfil Verschuren & Doorewaard’s criteria: useful, realistic, feasible and manageable (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010). This objective is useful, because the external communication plan provides the first step towards interaction with the target group, so achieving this objective contributes to solving the problem. However, it does not solve the entire problem, due to the fact that communication is a process that takes time and constant management that involves measuring, adapting the strategies and making continuous attempts. Consequently, the objective only contributes to solving the problem (realistic). Since the objective is clearly defined - it has a specific outcome, and the research scope is precise due to the limited target group and the selected research areas, the research objective fulfils therefore the criteria of feasibility and manageability.

It is important to note that in this report, the chosen target group is also referred as commercial companies, potential clients and businesses.

Research Design
4.1 Theoretical Framework

This theoretical framework identifies the key concepts and explores research areas that provide a research perspective and a theoretical support for this project.

4.1.1 PR Concepts & Strategies

PR is a broad field with many definitions. In order to have a clear direction, Moloney's definition for PR was chosen: “competitive communication seeking advantage for its principals and using many promotional techniques, visible and invisible, outside of paid advertising” (Moloney, 2006, pp.5–6). The definition indicates that the communication is not completely symmetrical and the communicator has intentions, but as Heath argues, the centre of PR is still relationships, since the interests of both parties play a role: “complex relationships by which interests and self-interests are enacted through structures, functions and shared meanings” (Heath, 2010, p.6).
By keeping in mind this perspective of PR, it has to be explained why PR was chosen. PR strategies are multi-functional: they help to increase visibility by aiming for publicity and promoting awareness of an organisation, as well as stimulating sales and managing communication (Theaker, 2004). Secondly, PR also centres on building trust, relationships, and authenticity which are fundamental for decisions of purchasing (Lane, 2016). Another important reason why PR was selected is that the variety of PR techniques increases the likelihood of reaching the target group, especially because PR channels are perceived as more credible and the message is constantly repeated through various channels (Kotler, 2005). Since STHH is trying to establish communication with the target group, it is fundamental to increase their visibility, because communication is a two-way process. It means that STHH can approach the target group, but also the commercial companies can start engaging with STHH. However, the commercial companies have to be aware about the existence of the organisation. Therefore, being more visible increases the likelihood of being hired as well. However, it has to be understood that being visible means being seen by the specific target group. As a result, strategic PR techniques are applicable. By using PR strategies, STHH can start communicating who they are and start promoting their services, especially workshops. They can increase their visibility, build trust and relationships with the target group.

A dilemma occurs by considering either exploring business-to-consumer (B2C) or business-to-business (B2B) PR strategies, since the communication between STHH and its target group falls in both categories. However, B2C PR is selected for the following reasons. Firstly, the target group is formed by different kinds of businesses that are also direct consumers of the service, meaning that they are the end-users. The process of offering them the products therefore falls into B2C category. Secondly, the main goal of B2B PR is meant to support the marketing strategies and commercial performance. It is used on its own only for branding (Kelly & Standing, 2014.), which is: “the process involved in creating a unique name and image for a product in the consumers' mind, mainly through advertising campaigns with a consistent theme. Branding aims to establish a significant and differentiated presence in the market that attracts and retains loyal customers.” (Business Dictionary: Branding, n.d.). Additionally, as it was already explored and established that PR strategies were selected, because they contribute the most towards the final goal: to design an external communication plan that helps to establish communication between STHH and the target group. However, the key factors of B2B PR still have to be taken into account, since the target group consists of businesses. Kelly & Standing argues that in B2B PR, complex messages are sent for a specific audience rather than as in B2C PR, simple messages are sent to masses (2014), so information about the target group has to be gathered.

It is essential to explore different PR strategies in B2C field because it helps to increase visibility and engage with the target group. A Universe of Consumer PR
model (Willis, 2014) gives an overview of B2C strategies that includes three main dimensions:

- **Media relations**: receiving media coverage usually is perceived as one of the most important PR strategies that involves a lot of different techniques as it is seen in the model. It is essential to point out that Edelman has distinguished four categories of media: traditional media (the well-known brands such as New York Times, The Guardian), hybrid media (the brands that were created in information age a.k.a. new media age), owned media (media channels of the organisation itself, such as their website), and social media platforms (Willis, 2014).

- **Events**: the dimension involves different activities from participating to creating different kind of events. These activities help to stimulate media coverage, and create an opportunity to engage directly with the target group and potential customers, and to be seen as a progressive business (Willis, 2014).

- **Sponsorship**: this dimension helps to create perceived value to an organisation, to increase its uniqueness and to stand out from its competitors (Willis, 2014). However, sponsorship as a PR technique except charity events is not going to be applied in this project, because it contributes towards visibility of the company but it has a less effect on promoting their services, especially workshops, so the financial investments are too high in comparison with benefits at the moment.

*Figure 1: A Universe of Consumer PR model (Willis, 2014)*
In order to create an effective PR strategy mix, techniques from different dimensions have to be integrated, and planned activities have to take place. The mix of activities help to achieve PR goals that are illustrated in the model (Willis, 2014). Some of these goals are applicable for STHH in this project context, since it is important for the organisation to be visible which means STHH needs to increase the ‘awareness’ and ‘information-flow’. Additionally, the ‘third-party endorsement’ is always beneficial and ‘engagement’ is one of the main goals, because it is directly linked to the project objective.

PR is also about sending messages that have to be made available and accessible to the target group. The messages also should attract attention, so framing of content and design of messages are fundamental. However, the strategies regarding design will not be discussed in this project, because STHH has already established their strong brand and its visualisation.

Framing is about choosing a certain frame of a message which influences and limits the way the message is going to be perceived by audience, which includes people who choose to attend the message. It is about emphasising certain aspects while making other ones less salient (Hallahan, 1999). According to Hallahan, there are seven models of framing in PR. In this case the framing of attributes is the most applicable, because this model focuses on framing characteristics of objects (1999). It important to research what attributes of STHH as an organisation are relevant for the target group in order to steer interests guiding the target group in their choice regarding possible workshops. According to Sinek, people are more likely to connect with companies that they can identify their values with. Sinek argues that the most innovative companies start to communicate from stating their purpose and values, and why anyone should be interested. Only then they communicate how they differ from competitors and what is their product. People like organisations that inspire (Sinek, 2009).

The attributes of the offered services (improvisation workshops) have to be framed according to the interests of the target group. Generally, companies tend to invest in activities that are beneficial for them. Accordingly, the benefits of improvisation workshops become attributes that should be highlighted. These type of workshops helps to improve and stimulate communication, leadership, adaptability, creativity, and team work skills (Tutton, 2010). According to De Vries, STHH offers tailor–made improvisation workshops which also can stimulate a variety of more specific skills such as presentation, interpersonal and intercultural communication, and problem solving skills (personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). These skills fall into the category of soft skills that are defined as following: “communicating, conflict management, human relations, making presentations, negotiating, team building, and other such ability, defined in terms of expected outcomes and not as a specific method or
technique such as statistical analysis” (Business Dictionary: Soft Skill, n.d.). It is fundamental to know which attributes have to be emphasised in order to be beneficially perceived by the target group. Attribute framing is a part of persuasive communication, it can be beneficial, but if not researched well enough, it can also turn against the sender of the message (Hallahan, 1999), therefore it is important to study the interests of the target group. Additionally, to consider different forms of messages is essential; emerging trends are infographics, pictures, videos and other visualisation techniques (Fathi, 2013).

There are also a lot of different techniques, tactics, and channels which can be used and adapted to a PR strategy mix. They have to be selected carefully taking the interests and preferences of the target group into consideration. It cannot be forgotten, that due to dynamics and constant changes, the environment has to be constantly scanned and monitored. PR strategies are context dependant and the target group should be understood, any shift in the attitudes should be recognised and taken into account.

4.1.2 Theories & Strategies Regarding Professional Relationship Building

This theoretical research area overlaps with PR strategies as it contributes towards incrementing visibility. However, it has to be distinguished, because building relationships means establishing direct communication and engaging with the target group, which is very important in order to achieve the main goal of this project. This strategy has its limitations, namely the lack of feasibility in reaching a big section of the target group and the time consuming aspects of it. Yet, it is noted that building relationships is an effective strategy, because people prefer relationships rather than a selling process. By engaging with people, an organisation can understand the needs of (potential) customers and make them “the hero and heroine in his or her story” (Brogan, 2011).

Since STHH wants to offer the product (=improvisation workshops) to businesses, which are direct users of the service, so the distribution channels become shorter. As a result, the customers of the product can have a direct impact on the process and planning, which only underlines the increasing importance of direct communication (Dwyer and Tanner, 2006).

In order to start building relationships, it is important to understand the process itself. Knapp’s Relationship model (1984) (Figure 2 - taken from Communication theory, (n.d.)) was chosen, because it identifies the relationship building steps and emphases important factors. The Knapp’s model focus on interpersonal relationships, but it is applicable for the professional relationship building, because even then communication takes place between a member of STHH and a representative of a commercial company.
The focus is only on the first three steps of the ‘coming together’ phase, because only those are relevant in this project context.

The first stage ‘initiating’ is a short stage, where people exchange the most basic information. It emphasises the importance of the first impression. ‘Experimenting’ is the second stage where more in-depth information is exchanged and the common things are explored. In this stage people decide if they want to continue building the relationships. If the process of building relationships continues, the next stage is ‘intensifying’ which means that the relationships become more personal and less formal: both parties start to put time and effort towards maintaining the relationship and making the bond stronger. In the ‘integration’ stage both people become closer to each other, the relationship is established and in the ‘bonding’ stage the status is formalised (Knapp, 1984).

In this project, this model serves as a reminder that by building professional relationships, communication takes place between two people. Therefore, the main factors of the steps presented in the model: first impression and superficial clues (‘initiating’ stage), exploring mutual benefits by exchanging more in-depth information (‘experimenting’), if that goes well, developing professional relationship through follow-ups like a meeting (‘intensifying’) are still applicable. The last two stages are not applicable, because it is about establishing the formal agreements, which is not the focus of this project.

Understanding the interpersonal relationship building process helps to build professional relationships. It is important to explore how the first stage ‘initiating’ can be created. A networking strategy becomes the crucial first step.

As it was mentioned before, the networking strategy has feasibility limitations. It is important to know which networks already exist and how they can be used in order to engage with the target group. Especially by keeping in mind that the 12 STHH members already have a personal network, which could potentially benefit the company as the whole. Granovetter’s theory of Interpersonal Ties helps to understand that two types of
relationships exist: ‘strong ties’ and ‘weak ties’. The ‘strong ties’ are created between people that have close relationships and who know each other very well. These are usually friends and family members. ‘Weak ties’ occur between people who barely know each other. However, Granovetter discovered that the latter ones are more important in the business and professional world context. For the reason that the ‘weak ties’ are the ones that create ‘bridges’, which help to reach a broader spectrum of people and companies. One of the main reasons for that is that friend circles of people with ‘strong ties’ usually overlap. That reduces their potential for creating new business networks. Usually people with many ‘weak ties’ can create large networks, because their circle of ‘strong ties’ and ‘weak ties’ differs. Consequently, they create more ‘bridges’, and are therefore more beneficial from the point of professional networking (1983). Since STHH wants to establish and develop communication with the target group, networking might be a fundamental strategy. In that case, it is essential to identify the ‘strong ties’ and especially the ‘weak’ ones of the STHH team, because that will help to identify already existing networks that the team could build on to connect with commercial companies.

In order to connect and engage more successfully with the target group, the network has to be widened, meaning more relationships with ‘weak ties’ have to be established with different people. This means that networking itself as a strategy is very important.
4.2 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model is a paradigm that illustrates the consequential relationships between the main concepts, as it can be seen in the model. It contributes towards achieving the main objective. However, primary data has to be collected in order to investigate the concepts. Only then it is possible to create an evidence based external communication plan.

In this project case, there are two subjects: the organisation itself and the target group. The strategies and main concepts identified in the theoretical framework illustrate how to connect theoretically (=based on academic literature) these two subjects and reach the research objective.

In order to establish communication, STHH has to be visible for the target group. This is going to be achieved by using PR strategies. All PR strategies involve producing messages, which have to be framed in the right way and sent through the right channels. Another way of being visible is participating and performing in different kinds of events including charity events (a technique from the sponsorship dimension). An important factor is that the messages and the events have to be accessible and available for the target group. Visibility helps to establish engagement, because if the target group is aware of STHH and their services, then they also can initiate communication. Building professional relationships includes direct communication, engagement and networking. It can be a very beneficial and crucial strategy for succeeding in increasing the likelihood of being hired. However, this model provides a theoretical hypothesis; therefore, it is fundamental to examine it by collecting primary data.
4.3 Research Framework

A research framework is a graphic representation on how the research is conducted and the final goal is achieved. It illustrates the project process step by step and leads to accomplishment of the external part of the objective (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

As the graph shows, the final goal of this research project is to design an external communication plan for Stranger Things Have Happened. This is achieved by the following. Firstly, a theoretical framework (part A) is developed by describing the theoretical research areas. The applicable theories and strategies regarding PR and professional relationship building are selected and the key concepts are derived. The preliminary research (placed in appendix) plays a vital role, because it provides the background information that is needed to see a big picture. The theoretical framework identifies the main concepts, and the relationship between those is illustrated in the conceptual model. It plays a fundamental role in research part B, because according to the model, the communication preferences of the two objects will be researched.

The objects have to be specified:
Communication preferences and interests of ...
    ... Object 1: Creative industries
    ... Object 2: Innovative companies

The plan is to collect data from 65 companies. It is hard to state the exact number of both objects, because few commercial companies fall in both categories. More information about the selection of the sample can be found in the methodology section (4.5). The list of all 65 companies can be found in appendix section 8.2.

The third object is Progress Events that is taken as a benchmark example that illustrates successful communication, PR strategies and mistakes to be avoided. This company is located in Groningen and offer a lot of different services including workshops for companies (Progress Events Bedrijfsuitjes, n.d.).
reasons behind the selection of the company is explored in the methodology section (4.5). After researching the objects, the results are summarised and analysed by keeping in mind the theoretical framework, and it is vital to understand what do the outcomes mean for this project (part C). Finally, based on the result analysis and interpretation an external communication plan is designed with a creative approach (part D).

4.4 Research Questions
The research questions drive and direct the research process, these are the questions that have to be answered. If they are answered successfully, then the research process is completed (Verschuren & Doorewaard, 2010).

The research questions are developed systematically and closely linked to research framework. For research phase parts (B & C), a central question followed by a set of sub-questions is created, which means that they have a successional relationship. The sub-questions are established with the aim of answering the central question. Additionally, it is important to identify what type of knowledge is required to answer the questions and what kind of research activities have to be carried out in every stage.

**Research Framework Part B:**
This part consists of *empirical* set of questions that have to be answered by collecting *primary data* using the following instruments: *interviews and questionnaires.*

**Central Question:** Which interests guiding the choice regarding possible workshops, communication preferences and PR strategies are relevant for the target group?

It has to be noted that in the research phase, the target group is not asked about STHH specifically in order to avoid influencing the research outcomes; STHH is referred to as an external company that offers improvisation workshops.

**Sub. Questions:**
- To what extent is direct communication important for the target group?
- How would the research participants like to be approached directly by an external company?
- Which media: traditional, hybrid media, owned media or social media are perceived as reliable information source by the target group?
- Which form of messages should be sent in order to attract attention of the target group?
- To what extent is important for the target group to see and to experience a performance of an external company?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To what extent does organising charity events add perceived value by the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent is a third-party endorsement important for the target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which soft skills are important for the target group in their work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How improvisation workshops should be framed regarding soft skills as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attributes in order to steer the interests of the target group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How an external company should frame itself in order to steer the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interests of the target group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is important for the target group when direct communication takes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do networks play a role by choosing an external company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the relevant outcomes of the benchmark interview in this project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What PR and communication strategies were and are used by Progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events? How did they experience the different strategies?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Framework Part C:**
This part includes a set of *analytical* questions that are answered by *analysing collected data* in the previous project stages.

**Central Question:** _What are the main outcomes of the research and how are they relevant for this project?_

**Sub. Questions:**

- Which concepts from conceptual model were identified as relevant by the target group?
- Which PR strategies are relevant in order to increase the visibility of an external company?
- What are the interests guiding the target group in their choice regarding possible workshops?
- Which communication preferences does the target group identify?
- To what extent is building relationships an important strategy?
- What relationship building strategies are relevant for the target group?
- What can be concluded by comparing the key concepts developed from theoretical framework with the collected results?
- What does this conclusion mean for STHH in this project context?
4.5 Research Strategy & Methodology

This report section is based on the book Research Methods for Business Students written by Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill (2009).

In order to answer research questions, which contributes towards achieving the objective, the research methodology has to be carefully selected and research activities have to take place. In this following paragraphs research strategy, instruments, and research steps are discussed.

This practical nature research is conducted by using a deductive approach, and for achieving the objective, secondary and primary data are vital; therefore, multiple-methods and triangulation technique are selected. Hereby is a review of the selected research instruments, and relationships between them:

- *Desk Research* is the key method used for collecting *secondary data* for the theoretical framework, from which the main concepts are derived and the conceptual model with criteria is designed. The latter is essential because according to this model, the research objects are analysed by using primary data collection methods.

- For researching the insights of communication preferences and interests of the target group, two instruments are selected. In this part of research, only primary data is collected. *Structured-interviews* are used to identify the preferences and interests, and to understand the underlying reasons. By conducting interviews in face-to-face communication or at least over a phone conversation, follow-up questions are possible, thanks to which a deeper understanding is achieved. However, in order to collect more data, the questions of a *structured interview* can be sent by email, if that is a preference by a company. It is not used as the main research tool due the limitations of the channel, but it is a possibility for the companies which are otherwise not able to participate in the research. The interview questions are developed directly from the conceptual model by making sure that all main concepts are researched. The interview questions are placed in appendix section 8.3.1.

*Questionnaires* are derived from the interviews; the difference is that they have multiple choice answers. The relationship between interviews and questionnaires is complementary, which means the outcomes of one instrument supports the other one, and vice versa. The research has a descriptive nature, it identifies important elements regarding interests and communication preferences of the target group, therefore opinion questionnaires are used. Internet mediated questionnaires are selected, because it is an instrument that helps to collect a lot of data in a short period of time and provides with an overview rather than with an extensive information.
Interviews and questionnaires are created from two parts: first one seeks to identify interests regarding soft skills, the perception of improvisation workshops, preferred media, and messages. The second part encourages the target group to imagine a situation where they are considering to hire an external company for improving soft skills including team work. It focusses on exploring communication preferences, relevance of PR strategies and interests guiding the target group in their choice regarding possible workshops within this given context.

This combination of instruments is necessary for achieving the objective, because only by having insights into the interests and communication preferences of the target group, is possible to create an effective external communication plan.

- **Strategic benchmarking** allows to learn from a company that already has established its position in the market field, therefore it can be seen as an example (in the report, referred as a “benchmark example”). The competitive benchmarking approach was selected because it offers the possibility gain insights into the strategies and processes used by other company that operates in the same field. Additional advantage is that it stimulates innovative ideas (Jurevicius, 2014). In this project context, the strategies are specific to PR and communication strategies.

Progress Events was selected as a company for benchmark example for several following reasons. Firstly, they successfully offer different kinds of workshops in Groningen and they have already established their position in this business. They run few workshops every week (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2). Secondly, they do not offer improvisation workshops, therefore they are not direct competitors of STHH. As a result, there are less obstacles for collecting data. However, to research their strategies is still interesting even though their target group is broader; they offer activities to students, groups of friends, but also to companies (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2). Finally, the company is based in Groningen making it accessible for the researcher.

For the benchmark example, two research instruments are used for collecting the data. Firstly, *desk research* is used in order to collect background information about the company and to observe their online communication. Also, a *benchmark interview* with the manager of Progress Events, Alex Leuning is conducted. The focus of the interview is on PR and communication strategies used in the past when they just started the company and now. It is aimed to understand their experience with different strategies and the information is treated as an example of a company that succeed in establishing themselves in Groningen. The outcomes of the benchmark example have a complementary relationship with the other findings of primary data. If the benchmark example
indicates any new findings that cannot be supported by the research results of interests and communication preferences of the target groups, then it has to be supported with secondary data.

4.5.1 Research Steps
Hereby in the following section, the main research steps are described:

1) The target group for this research project is very big and due to time and financial restrictions, a sample was created in the preliminary research. Afterwards it was critically reviewed again and the final sample consists of 65 companies, which were found by using the target group criteria:

- It has to be either creative or/and innovative companies,
- It has to have an international team, have offices in other countries or/and work with international clients (the international aspect),
- It has to be small or medium size companies located in the Netherlands. It means that they cannot have more than 250 employees (European Commission: SME, 2016) in offices within the country.

These companies were found by using Google search engine, Google maps, FoundedinHolland.com that provide a list of innovative companies and Rockstart.com that gives support for many start-ups. The sample was created by checking a lot of companies if they fit the criteria by reviewing their websites and LinkedIn pages. However, only 65 companies out of many existing companies in the Netherlands were selected, which means that this research does not represent the whole target group. The sample list can be seen in appendix section 8.2.

2) A non-probability sampling is chosen with a technique called self-sampling, which means that the companies are invited to participate in the research on a voluntary basis (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2009). This sampling method was selected by taking into account the size of the target group and that they do not have any obligations to participate in the research, so they needed to be interested and to have time; and by treating the research in a realistic way regarding time and financial restrictions.

Before sending out the questionnaires and conducting the interviews, both instruments were tested and corrected linguistically and sequentially. Then Google Form questionnaires were sent to 45 companies by email, and after a week a gentle reminder to participate was sent. Secondly, other 20 companies were invited to participate in the interviews and they also had the opportunity to indicated which form of interview: face-to-face (direct or video call), phone or email, they would have time for. Those 20 companies were selected by identifying companies with diverse profiles and fields in which they operate, in order to get a wider spectrum of outcomes. Both research activities take place parallel to each other, due their complementary relationship.
3) The desk research regarding Progress Events takes place parallel to the step two due the time limitations. The benchmark interview was conducted in step three due the busy period for the company. After the interview, the relevant outcomes are identified and supporting information is researched, but only if the data collection of step two does not support certain outcomes.

4) After conducting the research and collecting the data, the findings are summarised and analysed by keeping the theoretical framework in mind. The outcomes of semi-structured and structured interviews are going to be quantified, but also the provided explanation by the interviewees are going to be taken into account. Based on the main findings, and by taking into account the benchmark example, the external communication plan is designed with a creative approach.

4.6 Limitations
In the following paragraph, the limitations that occurred during the research process are discussed.

The main encountered limitation regarding the data collection process came from the target group. The participation rate of questionnaires and interviews was low. Even though more answers have been received regarding interviews, but most of the selected companies rejected due to the busy period.

However, it has to be highlighted that even, in case all the 65 companies would participate in the research, it still cannot be stated that it represents the whole sample, for the following reasons. The questions are subjective, they are aiming for a person’s opinion, so the answers can differ per person within the same company. It also can be influenced by a number of factors including language barrier, the moment of the day, or even mood of participants. Also, certain variables are not in the control of the researcher, such as who fills in the questionnaire regarding the position in the company and how much attention they pay by filling. It is also important not to forget that when it comes to questionnaire, the participants could choose from given answers, which theoretically can influence their opinion. Additionally, the possible connotations and misconceptions could occur by collecting primary data, so the response bias has to be acknowledged.

4.6.1 Activity modification
Due to the encountered limitation regarding the low participation rate of both research objects and due to the occurred overlap between the two research objects, it was decided to summarise the findings together in order to have stronger and more reliable outcomes. After that, the research project continues as planned: all collected primary data from interviews, questionnaires and the benchmark example are analysed together by using the derived concepts from the theoretical framework.
Research Findings & Analysis
The research outcomes are discussed per research questions. The findings from interviews and questionnaires are outlined together, while the research outcomes of the benchmark example are presented separately. In the analysis stage, all the findings are interpreted and discussed together. They are linked to the concepts from the conceptual model and to the theoretical framework.

5.1 Research Outcomes: Communication Preferences and Interests
The research sample consists of 65 companies, 45 of them were invited to fill in the questionnaire, and 20 were selected and invited to participate in the interviews. Below the participation rate of the research is presented in Figures 4 and 5:

![Research participation rate: questionnaire](image-url)

*Figure 4: Questionnaire participation rate*
Few things have to be noted:

— 10 companies were invited by a phone call and 10 by an email
— 9 of the 10 companies that were invited by phone asked to send a description of the research: 4 companies replied back and the rest fell into category of ‘not responding’ which means that they have never answered to the email
— From 6 companies that agreed to participate in the interviews:
  1 of them agreed on a standardised interview by email
  1 of them agreed to give the interview by a phone call
  1 of them agreed on a face-to-face interview
  3 of them were conducted through Skype meetings

— In total, 21 company out of 65 agreed to participate in this research
5.1.1 Communication preferences of the research participants

1) Which media: traditional, hybrid media, owned media or social media are perceived as reliable information source by the target group?

In order to figure out this question, the given context was slightly different for the questionnaire participants and the interviewees.

People who filled in the questionnaire and a standardised interview were asked to identify media platforms that are generally reliable as an information source. As a result, it can be seen in Figure 6 that national and international newspapers (traditional media) are chosen by participants as the most reliable, and it is followed by LinkedIn (social media) which was put in the second place. With filling in the option ‘Other’, people responded that they perceive books as a reliable source and that all platforms matter, are reliable and influential.

Regarding the interviews, firstly people were asked to identify reliable media platforms, which usually they described social media platforms, Wikipedia, industrial media, and trade magazines. Then the question was placed in a context, when the interviewees were asked to explain how would they look for information about a new company and what media platforms would they trust. The majority of participants identified Google search engine and that they would shortly scan through the first Google outcomes. Then LinkedIn (social media) was perceived as a reliable source, and one of the interviewees identified that the company's profile is important, as well as the founders' and employees'. Additionally, as in the first case as well as now, social media is dominating. However, it has to be highlighted that participants showed the interests in what is said about the
company online by different stakeholders rather than only reading what the company stated by themselves on their owned media.

2) Which form of messages should be sent in order to attract attention of the target group?

As it can be seen in Figure 7, the most popular form of messages between the research participants are short videos. Controversially, long form videos were not mentioned by any of the participants neither in questionnaire nor during the interviews. Other answers included apps, short and funny texts, moving images; one interviewee mentioned that his attention attracts mostly the messages that are shared by his network. Additionally, few interviewees stated that their attention and interests are steered mostly by the headlines; when asked to define what is interesting for them, they referred to different concepts such as ‘flashy’ headlines, and such as intelligent headlines with a linguistic play of words.
3) How would the research participants like to be approached directly by an external company?

![Bar chart](chart.png)

**Figure 8: Findings on how research participants would like to be approached by an external company in order to offer their services**

As Figure 8 illustrates, the questionnaire participants prefer to be approached by an external company, which would like to offer their services, in an event, where they have the possibility to see and experience the performance. Communication by email is placed as second preferred approach by questionnaire participants, and is also supported by two interviewees. One of them indicated that the advantage of the email is that they can respond to it on their own time, while a phone call puts them on a spot. The majority of the interviewees and one-third of participants of questionnaires indicated that they would prefer to be approached in face-to-face communication.

People who responded with “Other” said that the company has to be discoverable and accessible, and that they prefer to approach an external company by themselves. However, none of the interviewees rejected the idea of being approached, even though one interviewee mentioned that the channel does not matter, but he emphasised the importance of visibility. Another interesting outcome was that an interviewee would prefer that the email would include a short impression of the service. Some interviewees stressed the significance of the personal approach. According to them it is fundamental that the proposal is intended for their company specifically. It has to include their working challenges and how the offered service can contribute towards overcoming the faced challenges.
4) To what extent is direct communication important for the target group? To what extent is building relationships important for the target group? What is important for the target group when direct communication takes place?

Regarding hiring an external company, direct communication/engagement...

![Pie chart showing percentages](image)

*Figure 9: Direct communication & engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>From interviews</th>
<th>From questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building relationships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having something in common</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking the representative on a personal level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a fun conversation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being listened to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing mutual benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 10: Factors important for direct communication*

Figure 9 represents that the majority of the research participants affirm that direct communication and engagement are either crucial or at least preferable before hiring a company. In order to be clear, it has to be specified that the questionnaire participants were asked to identify to what extent the direct
communication influences their decision of hiring an external company: the ones who are represented in Figure 9 as “crucial” agreed that it increases the likelihood of hiring the external significantly, the ones whose answers are identified as ‘preferably’ meant that it would increase the possibility of hiring the external company. In short, the difference between the two answers is the degree to which it would influence the decision of hiring an external company. Regarding the interviewees, all of them without any exceptions emphasised that direct communication and engagement are crucial. Even more so, some of the participants revealed that they are always more likely to hire an external company when they know the representatives on a personal level, which means they had a nice conversation in an event or they share a similar circle of network. One of the participants said strongly that he would hire a company which offers soft skills workshops only if they are from his/her network.

Additionally, participants were asked to identify what is for them the most important when direct communication takes place between them and the representatives of an external company (Figure 10). All interviewees emphasised the process of building relationships. The ‘click’ and liking members of an external company are very important for the majority of the research participants. The research points out that establishing benefits and informal communication are vital. An important aspect is that the majority of the questionnaire participants prefer a two-way communication, where they actually are listened to.
5) What PR strategies regarding increasing visibility steer the interests of the research participants: to what extent is important for the target group to see and to experience a performance of an external company & to what extent does organising charity events add perceived value by the target group to an external company?

Seeing/experiencing a performance of an external company in an event would influence decision to hire them:

- 47%: It increases the likelihood
- 40%: Only if they were recommended
- 13%: Only if they approached personally
- 0%: It does not increase the likelihood

**Figure 11: Experiencing the performance in events (data only from questionnaires)**

Charity events attract attention and influence opinion about organising company:

- 37%: Highly
- 31%: Charity events - important, but the perception of the company does not change
- 21%: Charity events are not interesting, but the perception of the company changes positively
- 11%: Not interesting at all

**Figure 12: Importance of charity events. Note: Two interviewees did not answer this question**

Figure 11 identifies the different perceptions of the participants that filled in questionnaire regarding seeing/experiencing a performance and how much that influences the likelihood of hiring an external company. The answers have different variations. The majority of people say that it is important, but also they
have to be recommended by someone from their circle. An interesting fact is that seeing/experiencing a performance always matters, nobody rejected the idea which was also endorsed by all interviewees. Some of the research participants highlighted that engagement in events also allows the potential client to get to know the people from the external company.

When it comes to charity events (Figure 12) diverse outcomes are present. The majority of the participants showed interest in charity events, but it is perceived very controversially when a company is organising it. Some people agreed that their perception of the company does not change by the fact that they organised a charity event. Few participants expressed that it influences them positively, but only if they are sure that is an honest action rather than a PR activity.
5.1.2 Interests of the research participants

6) Which soft skills are important for the research participants in their work?

As Figure 13 illustrates that there are a lot of different soft skills perceived as crucial by the participants. However, an interesting observation is that people who filled in questionnaires identify variety of skills that are important in their companies, and the most dominant skills are problem solving and creativity. Interviewees who were asked open questions, talked about a variety of skills from listening, interpersonal communication to professional communication, but only one person identified that creativity is a needed skill in their work. Additionally, all interviewees agreed that team work is fundamental and that a company cannot be successful without it. When the interviewees were asked how does the company help to empower those soft skills, all participants answered that it is about creating the right environment, having meetings and reflecting. Three of the companies do not any other activities, and the other three representatives of the companies stated that they have team building activities and two of the them actually invest in activities that help to improve other soft skills.
7) How improvisation workshops should be framed regarding soft skills as attributes in order to steer the interests of the target group?

**Figure 14:** Associations regarding improvisation workshops

**Figure 15:** Perceived benefits of improvisation workshops

Figures 14 and 15 present an interesting tendency that there is a difference in perception between people who filled in questionnaires with checkboxes and interviewees.
The dominant answers by participants of the questionnaires regarding associations are that improvisation workshops help to improve skills and that it is challenging. However, when the interviewees were asked what they think about improvisation workshops, most of them were struggling to answer, they either not sure what it was or did not have a formed opinion about it (both reasons were stated). Only few people associated it with having fun, feeling out of the comfort zone (positively) and as an interesting activity, but did not talk about it explicitly and uncertainty was observed in face-to-face and skype interviews. Interestingly, all interviewees except one could identified that the workshops would be beneficial, but could not identify the benefits, the only answers that they provided were connected with creativity or team building. One interviewee, who had participated in an improvisation workshop, stated that except having fun, she could not recognise any other direct benefits. Nonetheless, the questionnaire participants gave a bigger variety of answers, still the most dominant answer remains that improvisation workshops stimulate creativity/thinking of the box skills. Additionally, they agree that it is also beneficial for improving presentation skills.

8) Which interests guiding the research participants in their choice regarding hiring an external company for possible workshops are relevant? How an external company should frame itself in order to steer the interests of the target group? To what extent is a third-party endorsement important for the target group? To what extent do networks play a role by choosing an external company?

Figure 16: Important factors

Figure 16 shows that many factors play an important role in considering hiring an external company. People who answered the questionnaire are interested in seeing the performance beforehand and receiving recommendations by a
friend/colleague. The interviewees gave explicit answers. All of them agreed that the price of the service and recommendations matter a lot. Regarding recommendations, it does not have to be from a friend or a colleague, but reviews generally are important. The majority of the interviewees also indicated that being connected to the company and having a ‘click’ is crucial and that would influence their decision of hiring them. Additionally, showing expertise and experience in the field, presenting a portfolio, and proving the direct benefits of the service are compelling for the interviewees. Few people stated that attention to the client (in the context, them) including fast email replies and answering calls immediately is essential. Furthermore, few participants were asked about the important attributes of representation of an external company and few interviewees were asked to tell about their favourite brands. Both groups talked about the values of the companies/brands that they can identify with.

5.2 Research Outcomes: Progress Events – benchmark

Research questions: What are the relevant outcomes of the benchmark interview in this project context? What PR and communication strategies were and are used by Progress Events? How did they experience the different strategies?

Progress Events is a Groningen based company that offers a variety of services from events to workshops. According to the manager, Alex Leuning, they work with different kind of clients, from student and friend groups to companies. They have the same approach to every target group, but they have different websites to present the information (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2).

Every service that they offer has a different website, but they all belong to the same the domain and also exist on their own. That means that the activities can be found through their main website and just googling a specific activity, the specific website pops up (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2). An interesting observation is that there are two websites for workshops: one is meant for general workshops https://progressevents.nl/uitjesgroningen and the other one is adapted for businesses: https://progressevents.nl/bedrijfsuitjesgroningen. Content wise both websites are the same, only the website for businesses uses some different formulations, the text is adapted to the target group. Nonetheless, by comparing those two websites with their main website: https://progressevents.nl which is directed to the event services, can be stated that even though the layouts are similar, the design differs (observation from Progress Events websites).

Moreover, Leuning revealed that once they launched the company, the first and the most important strategy was to be visible and to be ranked on top of Google search, so they spend a lot of time on adjusting SEO. Their goal was that if people type key words “activities in Groningen” their company’s name would be placed on top of the list. Also, the manger stated that back then they already did a lot of online marketing and advertisement, and they sponsored few sport teams.
Leuning pointed out that they also used paid advertisements, but it did not bring any success (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2).

He believes that ‘word of mouth’ and online communication contributed the most towards the success of the company. According to the manager, in order to stimulate ‘word of mouth’, firstly it is important to have a high quality product to offer and secondly service has to be excellent. Progress Events has at least one or two employees who are responsible for answering immediately the potential clients’ emails and phone calls. Their goal is to show attention and to communicate to the client that they can just relax, because everything is taken care off (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2).

Regarding online communication, the main channel is the websites, which also include reviews of the clients (Progress Events Bedrijfsuitjes, n.d.) and according to Leuning, the information is clearly presented, because according to his experience, by purchasing a service like this, people tend to compare information of different companies and usually the decision is not made by one person (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2). Additionally, they also have a Facebook pages (according to activities): Facebook page for corporate activities has 323 likes (Progress Events Bedrijfsuitjes Facebook, n.d.) and LinkedIn page that has only 8 followers (Progress Events Bedrijfsuitjes LinkedIn, n.d.), but Leuning pointed out that they are not focused on social media regarding workshops, because the content is always the same and people get bored of it. However, they encourage their clients to share the pictures with their network and acknowledge the organising company (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2).

Activities that contribute towards their visibility vary, such as pub-quiz and Beer festival, which is well-known in Groningen. Additionally, they also organised few small competitions in order to promote their workshop activities. Finally, Mr. Leuning reveals that having active team, participating in a wide range of activities outside the company’s environment, building relationships, expanding networks, and storytelling are crucial and contributed towards succeed for Progress Events (benchmark interview, appendix 8.3.2).

5.3 Data Analysis & Interpretation
This part focuses on the analytical set of research questions (referred as part C in the research framework): Which concepts from conceptual model were identified relevant by the target group?

The main concepts, derived from the theoretical framework, play a key role in this project, and the links between them were illustrated in the conceptual model. The research aimed to check the relevance of the PR and relationships building concepts and to identify the relevant interests guiding the research participants in their choice regarding possible workshops and their communication preferences. Therefore, the data is analysed by referring back to the conceptual
model and used theories. It should be noted that data from the questionnaires, the interviews and the benchmark example are analysed and interpreted together.

5.3.1 Visibility
Which PR strategies are relevant in order to increase the visibility of an external company?

The theories emphasise the importance of being visible, therefore different media relation, event and sponsorship strategies are used (Willis, 2014). It has to be remember that the sponsorship was not taken into account even though it can be an effective strategy for future reference. Only strategy from sponsorship dimension that was assessed was organising charity events which also fall into the event dimension within the conceptual model. Important to notice that the idea of organising charity was rejected by the research participants as it does not look either moral or trustworthy; therefore, if it is used for PR purposes in order to increase visibility, it might affect the reputation negatively. However, organising events and participating in different events that are attended by the target group are very important according to the research participants, because it gives the potential client opportunity to experience the performance and to engage with the representatives of the external company. Additionally, when it comes to media relations, it is important to appear in a reliable media, which was identified by the research participants as the traditional media and social media, with a special emphasis on reviews and recommendations. The owned media is still important, but the participants pointed out that they are aware that every company wants to represent themselves from their best side, so the reviews of other stakeholders and third-party endorsements are considered more important.

Google search engine was named as the main search engine for looking up information about a new company and it is supported as a successful strategy by the benchmark example. However, the contradiction appears when people were asked open questions regarding improvisation workshops, they were struggling to express their opinion about it and identify the benefits. As a result, it is logical to think that if a company is looking for an organisation that could help them to improve soft skills, they would not necessarily think directly about improvisation workshops, but they would use Google search engine for discovering their possibilities and options. Consequentially, it can be stated that Google search engine is also an important tool that contributes towards online visibility.

5.3.2 Framing & Messages
What are the interests guiding the target group in their choice regarding possible workshops? Which communication preferences does the target group identify?

In the literature review it was discovered that it is important to consider carefully what messages sent by STHH should be visible and attractive to the target group. It is important to identify the main trends regarding popular media channels,
forms of messages and which attributes of the organisation and the product should be included in order to attract attention:

— The research participants indicated that LinkedIn platform is essential, followed by Twitter and Facebook. However, the research participants are especially interested in review and referral sections.

— The trendy formats of messages that were identified by collecting primary data are short videos, pictures, and infographics. As it was mention in the report, the design and visualisation were not researched, because STHH has an established brand with its design and graphic presentation.

— Regarding the attribution framing, which means that certain characteristics of an object have to be highlighted in order to send more attractive messages (Hallahan, 1999), the research participants stated that for them it is very essential that the external company communicates and provides proof of their expertise and experience. The external company has to be perceived as reliable for example by providing a portfolio. Also, the research outcomes pointed out that it is important for an organisation to communicate their values. Sinick’s theory supports that people prefer companies that communicates ‘why’ they are doing what they are doing and inspire (Sinick, 2009). Moreover, regarding framing the improvisation workshops, it is important to note two main research findings. Firstly, the interviewees struggled in stating their opinion about improvisation workshops. The two main characteristics provided by the questionnaire participants were ‘challenging’ and ‘a great way of improving skills’. However, the second finding shows that people struggle to identify which skills they can improve by participating in an improvisation workshop. Even more, the soft skills perceived as important by the research participants IN their work are not the same skills that they can identify as benefits of improvisation workshops. They identify that it is the most beneficial for stimulating creativity and presentation skills, while the perceived soft skills included listening, team work and interpersonal communication. Also, by comparing these two questions, (all participants could give as many answers as they think that is relevant) the number of answers dropped when they were identifying the benefits of the improvisation workshops.

These findings mean that it is very important how STHH and its service are framed and presented.

5.3.3 Up-Close Relationship Building: Networking

To what extent is building relationships an important strategy? What relationship building strategies are relevant for the target group?

According to the academic literature presented in the theoretical framework, building relationships is fundamental. This concept was highly supported by all research participants including the benchmark interviewee. All of them mentioned at least once that direct communication, engagement, and being
connected are essential factors. The majority agreed that it influences the likelihood of hiring an external company. This concept was explored in the research from few angles. One of them is networking and the findings showed that it is crucial for two reasons. Firstly, all research participants identified that recommendations by people from their network play a key factor. Secondly, all participants admitted that the external company is more likely to be hired if they met them personally. Also, it was pointed out that while the direct communication takes place, there are few factors that have influence on the effectiveness of networking, which are the following: aiming for building relationships, active listening, liking the representative on a personal level, and establishing mutual benefits. Additionally, the research emphasised the importance of attention from the external company to their potentially clients and that also contributes towards building relationships. Knapp’s Relations Model supports the research findings by explaining that after the stage one of superficial clues and first impressions, then what matters is exchanging more in-depth information – connecting, finding mutual benefits, maintaining and putting effort in it – giving attention and making agreements (Knapp, 1984). Furthermore, the research participants revealed that if they are approached directly by an external company, they prefer the message and offer to be personalised, and it should indicate how the service can benefit directly their company.

5.4 Conclusion & Recommendations

This part answers the following research questions: What can be concluded by comparing the key concepts developed from theoretical framework with the collected results? What does this conclusion mean for STHH in this project context?

The analysed findings of this research do not represent the whole target group nor the selected sample due to the subjectivity of communication preferences and interest that vary per person rather than per company. However, the research outcomes identify the main communication trends, interests guiding the choice regarding possible workshops, and the relevant PR and relationship building concepts that have to be included in the external communication plan. Additionally, the designed plan cannot be taken for granted and ‘set in stone’, because communication is a dynamic field, and it is a process, which takes time, effort and constant monitoring, evaluating and adapting the strategies in order succeed. This conducted research contributes towards the external communication plan, which helps to start communication between STHH and the target group because it identifies PR strategies that attract attention, communication preferences and interests guiding the target group in their choice of possible workshops.

From the research analysis it can be concluded that starting to communicate with the creative and innovative commercial companies is a multi-layered activity. The layers are interconnected.
Firstly, research indicated that **building relationships** is fundamental; therefore, it becomes the primary strategy for the external communication plan. In order to build relationships, STHH has to get out there and interact with the potential clients, because it is not possible to build relationships without initiating communication. Consequentially, it is recommended to develop a networking strategy that helps to explore already existing networks and to establish new networks; therefore, it is advised to participate in the corporate and networking events where the potential clients might attend. If a performance of STHH takes place, the strategy also increases visibility of the organisation, but more importantly it allows to expend networks by communicating and engaging with people.

The research participants emphasised that they do not mind to be approached directly by an external company in order to offer their services, but a **personal approach** is crucial despite which medium is used. The personal approach includes presenting the direct benefits specifically to the selected company. It is more time consuming than communicating to everyone the same standard message, but by the research participants it is perceived as a more preferable strategy. It cannot be forgotten that according to few participants the personal approach also includes the attention from the external company such as reliable and fast two-way communication, where they receive all answers immediately.

Secondly it is important to **adjust and frame the messages** on the owned media including the website and LinkedIn with the content that the research participants identified as interesting and relevant. The research participants pointed out that they care about referrals and reviews. By looking at research outcomes, it is recommended for STHH to communicate their values, and to prove reliability, expertise and experience within the field. The content that was identified in the conducted research is more likely to attract attention and to steer interests of the potential clients. Also, to communicate the content different message forms and channels should be used.

Lastly, STHH has to increase online **visibility**, or more specifically findability. This recommendation is based on the fact that the research participants were not able to identify other benefits than team building and creativity of improvisation workshops, and these soft skills were not chosen as the most important skills for their work. This finding indicates that if they would search for workshops that can help to improve the most relevant soft skills, they would not think directly about improvisation workshops. As a result, it is advisable to adjust Google search engine that STHH would be possible to find by using simple key words regarding soft skill workshops.

As it can be seen the conclusions and the recommendations are much interconnected and certain activities help to achieve the goal by using not necessarily a direct angle.
Final note: the literature and the research outcomes highlight that it is not possible to achieve the objective by using one strategy. It has to be a mix of strategies that help to connect with the target group and also to increase visibility. STHH should be accessible and findable for the potential clients, because the target group should be able to approach the improvisation group easily. As a result, the primary strategy of the external communication plan is meant for initiating communication that contributes towards building professional relationships, and increasing visibility becomes a supportive strategy.

The strategies are time-consuming; therefore, it is strongly recommended to invest in hiring a communication professional that helps regarding implementation. It is a long-term investment that eventually will benefit the organisation, while implementing the recommendations by themselves is difficult due to fact that STHH members work on volunteer basis next to their full-time jobs. Finally, for the future reference, sponsorships and seeking to appear in traditional media should be considered.
External Communication Plan

The external communication plan offers advice to STHH on how to start developing a professional relationship with small-medium size, internationally oriented, creative and innovative companies located in the Netherlands (=the target group) regarding who they are and improvisation workshops.

In order to achieve its long term goal of professionalising the organisation, STHH needs to develop a professional relationship through communicating with the potential client who they are, what they stand for and what the benefit of their services are for that particular organisation.

The founder of STHH, Kees De Vries identified that STHH's main problem is the lack of communication between STHH and commercial companies, and the major underlying reason is the inadequate knowledge on how to communicate effectively with potential commercial clients (personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). For STHH, it is very important to establish the communication and to start working with commercial companies. This research project aims to give an advice on how to connect and to communicate with the target group in order to establish a commercial relationship.

In order to design an effective external communication plan, research was conducted regarding relevant PR and professional relationship building strategies, interests guiding the target group’s choice regarding possible improvisation workshops and their communication preferences.

The main outcomes of the research showed that the relationship building is valued a lot, including direct and personal communication; therefore, it is a primary strategy. As a result, the external communication plan is highly focused on the first step of relationship building – ‘initiating’ (Knapp, 1984).

The strategies are designed with the goal of advising STHH on how to ‘get out there’ and initiate communication by using the personal approach, by utilizing existing networks and expanding to new ones. Research participants clearly indicated that being approached personally is important, and being recommended by a person from within their circle or – better yet - being part of their network increases the chance of being hired sharply, it is almost a sine qua non.

Moreover, supportive strategies are designed in order to increase online visibility. They include findability and sending the messages that align with the interests of the target group. These strategies are based on few important findings:

— In the present situation, there is a discrepancy between the skills the target group perceives as the most important in their work and the soft skills that they identity with the improvisation workshops. Because of this discrepancy, it is logical to think that commercial companies who want to improve crucial soft skills would not search for improvisation workshops.
Improvisation workshops can help to improve a variety of soft skills such as communication, leadership, adaptability, creativity, and team work (Tutton, 2010), presentation, interpersonal and intercultural communication, and problem solving skills (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). The only benefits of improvisation workshops the research participants could come up with were creativity and presentation skills. So if the target group is looking for possible ways to improve the crucial skills – beyond creativity and presentation skills –, they would not think directly about improvisation workshops. Therefore, one of the strategies focuses on adapting Google search engine to increase findability, since it was identified as the main search tool.

— The STHH website and their LinkedIn profile should include the information, which according to the research findings steers interests of the target group, since website and the LinkedIn profiles were identified as a major media platform for researching information about an external company. The research participants pointed out that values, reliability, experience and expertise are all fundamental criteria when it comes to choosing an organisation to work with.

— The external communication plan contributes towards solving the client’s problem by advising on how to establish communication with commercial companies. The conducted research was focussed on opinions, so the outcomes do not represent the whole sample or the whole target group. However, it was gathered enough data to design an external communication plan that advises on how to establish communication effectively and increases the likelihood of STHH being hired.

Shortly, the external communication plan includes practical strategies that primarily focus on building professional relationships. Additionally, supportive strategies aim to increase visibility and accessibility. Being approachable for the target group is not the primary goal of this external communication plan, but it is interconnected with building professional relationships. Finally, the main strategy is not meant to establish STHH as a for profit organisation, but simply to generate enough income to be able to professionalise the organisation. In order to implement this external communication plan, it is recommended to hire a communication specialist, since it is a very time-consuming task.

6.1 Building Professional Relationships
Building professional relationships includes two main angles, and each of them has to be approached by using different tactics.

The angles to be discussed are:

— Personal approach communication
— Networking
6.1.1 Personal Approach Communication

There is no better way to build professional relationships that the personal approach. This strategy also shortly includes some rules regarding giving attention to potential clients.

**Whom to approach?**

STHH creates a list of high potential small and medium size companies that they would like to approach. Since, it is a time consuming activity, the list should include a realistic number of commercial companies. It is suggested that an optimal number would be around 20 companies per list, and the list should be created two times per year. Additionally, it is important that companies would be selected by using criteria of the target group: small or medium size internationally oriented creative and innovative companies located in the Netherlands. Additionally, it is also important to select companies that are accessible for STHH and in order to safe time, the selected companies should be either located next to each other, or work in one building such as Creative Valley where 25 companies share the same location in Utrecht (http://www.creativevalley.nl/) and Rockstart with many start-ups located in Amsterdam (http://www.rockstart.com).

Approaching small companies located in the same office building creates the advantage of possible collaboration between those companies, due to the fact that some small companies are just too small to take the workshops on their own.

**How to approach?**

- STHH needs to have an understanding of every company that it targets: including their working environment and everyday challenges.
- STHH needs to designed a template for their proposal to their target group that communicates the identity of STHH and what STHH has to offer.
- A short and clear proposal should be developed that is specific to every company with the spotlight on how the offered improvisation workshops can help to improve their professional skills.
- It is important to focus on wider range of soft skills rather than only creativity and presentation skills as research showed more prioritised benefits are listening, interpersonal and professional communication, and teamwork. However, the most important benefits have to be adapted per company and it has to be communicated ‘how’ the improvisation workshops can help that company specifically.
- The tailor-made proposals should also communicate the values and why STHH do what they are doing, it should present the experience and expertise of the improvisation workshop teachers by pointing out facts (read more about it in the section of ‘Owned Media’).

**What channels to use for personal communication approach?**

Personal communication is just that. Personal. The best way is that a representative from STHH would go to the companies in order to discuss the
benefits of the improvisation workshops for that company and receive input for the tailor-made proposals. Regarding the representative of STHH, more information can be found under the headline ‘Who should network?’.

When visiting a company, it is important to meet with the key decision makers (HR managers, owners, and project managers) of the company. It can be stated that it is not possible to visit all the companies all the time, so an alternative strategy can be used, which is the researching key decision makers and contacting them through a private and personal message through LinkedIn. This social media platform has several advantages. Firstly, it can be used as a tool to identify the key decision makers. Secondly, by sending through LinkedIn, STHH controls who reads the message, while if it is sent by general email, it can get lost between many other emails.

Using both channels, it is important to remember to follow up after two weeks with the approached companies. The responses have to be tracked without spamming.

*How to give attention to commercial companies?*

It is necessary that STHH would be always available by phone during the office working hours and that emails would be answered carefully and responded within 4 hours.

6.1.2 Networking

Networking is an important tactic in order to build professional relationships: go out there, meet people and initiate communication. It is important to meet lots of people in order to find the ones with whom mutual benefits can be established. Networking is a fundamental strategy that contributes towards starting building professional relationships. It consists of two different aspects: strategies for utilizing the existing networks and strategies for expanding the network circle by building new weak ties.

6.1.2.1 Utilize existing networks

*All on board!*

Each of the 12 members of STHH has already an existing network. It only needs to be identified, so two important meetings with all members are required:

— Meeting 1: some introspection for the STHH team. If the team can relate to organisational goals and understand the benefits for an organisation as the whole, then they will be more willing to contribute (Wiley, 2010). Therefore, in the first meeting, it is important for making sure how everyone in the team relates to (the goals) of STHH. A collective approach should be established that everyone is excited about and wants to support. It should include networking in daily life and sharing the story of STHH. The main goal of this meeting is to brainstorm what connections members have with the target group; it can include strong and weak ties – from friends to
acquaintances, or even ex-students that used to come on the Monday night to the shows, or the graduates who joined the workshops. The outcome of this meeting is that everyone agrees which actions to take, how to identify their own networks, and conduct more research regarding connections and their contact information.

— Meeting 2: Second meeting is a follow-up meeting meant for updating each other about the outcomes and make a joined list with the contact details by making sure that there is no overlap.

_Here is the list, what happens then?_

For reconnecting with the contact persons a personal communication approach should be used. The main goal of reconnecting is that the tailor-made proposals would be discussed with the contact person, who should be asked to communicate the proposal with a recommendation to a key decision maker. If the contact people reject the idea, it is possible to ask for the contact details of the key decision makers in order for STHH to approach them directly.

The channels used to reconnect with the contact people depend on the relationships between them and the individual member of STHH. Accordingly, it is recommended that every member of STHH would approach the contact person personally since they already know each other.

_What about the commercial clients of STHH?_

STHH already has some experience with working with few local commercial companies, but STHH are hired for shows rather than workshops (K. De Vries, personal communication, 18th of January, 2016). However, if the company already has seen the performance and actually liked it, then it is more likely that they will be interested in hiring STHH again for workshops. Before connecting again to the company, a tailored-made proposal should be developed (more in the section of Personal Communication). It is important to reconnect with the ex-clients by sending them an email to the contact person (or key decision makers that STHH has made connections with) and by giving them a follow up call afterwards to check if they have received the email and to make an appointment. The goal should always be to try and make an appointment; nothing compares to face to face contact.

6.1.2.2 Expanding networks

_Where can networks be created?_

It is fundamental to network and to create ‘weak ties’, so STHH has to get out there, meet new people and network. However, it has to be strategic networking, which means that it is important to be where the potential clients are and interact with them. Random networking is a waste of time and should be avoided.

There are few strategies that can be used to meet new people. First of all, a calendar of different events attended by the target group could be made. STHH
could offer their services to the event organisers. It should be not forgotten that the goal is to network, therefore members of STHH can stay after their performance and actively engage with representative from the network. Secondly, the performance can be offered also to different kind of networking events. Even if STHH is not performing, they should still participate in networking events and engage with people. This will increase visibility and help to build professional relationships.

*But what kind of events?*

There are many different events held all over the Netherlands, some events are annual and held every year and some are one-time opportunity. Consequentially, an extensive research has to be done in order to create an event calendar including information where is it held and the contact information of the organisers. In order to approach the organisers of the events, the personal approach should be used.

Hereby are presented couple of examples of events and networks:

— Industrial:


*Annual The Next Web Europe* conference held in Amsterdam and it gathers “all the crazy ones” – the technology leaders, investors and entrepreneurs (The Next Web: Conference Europe, n.d.)

*EUPRERA 2016* conference, which this year takes place in Groningen and Amsterdam, and invites communication and PR professionals from all around Europe (EUPRERA2016, n.d.).

*ClickNL* is a network meant for creative industries in the Netherlands and they organise a lot of different events from master classes, workshops, and exhibitions to conferences (ClickNL, n.d.).

*24 Festival* is annually held event in Amsterdam meant for creative marketing media (24festival, n.d.).

These conferences and networks are only examples; there are countless possibilities of different kind of industrial events. Big events such as conferences are planned more than a year in advanced, therefore to approach them at least a half of a year upfront regarding performances is essential in order to succeed.

— Local community events:

TEDx University of Groningen, a well-known event that gathers a lot of different people from students to professionals (TedXGroningen, n.d.). STHH can offer their services as an opening performance or decide to share their experience what they learnt in those almost seven years and what was observed by teaching improvisation to so many people. However, a speech should be given only if STHH actually believes in what they are doing, what values they stand for and if they honestly want to share their story with the local community.

UP Groningen organises couple of Start-up Weekends in Groningen, where entrepreneurs, designers, developers, and experts meet couple times in a year to help each other to succeed (UpGroningen: Start-up Weekend, n.d.). STHH could ask for opportunity to give a workshop that helps to improve important soft skills that are vital for start-ups in order to succeed in the professional world.

There are many different opportunities and events held in Groningen where STHH could participate and help. Participating in festivals, exhibitions, and parties is also important, but since these kind of events are attended by masses, it is more meant for increasing visibility rather than networking.

— Networking events:

There are many networking events, where STHH could participate even if there is no opportunity to perform. It is still beneficial to be present, to engage, and introduce the organisation to people.

There is a Meetup App, where people meet for different reasons and one of them is called professional networking. The networking groups are located in different cities, some of them have above hundreds of members and they held regular meetings that usually are for free (MeetUp: Professional Networking, n.d.). Additionally, there are bigger events such as The Networking Club (n.d.). The country is full of possibilities, there is only a need to start doing it.

It is important not to forget that by approaching organisers the personal communication approach is suggested and that the event calendar should be constantly updated, since every month there are new events announced.

Who should network?

The research of White & Milnes states that everyone is capable of networking. However, there are certain skills that have to be mastered by the person who networks, which are being a good communicator that is able to listen carefully, share business experiences, leave good first impressions, and maintain respect. Additionally, based on this research, three main skills are highlighted for networking. It is fundamental to show authenticity, be confident and people who tend to enjoy the process are more effective in networking. Also, curiosity about others plays a vital role, since it is a two-way communication (White & Milnes,
As the conducted research also states that it is important to connect with people rather than try to focus on selling the services. It should be not forgotten to identify the culture of the events and to adapt the outfits accordingly.

What is next?

After a networking event, it is important to maintain connection by using media platforms such as LinkedIn (White & Milnes, 2014) and giving them a call to agree on a meeting, where mutual benefits can be established for both organisations. That also that enhances the personal and direct communication. Another important activity is to evaluate the attempts, learn in order to be better next time, improve skills and most importantly keep getting ‘out there’ and networking (White & Milnes, 2014) within STHH.

Networking strategy is time consuming, therefore it is should be done step by step.

6.2 Increase Visibility

Increasing visibility strategies are only supporting, since the main focus is on professional relationship building. As a result, the focus is on basic techniques of online visibility, because the event strategies that also aims to increase visibility were explored in the previous section.

6.2.1 Online visibility

This part of the strategy can be implemented by STHH members (T. Mook, personal communication, 16th of May, 2016)

“If it is not on Google, it doesn’t exist” (Wales, n.d.)

Search Engine optimisation is important if STHH wants its potential clients to find them in Google. Additionally, key search words should be adjusted that are used to find STHH website.

Since people cannot easily identify the soft skills that can be improved by participating in improvisation workshops, the key words should focus on specific benefits and location, for example: interpersonal communication workshops in Groningen or team building workshops in Groningen. In an ideal situation, STHH website should appear between the workshops offered in the Netherlands.

To achieve ranking of the website and increase findability is fundamental: the STHH website has to appear in the first page of Google search engine, because 90 per cent of people who research a topic on Google, scroll through the first page and only through the ‘organic listening’ (not paid), the other 10 per cent review the paid ads, and only 10 per cent of people klick next for the second page. According to statistics the first three links of the first page receive the biggest traffic (Sharp, 2014). In order to monitor website and the process around it, it is suggested to use Google Analytics. It is very important to analyse the ranking of the website and constantly monitor it, since it is easily influenced by any changes
made on the website, competitors’ websites or changes in algorithms (Martinez, 2008).

*What about the owned media?*

The research participants indicated that they do not trust the owned media, but there are certain factors such as testimonials, proofs of experience, reliability, expertise and usefulness of improvisation workshops which steer their interests and are vital; therefore, the owned media has to include these things.

STHH has a lively, with an appealing design and user-friendly website, but a specific section of the website should be dedicated for only commercial companies, where all the information could be communicated in one place instead of them looking for the information in different sections or go through information that is meant for students such as USVA workshops (Stranger Things Have Happened: workshops, 2016). Accordingly, to the website, LinkedIn should be adapted as well. At the moment, Facebook and Twitter are excluded from the strategy, even though to share from time to time the content regarding workshops for commercial companies is recommended, since STHH has a lot of followers.

*What should be communicated in the section meant for commercial companies?*

— The basic information about STHH.
— The different activities offered for commercial companies.
— The values of the organisation have to be clearly communicated: what STHH stands for such as inclusive and positive humour, why do they want to offer the workshops for businesses, and what do they believe in?
— The framing of the organisation should make the experience and expertise salient. Just to state the fact that STHH has these attributes is not reliable enough. STHH will need to back that up with examples and past performances. Additionally, different facts can be emphasised such as the amount of time that STHH has been offering this service, how many people have taken the workshops and the profiles of the teachers and their expertise. It is important to show portfolio of STHH even though the organisation has not made any workshops yet for commercial companies, but the past clients should appear on the website, because it increases the credibility and reliability of the organisation. Importantly it is fundamental to have a third-party endorsement by asking references regarding the events and workshops from credible individuals such as from those companies that booked performance of STHH, people who participate in the workshops, but are not students. By providing references and reviews it is important to name who said it and their title, and not to leave as anonymous reviews, because then it loses its credibility.

The content should be communicated by using storytelling. This allows STHH to engage and persuade their target group and to raise awareness or shift attitude
by motivating people to re-tell the story or/and to consume the product (Sullivan, 2013). Smart suggested that the story has “[...] inspire, engage [...] Be relevant and create value” (Jacques, 2015).

The same information should be adapted and placed on LinkedIn since it was perceived as a popular and important platform. Every STHH member’s profile has to be adapted with his or her role and expertise that contributes towards the offered services.

Regarding framing the offered workshops, it is important to emphasise all the benefits that workshops can give to the companies. However, not only listing them is important but also explaining how participating in the workshops improve these soft skills.

*How to communicate the content on the owned media?*

It is important to use a mix of different format messages to keep the attention:

- The main format should be short and clear texts; it is recommended to stay away from long paragraphs.
- Infographics is a perfect way of illustrating the benefits of the workshops, it is easy to see and understand, as well this format can be posted on LinkedIn or sent via emails. However, it should not be based on assumptions, but on facts, therefore research beforehand should be done.
- A few short as possible videos should be edited to show the impressions of the workshops including communicating the inclusivity that everyone can do it, the benefits and the fun way of learning.

6.3. Conclusion

The designed external communication plan is complex, takes time and effort to implement it; therefore, it is advised to invest in a communication professional who monitors and executes the process. The strategies are designed based on the research outcomes and by taking into account the culture of STHH, which is informal, creative with a positive humour approach. The members are good communicators and they connect with people easily and well. The design plan allows them to embrace their strengths to the benefit of the organisation. It does not include any designed suggestions, so all the suggested products can easily be adapted to the design of STHH in order to maintain their identity.

In order to succeed, all members need to be on board, contribute towards the goal and communicate with each other very well. STHH has teachers with experience and they deliver excellent quality workshops, and it is fundamental to put time, effort and energy by connecting with the target group, because the organisation has opportunities, but it is not easy to grab them.
## 6.4 Planning & Organising

### 6.4.1 Time-frame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>July</th>
<th>August</th>
<th>September</th>
<th>October</th>
<th>November</th>
<th>December</th>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal approach:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make a list of 20 companies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design a tailor-made proposals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate the proposals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attention for clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize existing networks:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Nr. 1 of STHH</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Nr. 2 of STHH: finished contact list</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening connections from previous clients</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconnecting with the connections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding networks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating an event calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Updating event calendar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with the organisers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparing for networking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating &amp; networking in events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online visibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis by using Google Analytics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting key words &amp; ranking of the website</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring the ranking by Google Analytics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapting owned media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing infographics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making two short videos</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is only a suggested time-frame which is flexible and can be adapted according to the availability of STHH members. In the time-frame, some activities take all year long, but it indicates that continues attempts and activities are needed, which cannot be planned yet.
6.4.2 Financial and human resources
These costs are just rough indications in order to give an idea of the implication costs, but it is flexible and can be adapted according to the situation. Even though it might look as if a big financial investment needed, but it is a long-term investment that eventually should benefit the organisation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costs incl. purchases &amp; human resources</th>
<th>Onetime costs</th>
<th>Costs per month</th>
<th>Final costs (over a year period)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LinkedIn Premium Account (n.d.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47,99</td>
<td>479,90€*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for networking events: price based on around 8 paid events per year, and taking the ticket price (25,00 €) for The Networking Club (n.d.) as an example</td>
<td>25,00€</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>200,00€</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google Analytics**</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making two short videos**</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing infographics**</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for travelling costs: price based on 10 trips for 5 people with the group tickets (NS, n.d.)</td>
<td>11,50€ /ticket</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>575,00€</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget for calls: price based on 100 minutes/per month Skype call credit for mobiles and landlines in the Netherlands (Skype, n.d.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3,63€</td>
<td>43,56€**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A part time employee that can manage implementation: minimum wage per hour based on 20 working hours per week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In total:</td>
<td>792,29€</td>
<td>5 555,46€</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* LinkedIn is not needed in June and the first trial month is for free

** To use/design these products are in the ability of STHH; therefore, they do not need to pay a third party (T. Mook, personal communication 16th of May, 2016). However, even though it is not included in the cost sheet, but it is suggested to reward the member who would do it, since it will cost a lot of time.

*** The credit can be decreased or increased, if needed or Skype credit can be used and paid per call instead of monthly payment (Skype: Calling Rates, n.d.).

**** It is advised to hire a communication professional for at least 20 hours per week for first six months, and afterwards the hours can be decreased on increased, according to the needs. The part-time job payment per month is based on calculation suggested on the Dutch government page (Government: Minimum Wage, n.d.).

6.4.3 Risk management
Since communication is such a dynamic field, the external communication plan cannot be taken for granted and blindly followed. It has to be constantly monitored and adapted. In order to assure that the plan contributes towards achieving the main goal of the organisation, it is important that every
communication step is evaluated and the strategies adapted, if needed. Communication is a vibrant field, therefore evaluating and adapting after every small step are fundamental in order to succeed. The suggestion is based on of Reflective Communication SCRUM model (Ruler, n.d.). Additionally, it is important also to scan constantly the external environment that influences STHH and its communication including new communication trends, competitor activities, social media, the changing trends and attitudes of the target group. It is important to react to all the changes and adapt strategy, if needed. Therefore, to have a communication professional is essential.

One of the main unknowns is the reaction of the target group, because the services are not necessarily a need for companies, but they can be very useful, which has to be proven to companies. To find these commercial clients who would be willing to participate will take time. However, it is important to keep trying, to be present, to put effort and attempts, and adjust strategies, because there is no perfect formula or strategy to make it easy, but with a hard work, commitment and effort it is possible to achieve the goals of STHH.
7. Reference List


LinkedIn Premium Account. (n.d.). Unlock sales opportunities. Retrieved on 29th of May, 2016 from https://www.linkedin.com/premium/products?trk=nav_responsive_sub_navy_upgrade (can be seen only by logged in)


8. Appendix

8.1 Preliminary research

8.1.1 A Bit More About STHH

On 29\textsuperscript{th} of January, 2016 an informal interview with Gideon De Silva regarding client acquisition took place. The key aspects discussed in the interview:

- Two categories of target groups/potential clients: student organisations and locally based big energy companies were approached
- Only a few commercial organisations were approached
- HTML emails were used to reach the target groups: a first email was sent and after 2.5 months a second email was sent. The content was adapted according to the category of the target group
- A representative of STHH participated in networking events such as concerts, theatre events, etc. The networking was not meant for commercial companies
- The efforts regarding acquisition did not bring any success
- The analysis of the process was not done, but it can be assumed that possible obstacles could be timing and language barrier

Conclusion by the researcher: It is hard to make a conclusion regarding the commercial clients since only a very small amount was approached, so any conclusion is subjective and cannot be taken as valid. Therefore, it can be stated that the target group was not approached.

On 16\textsuperscript{th} of February, 2016, an informal interview with Thomas Mook regarding PR and communication of STHH took place. Hereby is the key information:

- The main communication channels are Facebook and the Website. Twitter is only a supporting channel that is directly connected to Facebook. For offline PR, posters are used, but STHH strategy is online focused.
- Flyering as PR strategy was not an effective attempt
- There are a couple of events (Art Basement, events at Dutch student organisations) that are beneficial in the context of PR
- STHH participates in charity events, but does not organise them by themselves
- They did also radio show, a TV-show, YouTube series
- No media relationships are established, but they do receive sometimes media coverage
— Values that STHH stand for are the casual nature of the shows and a certain kind of humour that “celebrates what is weird about people” – positive humour
— Comedy is used in the advertisement, but jokes are not enforced. Advertisements are simple and symbols are present: duck & sticky notes. The tone is: loose & colourful
— The alignment between the identity and the image of STHH is present, however it could be wondered to what extent
— The PR challenge is to communicate what STHH do, because usually people associate improvisation with stand-up comedy, which might make people feel uncomfortable. Additionally, it is hard to express that the games of the show are similar, but every single show is unique on its own way and has a different content.

8.1.2 Overview of the competitors
In order to explore the project context fully, it is important to investigate the external environment of this project. Quite a lot of companies that offer different workshops helping to improve soft skills exist in the Netherlands. Yet most of them are oriented towards team building activities, and only few offer improvisation or ‘theatre sport’ workshops that are based on improvisation games.

All the information about the companies is retrieved from the given websites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the company</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Improv workshops</th>
<th>Main Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puppet- X</td>
<td><a href="http://puppetx.nl/#aboutus">http://puppetx.nl/#aboutus</a></td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>Only during event: Improv Amsterdam</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boom Chicago</td>
<td><a href="http://www.boomchicago.nl/">http://www.boomchicago.nl/</a></td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>Yes, not specified about corporate planners</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EasyLaughs</td>
<td><a href="http://www.easylaughs.nl/">http://www.easylaughs.nl/</a></td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>Corporate workshops (Advertised by Amsterdam Marketing)</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom Goldhand</td>
<td><a href="http://tomgoldhand.com/workshops-in-improvisation/">http://tomgoldhand.com/workshops-in-improvisation/</a></td>
<td>Amsterdam</td>
<td>Improvisation movement and dance workshops, target group is not specified</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshoppen</td>
<td><a href="http://www.workshoppen.nl/workshops/workshop-theatersport/">http://www.workshoppen.nl/workshops/workshop-theatersport/</a></td>
<td>All over the Netherlands (incl. Groningen)</td>
<td>Theatre sport workshops based on improv</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Events</td>
<td><a href="https://progressevents.nl/bedrijfsuitjesgroningen/proeverijen/">https://progressevents.nl/bedrijfsuitjesgroningen/proeverijen/</a></td>
<td>Groningen</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Groningseuitjes</td>
<td><a href="http://www.groningseuitjes.nl/pos">http://www.groningseuitjes.nl/pos</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 8.2 The Sample

Hereby is an overview of the companies that were invited to take part in this research project.

The two categories of innovative and creative companies are illustrated only between commercial companies that were invited to fill in questionnaires. However, the division is not precise due to the existing overlap between these two categories. The companies that were invited to participate in interviews are not divided, because already by that it was adjusted that the findings of both categories have to be summarized together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company's Name</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IvRM</td>
<td><a href="http://ivrm.nl">http://ivrm.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@ivrm.nl">info@ivrm.nl</a></td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress Communications NL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.progresscommunications.nl">http://www.progresscommunications.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:contact@progresscommunications.nl">contact@progresscommunications.nl</a></td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stadsarrangement</td>
<td><a href="http://www.stadsarrangement.nl">http://www.stadsarrangement.nl</a></td>
<td>All over the Netherlands</td>
<td>Theatre sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De Postwagen</td>
<td><a href="http://www.postwagen.nl/">http://www.postwagen.nl/</a></td>
<td>Tolbert</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taribush</td>
<td><a href="http://taribush.nl/content/contact_opnemen_met_taribush">http://taribush.nl/content/contact_opnemen_met_taribush</a></td>
<td>Drenthe</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedrijfsuitje</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bedrijfsuitje.nl">http://www.bedrijfsuitje.nl</a></td>
<td>All over the Netherlands</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1001 activiteiten</td>
<td><a href="http://www.1001activiteiten.nl">http://www.1001activiteiten.nl</a></td>
<td>All over the Netherlands</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamuitstapje</td>
<td><a href="http://www.teamuitstapje.nl">http://www.teamuitstapje.nl</a></td>
<td>All over the Netherlands</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indoorstrand</td>
<td><a href="http://www.indoorstrand.nl">http://www.indoorstrand.nl</a></td>
<td>Groningen</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedrijfsuitje.nu</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bedrijfsuitje.nu/">http://www.bedrijfsuitje.nu/</a></td>
<td>All over the Netherlands</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Contact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVTPR</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lvtpr.nl">http://www.lvtpr.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@lvtpr.nl">info@lvtpr.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spice PR</td>
<td><a href="http://spicepr.nl/">http://spicepr.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@spicepr.nl">info@spicepr.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cream PR</td>
<td><a href="http://creampr.nl/">http://creampr.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@creampr.nl">info@creampr.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So PR</td>
<td><a href="http://www.lvtpr.nl">http://www.lvtpr.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@lvtpr.nl">info@lvtpr.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch PR Group</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dutchprgroup.com/">http://www.dutchprgroup.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@dutchprgroup.com">info@dutchprgroup.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We PR</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wepr.nl/">http://www.wepr.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:you@wepr.nl">you@wepr.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HH Nieuwegein</td>
<td><a href="http://www.Hhglobal.com/locations">www.Hhglobal.com/locations</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Joris.vanstiphout@hhglobal.com">Joris.vanstiphout@hhglobal.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pepperminds Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pepperminds.nl">www.pepperminds.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:werken@pepperminds.nl">werken@pepperminds.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synergy Events</td>
<td><a href="http://www.synergy-events.com/">http://www.synergy-events.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@synergy-events.com">info@synergy-events.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meijer &amp; Walters</td>
<td><a href="http://www.meijerwalters.com/">http://www.meijerwalters.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@meijerwalters.com">info@meijerwalters.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSUR Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bsur.com/">http://www.bsur.com/</a></td>
<td>amsterdambbsur.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicis Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://www.publicis.nl/desktop.php">http://www.publicis.nl/desktop.php</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@publicis.nl">info@publicis.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DigitasLBi Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://www.digitaslb.com/nl/">http://www.digitaslb.com/nl/</a></td>
<td>amsterdamlubituc.com</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangelove</td>
<td><a href="http://www.strangelove.nl/">http://www.strangelove.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:vincent@strangelove.nl">vincent@strangelove.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sid Lee</td>
<td><a href="http://sidlee.com/">http://sidlee.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:scormack@sidlee.com">scormack@sidlee.com</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey Benelux</td>
<td><a href="http://grey.com/benelux">http://grey.com/benelux</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:doeke.desteur@grey.nl">doeke.desteur@grey.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kessels Kramer</td>
<td><a href="http://www.kesselskramer.com/">http://www.kesselskramer.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:CHURCH@KESSELSKRAMER.COM">CHURCH@KESSELSKRAMER.COM</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Identity</td>
<td><a href="https://totalidentity.com/">https://totalidentity.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@totalidentity.nl">info@totalidentity.nl</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Innovative companies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samhoud Media</td>
<td><a href="http://www.samho.com">http://www.samho.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@samho.com">info@samho.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feli</td>
<td><a href="http://meette.com/en/">http://meette.com/en/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:hello@meette.com">hello@meette.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubideo</td>
<td><a href="https://ubideo.com">https://ubideo.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@ubideo.com">info@ubideo.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nectar</td>
<td><a href="http://nectar3d.com/">http://nectar3d.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@nectar3d.com">info@nectar3d.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lofal BV</td>
<td><a href="https://www.lofal.com">https://www.lofal.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@lofal.com">info@lofal.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3D Hubs</td>
<td><a href="https://www.3dhubs.com">https://www.3dhubs.com</a></td>
<td>+31 202 611 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Education</td>
<td><a href="https://4education.com/">https://4education.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:inquiries@4education.com">inquiries@4education.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media2b</td>
<td><a href="http://www.media2b.net/">http://www.media2b.net/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@media2b.net">info@media2b.net</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitonic B.V.</td>
<td><a href="https://bitonic.nl">https://bitonic.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:contact@bitonic.nl">contact@bitonic.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird Control Group</td>
<td><a href="http://birdcontrolgroup.com/">http://birdcontrolgroup.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@birdcontrolgroup.com">info@birdcontrolgroup.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bidroom</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bidroom.com">https://www.bidroom.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:office@bidroom.com">office@bidroom.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aerialtronics</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aerialtronics.com/">http://www.aerialtronics.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:request@aerialtronics.com">request@aerialtronics.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At Home</td>
<td><a href="https://www.athom.com">https://www.athom.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@athom.nl">info@athom.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made Awkward</td>
<td><a href="https://madeawkward.com">https://madeawkward.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:hallo@madeawkward.com">hallo@madeawkward.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AdGibbon</td>
<td><a href="http://adgibbon.com/">http://adgibbon.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@adgibbon.com">info@adgibbon.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adyen</td>
<td><a href="https://www.adyen.com">https://www.adyen.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:amsterdam@adyen.com">amsterdam@adyen.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aimforthemoon</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aimforthemoon.com/">http://www.aimforthemoon.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@aimforthemoon.com">info@aimforthemoon.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cirque</td>
<td><a href="https://thecirque.com">https://thecirque.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@thecirque.com">info@thecirque.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bynder</td>
<td><a href="http://www.getbynder.com/">http://www.getbynder.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@getbynder.com">info@getbynder.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bux</td>
<td><a href="http://getbux.com/">http://getbux.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@getbux.com">info@getbux.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Monks</td>
<td><a href="https://www.mediamonks.com">https://www.mediamonks.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@mediamonks.com">info@mediamonks.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Injection</td>
<td><a href="http://mediainjection.com">http://mediainjection.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@mediainjection.com">info@mediainjection.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve Digital</td>
<td><a href="http://www.improvedigital.com/about_us">http://www.improvedigital.com/about_us</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:amsterdamoffice@improvedigital.com">amsterdamoffice@improvedigital.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the Picture</td>
<td><a href="http://gtp.nl/">http://gtp.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:contact@gtp.nl">contact@gtp.nl</a> <a href="mailto:paul@gtp.nl">paul@gtp.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genius Travel</td>
<td><a href="http://geniustravel.com/">http://geniustravel.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:press@geniustravel.com">press@geniustravel.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Companies that were invited for interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Contact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Happen</td>
<td><a href="http://www.happen.com/">http://www.happen.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:amsterdam@happen.com">amsterdam@happen.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Website</td>
<td>Email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SuperHeroes Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://hellosuperheroes.com/">http://hellosuperheroes.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:airmail@hellosuperheroes.com">airmail@hellosuperheroes.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havas PR Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://www.havaspr.nl/">http://www.havaspr.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:Emelie.Mullenders@havasww.com">Emelie.Mullenders@havasww.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisse Kommunikatie</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wisse-worldcom.nl/en/">http://www.wisse-worldcom.nl/en/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@wisse-worldcom.nl">info@wisse-worldcom.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neushoorn</td>
<td><a href="http://www.neushoorn.nl/">www.neushoorn.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:janpierbrands@gmail.com">janpierbrands@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan A event management</td>
<td><a href="http://www.plana.nl/">http://www.plana.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:sales@plana.nl">sales@plana.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercultural Communication</td>
<td><a href="http://www.intercultural.nl/contact.aspx">http://www.intercultural.nl/contact.aspx</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@intercultural.nl">info@intercultural.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsterdam Marketing</td>
<td><a href="http://www.iamsterdam.com/en/amsterdam-marketing">http://www.iamsterdam.com/en/amsterdam-marketing</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@iamsterdam.com">info@iamsterdam.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twilight</td>
<td><a href="http://www.tvilight.com/">http://www.tvilight.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@tvilight.com">info@tvilight.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metabolic</td>
<td><a href="http://www.metabolic.nl/">http://www.metabolic.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@metabolic.nl">info@metabolic.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AccessArt</td>
<td><a href="https://accessart.nl">https://accessart.nl</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@accessart.nl">info@accessart.nl</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bohemian birds</td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@getbux.com">info@getbux.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:info@bohemianbirds.com">info@bohemianbirds.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sorted Management</td>
<td><a href="http://sortedmanagement.com/">http://sortedmanagement.com/</a></td>
<td>+31 (0)20 673 02 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockstart</td>
<td><a href="http://www.rockstart.com/">http://www.rockstart.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:hey@rockstart.com">hey@rockstart.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GitLab</td>
<td><a href="https://about.gitlab.com/">https://about.gitlab.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:community@gitlab.com">community@gitlab.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensu</td>
<td>sensu.org</td>
<td><a href="mailto:caspar@sensu.org">caspar@sensu.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physitrack</td>
<td><a href="https://www.physitrack.com">https://www.physitrack.com</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:support@physitrack.com">support@physitrack.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadboxer</td>
<td><a href="https://www.leadboxer.com/">https://www.leadboxer.com/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:support@leadboxer.com">support@leadboxer.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Double Dutch</td>
<td><a href="http://doubledutch.me/">http://doubledutch.me/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:leon@doubledutch.me">leon@doubledutch.me</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achtung! Amsterdam</td>
<td><a href="http://www.achtung.nl/">http://www.achtung.nl/</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:office@achtung.nl">office@achtung.nl</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.3 Summarized Interviews

#### 8.3.1 Interviews from creative and innovative companies

The semi-structured interviews that were conducted by phone, skype or face-to-face communication are summarised according to two sections of the interviews, because due to the structure of the interviews, some interviewees provided answers before the question was even asked, therefore the follow-up questions depended on the interview that takes place at that moment. All interviews are recorded and filed, except the interview over the phone conversation, which, due to technical problems, was not recorded. It has to be mentioned that there is one structured interview that was conducted by email.

All other interviews were semi-structured with open questions aimed at encouraging the interviewees to give their opinion without being influenced. The sequence of questions depended on the context and the process of each interview, because sometimes the interviewee mentioned the answer before the question was asked or it was asked as a follow up question if it fitted the situation.
Therefore, the following interview questions indicates the main sections of the semi-structured interview, but not necessarily the sequence of the questions.

Interview questions:

**Section I:**

1. Which soft skills do you consider crucial for the work quality in this company? How does the company empower and help to improve these skills? To what extent is team-work important in your company? What kind of team building activities do you undertake in the company?
2. Which media platforms do you perceive as reliable source of information and influential?
3. Which form of messages attracts your attention the most?
4. Could you describe your favourite brand? Why do you like it? What values do they show? How do they communicate? (Messages, channels)
5. How do charity events attract your attention and influence your opinion about the organisation?
6. What do you think about improvisation workshops? What do you associate with improvisation workshops? What benefits do you think you and your colleagues could receive by taking part in improvisation workshops?

**Section II of the interview:**

Let’s say, you would like to hire an external company for activities that help to improve soft skills and contribute to team work.

1. How and where would you look for information about an external company?
2. What factors play a role when considering to hire an external company?
3. How should an external company represent itself in order to be hired?
4. How would you like to be approached by an external company in order for them to offer their services?
5. To what extent seeing/experiencing a performance of an external company in an event would influence your decision to hire them/ propose for your organisation to hire them? (What kind of events?)
6. To what extent direct communication/engagement with an external company would increase the likelihood of hiring an external company?
Interview Nr. 1 with Ms. Sabrina Bos, Founder of AccessArt
13th of April, interview was conducted over a phone conversation

Section I:

The founder of AccessArt, Ms. Sabrina Bos identified team work and creativity/thinking out of the box as the most important skills at her company. The main empowerment of these skills is creating an environment where employees are allowed to work on what they actually like and by giving them responsibilities. The core team of the company is quite small who work with a few interns, so they do not invest in team building activities, but she acknowledged her interests regarding improving soft skills.

Regarding media reliability, Bos was not sure and she said that she prefers to look for several sources on online media including social media, according to her the reliability depends more on the sender. When the founder of the company was asked what messages she prefers and what grabs her attention, she revealed that usually it depends on the media platforms. For example, on social media such as Facebook, she prefers short videos, but on LinkedIn she is more interested in articles and images that are shared by the organisations that she follows.

Bos admitted that she has tried the improvisation workshops once and she thinks it is fun, but except that it is a good team building activity, but she cannot identify any other direct benefits of improvisation workshops for the company.

Section II:

When she is looking up for an external company, she uses always the search engine Google, and she researches the company on social media platforms, especially LinkedIn. According to Bos, not only does the main LinkedIn profile of the company matter, but she likes to check the profiles of the founders and employees of the company too. The interviewee emphasised that she is very interested in the recommendations and reviews that are given about the company.

She believes that there are few very important factors when hiring an external company. One of them is price, it matters if the service is affordable and if the price is according to the value that the company gets in return for the investment. Another important factor is the employees of the external company, she has to feel connected, therefore according to Bos direct communication is fundamental, especially for companies that are offering soft skills workshops. Additionally, she likes to be approached by companies directly and by personalized emails that are meant especially for her. The founder of the company emphasised again that references and recommendation by others are very important, and the quality of
the product and direct benefits have to be proven in order to make such an investment.

Note: due the time limitation, the question about favourite brand was not answered.

Structured Interview Nr. 2 with Mr. Leon Roet, Account Executive
18th of April, structured interview by email

1. Which soft skills do you consider crucial for the work quality in this company and how does the company empower and help to improve these skills?
Leon Roet: I would say that you need passion / love for what you do in any type of company you work for in order to becomes successful. Furthermore, you need to be flexible / have an open mind set. We are a startup, things don’t always go as expected. The company provides enough culture / team building in order to keep our focus onto the goals.

2. To what extent is team-work important in your company and what kind of team building activities do you undertake in the company?
Leon: Crucial, no team work means no success. We have an annual (international) offsite where the entire company comes together for a couple of days. Furthermore, different team outings and also weekly All Hands meetings for the entire company and also per office.

3. Which media platforms do you perceive as reliable source of information and influential?
Leon: Techcrunch.com, thenextweb.com, meetingsnet.com

4. Which form of messages attracts your attention the most?
Leon: Shares by my network

5. What do you think about improvisation workshops? What benefits could you identify?
Leon: Not sure what they are, but everything which keeps you as an individual / team get out of your comfort zone helps! You do always need to think about what you want to achieve in order for something to become successful.

Let’s say, you would like to hire an external company for activities that help to improve soft skills and contribute to team work.

6. What factors play a role when considering to hire an external company?
Leon: Their track record, who are they working with and what do their clients say about them?

7. How would you like to be approached by an external company in order for them to offer their services?
Leon: Think in terms of 'Social Selling'. They need to do their homework, know my pain points and be able to give an idea how their solution / service can solve my pain points. Cold, unprepared calls don’t make me want to continue a conversation.
8. To what extent seeing/experiencing a performance of an external company in an event would influence your decision to hire them/propose for your organisation to hire them?
Leon: Could be indeed have a great influence depending on what we are talking about. If the 'performance' is crucial in providing the solution it would make sense to have a good idea of this prior to starting a cooperation.

9. To what extent direct communication/engagement with an external company would increase the likelihood of hiring an external company?
Leon: Very likely, see question 7

Please note that due to the extremely busy period at Double Dutch, the structured interview was limited to the main questions.

Interview Nr. 3 with Mr. Caspar De Zeeuw, Producer at Sensu
19th of April, interview was conducted in face-to-face meeting in the office of the company located in Groningen

Section I:

The interviewee identified that listening, ability to ask good questions, interacting and having fun with clients while working as the most important soft skills for the work quality at Sensu. Additionally, it was highlighted that interpersonal communication is fundamental in their work as well. However, the company does not empower nor help to improve these skills. The interviewee believes that the most important attempts to empower those skills is to create a correct environment at work, he thinks that one of the tools is to evaluate the work when something goes unexpectedly. An influential factor is that their core team is very small, but they work with a lot of freelancers, therefore they do work in quite big teams. The producer claimed that the team work is crucial, but they do not do any team building activities and the interviewee does not personally believe in effectiveness of this kind of activities; according to De Zeeuw, their work is a team building activity itself. Only thing which they do together with co-workers outside work is having an occasional drink after successfully finishing a job.

The interviewee indicated that he does not trust social media, even though he perceived Wikipedia as a reliable source. However, from his point of view reliability depends on the profile of the sender. For him, the profile of the sender and his experience within the topic matter a lot. However, he always tries to get information through direct communication, if it is possible. Additionally, the producer at Sensu claims that all forms of messages attract his attention, usually it depends on a “flashy headline”.

64
When the interviewee was asked about his favourite brands, he expressed the negative feelings regarding brands in first place. Afterwards, he described a bakery shop located in Amsterdam and a specific expresso machine that he likes, the most important factors for him are authenticity and high quality of the products. When the interviewee was asked about charity events, he admitted that he actually is not interested.

Regarding improvisation workshops, the interviewee admitted that he has never tried and he personally thinks that it is beneficial only for companies with strict internal environment; as a result, the skills of thinking outside the box can be stimulated and improved by participating in improvisation workshops. On the contrary, according to De Zeeuw, Sensu has a free and creative environment, therefore he was not able to identify why workshops would be useful for them nor any other possible benefits except stimulating creativity. However, a workshop with an inspiring teacher can be a nice experience for practicing soft skills.

Section II:

As mentioned above the interviewee does not perceive any medium as reliable, and when he is looking for information he calls the company directly. Another important point was that De Zeeuw mentioned that the most important factors for hiring an external company are the following: reliability, experience, and expertise in the field. Additionally, for him it is very important that the results of the offered service would be proven, measurable, and visible; therefore, the portfolio itself is very important, as well as recommendations. Later in the interview, he stated that budget and attention to the clients (them in that case) play an important role, therefore he prefers hiring freelancers, especially because the interviewee believes that, generally, they tend to give more attention to the clients. The interviewee confirmed that the representation of the company is important. Nevertheless, he revealed that he would hire an external company for improving soft skills or team building activities only from his network circle. When De Zeeuw was asked about communication preferences and how he would like to be approached by an external company, the interviewee pointed out that he does not have any preferences. Regarding PR strategies, De Zeeuw confirmed that seeing and experiencing the product/service of an external company would be nice and would increase the possibility of hiring them and most importantly direct communication is vital.
Interview Nr. 4 with Ms. Anique Goemans, Management Assistant at Sorted Management

21st of April, interview took place over a Skype meeting

Section I:

Goemans identified that at her work, the most important soft skills are listening to each other and to the clients, communication, and complete dedication to the client’s needs. In order to improve and empower those skills, they have weekly meetings where everyone updates each other and decides on how it is going to proceed further. Goemans pointed out that the team work is crucial. They work in groups a lot, therefore dependency on each other occurs, and especially her role is like that of a “spider in the web”. However, they do not participate in any special team building activities. They have Friday drinks with colleagues and occasional parties, which, according to Goemans, are part of their job but also a lot of fun with the co-workers.

When Goemans was asked about reliable media, she said that as a company, usually they look up information on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and some industrial media. Additionally, the forms of messages that attracts her attention the most on social media are short movies and short, funny text messages, which can be read in a few seconds.

The interviewee identified Nike as her favourite brand. She really likes the sport shoes and sport outfits, because she prefers informal shoes and it fits her lifestyle. Goemans especially likes Nike for its clean design, the logo, simplicity, and high quality products.

Regarding charity events, in the interviewee’s opinion, charity would be interesting only if it connects to the area that Sorted Management is operating in. Personally, she perceives charity as a very positive action, which is supposed to be natural act for everyone. However, the fact that a company takes part or organizes charity does not change her perception of the company; the company itself is the most important.

When Goemans was asked about the improvisation workshops, she mentioned that she never had taken part in one, but she assumes that a person could have nice results by participating in these kind of activities. The interviewee thinks that the workshops stimulates creativity the most, it helps to think of new ideas, and if it is done with colleagues, then they can learn from each other in a different surrounding, see the colleagues in an another way and just have some fun together.

Section II:
If she is looking for a new company, firstly she Googles it, and scans through the first page of the findings. She also sees LinkedIn as a reliable source; she also checks its Facebook page; especially how many likes the company has. Moreover, Goemans identified the following as the most important factors which play a role by when considering to hire an external company: the budget, good reviews, which are fundamental, their flexibility – time and location wise, with increase/decrease in the number of participants. Goemans prefers that the external company would represent themselves friendly, they would respond quickly and to all questions, but they should not be too pushy. Regarding the communication preferences, the interviewee would always like to be approached by an external company through email, because then she can answer on her own time and check with her colleagues, if needed. It would be nice to have an impression in email such as a short video. Furthermore, the interviewee agreed that it is always good to see the performance and experience what the workshop consists of in first person, to know what they can actually do. She would like to see an external group in events such as parties. Regarding direct communication and engagement, Goemans emphasized that it is essential to leave a good impression. If she needed to hire an external company, she would always choose the company that she knows personally and that has left a good impression. Shortly, direct communication would increase the possibility of hiring the external company.

**Interview Nr. 5 with Mr. Janpier Brands, director of Neushoorn**

22nd of April, interview took place over a Skype meeting

**Section I:**

Negotiating, cooperating and leadership are the most important skills in Bands' work environment. Their methods of empowering are the following: learning by doing, reflecting on the work and examples from role models. The interviewee identified that team work is crucial, but they do not undertake any team building activities in the company. Mr. Brands stated shortly that he perceives social media as a reliable information source and short videos and moving images attract his attention the most, but of course, the subject of the message matters the most.

Regarding his favourite brand, Brands named Andewhall. It is his favourite for a few reasons. Firstly, he likes that it is created by only one person, and he carries out all the activities of the organisation. Secondly, it is unique and he likes the fact that the brand is relatively unknown. He can identify himself with the main values, which are aesthetics and ethics.
Regarding charity events, the director of the company responded that he does not trust companies that organise charity events, because he believes that it is done only for marketing purpose and only for their own benefits.

When the interviewee was asked about improvisation workshops, he admitted that these workshops are interesting and can be beneficial for boosting creativity skills due to the nature of the workshops, but it has to be carried out in a safe environment.

Section II:

Brands pointed out that if he is looking for information about some external company, firstly he uses Google’s search engine and scans shortly through the findings; as the most reliable information source he identifies Facebook, especially the comment section. Moreover, in order for him to hire an external company, the most important factor is that it has to be recommended by people from his network. It is also very fundamental that he would like and connect with the people from the company, therefore direct communication is playing a major role before hiring. Another important factor is the price, and local companies have a slightly bigger advantage. The interviewee mentioned that portfolio and practical results are very essential and they have to be communicated well. According to Brand the representation of the company itself is influential, but he personally prefers more informal companies that are able to communicate what they are doing and their reliability and expertise. According to Brands the most preferable way to be approached by an external company is at a café. Lastly, he would be happy firstly to experience the offered service in an event and that would increase the likelihood of hiring the external company.

Interview Nr. 6 with Serge Beckers, managing consultant at Wisse Kommunikatie
22nd of April, interview took interview took place over a Skype meeting

Section I:

Good communication, to feel and understand your colleagues and how they perceive situations, and listening are the most important soft skills at Wisse Kommunikatie, according to Serge Beckers. In order to improve these skills, personal meetings are held, where they discuss together, report back to each other and learn from best practice cases. The interviewee identified team work as extremely important in their company: on the scale from one to ten, team-work is at least a nine. Beckers revealed that they also participate in team building activities. The interviewee stated that it is a lot of fun, sometimes they have drinks, and sometimes they have knowledge sessions, where they learn and improve skills, but also get to know each other.
Additionally, regarding messages that attract his attention, the interviewee stated that personally he prefers articles and he believes that his colleagues have similar interests, because of their industry, which is a lot about linguistics, copy-writing and communication. According to the interviewee “they are what they do”. So, they are interested in the headlines – smart titles and play of words are important. However, he understands that it is very a specific preference within his company, therefore, with their clients they communicate also through other means like videos and infographics.

When the interviewee was asked about his favourite brand, he mentioned Adidas, because from his point of view, it is a reliable brand with strong traditions. They are very much present, but not in a flashy way as other brands, for example for celebrity endorsement they choose more modest famous people. These are values that he can relate to, especially tradition and quality.

As long as the company is doing charity honestly, the perception of the interviewee regarding a company increases in a positive way. However, he is against using it as a PR tool only for profiting themselves, for raising their profiles, because then it is not charity anymore, but it is marketing.

Regarding improvisation workshops, Beckers has no experience in the field (he has never participated in one). However, he perceives that it can be useful, especially for stimulating and learning to think out of the box, especially for people whose work is linked with writing, and who operate in creative industries. Additionally, the interviewee mentioned that it is useful for coming up with new ideas and for reaching the goal together. He could not identify more benefits of the workshops.

Section II:

Beckers argued that he does not trust media that it is created by the company itself such as the company website, Facebook and LinkedIn profiles, because the purpose of the owned media is to promote themselves and to show that they are ‘the best’. Consequentially, in order to have a clear image of a company, he checks a combination of media, also scans quickly through the first findings of the Google search, social media monitor, and trade magazines. Comment sections and referrals hold more importance in his opinion, he likes checking not what the company has said about itself, but how the company is perceived by the clients, employees and other stakeholders including clients and employees.

The most important factors that influence whether an external company is going to be hired are the price of the services, their proven skills, the click between him and the representatives of the company. Additionally, for Mr. Becker it is crucial that the company understands the communication sector, in which his company
operates and the challenges that Wisse Kommunikatie has to deal on a daily basis. Consequently, he prefers to be approached by email with a well-thought proposal, which shows that they understand the challenges and how the external company can contribute with overcoming and dealing with those obstacles. For Becker, seeing and experiencing the external company before hiring them is important, but the personal relationships, experiencing the people and the click are crucial.

8.3.2 Benchmark interview

Benchmark interview with Mr. Alex Leuning, the manager of Progress Events on 25th of April, 2016. Interview was conducted in face-to-face meeting in Groningen

Progress Events was found in 2005. The founders of the company, who also own the bar De Toeter, started the company by organising pub quizzes, whiskey and beer tasting at the bar. Leuning stated that at that time, the founders had only a bit of experience in the workshop field. In order, to attract clients and make the company more visible, few communication techniques were used. Firstly, they used online marketing and advertising. The manager of the company also revealed that they tried to use paid advertisements in the newspapers, but it did not bring any success. Additionally, Progress Events sponsored couple of teams including a soccer team. Leuning highlighted that back then the most important strategy was to establish couple of websites according to different activities including event management, workshops and corporate workshops and to make sure that they are ranked on the top of the first page of Google Web Search. According to him, they aimed that people could easily find them by only searching key words such as “Bedrijfsuitjes in Groningen”.

At the moment, the Google search optimisation is still an important strategy. They spend time and effort to maintain the websites in order to remain on the top of the ranking. Regarding the different websites, Leuning acknowledged that their target group is very broad from students to commercial companies, but the content of different websites is very similar; it is adapted accordingly to offered service rather than to the target group itself. At the moment, they are averagely booked couple times per week for workshops by Dutch people from all around the Netherlands.

Moreover, communication of the company remains focused online. Even though the manager stated that they do not use social media such as Facebook or Twitter regarding workshops, because according to him the content is always the same, so it becomes boring to their audience. However, they encourage the participants of the workshops to share pictures with their social circle and acknowledge the organising company. One of the most important techniques that benefits their company nowadays is ‘word of mouth’. According to the manager, they stimulate it by providing excellent products and service.
Leuning stated that their services are interesting to the potential clients, only if they are in demand and have the budget, a group of people and a date. Therefore, they focus a lot on being easily find online. However, when he was asked to identify what does he think is important for their clients and play a role by hiring a Progress Events, he identified that personal and direct communication is crucial. The manager stated that this factor is fundamental for attracting the new customers, but also by communicating with potential customers who contacted the company. Progress Events have at least one or two people who always are in office and carry out the responsibility of answering the phone and emails immediately. Additionally, he thinks that it is important to communicate to customers, that they should not worry and everything is organised and in control. The excellent service that satisfies the needs of customers increases effectiveness the ‘word of mouth’, because the customers tend to share their experiences.

Another important factor according to Leuning is clearly represented information on their website. He thinks that it is crucial to provide all information online including price, where the activity takes place and what activities are offered. The reason behind is that usually the decision to purchase a workshop is taken by a group of people and they tend to compare information from different companies. Therefore, it is advantage for the company to present the information clearly and have all the details published online. Another communication tool used by Progress Events is newsletters, which are automatically received by people who booked their services. However, they doubt the effectivity of the tool, because it is a one-way communication.

They have never organised any charity activities, but Progress Events has received a Green Key for their activities. They also communicate their values to their customers. Additionally, they organised the well-known Beer festival. Regarding increasing the visibility of the workshops, they organised few competitions in the past.

The manager of Progress Events was asked to identify which factors does he think contributed the most towards the success of the company. He believes that networking played an important role in several aspects. Firstly, the founders of the company own as well two pubs, which are connected and interlinked to Progress Events. In these two places, they communicate, connect and share their story with their customers, which increases the visibility and likelihood of being hired. Secondly, the team of the company networks a lot outside their business, for example, one board member joins a club meant for entrepreneurs. In these kind of place, they can network, learn new things, improve themselves and tell their story. According to Leuning, in order to succeed it is important to have a wide network, participate and be active in a wide range of activities and events.