Appendix 7 - Interview with Mr. Marius Rietdijk.

Face-to-face interview.

I: Interviewer

S: Interviewee

I: Could you please tell me what is your connection to the academia?

S: I'm working for 4 days/week at Vrije Universiteit at the business department and I teach 2 subjects: one is strategy, especially scenario planning, and the other specialty of mine is behavioural modification. That's about how to change people…how to change people's behavior in companies in order to implement strategies. I am also a consultant for one day/week and I apply the knowl edge about scenario planning and behavior modification in real life. This is what I do. And since my graduation in psychology I've been working in the academia…I worked for the University of Amsterdam, University of Twente, Nyenrode Business University and now for the VU. And I always enjoy making the connection between science and application…that is what distinguishes me also from a lot of academics…the fact that I really try to find scientific basis for business. I use "Pavlov's dog" and all the research that came after that in laboratories…and this is I think very interesting hard science that can be applied like an engineer in real-life business to increase performances and to let businesses work more efficient and to make people feel happier when they work.

I: What made you choose this balance of 4 days/week at the university and one in consultancy? Was it a conscious choice?

S: Well I had some changes in that. I worked for a couple of years also for myself for 5 days/week doing consultancy work but I was really eager to finish my PhD…and that I could do best in the university. I finished it one year ago and I always try to find a balance and always find opportunities…the choice between the workload in the academia vs consultancy depends on the opportunities. But I also have a great freedom in the academia to do what I want and I have sort of an independent position…and that makes it also attractive for companies to consult me as a business consultant …so I think I have a more independent position as an academic than if I was totally involved in consultancy.

I: Giving the fact that you work for 4 days/week in the academia, do you participate in the academic research projects ?

S: Yes I do. I also participate in research projects that are subsidized by the Economic Ministry in Holland…we call that third stream research that is sponsored by the Ministries or companies. I'm good at that and I also participate in "hard" research programs…but I'm really able to choose my own path of research. So what I do is very specialized research but I can also make it available…I can easily apply it to my colleagues' research because I can apply that scientific basis to their needs also. So I try to make it applicable for companies but also for other research areas.

I: Ok so this is the motivation behind…when choosing a research topic this is what you follow : applicability for companies and complementarity with the research of your colleagues

S: Yes…so it's both rigor and relevance.

I: To your knowledge, does this motivation of practicality also apply to the majority of the academic projects?

S: No…I don't think so. I think a lot of the academics are motivated only by publication reasons…if it fits in the direction of the journal that they apply for. I've also seen in journals that they are not comfortable only with theoretical work…that they try to find a bridge to the applicability. But I think that a lot of colleagues cannot prove or show managers what their added-value is. This is what I try to do, I always try to show …and I also think that in the business research it is important to take the management questions first and look at what we can offer as tools and as interventions to help the management problem. And that is also what it is in the business methodology books…that the management question should come first…but what I see at many colleagues is that they don't take the management question first but the journal question first…what is the gap in theory in the academic journals and not management questions.

I: You mentioned the inability to present the findings to managers. Is this maybe because of problems of communication, of "language" or is it maybe because of problems of the content of the research? Or maybe both?

S: Yes it is an intricate problem …the researchers don't understand what the manager's problems are so there is a communication problem…if they don't have contacts and understanding then there is a communication problem and that has an immediate effect on the content of the research. So this is a direct connection.

I: You also mentioned that the aim of the researchers are the journals that they want to publish in. What is your publishing "strategy". To put it more simple, what do you publish and where? What are your aims?

S: Well my aim is two-sided. First the theory about behavioural change…I think I'm always in the business of behavioural change also when I'm dealing with journal editors. I have to change their behaviours if I want to have my goals met. What I do is…the best thing in behavioural change is to reward their behavior to me. So if they invite me to write an article, I'm very inclined to do that . So I've got a lot of demands for interviews with journalists and they ask me to write articles also for popular magazines and I say more and more that "I don't have time to do that but you can interview me and write an article based on the interview …and this is what they more and more doing. So I don't have a "push" strategy …in which I want to push my knowledge into journals, but because I'm dealing with real questions of managers, the journalists and also the editors of many journals ask me to write an article for them. So then the probability that it gets accepted is higher…and that is an important strategy for me but I also want to get into the higher-level journals and then I have to just deliver quality and show them that my approach of behavioural change is also applicable in fields as culture and leadership and ethics etc. …and then I write articles about the implications of the theory on those respective areas.

I: On the other hand, do you consider yourself up-to-date to the academic literature? And if so, does this help you in your consultancy work?

S: Well I'm not so much focused on the latest trends or fads in management theory and that is why I feel very comfortable being up-to-date with fundamental research in behavior analysis…that is how the area is called …and I'm not very up-to-date with the laboratory research but I'm up-to-date with the applications of the theory…but of course, I also hear what my colleagues have to say, I read their articles, I participate in research seminars at the faculty so that I'm aware what their needs are. So I'm not only looking at the needs of the companies but also at the research needs of my colleagues…here in the faculty and also my colleagues in the US where the field is more advanced.

I: You mentioned that you also work with colleagues from the United States, I'd like to ask you about the things that you publish…are they mostly in Dutch or do you go for international and local ?

S: I found out that the theory that I'm most interested in was developed in the US, also in English journals and I also found out that in Holland it was no so well known. So I've written my PhD in Dutch also with the goal that people in Holland – psychologists , business scientists but also managers and consultants – could read it more easily…and now I'm actually busy with translating my PhD thesis into English because I think it may also be of added value for foreigners…and now I'm working more on the international level. Thus far though I haven't published a lot in English…only one or two articles and I was busy with translating the English research into Dutch because for managers and others it's easy to read and understand Dutch publications.

I: Coming back to the previous question…well first of all I'd like to ask you if in consultancy you work as an individual consultant or part of an organization? And did that change over the years?

S: I have an independent consultancy firm …I also have a firm with another person and at the University now I'm setting up a research school that is set up with one other person and I'm also involving some colleagues on that…it's called a center for behavioural change…so that is not one fixed enterprise. I also work a lot with independent consultants who want to have my content knowledge and are more into the marketing of the ideas…so they read my articles and say "this is interesting, I can make money from that. Let's make a deal and we do it together"…and these are somewhat ad-hoc projects that I do with other people.

I: And to your knowledge, are your consultant colleagues also up-to-date to the academic research or the scientific findings?

S: Well that's a good point. I'm now also a PhD coach for some external people who are in consultancy and I think that they are not always very aware of the scientific literature…so they have to make a big step to read scientific literature and not to stay fixed into some consultancy models which are less deep than academic models…and there is also a gap there which I find remarkable. The consultants also lack some knowledge about the academic literature. These are two separate worlds I think and ad big gap.

I: There both particular magazines and journals that are made at practitioners, but even here…for example the US Academy of Management has a special edition for practitioners and the "standard" edition aimed more at researchers. The delimitation is quite official.

S: Yes yes.

I: On the other hand I'd like to ask you about your academia colleagues. Do you think that they are up-to-date with the latest trends, methods or needs of the business ?

S: There's a big variety when it comes to my colleagues. Some are more oriented towards practice and they only have one day at the academia. Others are just focused on getting published in journals like the Academy of Management Journal. But in the Academia, we are rewarded for our publications. This is very important, so my for my popular journal publications I don't get any points…that also stands for economic research that was always very theoretic and they have a lot of journals in the list. That is really academic and not practical. Now we are more in the process of being a business faculty instead of an econometrics faculty – which we used to be. So there are a lot of changes going on and I don't know if this will lead to more practical approaches, but I think that the requirements for good publications are not only that it is practical and applicable but that is both scientific and applicable. Also, as a practitioner, as a consultant you must show that you really made a difference in the company. So there are also some research methodologies to do that. For example to make a baseline measurement in performance and then do an intervention, then show whether the intervention really had an effect on the baseline measurements and that is about performance measurement and not about attitude measurement…so both rigor and relevance are getting more and more important in the future. Now, the consultant colleagues are more focused on relevance but not on rigor…but they don't really prove whether they have effect in their consultancy work…and the colleagues who are more focused on scientific research are not so much focused on relevance but on what they call "rigor" – and that is that they fit into what colleagues before wrote in their articles…so that they add value and they play the game based on the rules of the journal. That's what they call "rigor". I think "rigor" is more that you have measureable effects on the interventions. So this is what I think…

I: So you think that there should be a reformulation of what "rigor" means in the scientific world. You mentioned that there is now a trend of the universities to encourage their professors…I'm talking here about the business faculties… to collaborate more with practice or to be more involved in practice, to work in practice. I'd like to ask you, to your knowledge if this encouragement is supported by clear directions or strategies…or is the encouragement only at a verbal level ?

S: Well it is not only at a verbal level, because there is also a trend that the Universities have to earn money apart from their subsidies from the government…so they have to find money from the companies too so they have to offer for example MBA programs….and the companies want to have teachers who really have experience in the real life…in companies. So that is also a clear criteria, that they had to prove themselves in real life and also in publications…more popular publications. So that is how they will be evaluated also by the leaders of the business schools. We are also dealing here at the VU with making a more business school department…I was in a conference in Germany on their behalf…so they are betting on more horses. Not only on hard science but also MBA's and they need people with different skills for doing that. And I try to be a bit in the middle of that…because I then have a better position …I try to get both rigour and relevance that is important both for MBA's and hard scientific research.

I: Did it happen to you that professor colleagues came to you asked or were curious about what you're doing in the consultancy part of your life?

S: Yes I feel very appreciated by all my colleagues. The hard scientists and the more practical scientists…I think I can bring across the communication because what I do is both scientifically interesting as it is practically interesting….and they are interested in what I do and we also do some joint publications, joint work and subsidized third stream research to attract money from companies. So I feel appreciated.

I: I was also referring more strictly to the work that you do as a consultant…if it is appreciated or if people in the academia are curious about what you do in consultancy.

S: Yes, also in business research one important method is the case study research and I can use my consultancy case-studies. I try to be rigorous in my consultancy work also…so that I can use case studies for scientific publications. So the two are very much connected.

I: Because you mentioned that you try to be rigorous in your consultancy work. How is that being appreciated by your clients ? And how does the fact that you are a professor being appreciated or taken into consideration. Not necessarily appreciated, because maybe it's a drawback in some cases.

S: What I think is that academics sometimes have a bad name in companies because – what we talked about earlier – they don't really focus on the client's problems…but because I focus on the client's problems and I try to find out how can I help companies to have more added-value for their costumers, then they don't consider me as much an academic professor but more as a person that has knowledge about change…how to change people and change in performance and they really see that as an added-value. I was also a bit afraid that after my PhD I will maybe be less interesting for companies, but that's not the case. On the contrary, after my PhD, my consultancy work has gone up very fast and I'm now involved in strategic questions of big companies and on how they want to do things. And they can use the knowledge of my PhD. In fact they looked at my PhD and one company asked me to help them re-arrange their strategy…so they don't see me that much as an academic professor. And that's also what attracts some colleagues. There was one colleagues that was very focused on academic research and not going into consultancy…and he said "now I stopped that, I don't want to focus only on the small part of the journal game-playing" …he said "I stopped that and I want to work for a company now" …and it was a surprise for everyone that he made that decision. A lot of colleagues…I'm on tenure, I have the luck of being on tenure, but many colleagues must publish so much and it is very difficult to do…especially now that they have to also teach a lot because there are a lot of students and we have less money available for paying them…they are feeling a bit alienated ...what Marx used to call alienated from their work …this is what I hear from some of the colleagues. That a little bit frightening also because now in a few years many colleagues will retire and there aren't that many people to hire. So too much focus on one path…what they do sometimes in the academia, can also be dangerous for academia itself…because people feel alienated from their research work.

I: You mentioned also that there are advantages and disadvantages of the fact that you are a professor…so I see that it goes both ways.

S: I also make use of the perception about professor - that they are very theoretical – I say to other consultants " ok I'm a bit more theoretical and you have all the real life experience, but we can make a deal. I can give you some of my knowledge and you can help me with being more practical…go to companies and make a good deal".

I: Could you tell me some of the advantages and some of the disadvantages of having this status of a scholar-practitioner? You did mention some of them , but I'd like to know if there are others.

S: Well maybe a disadvantage of being a scholar is that you make less money probably than a consultant but you have a more relaxed work environment, you can look at longer term but consultants have to make money immediately …this is also what I experienced at the Nyenrode Business University …it was sort of a mix between consultancy and academic work, but I didn't really have time to work on my PhD thesis there because there was too much practical work, sort of consultancy work…I learned a lot from that and I also used that afterwards for my PhD thesis…the experiences there…but at the moment there I didn't really have much time to read a lot or publish…and that is what I like about my stay here at the VU…I'm also very curious about the successes of my colleagues…I want to learn from my colleagues…and since 3 years ago we have a new professor , Tom Elfring…and he's also a mix of rigor and relevance and he's very good at understanding the rules of the editors of journals and I can learn a lot from him when it comes to publishing in high-end journals. So a disadvantage is that the pay is not that high…not high at all actually in the academic world…

I: But on the other hand, having this double status, you probably earn more than an academic but less than a full-time consultant.

S: Yes yes, that's the balance I want to find. I'm also motivated by money, I think money is good, but I'm also very motivated about gaining knowledge and understanding things and more spiritual things…I have a meditation and yoga studio…so I try to balance all things.

I: Can you think of other advantages or disadvantages? Have you ever used students to work for you as interns ?

S: Yes I have to use students also for doing part of my research…that is very helpful…but I was also thinking about that I get very easy contact with very high-level business people and I can invite them very easily for guest classes…really top-level people like former CEO's of Phillips or of AEGON…and that is what I like very much. I wasn't even having my PhD before last year and it was still easier to get in contact with high-level business people. So that was also one of my reasons to stay in the academia and finish my PhD. It took me a very long time …20 years…but it also gave me the freedom to do the research very rigorous and take the time to read all the materials and balance the analysis of the research situation and write my thesis…and I did my own way of case studies. So I think I keep the balance between the academia and consultancy and I also use a very big example for me from America - Aubrey Daniels is his name - and he also had a balance between academic work also having his own consultancy firm. That's a very good example for me. So there are advantages and disadvantages. Of course, I see more advantages than disadvantages in this combination. I feel that it is a very good position to look at the academic world and at the practical world and get into contact will all kind of people. I'm also, by the way, in politics. I see that also as a way of behavioural change…so I can combine a lot of fields from meditation to politics, it all fits into one point of view for me.

I: But do you think that being in both worlds, is it possible that you can excel at both or do you have to do some compromises…mainly because the lack of time ?

S: Yeah…there must of course be some compromises and what solves that problem is also to have students or PhD students to help me do my research and other consultants who help me do my consultancy work. So I'm more and more inclined to have employees or people who join me into doing the work I don't have time to do myself.

I: We kept talking and mentioning "relevance". There are a lot of people that debate on the meaning of the term, that's why it's fair to ask you how you would define "relevance". What does relevance in research mean to you in the context of business?

S: I think relevance means for me that research has direct implications for solving business problems. And especially for me that means productivity problems…so economic research can help in increasing the welfare of a country and of people…and business knowledge should add value to increase the performance of businesses. And increase the ability of the managers to do their work better. I believe certain laboratory research about human and animal behaviour can help doing that, but only theoretical research/desk research cannot add a lot I believe. So, for me-, it should add value to practical problems so that means that relevance and rigour are very much connected. The research must be done also at the site of the company and not so much in the university….so I think that the researcher should go into the company. You also asked me "for managers is it important that the research in the company is rigorous ?" and I think it is…because they also want to know whether the results of the research are really based on good designs. So there are also all kind of designs that for example start on one department and baseline measurement and do the intervention and then do a baseline one month later at another department and then do the intervention one month later so that you can look at the internal validity…whether that is good …and then it is also relevant for managers. So I think research and management in that sense is very much the same. So I think that's what 's relevance but I think it's also very much connected to rigour.

I: Ok. What would be your suggestion in order to mitigate the gap that we spoke about?

S: I think there must be more research about performance and management …and it should be more behavioural-oriented so it must be not only about attitudes and not only about opinions, about what people think but really about what they do and that there are more research strategies in observing people and measuring what they do and what their results are…and I think that is one of the major points – that we go from attitude research to behavioural and performance-related research…and there's a lot to be done about that. That's what I'm working on, and give sort of blueprints or direction for how to design such research that is both rigorous and relevant. I hope…that is one of my contributions in this science field. In my PhD it is also described how to do that…so it's not very abstract but not very statistical either…it's more like steps. And that is also what they say if you have that journal…the Academy of Management journal in 2007 they had a special issue about the gap between practical relevance and rigour. One of my solutions is that you make protocols for how to do practical research, how to manage, how to lead…that is that the theoretical ideas are translated into step-wise protocols for practitioners that really want to do something. For example, when you want to cook you have the recipe and you should use this first and then that etc. I also have…I tested a protocol in my PhD on how to manage better and how to increase performance based on rigorous and laboratory research in behavioural analysis in which Pavlov was the first scholar. So Pavlov was a scholar but he was also very much an experimentalist …and I think we should also be more experimentalists in companies as business people , both as consultants and as researchers…so I think that both have the same goals, the researchers and the consultants…and also companies want to see from consultants that they have added value and not only talk but also show results, and that is what I think now in these times of economic recession that this is what consultants are experiencing …they want me to give them tools for making their results measureable and their interventions more effective. So that is my answer on how the suggestions for improvement…I think my PhD thesis and my other research is really focused on that question.

I: Well, the point that I'm following for my thesis is…all my interviews are of people that work both in academia and practice…and I'm thinking that maybe by shedding some light on these people and on how they cope with the differences between the two worlds…maybe other people both from business and the academia might see that it is possible and might see how people do that…and following the role model idea they might also want to follow. Because I think that uncertainty of what's on the other side can be quite a big impediment if you want to do something…and a lot of people prefer to stay in the security of their present status than to try something that they know nothing about. By showing this, maybe it will motivate some people.

S: So, best practices to show…Is this your Masters thesis?

I: Yes

S: I think you're doing it very rigorously.

I: Do you think that it makes sense so go on this?

S: Absolutely, yeah. It's also what I see…that there's a big gap…and in fact the contribution that I wanted to make in my research was to bridge or to help bridge that gap. And you are now showing in the thesis what the gap is and how consultants and academics look at bridging it.

I: Thank you very much.

S: You're welcome.