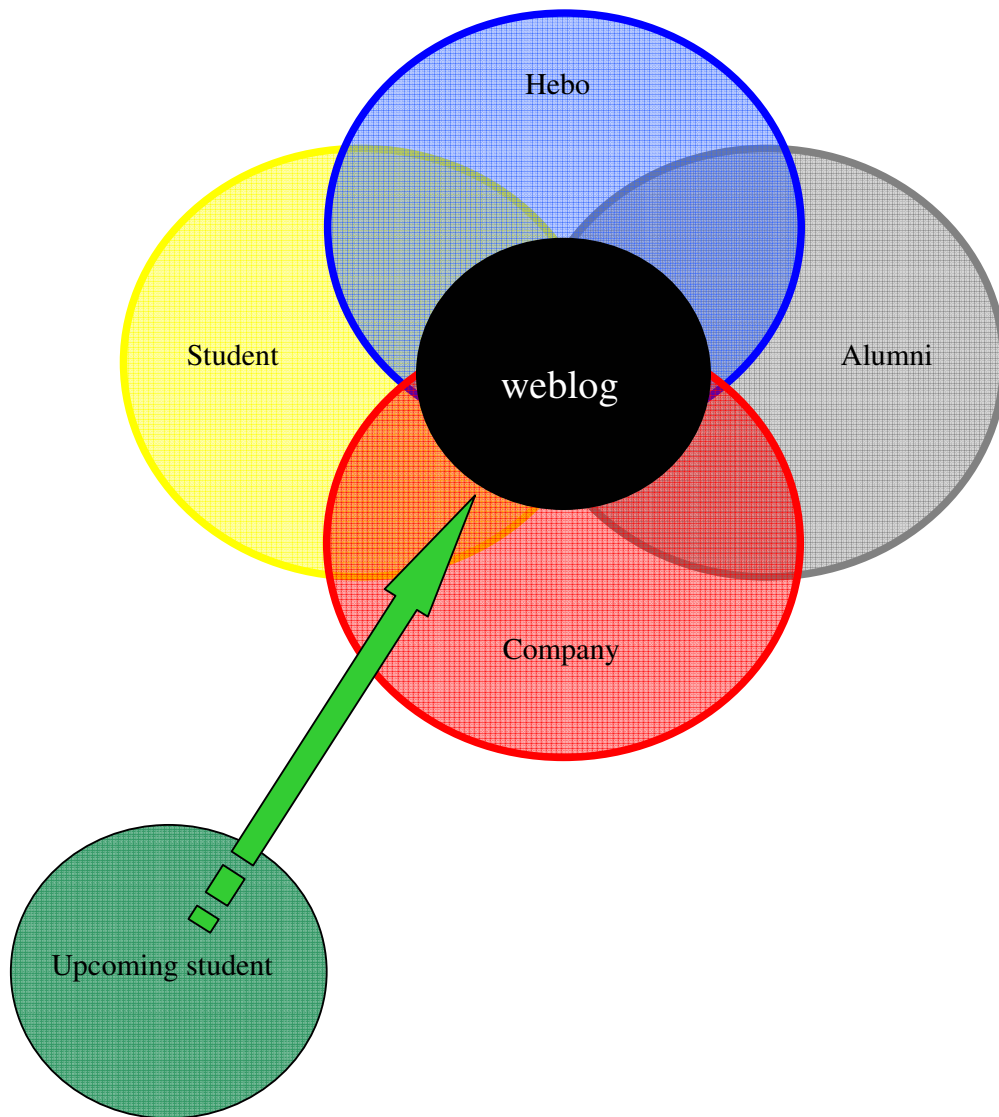


# Can a weblog contribute to the communication between participants of the Hebo community?



## **Executive summary**

The type of communication made possible through web logs and whether it has an added value besides the ordinary communication tools such as e-mail, telephone and websites are the main questions in this report. By means of the Habermas theory, the integration of the ideal speech situation into a weblog will be investigated. This means that all participants have equal access to communication, there are no power differences between participants and everybody has to act truthfully. To answer the question whether a weblog has the possibilities to fulfill these requirements, the communication capacities of Van Dijk will be explained and related to the weblog. Apart from the web log three other competitors such as chat, forum and web pages will be compared. After comparing these communication tools with the theory of Van Dijk, it can be concluded that a weblog is a very advanced communication tool that has the capacities to almost approach the possibilities of face-to-face communication. However, when there is no interest amongst the target group, the Hebo community, there will be no use creating one. Therefore, a survey has been held amongst the current Hebo students, Alumni, involved companies and Hebo management. The answer to the question whether a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community is yes, but it has to be made a success by the participants themselves.

## **Preface**

While studying at the Hebo, a lot of projects for external companies concerning identity, image and communication plans had to be made. In order to write a professional communication plan the information found on the internet was not enough. Therefore I decided to do my final paper within an organisation so information could be easily gained. When doing my internship at Nuon, I literally sat in the middle of the Corporate Communication department where they were occupied creating a weblog on the website. While talking about it the idea was born to write my final paper on this subject. The combination of the weblog and a research within an organisation, resulted in the investigation to a Hebo weblog. The outcome is in front of you, but it could not have been possible without the help of the Hebo management and its employees who supplied information and e-mail addresses for my survey.

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## **1. Introduction**

When creating the World Wide Web, its creator, Tim Berners Lee, had a vision on the purpose of the web. “The vision I have for the web is about anything being potentially connected with anything.” (Berners-Lee & Fischetti, 1999, p. 11)

The development of the use of the World Wide Web in the second half of the 90’s of the twentieth century, revealed a change in the communication between people. Due to the extended network of computers connected to each other, it is possible to communicate over long distance independent of time. What was at the beginning only accessible for a select group of technicians, has developed into a meeting place for anyone with an Internet connection (ibid). There are innumerable Internet forums where people can gain information from others or can ask a question online. Since the beginning of this century, a new phenomenon has become popular: the weblog. In brief, this is a type of website where new pieces of text, audio or images can frequently be published in reversed chronological order. The distinctive factor is the presence of a comment function that makes it possible to react and to start a conversation on all kind of subjects.

### **1.1 Research questions**

The central question of this research is whether a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community. Amongst the Hebo community belong current students, Alumni, Hebo management and involved companies.

Before discussing the weblog phenomenon in detail, communication needs to be explained first. In order to explain some characteristics of communication, the theory of a prominent philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, will be used. He writes about the ‘ideal speech situation’ and how it can be achieved. Some parts of his theory will be described in chapter two.

Secondly, the weblog phenomenon is described in detail in chapter three, including an example of my personal weblog. This will give a clear view on the characteristics of a weblog, its functions and what capacities it possesses.

The fourth chapter will take a look at the weblog as a communication tool related to the communicative characteristics of Van Dijk and compares it to three other communication tools that are comparative to a weblog.

Finally, chapter five looks at the results of a survey held amongst the Hebo community concerning the interests in a Hebo weblog. Based on these results and the different communication theories described in the chapters before, an analytical conclusion will be drawn whether a weblog can contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community followed by some recommendations.

This report is the first step that investigates the communication skills of a weblog and the interest in it amongst the target group. The conclusion gives answer to the central question and will be the basis for the decision to do further research or not. If the answer to the central question is positive, the second step should be a survey at the implementation possibilities and how to promote the Hebo weblog in order to make it a success.

## **1.2 Research methods**

In order to gain different theories and opinions on communication and weblogs, several sources have been used including desk and field research. These sources are:

- ❖ Literature research
- ❖ Research on the Internet
- ❖ Questionnaires amongst students, Alumni and involved companies
- ❖ Interviews with the Hebo management

## 2. The communication theory of Habermas

This chapter discusses communication using Habermas' theory. He claims that consensus is the main factor when reaching an 'ideal speech situation'. Habermas was born in 1929 in Germany. During his life he has published several books and articles which gave him international recognition. In 1981, his master piece appears: *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. He believes that the goal of communication is mutual understanding and that human beings possess the communicative competence to create such understanding (The Theory of Communicative Action, 2007, p.8). To come to an answer to the central question, this chapter will discuss three questions argued by Habermas' theory.

- The reason to communicate
- What is communication?
- When can we speak of good communication?

The last question will result in a description of the 'ideal speech situation'.

### 2.1 The reason to communicate

According to Habermas, the fact that we as human beings are able to communicate, means that we have the opportunity to start conversations with the world around us. People say things that can be tested by arguments concerning truth, legitimacy and relevance (Steeman, 2005, paragraph 5.2). This will be explained in the next paragraph.

George Bush, legitimated the attack on Iraq in 2003 by claiming there was sufficient evidence for the presence of weapons of mass destruction in that country. During the war, it became clear that the claim of the president seemed untrue. Now, the justification of the war in Iraq is doubted by many parties, hence a discussion followed. For example, the UN weapon inspector disagreed with the decision of President Bush to attack Iraq, since he had not finished his research yet. The President used his veto and power to attack Iraq. The action of President Bush started a discussion.

A decision based on arguments can be called rational. Habermas says that rationality means the achievement of agreement through communication, free of obligation. In a discussion, one tries to obtain agreement on issues based on arguments and counter arguments (ibid). In the case of President Bush, such a rational discussion did not take place, since Bush used his power as a president. Only when exchanging arguments which are not imposed by external

influences, one may speak of rational consensus. One concludes that the right of the strongest argument counts, not the right of the most powerful person, i.e. the President.

## 2.2 What is communication?

Habermas describes three types of action in his theory about communication:

- Instrumental action
- Strategic action
- Communicative action

The first, has as objective to generate a change towards a thing (object). For example: when roasting meat one uses the same action to change the meat from raw into well-done. The second objective is to generate a change in an individual's action (subject). On their turn, these individuals also have the possibility to (re)act strategically. Instrumental and strategic action describes Habermas as action where one's own success comes first. The person in question has a certain personal goal. Communicative action leads to social interaction as much as strategical action. The difference, however, is that communicative action does not have the objective to reach a personal goal, but to reach mutual understanding or consensus. In this case, individuals prefer the social aspects of communicating above personal success. According to Habermas, only communicative action can be called communication. (Steeman, 2005)

	Success orientated	Consensus orientated
<b>Not-social</b>	Instrumental action	
<b>Social</b>	Strategic action	Communicative action

*Figure 1: table clarifying the three types of action of Habermas*

The question is how we could be able to define arguments, used to achieve consensus, on their relevance and truth? Therefore, it is necessary that one can speak of good communication. According to Habermas (Kunneman, 1985, p. 9), one may speak of consensus when there is *communicative symmetry* between the participants. The term 'communicative symmetry' will be explained on the next page.

### 2.3 When may we speak of good communication?

Good communication is discourse and discourse is meant to exchange opinions and information. The question is how to create a communication process in such a way that this exchange of information is indeed reached. Habermas states that the quality of communication can only be guaranteed if there is *communicative symmetry* between all parties involved. Communicative symmetry means that certain conditions have to be met in order to achieve an 'ideal speech situation'. These conditions are:

1. all parties involved have equal opportunity to start a discussion, and to bring forward arguments and criticize those of others;
2. there can be no power differences between parties involved, as that might prevent relevant arguments being put forward;
3. all participants should act truthfully towards each other, to ensure that manipulation does not take place. (Kunneman, 1985, p. 66-68)

Only when these conditions are met, communicative symmetry between the people concerned can be reached. To be able to take all relevant arguments into consideration, everybody who has interest in the discussion must have the possibility to share his or her arguments. It cannot be that arguments of someone with more power has more value. Finally, the arguments put forward by the communicator, has to be based on the truth. When one or several participants use false arguments, this will lead to a false discourse. So in order to achieve communicative symmetry it is important that all participants in a discourse can be trusted and behave in terms of the ideal speech situation.

In his theory, Habermas does not exactly clarify in what settings an ideal situation can be created. Is it for example necessary that the people concerned have to be all present at the same place at the same time to be able to have a discourse? When a discourse concerns a subject that addresses many people, it seems to be impossible to create a face-to-face discussion. Take for example the attack of the United States in Iraq. Such a happening has a lot of impact on a global scale. In such a situation it is desirable that time and place can be conquered, so a global discussion is able to take place.

The World Wide Web is pre-eminently the environment where time and place may be conquered. Everyone with the possibility of an Internet connection has the opportunity to contribute towards discussions on the web. One type of channel where a discussion may be started is on a weblog. In the next chapter the weblog will be explained in general terms.

### **3. The weblog**

In general, one can say that a weblog, or a blog, is a website where new pieces of text or entries are frequently posted, always provided with a date and in reversed chronological order. In general, weblogs are placed by individuals and have a personal and informal style. Weblogs were used for the first time during the mid-1990s, but have become popular since the change of the millennium. One reason for this popularity was because of the availability of simple and free publication tools. Since everybody who has an internet connection may start a weblog, even without having technical knowledge, there is a great variety in content and quality. The number of readers may differ from just a handful to thousands. The content of a weblog may differ from diary notes to specific subjects which are discussed by referring to other blogs and giving comments on them. In principle, weblogs are mostly text oriented, but fotoblogs, videoblogs and audioblogs are also some examples of possible blogs. (Walker, 2003, p. 31)

In the beginning, weblogs were mainly 'linklogs'. The blogger collects links to interesting articles and publishes them on his blog. Using this technology, a weblog functions like a filter for others. However, the increasing number of bloggers, have created other types of weblogs too. Where at the beginning of the phenomenon, weblogs were only a collection of links and comments, many weblogs are now developed to express personal thoughts. The weblog is probably a tool that fulfills the desire of self-expression for many people. (Blood, 2000, p. 4)

#### **3.1 The rise of the weblog**

The weblog, seen in its current style, appears in 1996 for the first time (Herring et al., 2004, p. 1). Dave Winer started a webpage in February of that year, as part of the '24 Hours of Democracy' website, where he asked people to write essays about freedom. In his current weblog, Scripting News, he collects links to provide them of short comments. It has been on line since 1997 and is at the same time the longest existing weblog. In 1998, Peter Merholz announced to pronounce it as 'wee-blog', that finally lead to the abbreviation 'blog'. The person who maintains the blog is called the 'blogger'.

Meanwhile, the use of internet has grown tremendously and many people have created a weblog. In the beginning, it was possible to follow the similar weblogs, but soon this became impossible (Blood, 2000, p. 4). In 1999, Brigitte Eaton, a web developer, composed a list of about fifty blogs she new the existence of and so created the EatonWeb Portal. As criteria to

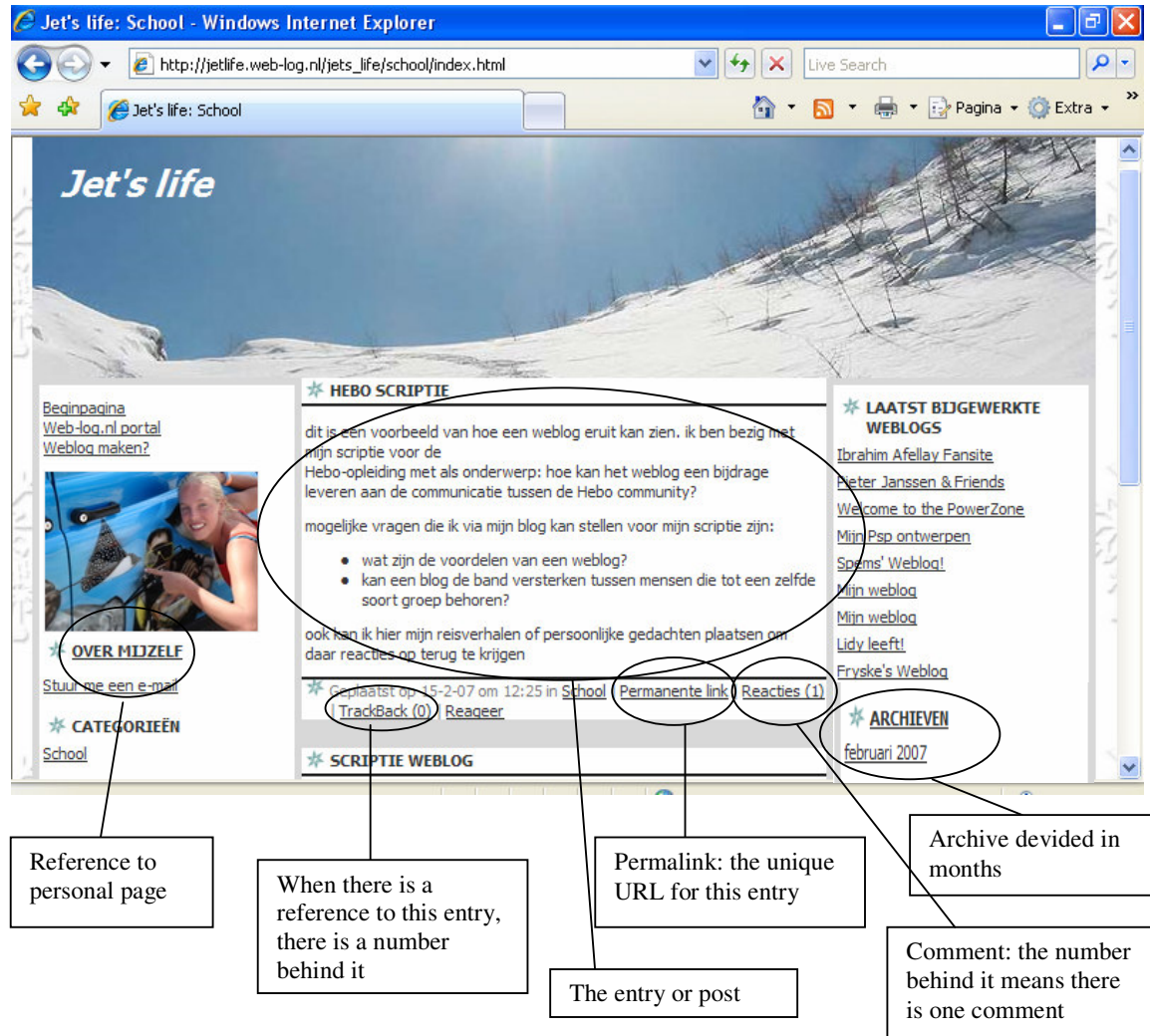
be able to join this list, the different entries had to be provided with a date otherwise it was not a blog. Finally this definition persisted. (Nardi et al., 2004, p. 3)

The real rise of the number of bloggers happened through the free software that became available to create a weblog. In July 1999 Pitas got launched: the first tool to create your own free weblog. Pitas was followed by Blogger and many others (Blood, 2000, p.4). The common characteristic of this software is that they are all free and that publishing on a weblog is easy and fast, because knowledge of HTML is not required. As it is so easy to create your own blog, everyone has the possibility to publish on the web. Perseus, a specialist in blog surveys, estimated that 31.6 million blogs have been created on services such as BlogSpot, LiveJournal, Xanga and MSN Spaces until 2005 (Purseus WebSurveyor, 2005). Currently, there are over 81 million blogs worldwide.

### **3.2 Technical terms of the weblog**

Since the tremendous increase of the number of weblogs, it is pretty hard to describe what makes a weblog. Looking at the content, there are not many blogs that look similar. However, some technical aspects distinguish the existing internet sites from weblogs. As explained before, blogs are frequently updated with new pieces of text or entries, always provided with a date and placed in reversed chronological order so the most recent entry is on top of the page. More recent is the list of characteristics of a blog by Gill (2004, p. 3). Next to the characteristics already mentioned, she adds the archives and the blogrolls. What all these terms mean will be explained by a screenshot with references to the place on the weblog.

Figure 2: Screenshot of my personal weblog with references and explanations of the different parts.



- Entry/post: publication, consisting of text, photos, audio or a combination.
- Comment: possibility for readers to react, so a conversation can be created.
- Permalink: the permalink gives the possibility for other bloggers to create a link to your entry to refer to this specific entry. It keeps entries constantly available in the archive, so people cannot run against 'dead links'
- Trackback: a tool that can be described as an instrument to follow conversations between different blogs. It registers where else in a weblog a link is made to your entry. When someone else refers to your entry, a 1 appears behind Trackback. The URL of that location appears when you click on Trackback.
- Blogroll: list of links to pages the blogger is interested in or has contacts with.
- Archives: links to older posts, normally categorized by month. (Holtz, 2005, p. 23)

### **3.3 Reasons to blog**

Until now, the technical aspects of the weblog has been described, namely the different tools that may be inserted. Looking at the content of weblogs, a lot of diversity is observed. A blog is a technical tool which is used to publish everything a blogger wants. Journalists see blogs as an alternative source of news and public opinion. Businessmen and people from the educational area interpret blogs as a tool to share knowledge. Furthermore, many individuals see blogging as a way to express themselves (Herring et al., 2004, p.1). In their survey, Nardi et al. (2004, p.1) are trying to retrieve why people blog. They discovered five types of motivations:

1. Fixing one's life (maintaining an online diary)
2. Giving comments and ones opinion (as a form a democratic self-expression)
3. Expression of emotions (to process personal problems)
4. Developing ideas through writing (a fixed place to express ideas and to adjust after comments)
5. Forming and maintaining communities (the use of Internet to network)

Next to these five motivations, Bausch et al. (2002, p. 36) also describes the motivation of sharing expertise. All these possible objectives of a weblog, result in a major diversity of the content. The desires and expectations bloggers have with respect to the interactivity through their weblog differ enormously. Gumbrecht (2004, p. 3) concludes that some bloggers do not appreciate it at all to receive comments on their blog. Gumbrecht claims in her article that the weblog offers a 'protected space' to the author. The attractiveness of the weblog is the control the blogger has over the medium. Comment is an exception. A blogger cannot predict the reaction of the audience, so comments may be positive or negative. Though, others mostly interpret comments useful to create a feeling of belonging to a community and it helps the blogger to adjust his ideas or entries.

However, some parts of Gumbrecht's conclusion need more attention. Nardi et al. (2004, p. 3) state that bloggers seem not to have any control on the comments. When a blogger uses free services, it may occur that comments cannot be deleted. To solve this problem, software is available to reach total control (for example Movable Type). On the one hand, this type of software makes it possible to edit or to delete comments. Undesired Trackbacks can be deleted too, for example when another blogger refers to an entry of the blogger that is

humiliating. On the other hand, the use of this software requires reasonable knowledge of at least HTML and is because of that requirement not accessible to everyone. This type of software, however, approaches partly the ‘protected space’ of Gumbrecht.

### **3.4 Type of communication in a weblog**

A weblog is often described as an ‘online diary’, but writing a diary is in general private and therefore a monologue. For this reason, a weblog can best be compared to the ‘Speakers’ Corner’ phenomenon. This is a place in Hyde Park in London where people can come together to discuss certain issues. This park has free access and everybody who has something to say may speak. A passer-by can listen or take part in a debate (Speakers’ Corner, 2007). Looking at the functioning of blogging, some comparisons to Speakers’ Corner can be noticed. By publishing entries in a blog, the blogger tells his story virtually instead of in Hyde Park. This story attracts attention because people have for example searched for a certain word on Internet that matches with the blogger’s story. People who are interested or do not agree have the opportunity to react. Concerning the communicative aspect, the same is happening in Speakers’ Corner as in the weblog: a dialogue is provoked after spreading information, also called dissemination. The intention of the speaker is to receive reactions from the audience. When publishing on a weblog this happens too. The blogger writes a piece of work, publishes it on his weblog and disseminates his text. Through admitting a comment function, the author of the weblog is willing to create a dialogue.

The descriptions of researchers of a weblog, mostly emphasize the frequency of publishing, a date and the reversed chronological order. In this report, these functions are of subordinate matter, since they are not the principal factors to achieve the objective of generating a dialogue. The comment and traceback functions are the deciding factors in order to generate a dialogue. To be able to answer the question whether a weblog may approach the conditions of an ideal speech situation, a look at the communicative characteristics of the weblog as an instrument is needed. It may be possible that certain aspects of Habermas’ theory are reinforced by the use of weblogs, while others may be weakened. For this reason, the next chapter will describe the communicative aspects of weblogs, which can have an influence on the ideal speech situation.

## **4. A weblog as a communication tool**

The third chapter has explained that a weblog is focused on creating a dialogue between author and audience. To be able to analyze whether an ideal speech situation is possible through weblogs, as described in chapter two, it is important to know in what way weblogs may influence the communication. In this chapter, the characteristics of a weblog that influence the type of communication in it, will be discussed. As guiding principle the theory of Van Dijk will be used. In his book *De Netwerkmaatschappij*, Van Dijk describes the consequences of trends on the internet and other media for people, society and organizations.

### **4.1 The rise of new media**

Van Dijk describes a change in society due to new communication roads, the so called electronical highways. Society moves from a mass culture into a network culture. In organizations all automated devices will be matched into networks. Communication devices such as telephone, computer, television, video and audio will be moulded into one network. (2001, pp. 9-10)

Some speak of a new communication revolution with the development of new communication technologies. Van Dijk claims that the core characteristic of the digital revolution can be described with the terms integration and interactivity. The most important structural change in new media is the integration of data and mass communication in one medium. That is why they are called multimedia. This process is made possible thanks to digitalization of data and to internet. Interactivity is the second structural change. Traditional media, such as radio and TV, are characterized by one-way communication. New media are remarkable because of their two or more way communication, enriched with the integration of sound, text and vision. (Van Dijk, 2001, p.17)

#### **4.1.1 The interactivity**

Van Dijk describes four levels of interactivity in his book. A principle element of these four levels of interactivity is that they are cumulative. This means that the highest level cannot be achieved without the former three levels.

The first level is the possibility of two way or multilateral communication traffic. The second dimension of interactivity is synchronicity. Van Dijk's believes that the succession of action and reaction, without interruption of time, improves the quality of interaction. However, some

new media such as e-mail are specifically used to have the opportunity to think better on the reaction. The third level of interactivity is the degree of control by the participants. This degree is characterized by the possibility of changing the role of sender and receiver, and by the control on content (telephone calls). The fourth and highest level is action and reaction with the understanding of context and signification (conversation). ( 2001, p. 18-19)

#### **4.1.2 Information traffic patterns**

Van Dijk describes four information patterns from Bordewijk and Van Kaam (2001, p. 19). These patterns are allocation, consultation, registration and conversation. Firstly, allocation is the dissemination of information emphasized during the last decades by mass media. Secondly, consultation is the search for advice from media. Examples are books, Internet, magazines and television. Thirdly, registration is the collection of information. Lastly, conversation is the exchange of information through for example telephone, chat and e-mail. Besides, new media offer the possibility to add several types of communication in one message (text, sound and vision). Van Dijk (2001, p. 21) claims that one speaks of a communication revolution due to the integration of allocation, consultation, registration and conversation in one single medium.

#### **4.1.3 Communication capacities**

Van Dijk presents an integrated approach of objective and subjective characteristics called communication capacities (2001, p. 25-27). These nine capacities may compare old and new media on their communication skills. The following nine can be distinguished:

1. The speed of new media to communicate over long distance.
2. The geographical and social reach: in theory, everybody could get connected with anybody or anything. In practice, a minority has the possibility to connect.
3. A fast growing memory capacity. On digital media, more content can be saved than on written media. Through face-to-face communication the capacity is also less, since the human memory is limited.
4. The preciseness of transferred information is better than through telephone or face-to-face. These media can send signals which may be interpreted differently. Written media are also precise, but new media have the possibility to add the exactness of data, audio or vision.
5. The selectivity of new media is often very high. In general, communication through media is mass communication like written media. The telephone was the first selective

medium (when dialing a number you reach the person you want). New media more and more offer the possibility of narrowcasting.

6. The interactivity of new media does not approach that of face-to-face communication, where one can switch immediately between the role of sender and receiver. For example, e-mail reaches the first level of interactivity but not that of synchronicity.
7. Stimulation richness always appears in face-to-face communication but not always in new media (not all new media have the ability of vision or sound).
8. The complexity of activities that can be done over distance is not high, but this differs a lot between the types of media. Contacts can be made and maintained, but in general conflicts must be solved face-to-face.
9. Privacy protection is one of the major disadvantages of new media. Face-to-face communication may be isolated easily, but is harder to realize through digital communication.

This paragraph has explained the aspects that are important when communicating face-to-face and through new media. The following paragraph will integrate these aspects in relation to the weblog.

#### **4.2 The weblog in terms of communication**

After explaining the communicative aspects of new media, it is possible to explain the weblog in relation to these communicative aspects. The weblog will be tested on interactivity, information traffic patterns and communication capacities. Besides, the weblog will be compared to three other communication channels on the internet, so the difference can be made clear. The three communication channels used to compare the weblog with are traditional websites, forums and chat. These three comparative communication tools are free accessible for anyone connected to the internet. Traditional websites are pages with information, such as companies who present themselves on the internet, including contact information. Forums are pages where people, mostly anonymous, can participate in discussions on a certain subject. Chat is a communication tool that offers the possibility to type text so a discussion can be started. On the internet there are many chat boxes for internet users to log on, so they are able to chat with other persons who are present in the 'chat room'. Just like on forums, chatters in general use a nickname resulting in an anonymous character.

#### 4.2.1 Interactivity and information patterns in weblogs

Many weblogs exist but do not have the intention to start a dialogue. In some cases a weblog just consists of a piece of written text, sometimes with some photos, just as the text of this document. In this case, there is no interactivity because one cannot speak of two or more-sided communication. In this form, the weblog has just a consultative character. Through publication on a weblog, information becomes available that can be read by others when and where they want. This is an important difference with respect to radio and television that follows the allocative pattern. These media decide the place and time of dissemination.

To speak of a new and interactive medium, the provision of an e-mail address for contact is already sufficient, because a two-way communication can be created. However, in terms of Van Dijk, a weblog cannot come further than the first level, because the second level he describes is that of synchronicity. The communication through a weblog is always asynchronous, since the answer of the blogger on a reaction takes time. Nevertheless, the weblog can be much more interactive than a traditional webpage. Websites that most companies have are static.

The benefit of asynchronical communication is the possibility to think better about your answer and to archive. Besides, adding a comment function gives the ability to start a conversation between author and audience, although it is not synchronical. To clarify the position of weblogs in respect to other new media, the following image may help.

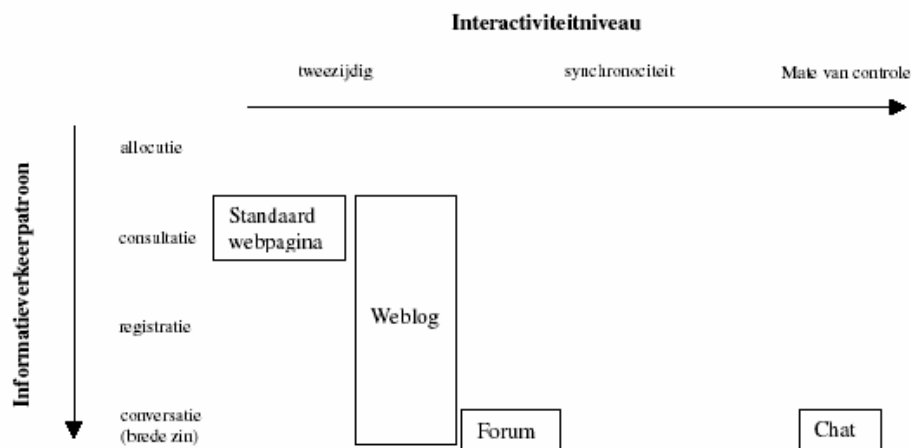


Figure 3: the position of the weblog in relation to other communication types on the internet looked at interactivity level and information traffic pattern. (Steeman, 2005)

Figure three shows that the weblog is a bridge between the gap of the original webpage and discussion forums (Herring et al., 2004, p. 10). Besides, it shows that the weblog as a communication medium can be seen as a new medium, since it covers three information patterns in one medium.

#### **4.2.2 Communication capacities of the weblog**

The nine communication capacities of new media of Van Dijk will be described in this paragraph. New media is a very general term and within these media, different capacities can be noticed. It is important to distinguish the medium (Internet) and the channel (chat, forums, webpages and weblogs). Since the communication medium is the same for the channels used here, some capacities can be explained all together. The speed, reach, memory capacity and the selectivity are all equal, namely high. This is because they all work on the internet and computer networks. The communication capacities explained more in detail in this paragraph are: selectivity, interactivity, stimulus richness, complexity, privacy guarantee and control.

Concerning chat, the selectivity is high because the conversation is addressed to someone familiar. Chat is only addressed to the people logged on and to the persons who are added to a personal contact list. Forums and weblogs are less selective, since they are accessible to anyone. However, they are subject related, so only people who are interested in that specific subject will intervene in the discussion. One may say that the subject of the forum brings people together with the same interests. The selectivity of a webpage is low. It reaches anyone with a connection to the internet.

The interactivity of the several communication channels is already described in the former paragraph. In brief, chat achieves the third level of interactivity, that contains two-way communication (first level), synchronicity (second level) and control on the interaction (third level). Forums, webpages and weblogs do not come further than the first level of interaction.

The stimulus richness of chat and forums is low, since there is, next to 'emoticons' (figures that show an expression), no possibility to add vision or audio. On the other hand, webpages and weblogs have many possibilities to increase the stimulus richness. A visitor of a weblog receives another image of an author than of only a name related to a comment on a forum.

Looking at the complexity, chat scores not high. It is designed and used to write fast and short sentences. When a response takes a bit longer than expected (because more sentences are typed), the person on the other side wonders if the chatter is still present. The technical design of the chat window is also created for short sentences. The asynchronicity of a forum gives the opportunity to take the time for a comment and the complexity of the response is normally higher than that of chat. However, the lack of stimulus richness limits the complexity. This is not the case with webpages and weblogs which have the ability to add sound and vision.

The privacy of chat and forums is reasonable high, due to the use of pseudonyms. Only a user name and e-mail address have to be given. For this reason, it is hard to trace the identity. The privacy protection of webpages and weblogs is rather low when a company or a person has its own web address. This information is registered and free accessible, so it is easy to trace the owner of a webpage. Though, when a hosting site is used (e.g Blogger), the privacy level is the same level as in forums and chat. However, the type of communication channel makes it more difficult to stay anonymous since the high stimulus richness (personal photos etc.). It is the decision of the user himself how much personal information is published.

Finally, the degree of control concerns the content. This control is average concerning chat. A request to start a conversation can be refused, but the content depends partially on what the other individual types, resulting in no 100% control. The degree of control in a forum is low. A participant of a forum cannot decide who participates or what will be discussed. The control on weblogs and webpages is 100% in hands of the author. The content is fixed by the organization or the individual. Besides, with the right software, it is possible to delete comments and trackbacks.

A comparison of the communication capacities of chat, forums, webpages and weblogs are summarized in figure four.

Capacity → Channel ↓	Selectivity	Interactivity	Stimulus richness	Complexity	Privacy protection	Control
Chat	+	+	-	-	+	+/-
Forum	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+	-
Webpage	-	-	+	+	+/-	+
Weblog	+/-	+/-	+	+	+/-	+

Figure 4: communication capacities of chat, forums, webpages and weblogs

## **5. Survey amongst the Hebo community**

The former three chapters, communication theories and weblogs are explained in detail. To be able to know what the Hebo community thinks of weblogs and what their interests are on this area, inquiries and interviews were needed. These inquiries are sent to current Hebo students, Alumni and involved companies. Interviews are held amongst Hebo management, who are occupied with maintaining and extending the relations of the Hebo community. The results of these inquiries and interviews will be described in the following paragraphs.

### **5.1 The interests of Hebo students in a Hebo weblog**

In order to investigate the interests of Hebo students in a weblog, an inquiry is held amongst 54 students varifying from the first until the fourth year and of different specializations. English stream students are not included, because this option only exists since 2000 while the Dutch stream is born in 1990. This major difference in existence would have given some problems when researching the interests of the rest of the Hebo community.

Of all students who participated in the questionnaire, 41% already have a weblog. The ones who do not have one yet, 74% would like to be the owner of a weblog. These numbers visualise the huge popularity of the weblog. Another outcome of the survey, that can be related to this popularity is the fact that 80% of all students think that a weblog could contribute to the communication of the Hebo community. However, two questions contradict themselves; on the one hand some (28%) felt no interest in sharing their experiences through a weblog, because there would not be any added value next to e-mail, blackboard or telephone. On the other hand, they did think a Hebo weblog would contribute to the communication (appendix 1, question 4). On the overall, one may say that a large majority believes a weblog may contribute to the communication of the Hebo. Most students (73%) do not know yet what they want after finishing their studies due to the broad curriculum of Hebo (30%) and because of the bad accessibility of job information (33%). The students who do know what they want after the Hebo (27%), 20% have decided on base of personal connections and 7% with help of information of the Hebo. Bringing students more in contact with their potential future workfield might give them a clearer vision on their possibilities. In general, one may conclude that students see a weblog as an added value next to e-mail, telephone or an ordinary website. The degree of interactivity, belonging to a group with the same interests and easily exchange of information and experiences are the most frequently used reasons for this added value. These arguments are followed by the possibility of equal access and obtaining someone's

opinion. On the question about what would be interesting to read on a Hebo weblog, 16% chose 'exchange experiences' and 'option to sell and buy books'. Furthermore, 14% marked the option 'links to all companies where graduated Hebo students are working' and 'internship experiences'. These percentages show that information on these subjects is very important for students, so it has to be easily accessible.

## **5.2 The interests of Alumni in a Hebo weblog**

Since 1990 Hebo exists, so the first group of graduates was in 1994. Nowadays, there are around 2300 alumnus who all stay part of the Hebo community, the one more than the other. During an interview with a person of the Alumni Board, it seemed that one major problem is to keep all the e-mail addresses up-to-date. Currently, with help of the new Alumni website, the board tries to solve this problem through a log on code on the website. An inquiry is sent to the  $\pm 50$  Alumni who already subscribed themselves. An advantage of this is that they subscribed themselves so quickly that they must be still interested in the Hebo. The outcomes of the survey with 39 respondents, visualizing the interests and opinions of Alumni concerning a Hebo weblog, will be described in the following paragraphs.

On the question about their future possibilities, 46% answered that they knew what they wanted after Hebo of whom 38% made their decision on base of personal connections. The main reason for not knowing what to do was the fact that the curriculum was very broad (23%) and that information about job facilities was not easily accessible (21%) (appendix 2, question 1). The half of the respondents still have somehow contact with the Hebo. From the Alumni who do not have any contact, 24% is interested. This could be realized by offering internships or becoming a guest speaker (appendix 2, question 2). Moreover, of the 39 respondents, 21 Alumni do not believe there is an added value of a weblog next to mail, telephone or websites for them (appendix 2, question 3). A reason could be that Alumni do not have the urge to communicate on interactive level. Sharing information through a website or mail is fast enough, while it is sometimes needed for students to have a fast answer. However, to the question whether they would look on a Hebo weblog to answer for example questions from students, 64% answered 'yes' (appendix 2, question 4). This percentage shows there is enough willing and affection from Alumni to help current students, so there is still a bond between these two. Furthermore, 38% of the respondents already have a personal weblog and give as main reason forming and maintaining communities. Of the 62% who do not have a weblog, 54% would like to have one because of the same reason and because of the

accessibility and the interactivity that a weblog makes possible (appendix 2, question 5 & 6). According to Alumni, a possible future weblog should be in general focussed on the current students, because they have to start conversations through for example questions. Question seven in appendix two shows that 100% believes a weblog should be devoted in conversations between student/student, 59% answers alumni/student and 64% says student/Hebo. Besides, 87% feels that the booklet 'AlumNews' should be published on a weblog so it would be accessible to everybody (appendix 2, question 8). Currently, AlumNews is sent by post to Alumni and afterwards it is only accessible to the person who made the booklet and has it on his computer digitally. When the Alumni board publishes it digital and makes an archive, it will become and stay accessible to everyone who is part of the Hebo community. Finally, 74% answered 'yes' to the question whether a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community (appendix 2, question 9). This is only 6% less than that of current students, but the major difference between students and Alumni is that students will participate actively in a Hebo weblog while Alumni will participate passively, because they will only answer questions of students.

### **5.3 The interests of involved companies in a Hebo weblog**

This part of the Hebo community was rather hard to identify, because what are involved companies? Therefore, a selection is made dividing involved companies in three groups: companies offering an internship, companies cooperating in projects and companies participating in the work field commission. The reason for this selection is that they are already related somehow to the Hebo, so when filling in the questionnaire they would have some affection. However, a questionnaire is sent to 45 companies of which two companies have only responded. This low response, shows that most companies probably do not have the time to fill in a questionnaire so they will neither have the time to participate in a Hebo weblog. One suggestion of Den Haag Marketing&Events was to make a newsletter addressed to all companies facilitating internships. Due to the low response, it can be concluded that companies will not take part of the Hebo weblog.

#### **5.4 The interests of Hebo management in a Hebo weblog**

In order to create an objective opinion on a possible future Hebo weblog, the Hebo management had to be involved too. From the Hebo management, more detailed information was needed, resulting in some interviews. Mister Dijkstra of the Alumni Board told that during the year several events and meetings for Alumni are organised, but whether they participate depends on them. Alumni all get the booklet Alumnews, but sometimes addresses are changed without telling Hebo resulting in a huge problem for the administration. The Alumni Board has two reasons to exist. On the one hand there is a need of current students and of Alumni to keep in contact in order to exchange information. On the other hand, Hebo itself needs the evaluation of Alumni in order to discuss whether its curriculum is good or has to be adjusted. On the question if the communication amongst the Hebo community could be improved, a confident yes was the answer. Certainly between students and Alumni the communication could be improved according to Dijkstra: “the need of students to know what they may become, can be answered by Alumni. They already have the experience so they can easily tell.” The Alumni Board has agreed during a meeting to organise two reunions in a year in order to create conversations and to exchange experiences between students and Alumni. Dijkstra did not visualise clearly how companies would participate in a weblog, because this stands in most cases too far of their bed. However, he believed that a weblog for students, Alumni and Hebo itself, might be a solution. This way a conversation could be easily started in a public sphere, so other participants are able to read it too. This could result in an easy share of information and experiences. The only point he and Ms. van Moorsel emphasized was that there has to be a clear distinction between the Alumni website and a Hebo weblog. The website is in order to share information and the weblog creates an interactive conversation.

When talking to misses Nieuweboer and Sigrid Segeren about the idea of a weblog, they seemed to be interested. The number of weblogs is emerging fast and an increasing number of companies become interested in one. One point they both came up with was the factor ‘control’. Who will control the entries on it and who will evaluate its added value? The question is whether the time and money put into a weblog counter balance the added value of a weblog.

## 6. Conclusion

The part of Habermas theory that is described in chapter two explains his vision on the ideal speech situation that is based on instrumental, strategical and communicative action on the one hand. On the other hand, it explains the characteristics of a conversation or discourse and what is needed to fulfill the requirements of the ideal speech situation. These characteristics are:

- no power differences
- equal opportunity to participate in a discussion
- each participant should act truthfully towards each other

The first point can be partially achieved through a weblog. A possible future Hebo weblog will consist of discussions between interested participants of the Hebo. Between these participants there are no power differences, because the identity of that person is not known. It can be just a nickname. However, the content owner of the weblog (Hebo itself) is able to delete posted entries, so when participants misbehave on the weblog, they could be blocked by Hebo.

The survey amongst students showed that equal access to a weblog was not their biggest concern although it still was more or less important. The fact that everybody can join a conversation on a weblog, results in equal access. It is not limited by codes, like on the website of The Hague School or on Blackboard. Everybody who is interested in Hebo may join. The last characteristic of Habermas' theory can be achieved too, but this totally depends on the participants themselves. The use of a Hebo weblog should be the exchange of experiences and opinions on interactive level. The quality of the discussions depends on the quality of the entries. The weblog should not be some kind of Msn, but a tool to put high quality information on to attempt discussions or conversations that is interesting to everybody who is part of the Hebo community.

Relating the other part of Habermas' theory, concerning the different actions, to the characteristics of a weblog, it can be concluded that the objective of a weblog only is to generate discussions and conversations (communicative action). It has nothing to do with generating a change towards a thing (instrumental action) or with generating a change in an individual's action (strategical). The objective of a weblog is generating discourse and that these discussions might be used to achieve personal goals is just an extra advantage.

It can be concluded from van Dijk's theory that the possibility to add audio, vision and text in one communication tool is the prove of integration. Besides, the four information traffic patterns allocation, consultation, registration and conversation could be all included in one medium: the weblog. However, there has to be made a difference between face-to-face communication and online communication in a public sphere. For example, not everybody of the Hebo community want to communicate their information through a weblog, but more through personal contact.

Paragraph 4.2.2 and figure four show that a weblog has an added value next to an ordinary website. The principal difference between a forum and chat is the possibility to add audio and vision next to text. Besides, the level of complexity is much higher than that of chat.

The survey held amongst the Hebo community shows that the majority of the students (80%) thinks a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community. The amount of Alumni interested in a Hebo weblog is lower, but still 74% thinks that a weblog has an added value, especially to students. Companies on the other side feel nothing for a weblog, because it takes too much time and they have better things to do. They prefer having one-to-one contact with the people they need, through for example telephone or e-mail. Maybe in the future, when the weblog phenomenon is a common used communication tool in work-life, a Hebo weblog will have more chance amongst companies. Finally, the Hebo management knows that weblogs are a hot item that more and more companies and schools are realizing. The only thing they were doubting about was whether the added value of a blog counter balances the costs of it and whether there would be enough interest from the Hebo community next to students. In general, one may say that current students are very enthusiastic about a Hebo weblog. Alumni still have enough affection with Hebo that they will look on the weblog and answer questions of students, but they are not interested in publishing entries about job experiences. They believe there will be an added value for students and Hebo itself, but not for the rest of the Hebo community.

## 7. Recommendations

A Hebo weblog could be a success amongst current students, but all capacities of a weblog must be used. It has to be clear that a possible future weblog should be a qualitative platform for discussions and questions. It should not be a tool to express complaints. However, how can this be realised?

As stated in the introduction, this report is the first step and now it has appeared that a Hebo weblog will have an added value for students, the second step has to be taken so the weblog can become reality. First, Hebo should offer a project to the studies Informatica of the Hague University. These students will have the assignment to design a real working creative concept of a Hebo weblog. This way, Hebo is able to keep costs as low as possible without hiring expensive website developers.

Furthermore, the Alumni website has to be promoted amongst current students so AlumNews and other information of Alumni can be read. This gives students the opportunity to read about their future workfield. However, as explained in chapter four, a website offers one-way communication that comes from the organisation. No discussion can be created. Therefore, it is needed that a Hebo weblog amongst Alumni will be promoted too. For example by creating a link on the Alumni website to the weblog. It is not expected that Alumni frequently publish experiences or happenings at work, but 64% of the Alumni still have enough affection with Hebo that they will answer on questions from students.

Another recommendation next to promoting the Alumni website and the Hebo weblog is to put online all companies that are related to the Hebo. This means companies offering an internship, participating in projects and companies where Alumni are working. Companies have no interest in a weblog, but Hebo already has a huge company archive that can be made easier accessible. At this moment, only the computer program Equibrowser (a library of companies offering internships) is on the computers at school available. Hebo has a huge network with companies that is tremendously interesting for students so this has to be made easily accessible. Most information about companies is probably already somewhere in the computers of teachers or management, so it should not take that much time to publish it online. Priority is to put it first on the Hebo website or Blackboard so it will be at least accessible to current students. To my opinion, it could also be very interesting for upcoming students who cannot enter Blackboard or the website yet. For this reason a weblog may be the

solution. This is free accessible and in case there are questions or statements, it can be easily discussed. This creates already a bond between upcoming students and the Hebo community before starting studies.

Finally, the Hebo management is not expected to maintain the weblog. Students create the discussions and Hebo can participate in it or learn from it. The initiative has to come from the students themselves, including the responsibility of using the weblog properly. This can be realized by appointing one Hebo student from each year who takes responsibility for the entries on the weblog. This task includes evaluating the quality, the popularity of the weblog, its added value and attending meetings with the Hebo management. In return, the student could earn for example two credits.

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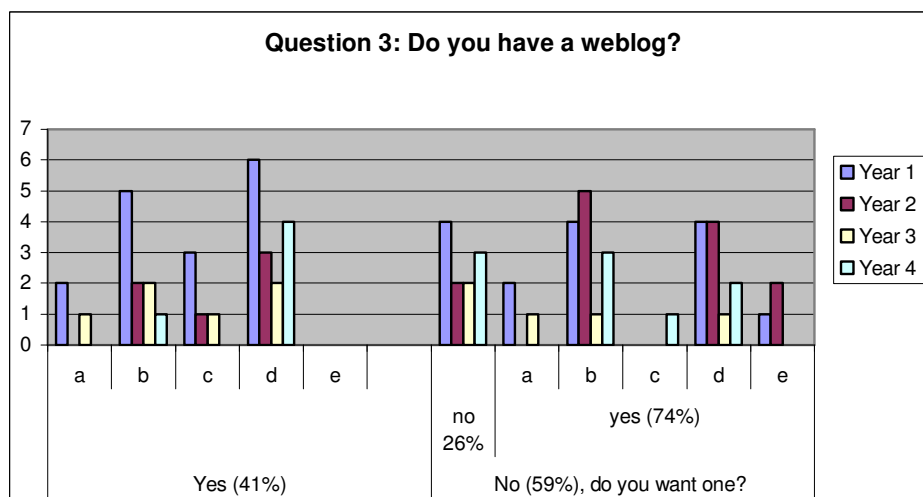
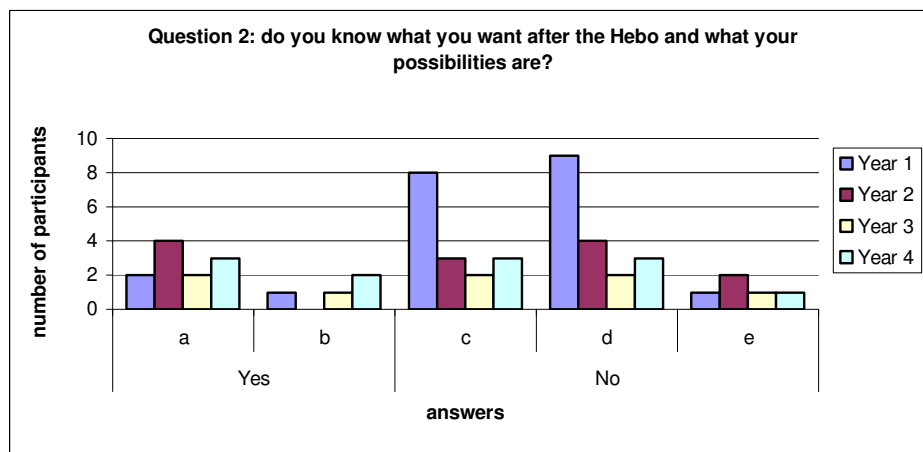
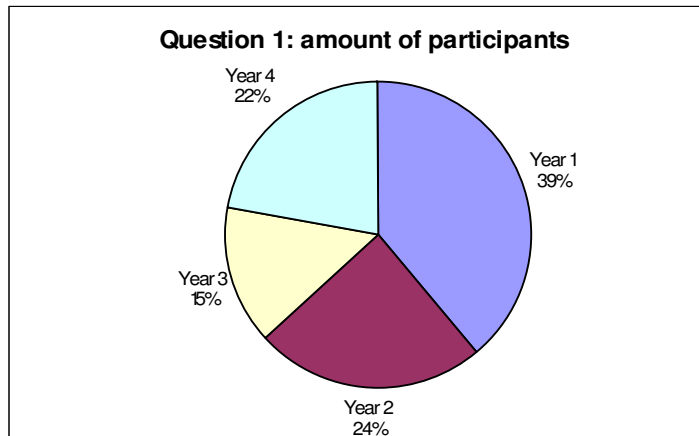
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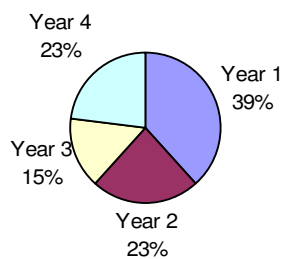
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## Appendices

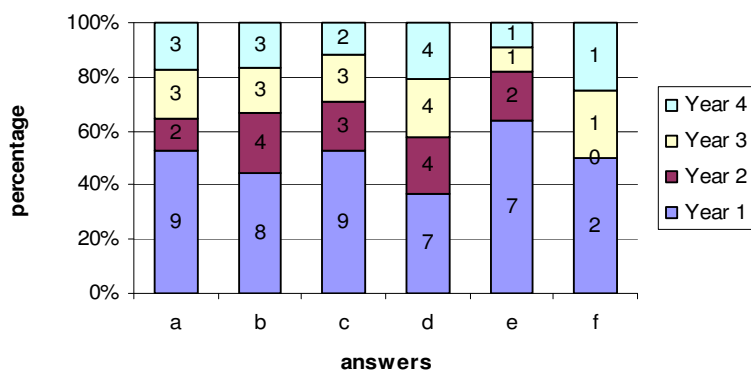
## Appendix 1: analysis of survey amongst Hebo students



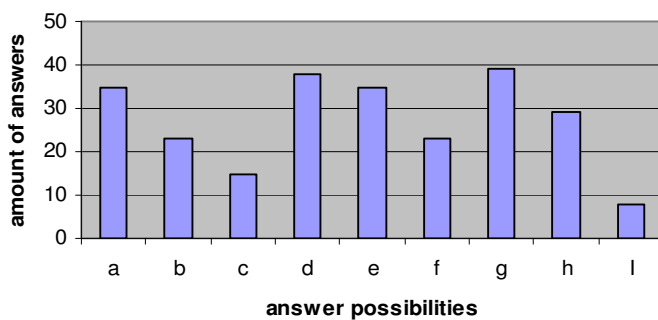
**Question 4: would you be interested in sharing your school experiences with the Hebo community?**



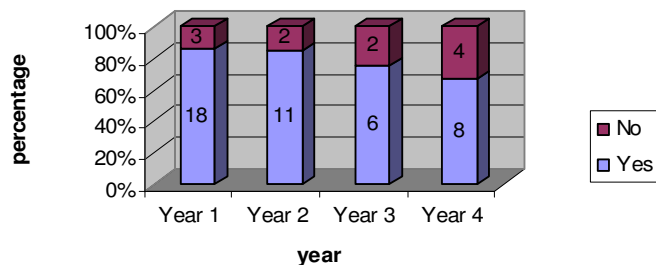
**Question 5: what is the use of a weblog according to you?**



**Question 6: What would be interesting to read on a Hebo weblog?**



**Question 7: do you think that a Hebo weblog may contribute to the communication of the Hebo community**



1. ☐ 1<sup>st</sup> year  
☐ 2<sup>nd</sup> year  
☐ 3<sup>rd</sup> year  
☐ 4<sup>th</sup> year
  
2. Do you know what you want after the Hebo and what your possibilities are?  
☐ Yes
  - a) Thanks to personal connections or due to a personal clear view.
  - b) Thanks to information of the Hebo.  
☐ No, why not?
  - c) Hebo curriculum is very broad.
  - d) Information at the Hebo on job possibilities are not easily accessible.
  - e) Information of the Hebo is sufficient, but I cannot decide yet.
  
3. Do you have a weblog (e.g msn live spaces, Hyves, Blogger)?  
☐ Yes (please mark a, b, c, d or e....more options are possible)  
☐ No...do you want one?  
☐ Yes (please mark a, b, c, d or e....more options are possible)  
☐ No
  - a) Because on a weblog can be published what you want.  
(no differences in power)
  - b) Because everyone can join to start a discussion, anytime, anywhere.  
(accessibility and interactivity)
  - c) Expression of emotions and opinions.
  - d) Forming and maintaining communities between friends, school, work etc.  
(the use of Internet to network, e.g Hyves)
  - e) all of the above.
  
4. Would you be interested in sharing your school experiences and your knowledge with the Hebo community (students, alumni, companies and Hebo itself) through a weblog?
  - a) Yes, it would be easier to communicate and to get in contact with the Hebo community on interactive level.
  - b) No, there is no added value of a weblog next to mail, telephone or websites.
  
5. What is the use of a weblog according to you? (please number in order of importance)
  - a) Obtaining someone's opinion
  - b) Sharing information, experiences and knowledge
  - c) Interactivity
  - d) Easily access to participants with the same interests (creating a community)
  - e) Equal access
  - f) There is no added value
  - g) .....

6. What would be interesting to read on a Hebo weblog? (more options are possible)
- ☐ Links to all companies where graduated Hebo students are working
  - ☐ Vacancies
  - ☐ CV
  - ☐ Exchange experiences
  - ☐ Internship experiences
  - ☐ Opinions about Hebo, curriculum or companies from everyone who is part of the Hebo community
  - ☐ Option to sell and buy Hebo books
  - ☐ Description of and comments on projects
  - ☐ One-to-one communication with help of a log in code
  - ☐ .....

7. Do you think that a Hebo weblog may contribute to the communication of the Hebo community?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

8. Do you have any personal remarks or suggestions?

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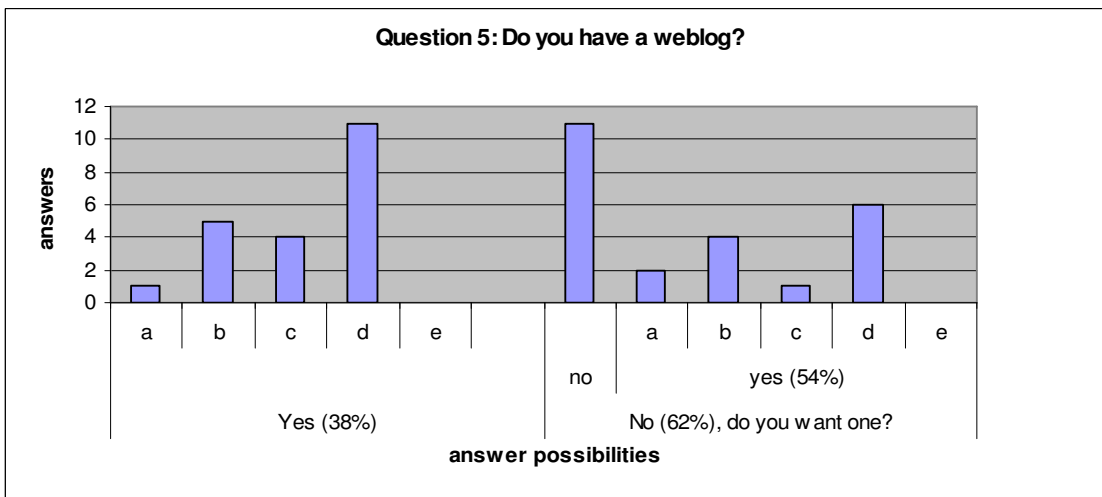
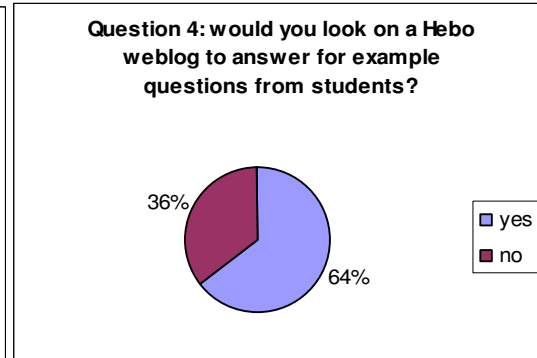
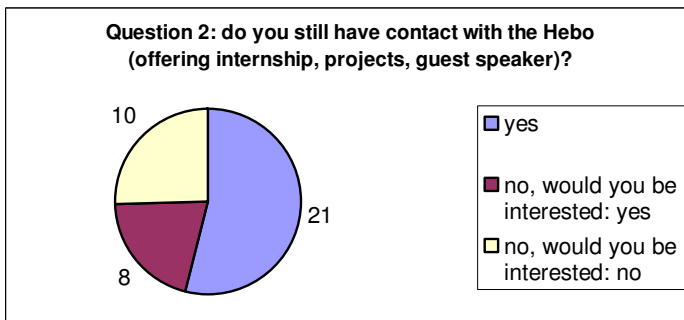
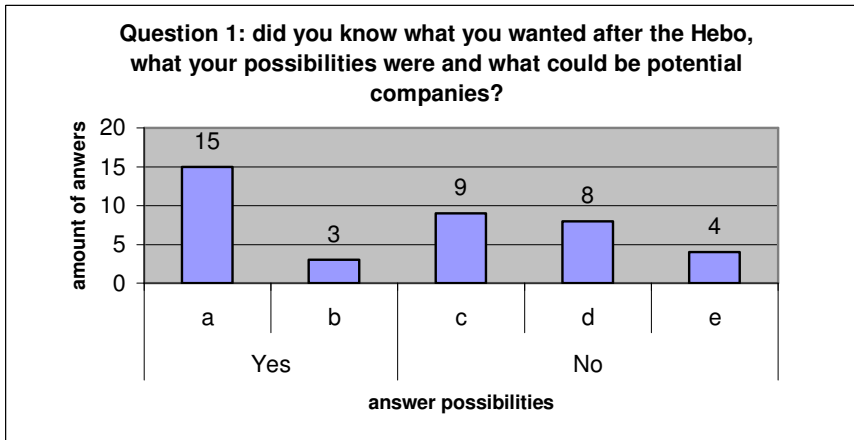
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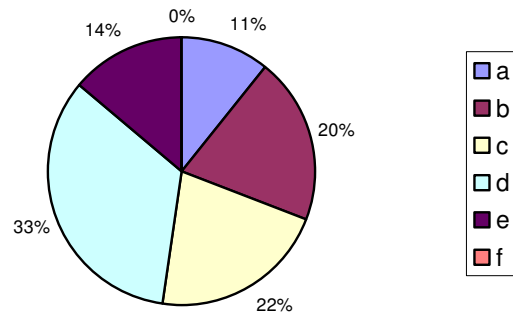
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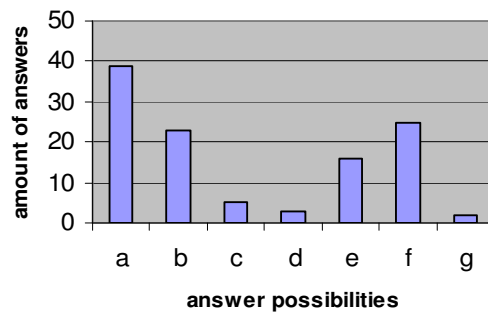
## Appendix 2: analysis of survey amongst Hebo Alumni



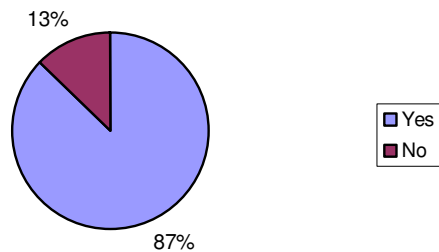
**Question 6: What is the use of a weblog according to you?**



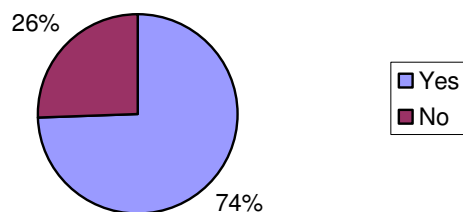
**Question 7: A possible future weblog should be divided between:**



**Question 8: The little booklet 'AlumNews' should be published on a Hebo weblog, so it would be accessible for anyone of the Hebo community**



**Question 9: Do you think a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community?**



1. Did you know what you wanted after the Hebo, what your possibilities were and what could be potential companies?  
☐ Yes
  - a) Thanks to personal connections or due to a personal clear view.
  - b) Thanks to information of the Hebo.  
☐ No, why not?
  - c) Hebo curriculum is very broad.
  - d) Information at the Hebo on job possibilities were not easily accessible.
  - e) Information of the Hebo was insufficient.
  
2. Do you still have contact with the Hebo (offering internship, projects, guest speaker)?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No...Would you be interested?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
3. Would you be interested in sharing your work-life experiences and your knowledge with the Hebo community (students, alumni, companies and Hebo itself) through a weblog?
  - c) Yes, it would be easy to communicate with the Hebo community on interactive level.
  - d) No, there is no added value of a weblog next to mail, telephone or websites.
  
4. Would you look on a Hebo weblog to answer for example questions from students?
  - a) Yes
  - b) No
  
5. Do you have a weblog (e.g msn live spaces, Hyves, Blogger)?  
☐ Yes (please mark a, b, c, d or e to explain why)  
☐ No...do you want one?  
☐ Yes (please mark a, b, c, d or e to explain why)  
☐ No
  - a) On a weblog can be published what you want.  
(no differences in power)
  - b) Everyone can join to start a discussion, anytime, anywhere.  
(accessibility and interactivity)
  - c) Expression of emotions and opinions.
  - d) Forming and maintaining communities between friends, school, work etc.  
(the use of Internet to network, e.g Hyves)
  - e) All of the above.

6. What is the use of a weblog according to you? (please number in order of importance)
- a) Obtaining someone's opinion
  - b) Sharing information, experiences and knowledge
  - c) Interactivity
  - d) Easily access to participants with the same interests (creating a community)
  - e) Equal access
  - f) There is no added value
  - g) .....
7. A possible future weblog should be divided into conversations between (more options are possible):
- a. Student/student
  - b. Alumni/student
  - c. Company/student
  - d. Company/Hebo
  - e. Alumni/Hebo
  - f. Student/Hebo
  - g. Alumni/company
- .....
8. Do you think that the little booklet 'AlumNews' should be published also on a Hebo weblog, so it would be accessible for anyone of the Hebo community?
- a) Yes
  - b) No
9. Do you think a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the Hebo community?
- a) Yes
  - b) No

10. Do you have any comments or suggestions?

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Thank you for filling in this questionnaire  
Please send your answers to: jet\_1985@hotmail.com

### Appendix 3: survey amongst companies

1. What is your relation with the HEBO?
  - a) Involved in project(s)
  - b) Participant of the workfield commission
  - c) Offering internship
2. Would you be interested in sharing your work-life experiences and your knowledge with the HEBO community (students, alumni, companies and HEBO itself) through a weblog?
  - e) Yes, it would be easy to communicate with the HEBO community on interactive level.
  - f) No, there is no added value of a weblog next to mail, telephone or websites.
3. Do you or your company have a weblog (e.g msn live spaces, Hyves, Blogger, on the company website)?
  - ☐ Yes (please mark a, b, c, d or e)
  - ☐ No...do you want one?
    - ☐ Yes (please mark a, b, c, d or e)
    - ☐ No
      - a) On a weblog can be published what you want.  
(no differences in power)
      - b) Everyone can join to start a discussion, anytime, anywhere.  
(accessibility and interactivity)
      - c) Expression of emotions and opinions.
      - d) Forming and maintaining communities between friends, school, work etc.  
(the use of Internet to network, e.g Hyves)
      - e) All of the above.
4. What is the use of a weblog according to you? (please number in order of importance)
  - a) Obtaining someone's opinion
  - b) Sharing information, experiences and knowledge
  - c) Interactivity
  - d) Easily access to participants with the same interests (creating a community)
  - e) Equal access
  - f) There is no added value
  - g) .....
5. What would be interesting to read on a HEBO weblog? (more options are possible)
  - ☐ Links to all companies where graduated HEBO students are working
  - ☐ Vacancies
  - ☐ CV
  - ☐ Exchange experiences
  - ☐ Internship experiences
  - ☐ Opinions on Hebo, on the curriculum or on companies from everyone who is part of the Hebo community
  - ☐ Description of and comments on projects
  - ☐ One-to-one communication with help of a log in code
  - ☐ .....

6. A possible future HEBO weblog should be divided into conversations between:  
(more options are possible)

- ☐ Student/student
- ☐ Alumni/student
- ☐ Company/student
- ☐ Company/Hebo
- ☐ Alumni/Hebo
- ☐ Student/Hebo
- ☐ Alumni/company
- ☐ .....

7. Do you think that a weblog may contribute to the communication between the participants of the HEBO community?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8. Do you have any personal remarks or suggestions?

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