

COMMUNICATION ADVICE FOR THE PLATFORM LIFE  
SCIENCES AND HEALTH OF THE BRANCH ORGANISATION  
NEVAT

BY

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## Foreword

***“You can have the greatest idea in the world, but if you can’t communicate your ideas, it doesn’t matter.” – Steve Jobs***

Many wonderful ideas from the greatest minds of this world are unknown to us, simply by the fact that they weren’t communicated well to the public.

This thesis was written in the spring semester of 2014 under the supervision of Evelyn Bekooij-Westerhoudt of the University of Applied Sciences. I would like to thank her for her critical remarks and guidance during this period. This report is the documentation on the research I performed in commission of the NEVAT. My company supervisor at the NEVAT was Edwin Dekker, special thanks to him for his expertise, guidance and many interesting conversations. Thanks to the NEVAT for allowing me this insight into the organisation and to experience this interesting organisation. Furthermore I would like to thank the members for giving me feedback and participating in my research. In particular I thank the platform members for allowing me to interview them and for giving me a front seat into the formation and formalization of the platform LS&H. Most importantly I want to thank my family and friends who have been there for me during my study, but especially during this period. This assignment has been challenging and at times I have been challenging too. All patience and support is indescribably appreciated, even if it might not have appeared like that at the time. A final word of thanks goes to Marcel and Tonny, you both know why.

Even though this assignment was challenging, I have embraced and appreciated the challenge. My hope is that you will appreciate the result as well!

Rachelle (Rafaël) Groenemeijer





## Management summary

The NEVAT is a Dutch branch organisation for industrial suppliers. They provide, on a non-profit base, services for their members such as coaching, lobbying and organising meetings to get the members in contact with other players in the industry. From previous research and experience, the NEVAT found out their members had the desire to look past their direct customers to the final customer and keep him in mind while doing business. This led to the formation of the platform Life Sciences & Health, meant as a place for NEVAT to excel in its facilitating role of getting the members in contact with different parties involved in the medical technology sector. Even though the NEVAT has been doing numerous activities, such a platform is new to the organisation, both in strategic as communicative sense. The aim of this research is to advise the NEVAT on how best to communicate with its members concerning the new platform LS&H. This is done by first researching the current communication experiences of the members and then finding out what they would prefer for the new platform.

After desk research on communicative theories such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, field research was done. A mixed method approach was used, combining a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews and a feedback session with the platform members. All showed a convincingly positive opinion about the communication from the NEVAT. Main point of attention was that both the NEVAT and the members needed to get used to this new communication situation.

Because of the positive feedback, this report does not recommend major changes in the communication for the NEVAT. However, to keep the members positive, the following is advised:

- Facilitate the members in the process of getting used to this new platform structure.
- Guide the members in slowly taking more responsibility for “their own” platform.
- Try to reduce uncertainty with the members by providing a safe environment and forming road maps.
- Keep on improving by doing (follow-up) research and maintaining a critical eye.



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## Chapter overview

In the following report the research done for this graduation assignment is described and explained. The first chapter serves as an introduction to the topic and explanation of the scope of the research. The organisation for which the research has been executed, the NEVAT, is introduced, the structure and strategic goals are defined and their current activities explained. After that, the platform Life Sciences and Health is introduced as the main focus of this research and the environment, or ecosystem, in which this is launched is illustrated. The problem, justification and restrictions for this research are explained after which the policy and research questions, as well as their goals, are defined.

The second chapter serves as the conceptual framework of the research. Previous research that has been done on the subject from the field is the practical base for the research. The theoretic background is found in literature on communication and communication theories. The framework is established and explained in relation to the case.

The following chapter describes the methodology of the field research to be performed. The practical research was divided into a quantitative questionnaire, qualitative interviews and a feedback session based on the previous. First the different types of research used are explained and the sampling is justified. Subsequently the operationalization and response rates are discussed.

After the preceding background, theoretic framework and operationalization, the field research was done and results were gathered. These results are presented in chapter 4. For each of the research activities, the results are given and analysed.

In chapter 5, conclusions are drawn, using the information gathered in the different preceding chapters. Combining the theory and the results, the research question and its two sub questions are answered.

Finally, from the conclusions to the research, an answer is given to the policy question. This is done in chapter 6 in the form of recommendations to the NEVAT. These recommendations are formulated from the information gathered from the research and tailored to the specific subject.



## 1. Introduction & Background

The following chapter will serve as an introduction to the topic; it will give background information, provide the reasons for and goals of doing the research and state the research questions. It starts with the description of the company the research has been done for, leading to problem definition and the frame of the research.

In this research the term 'platform' is used often; unless otherwise indicated this means the platform Life Sciences & Health the NEVAT has launched. The word platform has been chosen by the NEVAT because they want to have a supporting role. It is a part of the organisation that facilitates collaboration and discussion between different groups; this concept is directly in line with the goals of the NEVAT for the initiative. A second platform that is referred to in this research is the platform Agro & Food. The NEVAT has simultaneously launched the two platforms, though alike in concept fundamentally different in execution.

Another term used frequently is 'members'. The different industrial suppliers are members of the NEVAT; this means that they are paying a contribution to the organisation and in return the NEVAT provides different services. In total the NEVAT has 210 members. Companies, who are already NEVAT member, can however also be a platform member (to one or both of the platforms), which means an additional contribution, but also additional activities and services related to this platform.

In the interest of legibility, the platform Life Sciences & Health is shorted to platform LS&H. The same goes for Original Equipment Manufacturers; shortened to OEMs. The medical technology sector is usually shortened to MedTech.

To get a good perspective on the research, first the background is clarified by means of desk research. The NEVAT as an organisation is researched: what their activities are and how they are communicating with their members. After that, an overview is given of the main players in the field; how the so-called ecosystem is organised between patient and treatment and on where the suppliers are in this grid.

## 1.1 The NEVAT

The NEVAT is a Dutch branch organisation for suppliers in the industrial sector. Their slogan “connecting winners” is a very good point in describing what they do as an organisation. They attract suppliers in different segments and sectors of the industry and provide different services to them. They organise their activities according to 4 main pillars:

1. New business: organising (inter)national networking and knowledge activities to give members the opportunity to make new business contacts. While it is up to the members to generate the actual business, the NEVAT does stimulate the contacts to create collaborations.
2. Professionalization: coaching members in their self-awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and their own position in relation to customers and competitors.
3. Industry policy: lobbying on national and European level for the optimal legislation for industrial suppliers.
4. Organisation business: next to the three main pillars, the NEVAT has a secretariat in charge of organising the sector, platform and member meetings, creating the manifestation, maintaining the memberships, acquiring new members, keeping the finances in order and organising the communication; PR, newsletters, website and other marketing activities. (NEVAT, 2014)

The NEVAT keeps certain values in mind while doing so. Their core values are:

- Being useful and innovative as a branch organisation for top-level industrial suppliers.
- Being an added value for their members to improve their competitive ability and thus their business success.
- Facilitating active market orientated sector groups who function independently.
- Stimulating collaboration within and between sectors.
- Differentiating themselves as a technology leader amongst branch organizations.
- Maintaining their independent position (not being reliant on financing or subsidizing by third parties).

- Being open to cooperating with other branches for projects supporting the NEVAT strategy.
- Cherishing the combination of high content and fun. (NEVAT, 2014)

They have been organising their activities according to different sector groups: Electronic Manufacturing Services, Group Metal Processing Industry, Large Machining The Netherlands, Precision Parts Platform, System Developers, System Suppliers and Holland Automotive. (NEVAT, 2014)

They keep in frequent contact with their members. One of the main communication tools is the newsletter, which is sent out via email. This is a regular and comfortable means of quickly transmitting information to all members at the same time. Within this newsletter there is room for different topics, depending on what is happening in the market. To maintain readability, the articles are kept short and to the point. However, when more information is useful for the article, a link to an article on the NEVAT website is added so whoever is interested can read more. The topics in the newsletter range from a report on the last technological convention or the NEVAT agenda to articles about trends in one of the target markets.

Another important part of the NEVAT activities is meetings. Even though there are many good ways to communicate through different media, the NEVAT still sees the greatest value in face-to-face meetings. They do this in various shapes and forms. They are present at large technological conventions to promote the organisation as a whole and to network with current members, possible future members and other players in the industry. They also organise their own smaller conventions, bringing together parties for networking or sharing their expertise. The different sector groups of the NEVAT have regular meetings to discuss the innovations in the market and strengthen the position of the sector in the market.

To maintain their position as a strong branch organisation, the NEVAT has to keep itself informed on what is happening in the markets of their members. Therefore, they are constantly performing research; gathering information from partners, members, competitors, organisations, the government etc.

Concerning the platform, which will be discussed later in more detail, the NEVAT has first done research on the subject and performed a survey to see if members would be actually seriously interested in this initiative. Before the formalisation of

the platform, the NEVAT has organised a few preliminary meetings with a larger audience to see who would be interested in joining the platform, but also to see what type of meeting would be best suited for this platform. These meetings were with academic hospitals, technical universities, research professionals and start-ups and were meant to gain insight in the possibilities, challenges and problems in the market. Currently they are in the phase that the platform has official members who are meeting and (started) making agreements and plans.

Finally, the NEVAT is, as a branch organisation, active in lobbying for legislation that is optimal for its members. They are active both on national and European level to represent their members.

Even though most of the (communication) activities are the same for all members within the NEVAT or within a certain group, however there are of course variations. The power of the NEVAT and their networking managers, in this case Edwin Dekker, lies in estimating if a certain member requires for intensive contact, follow-up and attention. The commitment of certain members might be, and is, higher than that of other members. It is up to the NEVAT to find out for what purpose a certain company has a NEVAT membership and how actively involved this company wants to be. From that, the NEVAT can anticipate what level of interaction the members require and desire.

The NEVAT has been quite successful in their activities, maintaining a large group of loyal and long-time member. Now however, the NEVAT has started a more ambitious initiative.

## 1.2 The foundation of a new initiative

They are currently launching a platform for suppliers in the medical sector and aim to connect suppliers and OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) with a solution orientated approach in mind. This means that they are shifting their focus from a general to a specific sector approach; aimed at solutions in the market instead of company abilities.

This is different from their previous activities in the sense that there is a less general approach and more focus on a specific goal. While this seems different from the past, they still need to please and facilitate their members. The business part of the concept is currently being developed, but the NEVAT is unsure on how to communicate this initiative to its members to generate the best result.

The initiative was born from the constant eye the NEVAT keeps on the developments in the markets of its members. As a non-profit organisation the main focus is to facilitate the members and keep them involved in the organisation. In this light, the NEVAT retrieves information from the market, but also performs its own studies. In 2008 NEVAT conducted research into the production industry. The Dutch OEMs, who are the direct customers of the members, demand 'low volume, high diversity' which has strong implications for the suppliers. This demand is created by the consumers and therefore indirectly by the OEMs' customers. To support these changes in the market, a new business model is being created in which modular development and a focus on the final product is important in every step of product development. This means for the suppliers that they have to start looking past their customers, the OEMs, towards the end market. (NEVAT, 2008)

In 2011, the choice was made to pursue two markets further, as smaller research from the company showed that these markets had interesting growth percentages: Agro & Food and Life Sciences & Health. The NEVAT expects a growth of 6% in the medical market in the coming year. (NEVAT, 2014) This was communicated through the usual channel, the newsletter, and a small meeting with nine potentially interested members was held at a large convention. This spike in interest caused the NEVAT to send out a questionnaire inquiring all members on their interest for an initiative looking over OEMs to final customers. 35 members expressed their enthusiasm, which led to the first meeting of nine suppliers with a final customer, the university hospital in Nijmegen, and the first larger convention of 90 members in the fall of 2012.

After that, the idea really started to take shape. In the spring of 2013, the NEVAT joined the FME Cluster Life Sciences & Health. The FME-CWM is an overseeing and connecting organisation in the Dutch technology industry. Its over 2400 members, from every level of the technological sector, generate a combined annual turnover of over €60 billion. Furthermore, over 100 branch organisations such as the NEVAT are connected through the FME-CWM. (FME-CWM, 2014) The reason for NEVAT to join this FME cluster was because it has a broad base of OEMs with whom the NEVAT's members, almost exclusively suppliers, are eager to get in contact.

The presentation of the book “Diagnose Zorginnovatie” (Diagnosis Healthcare Innovation) in September 2013 gave another push in starting the concrete planning for what later became the platform LS&H. A 2-year study was done into Dutch healthcare because the realisation came that the current demographic and economical situation are putting an enormous pressure on the healthcare system and will increasingly do so up to a point that the quality of healthcare starts to suffer under the quantity. The researchers and other experts in the field have identified four main domains in the healthcare agenda: geriatric care, COPD and asthma, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. One of the main conclusions of the research was that technological development is one of the strongest tools we have to alleviate the pressure healthcare puts on society. (Idenburg & van Schaik, 2013) This is exactly where the NEVAT feels their members, united in the platform, can step in.

In the fall of 2013 a second large convention was held at the Technical University in Delft. With a turnout of 125, the NEVAT felt confident to go ahead with the formal foundation of the NEVAT Platform Medisch & Zorg (Life Sciences & Health). During the final months of 2013 and the spring of 2014, different preliminary meetings were held to establish definitive interest with the members by visiting final customers like (university) hospitals and inviting the FME-CWM and its OEMs to join the meeting. Between November 5<sup>th</sup> of 2013 and April 4<sup>th</sup> 2013, four meetings were organised to gauge the interest of the potential members and to show the possibilities of this new type of initiative.

The platform is developing at the moment, but three main goals have been established to help the platform members in participating in the innovation process of, and adding value to, the medical supply chain and subsequently give an impulse to their own organisation by:

1. Hosting supply and demand sessions: bringing OEMs with a specific product development demand in contact with relevant suppliers.
2. Creating an overview of the different market areas in the health care industry, including information on size and key market players.
3. Developing roadmaps for different areas in the health care industry during communal meetings with relevant parties such as suppliers, OEMs, hospitals, insurance agencies and care givers. (NEVAT, 2014)

The four main means to achieve this are:

- Organising activities: minimally three meetings per year, of which two with other parties in the market and one internal membership meeting.
- Commencing partnerships: this to exchange information with other clusters, platforms and initiatives alike.
- Promoting cooperation within the chain: organising meetings to get the different parties within the chain together and communicating.
- Starting projects and researching markets: organising open meetings with potential final customers leading to direct business or simply providing market information. (NEVAT, 2014)

### 1.3 The ecosystem

The new platform LS&H is of course organised by the NEVAT and meant for their members. However, as can be seen in the previously mentioned goals, the purpose of the platform is to venture out and get in to contact/work together with other parties in the same field. Previous research done by the NEVAT in 2008 led to the conclusion that the suppliers needed to start looking towards the final market. However, in between patient and treatment there are many parties that play a role and the NEVAT is somewhere in the middle. For the purpose of this research, only treatments involving technologies are taken into consideration.

The development of a new treatment (tool) often comes from a demand from doctors, groups of patients or patient associations who are suffering from or otherwise involved with a certain disorder or disease. Researchers at for example technical universities and hospitals start figuring out a possible solution for a certain problem. While specific medical knowledge comes from the medical researchers, technical knowledge will come from the professionals at universities. A solution or tool will only work if it actually gets to the patients; therefore it has to be produced, usually by and under the guidance of an OEM who will also market the product. They usually have skilled researchers of their own who can also play an active role in developing the product. The OEM relies on many suppliers to get the different components, materials or even sub assemblies and systems for the product. Because the industrial suppliers are each specialized in their own field, they are often asked for advice in the development of the products, which materials best to use and how to incorporate these. The industrial suppliers are

organised through branch organisations such as the NEVAT and represented by organisations such as the FME-CWM. The product will also undergo extensive testing in laboratories, research facilities or on patients after which the product has to be approved by different organisations. The OEMs and the developers of the product get in contact with the market to actually sell it. For this the hospitals are contacted, but also patient organisations to make sure this solutions fits with the wishes of the patients and health insurance companies to make sure this is in line with the compensations. After this, doctors and nurses in hospitals, or other care facilities, on the patient, use the product.

There are many ways that lead from a medical problem to a solution. Perhaps the most ethical point of view would be to put the patient in a central position and find the best course of action for his benefit. While researchers and OEMs develop that what is necessary for patient treatment, they do have their own interest. For the purpose of this research the ecosystem will be looked at from the point of view of the NEVAT as a branch organisation and its platform LS&H.



Figure 1: Ecosystem medical market

The NEVAT has joined the FME-CWM to have a stronger representation and to allow NEVAT members access to the OEMs united by the FME. The goals of the platform include getting in contact with OEMs and final customers. The NEVAT is the communicating link between the industrial suppliers and the different other parties. It will host meetings with patient associations and people from the local

or national government to let the members gain more insight in the MedTech world. Because the industrial suppliers also want to be more involved in the development of some products, the NEVAT introduces them to researchers, doctors, hospitals and universities. Furthermore, the NEVAT represents the members of the LS&H platform as good candidates for supply to OEMs.

It can be concluded from the above that there are many players in the ecosystem of medical technology standing between patient and treatment as visualised in figure 1. They each have their own goals and place within the system. It should also be said that the route from patient to treatment has many possibilities. Treatments or tools can be developed at a university and only in a final stage adapted to patient care, or specific research is done for a certain medical problem. There is no one way the players work together, they are just all present and the interactions between them vary. The platform LS&H aims to strengthen the interactions with the industrial suppliers and strengthen their position.

#### 1.4 Problem definition

The organisation has been in the business of connecting people and companies for quite some time, but this new activity is demands a new approach. While they seem to have been quite successful in previous activities, the new platform demands a slightly different plan of action. Previously, they have been targeting suppliers by sector. The new platform structure groups suppliers not by capabilities in production, but by targeted final market. This means that not only for the member companies, but also for the NEVAT, there is a lot to get used to.

The research is intended mainly to benefit the new platform and its communication. However, the information into the members' communication experiences will come from a combination of the past experiences of the members with the desires for the future situation. While the past experiences of members will give a clear image of the current situation, they can also set a precedent for the desired future situation.

#### 1.5 Restrictions

Within the launch of this new platform, there are different angles that could be explored. Since this is the graduation assignment for a communication study, there in lies the first restriction. It is easy to stray towards a strategic advice, while

the focus for this research is the communication environment and communication tactics. However, it should be taken in mind that the strategy and communication are so closely linked that it is difficult to truly see the one separate from the other.

A low response rate to the survey is possible since the target group is already limited in size. Previous research amongst members has pointed out a relatively good response rate. This can be explained by the fact that members can benefit greatly from a positive collaboration and platform, even when it requires investment from both parties at the start. However, the contact persons at the member companies are of the direction level, which means that they are likely to be very busy. Therefore, the companies that have less involvement with the branch organisation are less likely to complete the questionnaire.

Another constraint might be that even though the practical research and experiences might be successful and point towards a certain direction, theoretic support might be difficult. In searching for different theories, it will be difficult to match theories with the practical application of the project. Furthermore, the organisation has an interesting and relatively unique structure. Because the organisation does not work on a profit base, they are bound to income provided by the members, but also restricted to doing exactly that what the member want. In this sense, the organisation-member relationship is a non-traditional company-customer relationship. Because of this, traditional consumer behaviour theories will not apply to the members as consumers. However, this is one of the reasons why this research should take place as well. The nature of the organisation makes it difficult to rely on the research of others. Therefore they have to execute their own research such as this.

While the research does not aim to create a novel communication theory, the advice following the research hopefully can apply to new and other platforms as well.

Furthermore, notice should be taken that the success of this research and of the communication is not 100% linked to the scientific and strategic success of the project. Especially in the early stages of the process the members might feel that the communication is of lesser importance than the strategic planning, and will therefore be more positive than would be expected.

A final note is that while this research was done, the platform has been evolving the whole time. In that sense, some of the results, conclusions and advice will be

out-dated by the time the report is finished. Some of the perceived problems and negative points will have already been solved and some of the advice will already be applied. However, the main advice will hold for this platform as well as for any future platforms to be erected.

To structure the report, a main policy question was formulated. Since this report is meant to serve as communication advice for the NEVAT, the policy question centres on how best to communicate. The subsequent research follows the research question meant to investigate the different factors influencing the communication when it comes to this platform. This is not to say this is a complete list of factors influencing communication in general, but specific to this situation. The following research is then divided into two main sub questions. The first is focussing on the current experiences the members have with the communication from the NEVAT. The second is more aimed at the desired future state, at what type and style of communication the members would like to see.

### 1.6 Policy question

How can the NEVAT best communicate towards its members to perform a platform function for industrial suppliers?

### 1.7 Research questions

Which factors influence the communication experience of the members within the platform?

### 1.8 Sub questions and sub-sub questions

- What are the experiences of the members with the NEVAT?
  - How do the members experience the frequency of the communication?
  - How do the members feel about the media currently used?
  - What are the experiences of the members concerning the content of the messages?
  - How do the members experience being targeted as a group in this new platform?
- How do the members prefer to be communicated with?
  - Do the members prefer being targeted individually or do they like being targeted as a group?

- Do the members prefer communication only via NEVAT or between members as well?
- What media do the members prefer to be communicated through?
- What type of messages would the members like to receive?

### 1.9 Goals & Objectives

The main objective for this research is to come up with a strong advice for the company to communicate with its members, with a focus on the communication activities related to the new platform. This is in order to reach the company's goal of having a successful platform. The goal of the platform is then to have companies, suppliers, manufacturers, hospitals and other organisations work together in achieve substantial progress in the medical technology sector.

Coming back to the research; a primary objective is to gain insight in the current situation; what is the current view on NEVAT amongst the members? How do the members experience the situation?

A second objective is to get the members satisfied with the NEVAT ensuring their membership and strongly invested in the platform to reach the strategic goals of the platform

For the functionality of these objectives for the research, they have to be formalized in a SMART way. (Meyer, 2003)

*Specific* – The goal of the research is to evaluate and improve the communication between the NEVAT and their members concerning this new platform. While the research is aimed at the benefit of the NEVAT, aided by the feedback of the members, the benefit is to both sides. This is because the success of the members and the success of the NEVAT are both related to the strategic success of the new platform, and the outcome of this research can improve the (chance of) success for the platform. These members as described are Dutch suppliers in the industry.

*Measurable* – The objectives can be determined via qualitative and quantitative research. The experiences and satisfaction of the members are translated from the outcomes of the survey. Even though the level of satisfaction with the communication has not previously been measured, this will not be a problem. This research will serve as a measurement into the members' experiences and wishes. The organisation keeps on research this

from different angles. Therefore, it is no issue that for this subject it is the first and probably the last research, because research into the members' experiences is an on-going process for the organisation

*Achievable* – Since the platform has only just been launched, all parts of it are at the start-up phase still. While changes take place in a rapid tempo, this means that for now also the communication is still at a very basic level. This is sufficient for now, but implies there is enough room for improvement. The research is dependent on the cooperation of the members, but since the success of the platform is in their benefit as well, it is likely that they would be willing to cooperate.

*Relevant* – The improvement of the communication for the new platform is very relevant for the success of the platform. However looking further, the main relevance lies in the eventual success of the platform itself. This new platform project is a costly endeavour, for both NEVAT as their members, but it is a good opportunity to work together as a group in a branch toward a common goal. This in turn is derived from the pursued benefit for the Dutch healthcare system presenting a great societal relevance.

*Time-bound* – the fact that this is a graduation assignment means that the time frame is predetermined. However, the organisation has a similar time frame. The first large stage of the project ends around the same time as this research will, before the summer. After that, the company can use the results of the research to execute some of the suggested improvements over before the second large deadline, the presentation of the strategic part of the project after the summer.

## 1.10 Conclusion

The objective for this research is to come up with a strong advice for the NEVAT aimed at the communication concerning the new platform LS&H. The foundation of the platform by the NEVAT is justified by the different research done into the medical market and into the technological industry, as well as by the extensive knowledge the NEVAT has of its members and their needs.

To advice of this report will answer the policy question of how the NEVAT can best communicate towards its members in performing a platform function for industrial suppliers. The research will be done to find the factors influencing the

communication experience of the members within the platform. To first get insight into the matter, the organisation of members, customers, suppliers and other parties within the health care ecosystem is researched and determined. The current activities are determined and the experiences concerning communication investigated. Finally the preferred media for and style of communication are established to serve as an advice for the improvement of the current communication.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

In the following chapter, a close look will be taken at some communication theories that can (help) answer the questions posed in the previous chapter. While these theories were formed as general notions and derived from very different research, some core concepts can aid in answering the main question of this particular research.

### 2.1 Literature review

As mentioned previously, the origin of the platform LS&H can be found from different cues in the market. In 2008, the NEVAT has performed its own research into trends in the market as well as to changes to be made in their strategy. One of the main conclusions of this research was for the members, the industrial suppliers, to look further past their direct customer the OEM to the final customer. To do so, an entirely new perspective has to be adopted. (NEVAT, 2008)

The research report 'Diagnose Zorginnovatie' from Idenburg and Van Schaik has laid the foundation for this research. Their book answers a lot of questions concerning strategic healthcare management and has been at the start of the platform. The research indicates that technology can provide (part of) the answer to the demand for health care exceeding the supply. (Idenburg & van Schaik, 2013)

For the communication of the platform to be beneficial to the strategic goals, the communicators from the NEVAT have to be competent. Adler and Rodman identified several attributes that characterise effective communicators: (Adler & Rodman, 2009, pp. 15-17)

- Competent communicators have a range of different behaviours to choose from.
- They do not only possess the ability to behave in a certain way, but they are also able to choose the behaviour that is most appropriate for the situation.
- After having chosen the correct behaviour, they are skilled at executing the actions associated.
- Emphatic ability, or the ability to take the other side's point of view, is important in communicating effectively.

- Cognitive complexity is the ability to analyse the other party's behaviour from different perspectives and thus viewing an issue from different sides.
- Self-monitoring is another skill essential to good communicators; being able to observe and analyse your own behaviour makes that you can improve it accordingly and continuously.
- A final important attribute is the commitment the communicator has to the relationship; there is a connection between the level of care for a communication and the effectiveness of the communicator.

These different attributes can be seen as assets for a person to improve his communication, however they can be applied to a company as a communication persona. In this light, these attributes can be helpful to the NEVAT as a communicator to the companies, but also to the companies as communicators within the platform.

In his book, Anurag Patidar identifies seven main factors that can influence the communication process.

1. Attitude: the internal inclination a person has to behave in a certain way in a particular situation.
2. Sociocultural background: culture and background can have a strong effect on the communicative behaviour.
3. Past experiences: current communication is the result of feedback from and experiences with previous communication.
4. Knowledge of subject matter: the knowledge a communicator has on the subject matter can help determine if the message gets across, the knowledge the receiver has of the matter is important as well.
5. Ability to relate with others: empathic ability makes for good communicators.
6. Interpersonal perception: a strong perception of other parties in communication makes it easier to gage if a message comes across.
7. Environmental factors: external factors like time constraints, disorder and noise in the messages can prevent a message to be understood. (Patidar, 2012)

When directing their communication, the NEVAT can profit from looking at these factors and use them to their benefit. It can be assumed that the attitude the

NEVAT has when communicating is positive and professional. Even though they have less control over the other party, the members are also likely to have a positive attitude, as they are the one most to benefit. All the members are Dutch and are therefore likely to have a similar sociocultural background. Therefore problems in understanding each other in this sense are unlikely to arise. A critical note that can be placed here is that within the Netherlands there are smaller cultural differences; from the jovial south to the stern north. The third factor can almost only benefit the NEVAT as they have had years of experience in communicating with their members in the technological industry. Numerous small surveys have been done into the experiences of the members of which the NEVAT has learned.

When it comes to knowledge of the subject matter, the NEVAT is no expert. Because they are a branch organisation, and not an industry professional, their knowledge on the industry will be less than of the individual members. However, while they are in a continuous learning process, they have a strong additional benefit. While the individual members have a deep knowledge on their specific subject, the NEVAT has a broad knowledge and an overview over the market. Their technological knowledge is sufficient to understand and lead the conversation, while the diversity in their knowledge makes them a strong facilitator between different fields and players. The fifth and sixth factor can be seen as the main characteristics for the NEVAT. A strong empathic ability and perception of the other parties in communication brings the personal touch to communication that business life sometimes lacks. The fact that the NEVAT is a non-profit organisation makes that they can feel less rush from the commercial life and focus on facilitating their members. Environmental factors are the most directly influenced. Especially in the case of meetings they organise, they can (try to) optimize the environmental factors for good communication.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

The main proposition of the agenda setting theory, presented by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, is that media can tell audiences what to think about, but not what to think of it. If the media regard certain issues as more important, the audience is very likely to follow. The theory is shaped from two main assumptions: the media filter and shape realities instead of reflecting it objectively and

concentration on certain issues by the media leads to the public perception of importance of these issues. (Griffin, 2012) A major critique on this theory is the fact that the theory was based on traditional media. The level of interaction of traditional media opposed to the interaction in new/electronic media, leads to the assumption that traditional media would be more effective in setting an agenda than new media. A cue for this is the absence of comparative cues in online media. (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002)

For the case of this research, agenda setting theory can help in the understanding of the audience. The theory tells not only what to look for when it comes to information dispersion to members, but also how the image in their minds could be altered. (Griffin, 2012) By using their own knowledge on the entire market and focussing on important topics, their importance can be conveyed to the members. Especially in quantity, the NEVAT can focus the members on major topics. Taking the critical point about new media into consideration, the NEVAT would be better in setting the agenda with their members using traditional media. While electronic media has effectively replaced written media, for the purpose of this research email is considered as the most traditional of electronic media.

### **Elaboration Likelihood Model**

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, or ELM, as developed by Richard Petty and John Cacioppo puts the persuasiveness of an argument in perspective with its position on the scale of elaboration, the so-called “elaboration continuum”. The model poses that the view of people on certain issues can be impacted by any of the features of a message and that their own reasoning and motivation determines if they are persuaded by the message. Individuals can be persuaded by one of two routes proposed by Petty and Cacioppo. (Dainton & Zelly, 2005) The central route leads to persuasion when the recipient has sufficient information to analyse the message and its advantages or possible consequences. This route is also known as the elaborated route as the messages include strong arguments, solid information and evidence to support the message. While can lead to long-term success, ELM states that this can only be achieved when both of the two following factors are met: 1) the recipient has to be motivated to receive and process all of the elaborate information presented,

and 2) the recipient must be, cognitively and intellectually, able to process everything. (Dainton & Zelly, 2005)

The peripheral route results in persuasion based on the secondary characteristics of the message, not through the evaluation of arguments. Messages sent through the peripheral route speak to the receiver's emotions and use certain social cues such as authority, liking and reciprocity. (Dainton & Zelly, 2005)

This model, as can also be seen in figure 2, can help with the evaluation and improvement of the message to be sent out to NEVAT members. Upon analysing the target audience, one can assume the central route persuasion is key in messages. Since the success of the platform will mainly be beneficial to themselves, they will be motivated to take in the messages. The large industrial suppliers are built

on the evaluation of scientific data and the deduction of business strategies from this. Therefore they are capable of processing complicated messages. The final step in creating a strong positive attitude change, following the ELM, is using a strong argument meaning the content of the message should take priority.

### Uncertainty Reduction Theory

In 1975 Charles Berger developed a post-positivist communication theory stating that two parties seek to reduce the uncertainty in their interaction and they require information about the other to do this. The uncertainty reduction theory, or URT, further states that to develop a good relationship, both parties demand information because of the need to be able to predict the behaviour and actions of the other party. Communication is the key factor that is used to get this

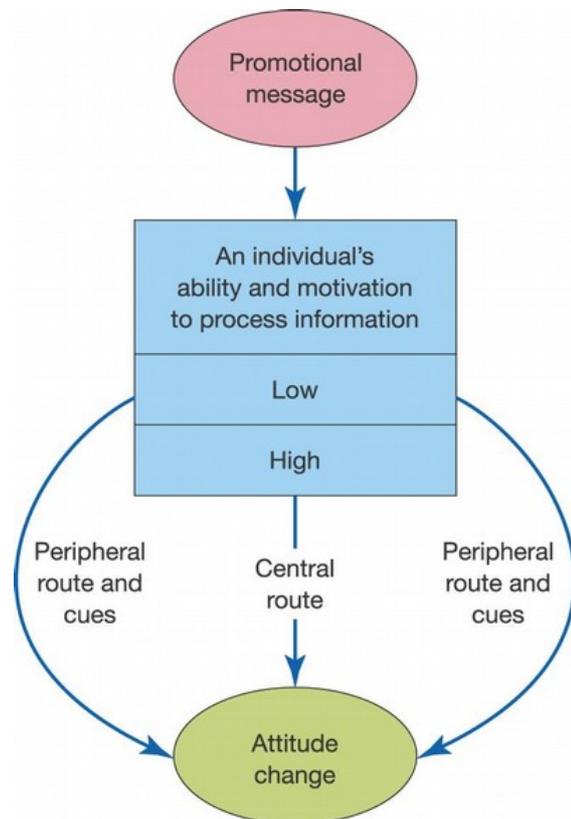


Figure 2: Elaboration Likelihood Model, Josh Blatchford.  
<http://manifestedmarketing.com/2013/10/03/rock-star-games-grand-theft-auto-5-guerilla-marketing/>

information and to thus reduce uncertainty in building a relationship. (Griffin, 2012)

Berger has distinguished two primary sub-processes in stating that the reduction of uncertainty is crucial in building a relationship: prediction and explanation. Predictability of a relationship is in Berger's opinion the opposite of uncertainty, and is therefore desired, while the ability to explain the meaning of another party's behaviour is a crucial factor in actually accomplishing this decrease of uncertainty.

The theory uses seven key axioms in his central concept of uncertainty. (Griffin, 2012)

1. Verbal communication: as the amount of verbal communication increases, the level of uncertainty will decrease.
2. Nonverbal warmth: as nonverbal expressiveness increases, the uncertainty level will decrease as well as vice versa.
3. Information seeking: in case of high uncertainty, the desire for information is highest.
4. Self-disclosure: low levels of uncertainty allow for the most self-disclosure and intimacy.
5. Reciprocity: the need for reciprocity is related to the level of uncertainty.
6. Similarity: the level of uncertainty is decreased by the number of similarities between the parties.
7. Liking: a decrease in uncertainty comes with an increase of liking.
8. Shared networks: the number of shared networks reduces the uncertainty between the parties.

These axioms offer explanations of the negative effects of uncertainty in relationships, but also tools for uncertainty reduction and therefore improvement. The success of the platform depends on the relationship the members have with the NEVAT, but also strongly on the intercompany relationships between members. Especially for the latter of these two, the URT can offer aid. In the case of members having to interact and form relationships of trust between them, while previously having seen each other as competitors, uncertainty is undoubtedly high. Adding to this uncertainty, they are partaking in a platform that has yet to prove its success. The first and second axioms indicate that communication, verbal as well as nonverbal, is minimal in case of uncertainty, but relationships

can be strengthened by increasing and improving these forms of communication. The members who are (considering) participating in the platform are eager for information in their uncertainty; this is a point where the NEVAT can facilitate its members by offering this information and reassuring. The sixth axiom of similarity will be of lesser concern, as the members are already placed together within the platform based on their similarities. The final axiom mentioned, stating that the number of shared networks reduces the level of uncertainty between parties, can prove of good use for the NEVAT. Networking is the strength of the NEVAT and combining the networks of members will increase their trust towards each other.

### **Uses and Gratifications Theory**

Uses and gratifications theory (UGT) tries to explain why individuals use certain media and what do they use that specific medium for. One of the assumptions is that, given that the consumer has a clear view of the intent and use, the consumer has a certain power of choice in media. Contradictive to mass society theories, it poses that the individual is active in electing certain media to best serve their goal. Furthermore, it assumes that people have enough knowledge and awareness of their own media use that they can provide a good image of that use when asked. (Griffin, 2012) (Dainton & Zelly, 2005) (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974)

Katz et al. described three main assumptions to the Uses and Gratifications Approach: (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973)

1. The audience is perceived to be active in its media use.
2. The audience member has the primary initiative when linking gratification to media choice.
3. Different media compete with each other and with other sources of gratification.

The final assumption posed in the UGT will serve as a justification for the research. Since the platform is designed for professionals, each of course in their respective field, the premise is that they are aware of their own media uses and preferences and will therefore be able to provide a clear image. A critical point for this theory is that the gratifications originally used in mass media are not directly applicable to the target group of NEVAT platform members. The four traditional gratifications are: to entertain, to inform, to reinforce personal identity and to work

on personal relationships and social interaction. (Dainton & Zelly, 2005) The quest for information is most certainly one of the main factors driving the platform, but entertainment is not one of them. While not exactly in the same way the original researchers of UGT, the gratification of personal identity is sought in this platform. However, this is not sought on a personal level, but on the level of the company; the identity of the company is enforced by the participation of the platform. The final gratification is concerning relationships and social interaction, and therefore most relevant to the platform. Participating in this platform and the activities organised, can help the company strengthen its networks. The conclusion of the UGT is that individuals seek the media to satisfy their needs and thus play an active role in the choice of media. (Dainton & Zelly, 2005) This holds the same for the individual as for the members in the platform; they too play an active role in the choice and use of media to best reach their goals.

### 2.3 Conclusions

The root of this research can be found in different cues from the market. While research done by the NEVAT itself has provided some foundation for the platform, and subsequently this research, research done by other organisations and people has been of good use for this report. Market research has contributed to the understanding of the strategic part of the platform; communication research provides a background for the communication concerned. The agenda setting theory can help in understanding how best to focus the minds of the members on the topics most important to the NEVAT. The elaboration likelihood model tells us that persuasion via the central route will be most useful for this target audience and messages should therefore be supported by strong arguments. A new initiative can lead to uncertainty with the members; the uncertainty reduction theory explains how this uncertainty can be decreased. Finally the uses and gratifications theory helps explain the uses the members have for the platform and the gratification they will get from participating.

### 3. Methodology

The following chapter discusses the different approaches, tools and research methods that were used to establish the experiences of the members in the current situation and the desired future state.

#### 3.1 Mixed method approach

To ensure the best results, and to reach the different objectives of this research, a mixed method approach was used. Both qualitative and quantitative research has been used in combination to create a complete result. By integrating the different results, weighing both equally, the knowledge of the topic is aimed to be more accurate. (Gilbert, 2008) The use of two different techniques to answer the same research question also means that the weaknesses of one method can be compensated by the other method. (Denscombe, 2007) In the end, the different types of research were combined in answering the research questions; theoretical knowledge from desk research is used to explain the data from the quantitative research and to support the advice.

The first two tools that were used for this research are:

- A questionnaire
- Interviews

The third research activity can best be described as a feedback session or a trial run for the preliminary advice. After the first results of the abovementioned tools have been collected, a preliminary advice was formed. This was transposed into the form of a meeting agenda; points of criticism as well as advice for improvement were placed on the agenda for the meeting and notes were taken to adjust the advice where necessary.

While desk research was used into literature, the most practical/important part was contacting the members and researching the experiences, this was done via a questionnaire, interviews with a few members. Both types of research are cross-sectional, allowing for a larger sample, and were performed parallel. An additional benefit of this type of research, especially in this case where the object of study is evolving at a rapid pace, is that all respondents are commenting on the same situation. (Gilbert, 2008) The third research activity was performed a little after the first two. While this meant that the members would not be

commenting on exactly the same situation, it did mean that the rapid of progress the platform is shown.

When it comes to experiences and preferences of communication, trends can be detected and general opinions can be concluded. In these cases you can never facilitate every member 100%, therefore adjusting to the opinion of the majority will make the larger part feel appreciated. The mixing of methods shines light on general experiences and preferences, while allowing for depth and elaboration.

### Questionnaire

The questionnaire represented the quantitative part of the research. The goal of questionnaire was to gain insight into the knowledge and opinion the members have of the communication between them and the NEVAT, especially in regards to the new platform. The questions allowed for a precise answering, avoiding ambiguity, while also allowing for broadly based conclusions. Most of the questions, 13 of 15, were closed questions, which is usually the best in case of a larger number of respondents. (Gilbert, 2008) The questionnaire started with an explanation of the reasons for and goals of the study, after which a short time line of the platform was given to remind the respondents on the situation. Furthermore, the questions were grouped by subject and asked in a logical order to make it easy for the respondents. The survey consisted of mainly descriptive questions to establish the nature of the members and to assess their experiences. Some of the questions had scaling options to determine the level of satisfaction.

Using a self-completion questionnaire also added to the reliability and validity of the study. Since no interviewer was involved and the respondents were informed before the questionnaire that their responses were collected anonymously, the respondents were likely to give more honest answers and were not biased in their answers by the interviewer. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010) The questionnaire was drafted to allow for repetition of the study in both completion and administration, and, as will be described in a following section, the clearly defined target group could be addressed directly. (Gilbert, 2008) The questionnaire was sent out in Dutch, as the target group is Dutch. The English translation of the questionnaire can be found in appendix 1.

## Interviews

While the questionnaires allow for direct answers, grounded within their relatively large numbers, interviews offer a qualitative, or in-depth source of information. The interview was semi-standardized, the major questions were set beforehand and the same in every interview, but there was room for slight variations and probing. (Gilbert, 2008) The majority of the interview questions were open-ended questions designed to understand the reasoning behind decisions and opinions. Since the respondents were professionals in the technological industry, focussed on the strategic benefit of this platform, they might have had problems defining their opinions on the specifics of communication. Because they are likely to have a lack of awareness for the communication, the questions are designed to put their focus towards this and during the interview probing is applied. (Gilbert, 2008) Also the interviews were performed in Dutch, the English translation of the questions can be found in appendix 2.

## Platform meeting May 13th

The third step into this research was putting the preliminary advice, retrieved from the questionnaires and interviews, to the test. Data was collected using the previously mentioned research tools. This information was used to write a preliminary advice with points of attention and criticism. During the first real platform meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup>, where almost all current members were present, this advice served as (part of) the agenda for the meeting. Naturally this advice was focused on the communication; therefore it was complemented with the strategic agenda for the meeting. This feedback meeting was an intimate and informal one, allowing for critical discussion and concrete steps to be taken. During the meeting notes were taken to later incorporate in this research.

## 3.2 Sampling

The population, or the group of subjects the advice will be about and relevant for, is as previously described the members of the NEVAT. (Verhoeven, 2011) In most social research, the population is a large group, or universe of units as Alan Bryman describes it. To keep the research doable, a sample is taken from the population for investigation. (Bryman, 2012) From the reactions of this sample, conclusions can be induced to relate to the entire population. However, the

population for this research is the member group of the NEVAT. This is a group of 210 companies, of whom contact details are known to the organisation.

For the digital questionnaire, no sampling had to take place, because it could be sent out to the entire population, as a census. (Bryman, 2012) The entire population is seen as the sample in this case. The number of results was then strongly dependent on the nonresponse; which is when subjects, selected for the inclusion in the research, do not provide answers on the questionnaire. (Gilbert, 2008)

The interview was used to obtain in-depth answers, especially concerning the new platform. Therefore the current members of the platform were approached to be interviewed. At the time of the execution of the interviews, six companies had pledged membership to the platform. Knowing not all would have time, all six companies were contacted in the hope and expectation to get at least three interviews. In that sense, again no sampling had to take place. The number of interviews is dependent on the response or in this case willingness to participate.

For the platform meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup>, used to get a secondary look into the communication experiences of the members, all current members were invited. Because the contact persons for the companies were either the company director, or one of the directors, and they are known for busy schedules, it is expected that one or two members will not be able to make it. This is also a form of non-response.

### 3.3 Collection of data

After having described the methods of research and the justification of the sample size, the next part describes the collection of the data. For the questionnaire, it was decided in consultation with the company supervisor, that the members were contacted via an invitation by email. The questionnaire itself was digital and could be filled out by following the link in the email. For the collection of the questionnaire data, the online software Qualtrics was used. This website allowed the possibility for graphics, texts, a wide array of question types and different questionnaire routings depending on the answers given.

Respondents, who answered 'no' on the question if they had been present on one of the previous platform meetings, were routed past the question concerning the experiences on these meetings. The questionnaire could easily be filled out

on different mobile devices, allowing the respondents to complete the survey at their best convenience. The respondents were given notice when they had not answered one of the questions, making them fill out every question on a page before being able to proceed to the next.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of distributing a survey online way. The Internet is, according to Kotler, '*especially well suited to quantitative research*'. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 137) The advantages of executing the survey online is that responses are automatically and instantly recorded. Besides this, the speed and flexibility makes online questioning a preferred method. A major downside, as will be discussed in the coming part, is the low response rates of online questionnaires. This not only because of people do not respond at all, but also because people might have doubts concerning certain questions or run into problems filling out the survey and give up or fail to fill out the questionnaire completely. (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010) (Gilbert, 2008) To make it as easy and natural as possible for the respondents, the questionnaire was in Dutch. Therefore, the results in this research were translated.

In the case of interviews the sample was the current members of the platform; six companies at the time of this research. All six companies were first contacted via email by the company supervisor and main contact person of the platform to inform them of my research. After that they were contacted by me via email to explain the nature of my research and to ascertain their willingness to participate. Because of time constraints, mainly from their side, it was decided best to do the interview by telephone. This as it is often easier to fit in a telephone call in a busy schedule, if necessary during their commute. A telephone interview is "one of the best methods for gathering information quickly". (Kotler & Armstrong, 2010, p. 137) The interview was a semi-standardised interview. While the questions were set, the order and the amount of prompting and probing were slightly adjusted to the answers and talkativeness of the interviewees. While one of the interviews went exactly according to the predetermined plan, a second interviewee answered a few consecutive questions upon asking just one question. In this case the order was slightly altered. (Gilbert, 2008)

The collection of the data at the platform meeting consisted of taking notes at the meeting. Even though not all comments could be manually written down, the

main remarks concerning communication could be. Afterwards the notes were processed and incorporated in this report.

### 3.4 Response

Both for the questionnaire, as for the interview, the main factor influencing the number of responses was the non-response. (Gilbert, 2008) For the platform meeting, not all members could be present as well due to busy schedules of the contact people.

The response rate of the questionnaire is calculated by taking the issued sample size, in this case the size of the population, and the number of responses and dividing the second by the first. (Gilbert, 2008) In this case, the main contact persons at the companies are the higher-level managers. The response rate from this group tends to be relatively low. Even though a low response rate might induce bias, extensive boosting of responses can in turn lead to a similar bias. (Bryman, 2012) Beforehand a feasible goal was set on 20% of the population, which translates to around 42 responses. After a 2-week period following the invitation and the reminder, this goal was met and the data analysis was commenced. Of 210 companies who received the invitation, 50 complete responses were collected, which is a response rate of 24%.

For the interviews, a similar goal was set, taking the same notions into consideration. Again the top managers were the desired respondents, but rationally it was too optimistic to think all six would make time for an interview. However, since the group of current platform members is small, three interviews would be both the minimum and the expected outcome. Three respondents make up 50% of the current group of platform members and are therefore likely to give information that could be used for statements about the entire group. Upon request, three company executives were willing to be interviewed. The three interviews took place on two consecutive days, adjusted to the respondents' schedules while keeping the time frame and circumstances equal.

The platform meeting was set up to facilitate the current members in making solid progress. All interviewed members had indicated a desire to pull the platform out of the abstract and generic and into a more concrete form. Therefore it would be best if all members were present. However, as mentioned previously, the representatives of the company are of the directors' level and are therefore very

likely to have busy schedules. Some of the companies had just joined a few weeks before this meeting so it was likely that one or two companies would not be able to make it. In the end, four companies were represented at the meeting, which is a respectable response rate of 67%.

### 3.5 Conclusion

To ensure the best results, a mixed method approach was used in this research. While quantitative research was performed by means of a questionnaire, qualitative answers were sought through interviews and confirmation through the platform meeting. The questionnaire had to be done online and the invitation was sent to the entire member group of the NEVAT via email. After a few days, a reminder was sent to encourage people to fill out the questionnaire after which a total of 24% responded. The semi-standardized interviews were done over the telephone with three of the six current platform members. The platform meeting, where the provisional conclusions of the previous field research served as an agenda, provided confirmation from a representative of 67% of the members. For the questionnaire, the interview and the platform meeting, the goals for response set upon commencing the research were met, albeit just. However, the assumption is that the conclusions to be drawn from this data are representable for the rest of the population.



## 4. Results

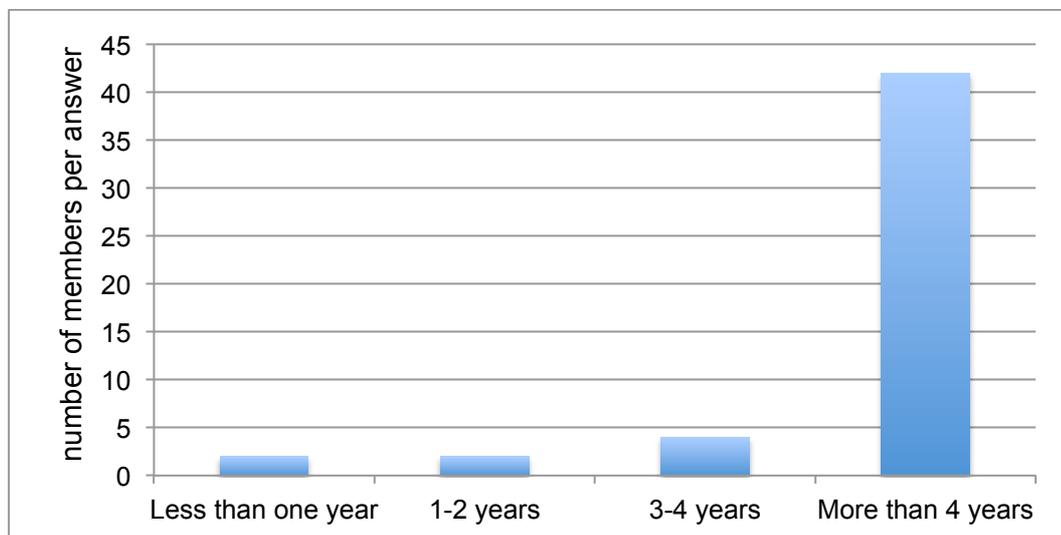
The previous chapter described the way the research was planned out and how the responses have been collected. This data will be presented, explained and analysed in the following chapter. The complete data can be found in the appendix.

### 4.1 Questionnaire

#### General characteristics

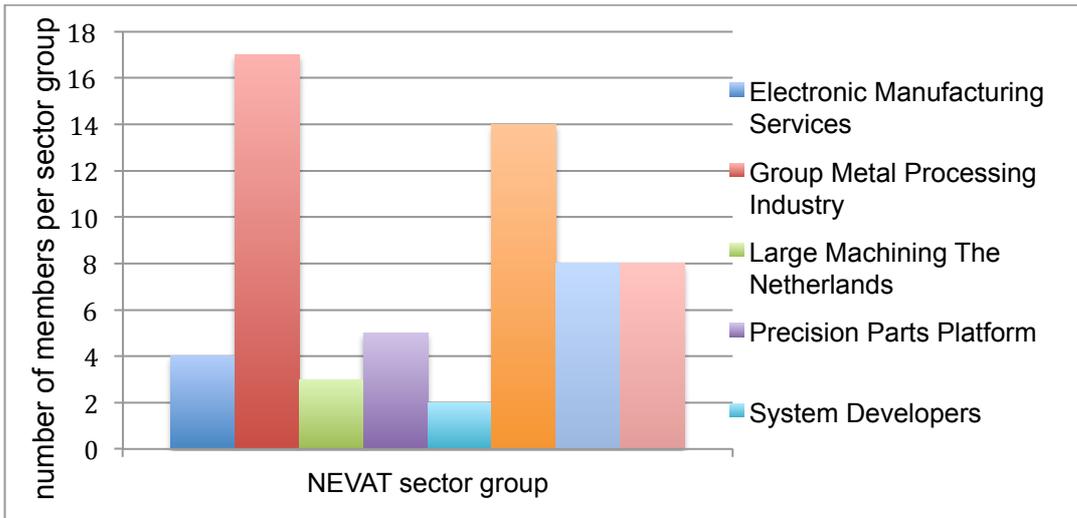
The aim of the questionnaire was to gain insight in the experiences the different NEVAT members have with communication from the NEVAT and what their opinions of and experiences with the new platform are.

The first questions into the characteristics of the members serve as an introduction of the members, to later be able to compare these to the experiences. What sticks out, as can be seen in figure 3, is that the members are on average long-time members. 84% of the respondents indicated that they have been part of the NEVAT for more than 4 years.



**Figure 3: Duration NEVAT membership**

The possibility exists within the NEVAT to belong to certain sector groups. Determined by the primary type of activity, the companies can be part of this group and will receive information specified to this activity. With respectively 34% and 28%, the metal processing and system supplier groups are the largest as can be seen in figure 4.



**Figure 4: Membership to sector groups**

Even though all NEVAT members were invited through mail and meetings to join the platform, there is still 6% of respondents who do not (remember to) have received the invitation to join one the new platforms in the last months of the previous year. (For details, all results can be found in appendix 3)

Looking at the answers concerning participation in the platforms, we see that 18 respondents have indicated that they are participating and nine of them indicated that they are part of the LS&H platform. In reality we know that only six companies have signed up yet. A side note can be made here that companies who have participated in preparatory meetings, but have not yet actually signed up, could have felt like they are already participating. Figure 5 gives the comparison of the respondents indicating that they are partaking in the platform and to which platform(s).

		Are you currently taking part in one of the platforms?		Total
		Yes	No	
Are you taking part in the platform - Agro & Food?	Yes	13 72.22%	0 0.00%	13 28.26%
	No	5 27.78%	28 100.00%	33 71.74%
	Total	18 100.00%	28 100.00%	46 100.00%
Are you taking part in the platform - Life Sciences & Health?	Yes	9 50.00%	0 0.00%	9 19.15%
	No	9 50.00%	29 100.00%	38 80.85%
	Total	18 100.00%	29 100.00%	47 100.00%

**Figure 5: Comparison Q4 and Q5, platform participation**

Figure 6 shows that some of the respondents are taking part in one of the two platforms, but of the nine LS&H platform participants, five indicate a secondary membership to the platform Agro & Food.

		Are you taking part in the platform - Agro & Food		Total
		Yes	No	
Are you taking part in the platform - Life Sciences & Health	Yes	5	4	9
	No	8	29	37
Total		13	33	46

**Figure 6: Taking part in one or both platforms**

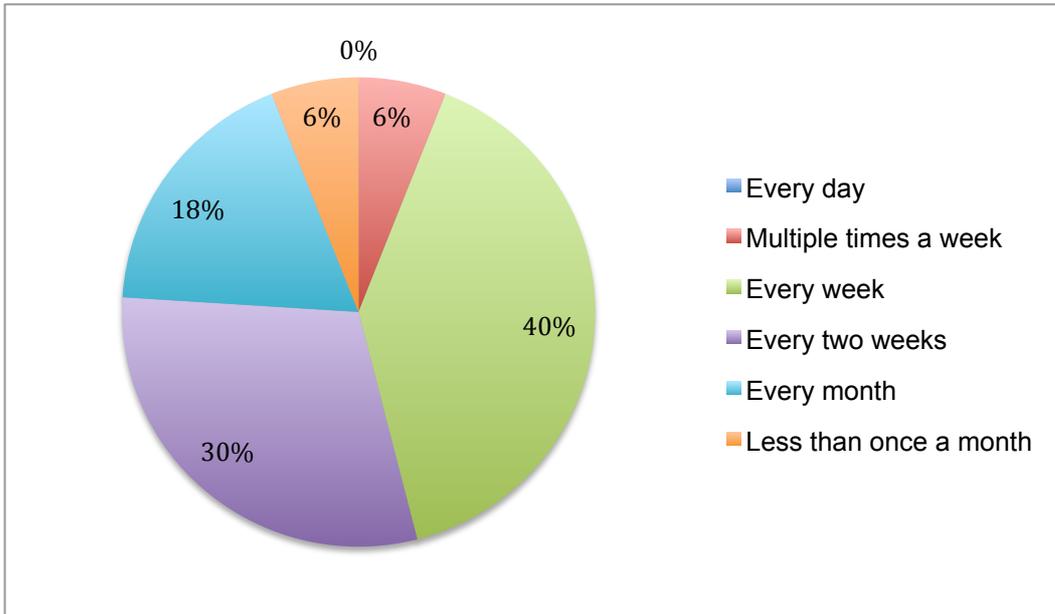
A final comparison from the general characteristics part of the survey is the following: the different sector groups compared to participation in one or both of the platforms. While the division of sector groups is made based on activities, the platforms are formed based on final consumers. While there is an overlap to be expected, this does not necessarily mean a relation between the sector group and one of the platforms. Respondents to the questionnaire were requested, for both platforms, to indicate their participation. Figure 7 displays for the platform participants, or non-participants, to which sector group they belong, separate for both platforms. In figure 7 you can see that the group System Suppliers is far more likely to choose the platform LS&H than the platform Agro & Food, whereas many of the participants to this latter platform are from the Group Metal Processing Industry.

		To which sector do you (primarily) belong?								Total
		Electronic Manufacturing Services	Group Metal Processing Industry	Large Machining The Netherlands	Precision Parts Platform	System Developers	System Suppliers	Holland Automotive	I am not part of any of the sectors.	
Are you taking part in the platform - Agro & Food?	Yes	2 15.38%	5 38.46%	1 7.69%	1 7.69%	0 0.00%	3 23.08%	0 0.00%	4 30.77%	13 100.00%
	No	2 6.06%	12 36.36%	1 3.03%	3 9.09%	2 6.06%	11 33.33%	7 21.21%	3 9.09%	33 100.00%
	Total	4 8.70%	17 36.96%	2 4.35%	4 8.70%	2 4.35%	14 30.43%	7 15.22%	7 15.22%	46 100.00%
Are you taking part in the platform - Life Sciences & Health	Yes	3 33.33%	2 22.22%	0 0.00%	1 11.11%	1 11.11%	6 66.67%	0 0.00%	0 0.00%	9 100.00%
	No	1 2.63%	15 39.47%	2 5.26%	4 10.53%	1 2.63%	8 21.05%	7 18.42%	7 18.42%	38 100.00%
	Total	4 8.51%	17 36.17%	2 4.26%	5 10.64%	2 4.26%	14 29.79%	7 14.89%	7 14.89%	47 100.00%

**Figure 7: Comparison sector group and platform participation**

## Communication

Upon looking at the questions designed to gage the opinions about communication of the members, a definite positive trend can be distinguished.



**Figure 8: Communication frequency**

In general communication takes place and is noticed/read every week or every two weeks (figure 8). Looking then at the opinions about communication we see that 92% thinks the frequency of communication is exactly right. Furthermore, inquiries were done do the opinions of different media used by the NEVAT. Again we can see a very positive tendency, as displayed in figure 9. This especially for email, the medium the NEVAT uses most and is therefore most important to them. However, even though communication takes place via telephone, 80% of the respondents indicated they have no opinion about this medium. This might be because, while all members receive the exact same message via email at the exact same time, not all members are in contact via telephone with the same frequency. Some members have indicated more or less interest in communication via the telephone and it is up to the NEVAT to sense this.

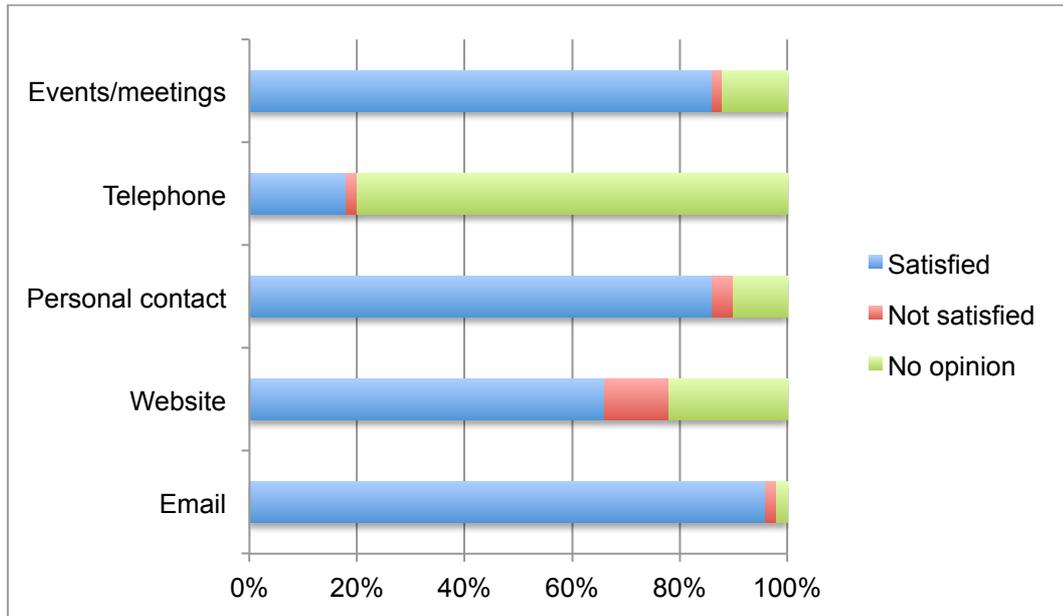
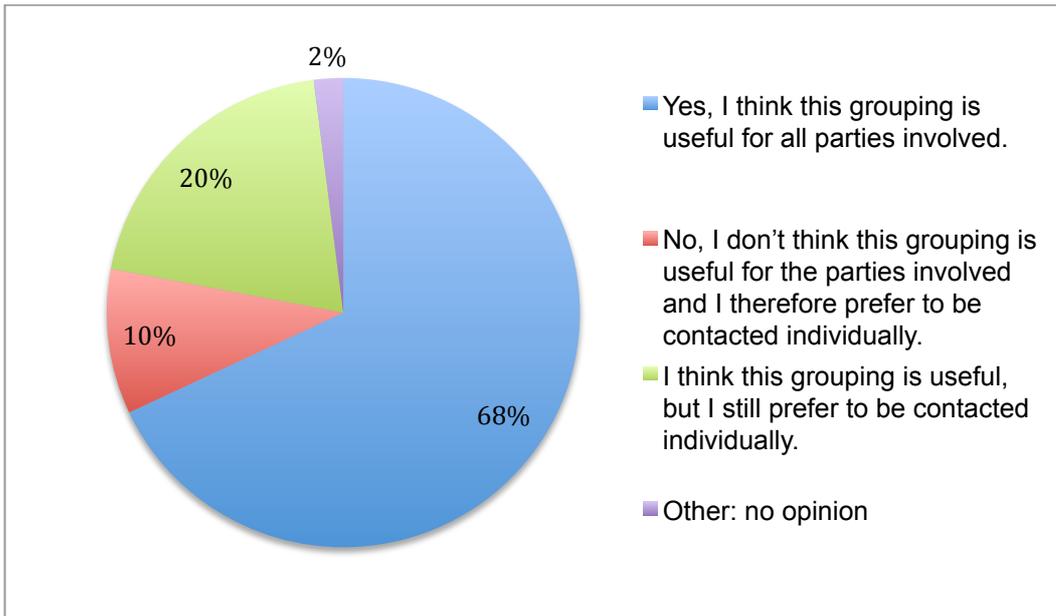


Figure 9: Opinions about different media

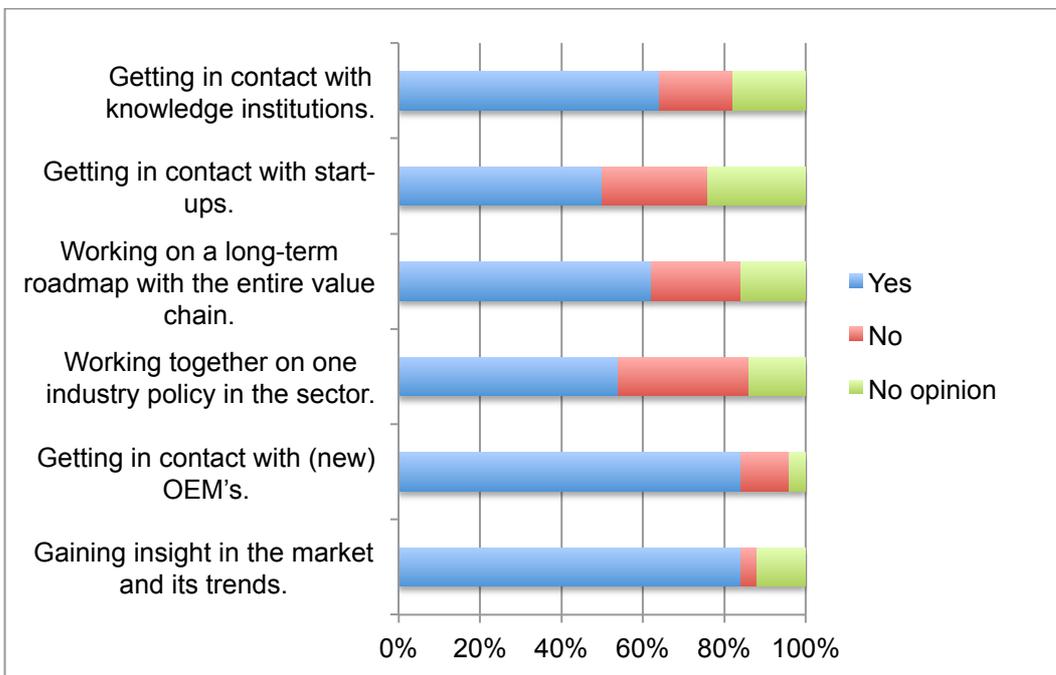
### Platform Life Sciences & Health

One of the things that have changed communication-wise, with the foundation of the new platforms, is that the members of this platform are targeted as a group with a common goal. The sector groups put companies together who have operate in different commercial markets, but have the same, or alike, skill sets, the platforms on the other hand group companies with different competencies, who are all working in the same market. Another big change is that the communication within this group will not go only between the company and the NEVAT, but also actively between companies. The opinions the respondents had on this fact can be seen in the following figure (figure 10). While this is challenging and might take some getting used to, from all sides, a large majority is in favour of this (68% + 20% = 88%). This includes a smaller group of 20% that does think there is a positive side to this, but feels that it is best for their own company to be communicated with on an individual basis.



**Figure 10: Opinions on inter-company interaction & communication**

When asked about the content of the messages, the perceived benefits and the expectations, 84% of respondents indicated that gaining insights in the market and its trends is an added value (figure 11).



**Figure 11: Main added values of the platform LS&H**

The respondents who indicated they had been present at one of the platform meetings were asked for their experiences there. The experiences were again

positive as can be seen in figure 12. However, not many members felt that they had much to contribute themselves, which is supposed to be an important part of the platform. 60% of the respondents is positive about the organisation of the NEVAT.

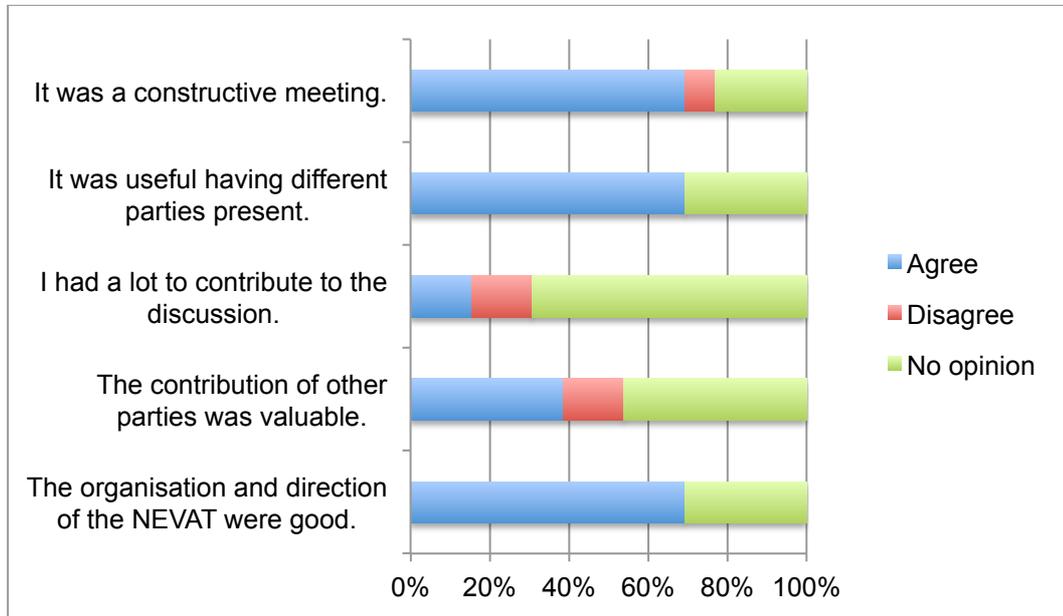


Figure 12: Feedback on LS&H platform meetings

## 4.2 Interviews

The following is a summarizing compilation of the three in-depth interviews. An English summary for each of the interviews can be found in appendices 4, 5 and 6. The complete Dutch transcripts are to be found in appendices 7, 8 and 9.

As mentioned in the methodology, the interviews were done with three of the six currently subscribed members to the Life Sciences & Health platform. All three interviewees were very positive in general about the communication between their company and the NEVAT. The majority of the communication goes via email, which they appreciate as they can easily read it at their own preferred time. While the messages, such as the newsletter, are usually short, to the point and concise, the quality of the information is good and they also offer the possibility for more in-depth information in the form of links to articles, usually to be found on the NEVAT website. The members also are in frequent contact by telephone with the NEVAT, usually in the person of Edwin Dekker, which they also experience as very positive. He is often able to offer a more personal note to

the conversation. One of the interviewees states a specific enthusiasm about following the NEVAT on social media.

Another important moment of contact between the companies and the NEVAT is when there are events. The companies are members of the new platform, for which there have already been some meetings, but they are also often present on the general NEVAT meetings as well as the meetings for their respective sector groups. The organisation concerning these meetings from the NEVAT is always good, from the invitation to leading the conversation. Usually information is sent out with the invitation to these meetings, this information is perceived to be relevant but somewhat superficial. However, the interviewees note that they prefer it if crucial and basic information concerning the meeting, such as date, location and topic, could be communication further in advance; additional information can follow later. At the meetings, they feel everyone gets a chance to speak and share. Especially concerning the LS&H platform meetings, the meetings are still considered too generic, which is understandable considering the early phase the platform is still in. They expect, request or even demand, that the information will proceed to go into depth.

They are positive about the fact that communication for platform members is grouped and that within the platform companies will have to actively communicate between each other. All of them are enthusiastic about this, but acknowledge that this is still in a very early phase. The companies are not used to taking an active role in this type of platforms or the communication concerned with it, and therefore they see a role for the NEVAT in facilitating this. The companies might have also seen each other as competitors in the past and now start working together towards a mutual goal. Therefore the level of trust, and with it the amount of necessary information the companies share with each other, is low. To improve this, they suggest facilitation and mediation by the NEVAT, possible even in the form of guidelines and rules.

Another point the interviewed companies would like to see given attention is for NEVAT to lay the connection between the companies in the platform and the higher-level health care sector, local governments and final customers. They also see that the NEVAT is playing an active role in the platform, and will continue to do so while the platform is still in its early stages of development. As a final point however, in the future the part of the NEVAT should be limited, initiative has to be

taken more from the companies as well and the role of the NEVAT should be a strong facilitator.

### 4.3 Platform meeting May 13<sup>th</sup>

From the results of the questionnaire and the interviews, some preliminary conclusions were drawn. These points were written down and incorporated into the agenda to be discussed during the meeting. The complete conclusions and advice are to be found in the following chapters, but some point of focus for the meeting were:

- The respondents are very interested in gaining insight in the market, the developments of trends and how this platform relates to similar initiatives in the MedTech sector; they see a leading role for the NEVAT in this.
- They see a role for the NEVAT in getting not only the companies individually, but also the platform as a consortium, in contact with the industry.
- The NEVAT is currently active in gathering all information and organizing meetings, but the companies themselves can slowly start playing a more active role as well, guided in this process by the NEVAT. Especially concerning technological expertise the companies can attribute, however the NEVAT has to take the lead in combining and bundling this information.
- To have the platform be successful, the companies have to be open and forthcoming with their information, but they can only do so when there is a trusting and safe environment. The respondents feel that a good way to get to this level of trust is if the NEVAT would help them setting up some rules and guidelines concerning confidentiality.

Even though there have been some preliminary meetings with a larger group, the meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup> was the first exclusive meeting of committed members. During a two-hour meeting, important topics were discussed; from the views on and objectives for the platform to the role of the NEVAT vs. the role of the companies.

One of the points that came forward during the meeting is that there are many other initiatives in the MedTech sector, but that the members do not have a clear view of how many and their scope. This platform should have a differentiating

factor to be successful. *“Eventually were are all in this to generate sales.”* To do this, there are two main things that have to be done. First the different other initiatives in the MedTech sector have to be investigated; what their scope is, what their objectives are and how they can relate to the market, each other and the LS&H platform. Secondly, the scope, goals and objectives of the LS&H platform have to be identified. Since the companies can have a different view on this, the agreement is made that the companies write out their view on and goals for the platform to all be combined later by the NEVAT. After this has been done, the strategic goals for the platform can be defined.

According to Edwin Dekker of the NEVAT *“modern meetings are no longer large gatherings, but smaller congregations so that people can get to know each other better”*. Therefore the general opinion is to not get many more than the existing members into this group. The first idea of this platform was to get members from different skill sets and currently different competencies are represented. Within a smaller group of companies, the members think it is easier to gain trust. However, in spite of a small number, it will remain difficult to feel free to share information with another company in fear of competition. Therefore a code of conduct might help in creating a foundation of trust. This is where the NEVAT can offer their neutral, third party point of view in creating such a code or guideline.

In the case of future projects, the companies would not be each other’s main competitors. For larger projects they could even work together, and rather within the platform than with partners outside of the platform. *“You find each other sooner within the platform than outside.”*

As mentioned previously, the different members currently have different views on what the platform could mean for their company. However, they do agree on some points. The platform is a good source of information; the NEVAT can provide information on the market and the other members can supply inside information on their specific field. *“The platform is your sounding board. That is where you get your information from.”*

The fact that the companies take the time to meet up more often and are (becoming more) open and active in conversation means that they can discuss problems and challenges. Email is a very popular medium in this, for the directness and the ability to send information quickly to all. *“We all know each other well enough to communicate directly.”* This is however also something they

will have to improve during the coming months. An exclusive meeting with the small group of members allows for a good discussion and the members have all experienced this meeting as a very productive one. Therefore plans were already made for the next meeting.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

Through the different parts of the field research, a lot of results were gathered. The questionnaire focussed on getting an overview image of the experiences with the communication of the NEVAT in general and concerning the platform LS&H in specific. The first few questions on the characteristics of the members showed that the large majority of respondents were long-time, loyal members. The Group Metal Processing Industry and the Systems Suppliers were the largest sector groups represented. Four of the respondents have indicated membership to only the platform LS&H and five to both LS&H and the Agro & Food platform. The current frequency of communication, every week or every two weeks, was perceived as the exact right frequency. Most positive were the opinions about email contact and events/meetings. A large majority is positive about the grouping of communication by means of the platform. The members have various goals for the platform but are very positive about previous meetings and communication concerned.

The interviews with current platform members provided an extensive view on their communication experiences and goals for and views on the LS&H platform. They too presented a positive view on the communication, especially in the case of email and telephone, and in one case social media. They were positive about the preliminary platform meetings, but all desire concrete actions and in-depth discussion for the coming meetings. The rearrangement of communication, now shared and both ways between the members and the NEVAT is appreciated, though it takes getting used to. The NEVAT can facilitate in the (near) future by facilitating this process and supporting the gaining of trust.

The platform meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup> confirmed the preliminary conclusions. It was thought of that the group should not get much larger than that; this way different competencies were represented once or twice to avoid competition and enhance the feeling of partnership and trust. The current platform members indicate that the size of the group now is large enough, but other NEVAT members might have the intention of joining. The future will have to decide whether or not these



members can join the existing group of the platform, or if a new work group has to be formed. Facilitation is required from the NEVAT in the communication, bringing the information from the separate members together and getting members in contact with the industry.

## 5. Conclusions

The final goal of this research is to write an advice for the NEVAT to improve their communication. The research done to achieve this, started from the following main research question: *“Which factors influence the communication experience of the members within the platform?”* To answer this question carefully, it was divided into two sub questions with each sub-sub questions.

### 5.1 Experiences of the members

The first sub question was one of the main focus points of the field research. It is notable how positive the members are concerning the communication, for the different media and activities the mass is positive.

Concerning the experiences with communication frequency we can see that the large majority is positive about the current situation. 92% of the respondents in the questionnaire answered that they feel the current frequency is exactly right, which is between every week and every two weeks. Even though once every two weeks might not seem very frequent, one should take into consideration that a branch organisation like the NEVAT and its activities are outside of the normal business for a company. Therefore the time available to spend on such an organisation is sparse and usually added on top of the normal activities. This might explain that this relatively low frequency is preferred; it provides the required information without being too time consuming.

The main media used by the NEVAT are email, telephone and website, furthermore meetings and personal contact are important. A stunning 96% of the questionnaire respondents is satisfied with the communication by email. The interviewees were unanimous in liking email because they provide interesting and relevant information in a concise manner. This makes it easy to read in a spare moment. Usually the information is in-depth, but when more is required, links are added that lead to more elaborate articles. This was again confirmed at the platform meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup>; they planned to remain in active contact with each other and email is medium of first choice.

When it comes to telephone contact, we see that 80% of the questionnaire respondents has no opinion about this medium. As mentioned previously, not all members are as frequently in contact with the NEVAT. It is up to the NEVAT to

decide with which member to have more intensive contact. However, of the remaining 20%, only one member was not satisfied with the contact by telephone. The interviewees were unanimous in their positivity about contact by telephone.

Slightly less enthusiastic than about email, but still very positive, are the respondents about the website. 66% of the questionnaire respondents were satisfied with the website. A possible cause for this might be that the website has recently been totally renewed to increase the usability and possibilities for suppliers to showcase their expertise. Even though it usually takes some time to get used to a new website, the members seem to be comfortable with it. The interviewees also gave a positive sound regarding the website, especially as an easy source of information concerning their field. Furthermore, websites require more activity from the members. While it is easy to look for information on the website when needed, it usually is just there. Emails and telephone calls actively reach the receiver, and he just has to take in the information, while going to a website requires more initiative.

Even better were the responses for personal contact and events/meetings. For both types of communication, 86% indicated a positive experience. This especially is also something the members who were interviewed were very positive about. They praise the organisation and how the NEVAT, in the person of Edwin Dekker, leads the meetings and the discussions. All parties are allowed time to give input. The platform meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup> added to this that the members also prefer the new style of meeting, so with smaller groups to make it easier to have an in-depth discussion and get to know all parties as well as get to decisions.

The last medium investigated was telephone. It is noteworthy that 80% of the survey respondents indicated to have no opinion about this. Of the rest was 18% satisfied. This lead to the conclusion that this is neither good nor bad, and taking into consideration the fact that not everyone receives the exact same amount of telephonic contact, it might be that some respondents do not remember the received calls. On the other hand the interviewed members were positive about contact by telephone (it might be worth mentioning here that the interviews were conducted by telephone) and they enjoyed the ease of making/receiving a quick call to arrange something. Here it has to be said that loyal and active members

are naturally more often in contact, also by telephone, with the NEVAT and the interviewees were all committed NEVAT and platform members.

Besides frequency and media, the content of the messages communicated to the members is also important. We can see that the members prefer the media which are to the point and concise. However, at times the information sent out with the mailings can be somewhat superficial. The respondents to the questionnaire have indicated their perceived added values to the platform. 84% of them would want to 'gain insight in the market' and 'get in contact with OEMs'. Other demanded values are 'getting on contact with knowledge institutions' and 'working on a long-term road map with the entire value chain'.

The four traditional gratifications of the Uses and Gratifications Theory (to entertain, to inform, to reinforce personal identity and to work on personal relationships/social interactions) are in a way very applicable to this target group. While entertaining might not be the first gratification the members get from the platform, the other three are indeed quite relevant. Like the platform members said repeatedly during the interviews and the platform meeting, the platform will be an important source of information for them. The personal identity of the company will also be reinforced by being presented together as a strong platform to OEMs. Most importantly as both the NEVAT and the members keep stressing, the platform is a great opportunity to get in contact with other players in the medical industry sector.

Especially the members who are already participating in the platform and who were interviewed indicated that, for the platform to be successful, a high level of trust is needed between the members. To be able to share even more sensitive information about the company, in the benefit of the platform, the companies must trust each other to use this only for mutual benefit.

Finally, both the questionnaire as the interviews showed that the members experience the new grouped communication as something positive. The survey showed that 88% of the questionnaire respondents thought this form of communication was useful. The interviewees, committed platform members of course think this is positive; otherwise they would not have joined the platform. They appreciate their fellow members each for their own expertise, providing a broad view on the industry at one table.

In conclusion, the experiences of the members with the communication from the NEVAT are very positive. The large majority feels the communication frequency is just right and the media used are useful and preferable. When it comes to content, members tend to prefer a little more depth in the messages. Although they are still positive, especially the committed platform members still like more depth in the information. The new grouped communication is, even though some NEVAT members feel it is not suited for their company, a positive development.

## 5.2 Preferred communication

The second sub question was designed to gain insight in how the members would prefer to be communicated with. While we can see that a very large majority thinks the communication to a group instead of to the whole is useful, in total 30% still prefers to be contacted individually. Even though the NEVAT is now starting with the platforms where the communication is grouped, there are no plans to stop anything from their current activities and individual members who choose not to participate in the platform are still getting attention like before.

When the communication between members is concerned, this is something that is an action specifically of the platforms. The interviewed members note this as one of the stronger points of the platform, even though this is also one of the challenges. They see the intercompany communication as a useful way to collaborate in making the platform to be a success. However, sharing company information takes a level of trust. This is confirmed at the platform meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup>, the suggestion is made for a code of conduct or at least guidance from the NEVAT in the process of changing (some of the) communication. This is best explained by the uncertainty reduction theory. While the members are still in the early stages of the platform, the level of trust is still low and the level of uncertainty is still high. The axioms Griffin defined can be used to reduce this uncertainty. (Griffin, 2012)

Looking at the preferred media email is a definite favourite. Both for the questionnaire respondents as the interviewees, email is the medium of choice. Looking at the agenda setting theory, traditional media seem to make the most impact. Even though they have effectively been replaced by electronic media, one could say emailing a newsletter comes close to traditional media and might therefore be the best option. Furthermore, most respondents still see a good value in meeting face-to-face, even though meeting styles may change. One of

the interviewees express a preference for twitter as it is both a fun and useful way to keep up-to-date with smaller news and furthermore it can be a teaser to find out more about a certain topic. Another interviewee said that a group application, exclusively for platform members, would be a good way to share confidential information. The members present at the meeting of May 13<sup>th</sup> again expressed their favour of email and meeting in person. The first allows them to share information and plan meetings, the second is because true discussions are held at meetings and concrete plans can be made then. When looking at the uses and gratifications theory we find the justification that professionals are aware of their own media use and this means their responses provide a good image of their media use.

The questionnaire asked about the added values of the platform for the members. Most members see the platform as a good way to get in contact with the rest of the ecosystem; knowledge institutions, start-ups, OEMs, etc. This will have to be a core part of the messages. Another important point that came forward during the questionnaire is that the members rely on the NEVAT to work together on roadmaps and one industry policy. Finally, one of the most important added values of the platform for the members is getting insight in the market and its trends. The interviewed members gave similar answers, though their commitment is a lot higher. This also means that their answers are more in depth. They too want to gain more insight in the ecosystem, into other MedTech initiatives and trends. As they also mention during the platform meeting, they want to seriously get going, set up guidelines for the platform and start looking for projects. The elaboration likelihood model furthermore tells us that the messages should be focussed on strong arguments. The members are most to benefit from the success of the platform and they are motivated and knowledgeable. This makes that the central route of persuasion, or conveying messages, is key for the NEVAT. The members are best informed and kept content by message with strong content and good arguments.

The agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw proposed that the NEVAT cannot specifically tell the members what to think about a certain subject, as a neutral party they have little interest in this, but they can guide the members to think about certain topics. In the meetings organised by the NEVAT, this is exactly what is happening. The general idea of course has to be beneficial for the

platform and its members, but specific points of focus are determined when the NEVAT sets the agenda, determines the location and invites any possible guests.

The large majority of the NEVAT members is positive about the communication in the form of a platform. They feel that communication in between members, as well as with the NEVAT, can contribute to the success of the platform. The members are almost unanimous in liking and preferring email as the main means of communication, and personal meetings next to that. The committed platform members share this view. The content should be the main focus and the information should be presented in a concise and factual way.

### 5.3 Conclusion

The different sub questions show interesting results. There are many positive reactions from the members on the communication from the NEVAT. The seven factors that Anurag Patidar identified as influencing the communication process hold for this target group, even though the relationship between communicators is different than he had in mind. Furthermore, there are other influences on communication experiences specific to the NEVAT and the platform. A contributor to the experience is the fact that the roles in communication are shifting to a network-like structure in between members instead of two-ways between member and NEVAT. Furthermore, the type of media used is influential. The current use of media receives very positive feedback. The members have indicated in both the questionnaire as during the interviews, that these factors are of lesser importance compared to the content of the message. The ELM implies that the target group requires good arguments and strong content, focussed on the facts. Efficiency and effectiveness are important to the members, even more so because they are doing the platform next to their normal, busy schedules.

## 6. Recommendations

This final chapter serves as the advice for the NEVAT and will answer the policy question as stated at the beginning of the research: *“How can NEVAT best communicate towards its members to perform a platform function for industrial suppliers?”*

The research has identified many points that need to be taken into consideration. One thing that has to be said before these recommendations is that the respondents, the interviewees and the platform members contacted for this research were predominantly very positive about the communication from the NEVAT. In that sense, one could say that no recommendations for improvement are necessary. However, as was mentioned often during the research, the platform is still in its early stages. This does not mean that the communication should not improve, if anything it means that extra effort should be put into it.

We see that the currently used frequency of communication is perceived to be optimal; therefore it would not be wise to change anything about that. It is important to keep the communication adjusted to the target audience. In this case the target audience is very busy and, since the NEVAT activities lie outside of the normal business for the members, this is done in spare time or often the private time of the directors. Therefore the NEVAT should, even if they wish to communicate more in the future, not increase the frequency (drastically), but rather find ways to combine messages or be selective.

The media itself that are used are also perceived as positive, so it would not be advised to change them for the general organisation. However, a new platform can mean new ways of communicating. While the members of the platform have indicated they still prefer email and meeting in person, the NEVAT can think of a safe way to share more private information. One of the members suggests a group application exclusively for members of the platform. Because new media seem to take an increasingly large portion of time in peoples' days, this can be an option for this last comment. Otherwise, an exclusive part, or closed community, can be added to the website as the central place for members to share their information and for the NEVAT to share information exclusively to members.

The NEVAT is currently “doing everything” concerning the new platform. They are active in collecting information, combining and distributing it, organising and

hosting meetings etc. However, it is the wish of both the NEVAT and the members is to place a small part of the responsibility with the members, since it is them who benefit most from the success of the platform. The NEVAT can have a guiding role in this, finding those activities that can best be performed by the members. The NEVAT is not an expert in the industry, but the members are. Therefore it would be wise to have the companies find out and gather the information for their respective field, while the NEVAT can then bundle and clarify this. This is again a place where the NEVAT can use its strength in facilitating. The questionnaire results show that only a small group of respondents felt like they had a lot to contribute to the meetings. Therefore it is important for the NEVAT to make sure that all members feel like they are contributing. While the possibility of contributing is already there for all members, not all seem to have a similar feeling of contribution. The NEVAT can actively encourage members to contribute by addressing members that seem quiet during the meeting or asking them critical or inquisitive questions. The NEVAT has to make sure that, even if not all members actually have to contribute something, they still feel like they are actively participating in the meeting.

A very important point for the members is that, right now there is still a lot unknown, a lot to get used to and therefore a lot of uncertainty. When looking at the uncertainty reduction theory, the NEVAT can use the axioms defined in their favour. The relationships between the members and the certainty the members have of the platform can be improved by trying to work with these axioms. As the amount of verbal communication increases, the uncertainty will decrease. Therefore the NEVAT should encourage more communication between the members to have them be more certain of each other, but they should also work with the communication from the NEVAT to have the members be more certain of the platform itself. Nonverbal warmth can also decrease the level of uncertainty. Because this is best done in personal meetings, it is advised that the NEVAT remains active in organising face-to-face meetings. Maybe the most fitting to the platform is the axiom of information seeking. For almost all members, one of the most important uses for the platform is to gather information. This means that if they receive the desired information, they will not only be pleased with the platform, but also be less uncertain thus more confident in the platform. Even though uncertainty might mean less self-disclosure, little self-disclosure also means a higher uncertainty. To break this, the NEVAT should try and provide a

safe environment for the members to start increasing the certainty. There are also factors that are already in a good state. The platform members are approached based on similarities: they are all interested in innovative initiatives and are involved in the medical market. Even though they have different specialities, they are all in same industry. They also already have quite some share networks through the NEVAT. This is however also something the NEVAT can increase. By introducing other parties, like for example OEMs, other industry initiatives or hospitals, the amount of shared networks increases and with it the trust in each other will. Something the NEVAT can do less about it increase the liking between the parties, however they can have influences by creating a positive environment. Finally the reciprocity can be guided and facilitated by the NEVAT; they can perform the role of leader of the conversation and with it suggest agreements for, for example, the sharing of information and the executing of activities. Another good way to reduce the uncertainty and to build the trust between the members, is for the NEVAT to write a Code of Conduct, of sorts. This might be a very minimalistic set of guidelines the members have at their disposal to encourage them to feel safe to share even some more sensitive information.

The members have also indicated that they prefer crucial information for meetings, such as date, location and topic, is sent out more in advance. While additional information can follow later, these points are critical in deciding if the meeting is something they have to make room for in their busy schedules. The advice is therefore not to wait with a meeting invitation until all information is complete, but to send out the basics in advance and the complete story later. Within such a small group of platform members, the NEVAT can and should try to communicate with all to find the meeting time and place that suits the most members best.

Furthermore, the NEVAT should constantly be working on being the most competent communicator they can be. They have been quite successful in communication, but a different challenge has been added for the platform. Not only the NEVAT will be active, the members will also play an active role in communicating between each other; it is the role of the NEVAT to guide them as the interviewees indicated. Adler and Rodman defined several attributes for effective communicators, which are all equally important, but in the case of the platform special attention can be given to these:

- Empathic ability: the members have been used to fending for their own company, now however they have chosen a path of collaboration. While they have previously been competitors, they are now pursuing a cooperative style of business. This calls for empathic ability, something the companies are not used to. Because the NEVAT has a neutral, third party role, they can actively encourage the companies to look at a case from another point of view.
- Self-monitoring: the ability to look critical at your own behaviour in communication can help you improve it. At first the NEVAT will be monitoring the discussion and thus the members, however they have to encourage independent behaviour and critical views in the members.

Anurag Patidar also identified factors that can, if taken into consideration, improve the communication process. Some of these factors are already suitable for smooth communication; the sociocultural background of the members for example is quite similar. However, when it comes to attitude there might be challenges in the future. While the members have started out with a very positive attitude, strategic challenges still lie ahead that might cause their attitudes to change. The NEVAT can be there to keep the members faced in the right direction and towards the same goal. While there are factors in the communication that are outside of the control of the NEVAT, environmental factors are, to some extent within their control. When sending out a message or planning a meeting, the NEVAT should be very careful to make sure no environmental factors cloud the message. Especially in the case of meetings it is important to organise them well for maximum impact. The research has shown that the members of the NEVAT and of the platform are already very positive about this. However it is important to have a constant eye and looking critical at their own skills to stay on top.

This also serves as the last point of recommendation. While the current situation is that the members, of the organisation and the platform in particular, are content with the communication and organisation, the situation of the platform is changing rapidly. The platform is now in its early stages, therefore the opinions might differ when the platform has reached an adult stage. For that reason, follow-up research is recommended after a certain period, lets say one year, to reassess the situation. This could mean repeating (part of) this research, or

designing a new research strategy, as long as the focus is on establishing if the communication is still supporting the strategic goals.

### **A final word of advice**

One of the most important things for the NEVAT, even though research like this one indicated that they are very much on the right way, is to stay critical and keep improving. It is likely that the respondents were so positive because the NEVAT is very active in finding out exactly what their members want and need from them and then, as a non-profit organisation, providing that (within reason). It is important that the NEVAT should maintain its facilitating role. This is what the NEVAT is known for and what it is praised for. While the positive results show that drastic changes are by no means necessary, it will still be necessary to keep analysing the organisation to remain an added value to the members. Through research such as this, the NEVAT can stay ahead.



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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Questionnaire questions

*“Your Network Represents Stone-Hard Currency” – Dr. Tjip de Jong*

No-one knows and understands this better than the NEVAT and you.

My name is Rachelle Groenemeijer and I am currently doing the study International Communication and Media. For my graduation assignment I am researching, on behalf of the NEVAT, the communication of the NEVAT in general and especially concerning the launch of their new platform Life Sciences & Health (LS&H) to improve and optimise this where possible. By means of this questionnaire I hope to gain insight in the user experiences and wishes.

My request to you is if you could answer the following questions openly. The answers will be processed anonymously and the data will only be used for writing my graduation assignment. Based on this, I will present the NEVAT with an advice for the improvement of their communication.

Thanks a lot in advance for your cooperation!

\* \* \*

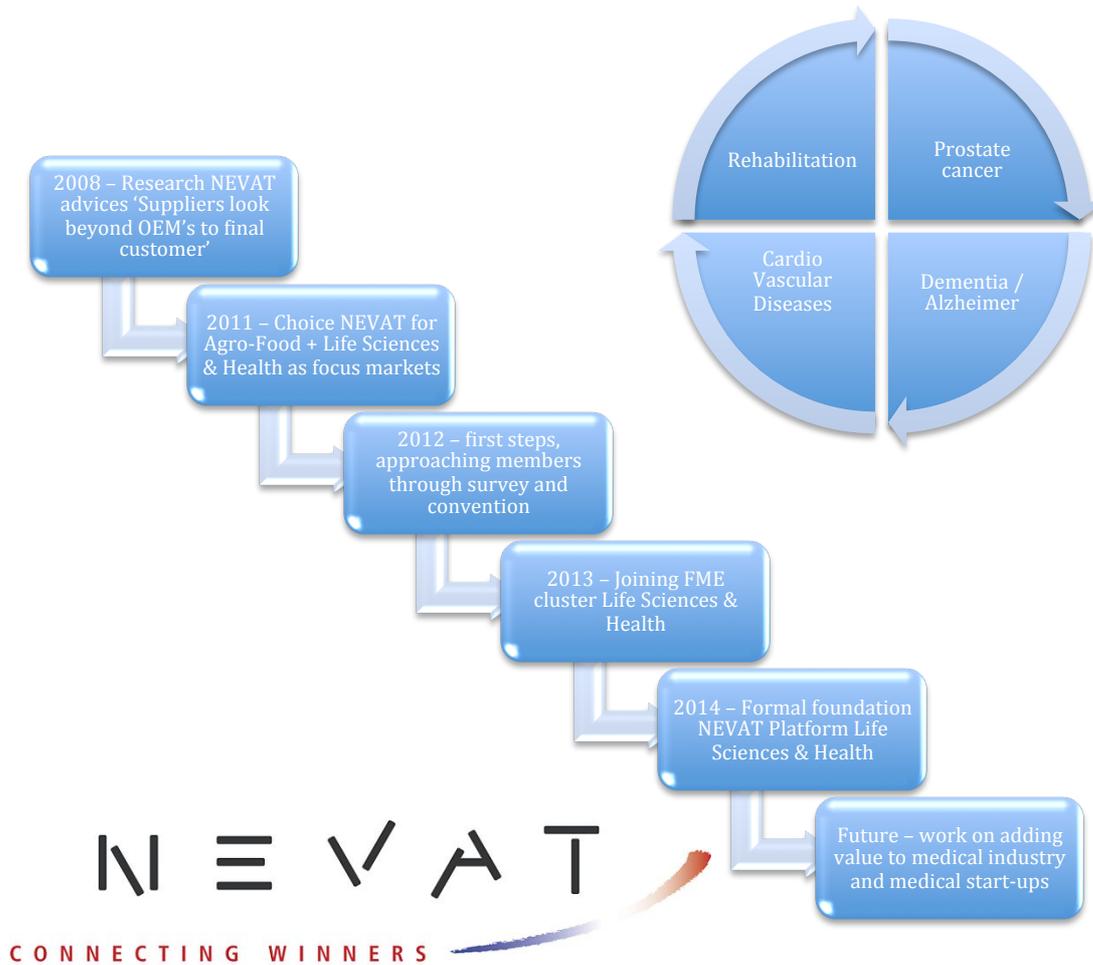


Figure 13: Timeline of platform formation (before questionnaire)

**Q1. How long have you (approximately) been a member of the NEVAT?**

- Less than one year
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- More than 4 years

**Q2. To which sector do you (primarily) belong?**

- Electronic Manufacturing Services
- Group Metal Processing Industry
- Large Machining The Netherlands
- Precision Parts Platform
- System Developers
- System Suppliers
- Holland Automotive
- I am not part of any of the sectors.

**Q3. Late 2013, the NEVAT has started the foundation of two platforms for industrial suppliers to work together towards innovation in the production industry. Have you been invited to take part in one of these two platforms?**

- Yes
- No

**Q4. Are you currently taking part in one or both of the platforms?**

- Yes
- No

**Q5. In which of the platforms are you taking part?**

	Yes	No
Agro & Food	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Life Sciences & Health	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q6. If you have indicated at the previous question that you are not taking part in one of the platforms, could you please state why not? If you have indicated that you are taking part in one of the platforms, could you please state why?**

...

\* \* \*

**Q7. How often on average does the NEVAT communicate with you? (think of email, personal contact, telephone, website, meetings, etc.)**

- Every day
- Multiple times a week
- Every week
- Every two weeks
- Every month
- Less than once a month

**Q8. What is your opinion of the frequency with which the NEVAT communicates with you?**

- Too low                      Exactly right                      Too high
- 

**Q9. What is your experience with the following media the NEVAT uses in its communication with you?**

	Not satisfied	Satisfied	No Opinion
Email	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal contact	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Telephone	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Events/meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Q10. Currently the NEVAT is busy launching different platforms, organising suppliers and thus contacting them as a group. Do you think this grouping is positive and useful?**

- Yes, I think this grouping is useful for all parties involved.
- No, I don't think this grouping is useful for the parties involved and I therefore prefer to be contacted individually.
- I think this grouping is useful, but I still prefer to be contacted individually.
- Other:

**Q11. Where do you think lies the added value of a market orientated platform?**

	Yes	No	No Opinion
Gaining insight in the market and its trends.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting in contact with (new) OEM's.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working together on one industry policy in the sector.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working on a long-term roadmap with the entire value chain.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting in contact with start-ups.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting in contact with knowledge institutions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* \* \*

**Q12. Have you been present at one or more of the meetings of the Life Sciences & Health cluster on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014, February 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 or April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014?**

- Yes
- No

\* \* \*

**Q13. What have been your experiences on the LS&H meeting(s)?**

	Agree	Disagree	No opinion
It was a constructive meeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It was useful having different parties present.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I had a lot to contribute to the discussion.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The contribution of other parties was valuable.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The organisation and direction of the NEVAT were good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* \* \*

**Q14. The next meeting for the medical platform is scheduled for May 22<sup>nd</sup>, are you planning to attend this meeting?**

- Yes
- No

\* \* \*

**Q15. Do you have any additional comments or remarks on the (improvement of the) communication of the NEVAT?**

...

## Appendix 2: Interview questions

1. Could you describe what your company does in a few sentences?
2. How have you first heard of the new platform Life Sciences and Health of the NEVAT and what was your first impression?
3. What caused you to make the decision of taking part in the platform LS&H?
4. What do you think the platform can mean for your company?
5. What do you think your company in turn can contribute to the platform?
6. The communication from the NEVAT is partly now on a group basis, instead of purely individual. How do you experience this?
7. The platform encourages contact between the partaking companies, what is your opinion about this and how would you go about this?
8. In what do you think the NEVAT can facilitate more?
9. Via which media does the NEVAT communicate with you and what is your experience with this?
10. What is your opinion about the communication you receive from the NEVAT in general? And concerning the new platform?
11. Do you think the messages you receive from the NEVAT are always relevant and up-to-date?
12. Which ways of communication would appeal to you besides the current?
13. Do you feel there is anything missing in the communication from the NEVAT?
14. How have you experienced the previous meetings of the platform LS&H?
15. Are there any other comments or points in improvement you have for the NEVAT concerning the general communication or specific to the platform LS&H?

### Appendix 3: Results questionnaire

#### Q1. How long have you (approximately) been a member of the NEVAT?

Answer		Response	%
Less than one year		2	4%
1-2 years		2	4%
3-4 years		4	8%
More than 4 years		42	84%
Total		50	100%

Table 1: Results question 1

#### Q2. To which sector do you (primarily) belong?

Answer		Response	%
Electronic Manufacturing Services		4	8%
Group Metal Processing Industry		17	34%
Large Machining The Netherlands		3	6%
Precision Parts Platform		5	10%
System Developers		2	4%
System Suppliers		14	28%
Holland Automotive		8	16%
I am not part of any of the sectors.		8	16%

Table 2: Results question 2

**Q3. Late 2013, the NEVAT has started the foundation of two platforms for industrial suppliers to work together towards innovation in the production industry. Have you been invited to take part in one of these two platforms?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	47	94%
No	3	6%
Total	50	100%

Table 3: Results question 3

**Q4. Are you currently taking part in one or both of the platforms?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	18	36%
No	32	64%
Total	50	100%

Table 4: Results question 4

**Q5. In which of the platforms are you taking part?**

Question	Yes	No	Total Responses	Mean
Agro & Food	13	33	46	1.72
Life Sciences & Health	9	38	47	1.81

Table 5: Results question 5

**Q6. If you have indicated at the previous question that you are not taking part in one of the platforms, could you please state why not? If you have indicated that you are taking part in one of the platforms, could you please state why?**

...

**Q7. How often on average does the NEVAT communicate with you? (think of email, personal contact, telephone, website, meetings, etc.)**

Answer		Response	%
Every day		0	0%
Multiple times a week		3	6%
Every week		20	40%
Every two weeks		15	30%
Every month		9	18%
Less than once a month		3	6%
Total		50	100%

Table 6: Results question 7

**Q8. What is your opinion of the frequency with which the NEVAT communicates with you?**

Answer	Response	%
Too low	3	6%
Exactly right	46	92%
Too high	1	2%
Total	50	100%

Table 7: Results question 8

**Q9. What is your experience with the following media the NEVAT uses in its communication with you?**

Question	Not satisfied	Satisfied	No opinion	Total Responses	Mean
Email	1	48	1	50	2.00
Website	6	33	11	50	2.10
Personal contact	2	43	5	50	2.06
Telephone	1	9	40	50	2.78
Events/meetings	1	43	6	50	2.10

Table 8: Results question 9

**Q10. Currently the NEVAT is busy launching different platforms, organising suppliers and thus contacting them as a group. Do you think this grouping is positive and useful?**

Answer		Response	%
Yes, I think this grouping is useful for all parties involved.		34	68%
No, I don't think this grouping is useful for the parties involved and I therefore prefer to be contacted individually.		5	10%
I think this grouping is useful, but I still prefer to be contacted individually.		10	20%
Other:		1	2%
Total		50	100%

Table 9: Results question 10

**Q11. Where do you think lies the added value of a market orientated platform?**

Question	Yes	No	No opinion	Total Responses	Mean
Gaining insight in the market and its trends.	42	2	6	50	1.28
Getting in contact with (new) OEM's.	42	6	2	50	1.20
Working together on one industry policy in the sector.	27	16	7	50	1.60
Working on a long-term roadmap with the entire value chain.	31	11	8	50	1.54
Getting in contact with start-ups.	25	13	12	50	1.74
Getting in contact with knowledge institutions.	32	9	9	50	1.54

Table 10: Results question 11

**Q12. Have you been present at one or more of the meetings of the Life Sciences & Health cluster on November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2014, February 16<sup>th</sup> 2014 or April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014?**

Answer		Response	%
Yes		13	26%
No*		37	74%
Total		50	100%

Table 11: Results question 12

(\* Respondents who answered 'No' to this question were bypassed to the last question.)

**Q13. What have been your experiences on the LS&H meeting(s)?**

Question	Agree	Disagree	No opinion	Total Responses	Mean
It was a constructive meeting.	9	1	3	13	1.54
It was useful having different parties present.	9	0	4	13	1.62
I had a lot to contribute to the discussion.	2	2	9	13	2.54
The contribution of other parties was valuable.	5	2	6	13	2.08
The organisation and direction of the NEVAT were good.	9	0	4	13	1.62

Table 12: Results question 13

**Q14. The next meeting for the medical platform is scheduled for May 22<sup>nd</sup>, are you planning to attend this meeting?**

Answer	Response	%
Yes	6	46%
No	7	54%
Total	13	100%

Table 13: Results question 14

**Q15. Do you have any additional comments or remarks on the (improvement of the) communication of the NEVAT?**

...

#### Appendix 4: Summary interview #1

The company is a system supplier from the Noord-Holland region in the Netherlands, They have first heard of the new platform Life Sciences & Health in a meeting with Edwin Dekker. Because they have the desire to catch trends and needs from the market in an early stage, they have joined the LS&H platform. Even though it is still in its pioneering phase, the first impressions are very positive. They have the desire to work more efficiently and they aim to reach this using their network and experience. They see a facilitating role for the NEVAT. When it comes to companies communicating between each other, they say that this is something really positive, but that it is still awkward and they need to grow accustomed to it. This type of communication does increase involvement and initiative of the participating companies. The company has taken a first step in this, but they feel that they need the NEVAT to aid in communicating to other companies. The company would also like to approach final customers together with the platform, even though this also poses some challenges because they are both colleagues and competitors. To guide this, they would like the NEVAT to assist in establishing rules and guidelines.

The current means of communication from the NEVAT are well appreciated, the newsletter provides quality information and is sometimes complemented with links to articles on the website. The use of new/social media by the NEVAT is very much appreciated as well, they are active in following the NEVAT on twitter. They acknowledge the fact that the communication between members is still in a very early stage, also because the number of members is still low. The communication from the NEVAT concerning the new platform is praised, but especially when it comes to planning a new event, it may be more concrete. When knowing the date and place of an event well ahead of time, it is easier to plan and keep this free. It is useful to know the topic up front, but detailed information can easily be communicated later. For now the communication and planning concerning the new platform is very democratic, which might become less in the future with more members, with a leading role for the NEVAT. Current communication is mainly via email and at meetings. At these meeting there is always a good organization and the NEVAT, in the person of Edwin Dekker, can lead the discussion well making sure all parties get time to give input and comments. On conclusion, the opinion about the current communication, both in



style/tone of voice and type of medium as in content, is very positive, only specific to meeting times the information can be sent more in advance.

## Appendix 5: Summary interview #2

The company is an industrial supplier, specialized in system supply. They first heard of the platform Life Sciences & Health through a sector workgroup meeting of the NEVAT. Because they have been interested in a cooperative style amongst companies, but also because they see good perspectives for this in the current market with their membership of the NEVAT, they have decided to join the LS&H platform as one of the first. They are very much in favour of developing business across the sector and are eager to support initiatives that do this. They mainly expect insights in market developments of the platform, as well as information on trends and parameters. With their own experience they feel that they can contribute to insights within their segment and creating knowledge models.

The shift in communication from individual to collective is a positive one in their opinion. While they are unsure via which way and medium the communication within the platform has to go, they see benefits to both traditional and new media, however they would like to maintain control over the information they contribute. The suggestion is made for a closed or private group application, exclusive to platform members. Currently emails from the NEVAT are often a good source of information, as well as a starting point to find out more, made easy through the links to the NEVAT website in the mailings. Less frequent, but equally appreciated, is the personal or telephonic contact. They feel that the new platform is still very general and somewhat searching for a clear heading, but is going in the right direction. The desire is there to start going depth with the plans. In the current situation the companies are acting only on their own behalf, but it is desirable that they start to see the benefits of having a strong platform that can also indirectly benefit their own company, but efforts in cooperation have to be made to reach this. The NEVAT can guide the companies in becoming more open towards the cooperation. In the opinion of the company, the communication concerning the platform is too generic and not enough towards a clear focus point. They feel that the reason for this is that the platform is still in its early phase, and that this will naturally become more concrete. A good medium for concrete communication is email, but the meetings also are valuable. The company has not been able to be present at one of the meetings, but they feel the need for a clear launch of the platform, this way clear and concrete objectives

can be set for strategic goals and the cooperation between companies. This is also good to align the visions of the companies. All companies will have to invest time and probably money in the goals of the platform to create profit for all. The NEVAT can again be a facilitating factor, intermediation between the companies and reaching out to local or national governments to open possibilities, but the core of the platform has to come from the member companies. The first months are crucial and companies have to participate and communicate actively to make the investments worthwhile.

### Appendix 6: Summary interview #3

The company is supplier to the high tech industry in Eindhoven. Through the meetings with the branch organisation NEVAT they have learnt of the two new platforms. Furthermore, they are frequently in contact with Edwin Dekker who also sparked their interest in the new initiative. From a strategic point of view, they have joined the net platform for its market-orientated approach. Even though they have to be critical which initiatives to join, the support was immediately there for this concept. After the first information sparked interest, they have been kept up to date by the NEVAT with the developments of the platform. From this, the company can also steer a course to take up own initiatives. The platform will help the company in gaining information on which other initiatives are being developed in the market, but it will also help the company to be seen and to get involved deeper with these new developments. They bring their own experience from the sector of high tech system assembly and are willing to share knowledge with partners in the new platform.

The communication with the NEVAT is mainly via email and telephone, but meetings are also a good time to get in contact. The information in these messages is usually short and to the point, which is appreciated in the busy corporate life, and the NEVAT is usually active in the follow-up. The platform itself is obviously still in the early stage, and therefore it is difficult to already form a true opinion about it. For now it looks good, but improvements can be made in all areas to gain a larger group of platform members. In general they are really positive about the different media the NEVAT uses, especially about the main contact person Edwin Dekker. The communication between the different companies within the platform and the awareness of the importance of collaboration are growing, even though the trust in between them still has a way to go before the companies can accept each other as partners more than as competitors. The NEVAT can play a good role as intermediary, but also facilitating the actual communication at meetings and offering information on the markets and trends. The NEVAT usually leads the conversations at meetings, which is seen as something positive since they allow all parties to speak and get all important points out. The discussions have an in-depth level of knowledge. A final point of improvement might be that the NEVAT can get the members as a group in contact with more customers in the health care industry.