

Transcription of interview

Joost Timmerman

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1 Names and definitions

T Joost Timmerman

C Harco Cuppens

2 Transcription

0:00:00.0 T Well welcome. [C: Yeah] My name is Joost Timmerman. I'm here to interview Harco Kuppens about organisations. [C: Yes] Doing this for the course research methods. So I'll be practising how to do an ... conduct an interview. I have a few questions prepared. I also have a piece of paper here and a pen if you feel the need to draw anything. [C: Okay yeah fine] So if you're ready I'd like to start.

0:01:33.3 T First of all, could you tell me about yourself?

0:01:38.5 C Okay, I'm Harco Kuppens. I'm working here as scientific programmer. I'm doing already a few years. I am currently busy with the Thalia project. We're doing research for learning state machines, automatic learning, and my involvement is more the software support. writing software tools for the researchers and besides of that I'm also the central person in our department ... its three sections within informatics. we are in the MBSD ¹ section and if the people have problems with printing or all kind of stuff or need something new machine I am also the person so I do a little bit system administration also [T: Okay] That's part of my job also [] and also some general support for the institute. I give some information systems for the institute. That's also what I am doing. So it is pretty broad and it nice.

0:02:02.3 T Okay, what is your background regarding education and job history?

0:02:06.0 C So, my education is I studied physics here at the university of Nijmegen. and after that tried to do an PHD but cancelled that and then I did some small jobs and then I applied here for a job. and since ... I am already working here for ten years. I could say this is my first big job

0:02:31.4 T okay so you are working here for 10 years in your current position [C positing, yeah yeah]

0:02:37.6 T all right, so could you tell a bit about the company you work for?

0:02:44.0 C The company ... ow its a special company the university you could say {laughing} its ... the intention of the work is more in ... reaching ... good ideas in sof... it's more ... people are more [{mumbling} how could I say it more like eeh] ... if you work here you don't have to report time on how long you work it more like getting ... reaching a goal and solve problems and

¹MBSD: Model Bases System Developemnt

stuff ... and not so much about ... so eh its not a nine to five job. You can come in at any time you want but at some point you have to have some problem solved or some work done. another mental ... yeah all the PHD students also work very hard in the weekends all they have to do sometimes stuff so it's ... [T okay] more the ... have heart for their work

0:03:56.1 T What do you consider the goal of the university

0:03:59.9 C The goal of the university. Nowadays it is officialy is writing as much papers as possible with good quality but in general I would say the university has as goal to acquire knowledge ... and with knowledge should make ... enrich our society and make quality of life better I would say

0:04:26.5 T Do you think you would be able to do your work without communicating with your colleagues

0:04:38.0 C ... ehm no I ... wouldn't be able to do my work without communicating with my colleagues. But yeah at some point its not so that I have to discuss a lot of times with people at a day but now or then we have to collaborate and talk about what to do and steps. so the work is a lot of individual work but between that work talk about you want to do and discuss what we should to do. so it would be possible to ...

0:05:15.5 T What would go wrong if you didn't ... would there things that go terribly wrong

0:05:24.8 C ... Yeah I would probably make something I would like and ... {laughing} yeah what would go wrong? ... yeah it doesn't make any sense to discuss before what you are going to because ... you should ... for instance now today we had a discussion about ... our tool we have now for our research and we want to extend it with some algorithm to add some extra smartness in the tool and to do that we needed some information about some parameters and a pre and its a little technical but yeah ... so discussed how what was a smart way to get that information in the system in a fast way and i suppose there are hundereds of ways to do that but if you discuss that then yeah ... better then ... you get better solutions and thats very important in research to discuss

0:06:41.8 T What colleagues do you tend to communicate the most with

0:06:47.6 C Now with this tool the most with the PHD students which {can't hear} and otherwise with people within the Thalia project. Frits Vaandrager and PHD. But it's a small group so ... and then for my other work i ... then yeah ... for support. People come in and I have to help and it's just standard communication

0:07:16.3 T But for example the PHD project you were working on now, the PHD student is also a developer or ... what's his role in the project then

0:07:28.4 C Now she is doing research on automaat learning so I am more support for here. So she made the beginning of the tool and I came in later in the project so I now we are proving this tool and I sometimes forget about how I sometimes proof the tool. She can also say to me from that should be implemented and I implement it then she can use the time for writing papers and writing out the ideas for publications. So I dont write any publications {laugh}

0:08:15.9 T What means do u use most to communicate

0:08:18.3 C What means? Well usually I speak {laugh} and sometimes by email but yeah so the collaboration in this group is locally so you just walk to the office and talk with the person or just have a meeting once a week

0:08:18.3 T Okay [C: yeah]

0:08:40.6 T Alright, I also have to ... no, I have one more question about communicating. Do you think the environment here in the university is suitable for communicating

0:08:53.7 C I think ... it is very suitable ... I think that people if you ask them something they also will respond ... and questions so that's ... that academics are more open to questions I think then if you go to a company people have more deadlines and ... but yeah I think otherway maybe ... also ... maybe we should be something that's should be better with us, general problem I think ... a lot of people are doing their own specific research that's also sometimes difficult to know exactly what somebody is doing and ... so that's why we have these cloak you see on the wall what people are doing, other people are doing. So someone sitting five doors abroad does something totally specific different i'm doing. I don't know in details what are they doing, so you don't often go to those people to ask problems. I think if you better knowledge about that then it ... maybe you see more easily connections with your own research. and if you have a problem and you can go to that person that's. ... but i'm more the programmer {laughing} research is not my first ... myeah

0:10:37.3 T Okay [C yeah]

0:10:39.0 T Okay, I have few questions about the structure of the organisation here ... can you explain a bit about the main parts of which this organisation exists.

0:10:46.7 C The main parts? ... So it's ... from the institute informatics, the university has more institutes. we have divided this institute in three big sections a few years ago. Bart Jacobs reorganises informatics and ... {cough} So we have three sections and ... also it's a research institute you also have an education institute so people which are parallel I would say. The people from the research institute that give education in the education institute. but I think the organisation is pretty flat. cause you have some director how would you call it ... direction ... I don't know. Yeah and then ... so they ... the education institute has some direction and ... yeah how you call yeah the board of directors of ... I don't know. {can't hear} the board of directors. but ... yeah it's a little bit strange cause our head of department is not the professor so the structure is a little bit strange.

0:12:23.7 T So there is a professor and there is a head of the department

0:12:27.0 C Yeah Peter Lucas is now appointed head of the department and Rinus is also a professor ... originally ... I would say that the share, the professor share is the real authority in an university but I think for practical organisation ... they don't get paid to do this job also ... but it doesn't interest me that much {laugh} so I don't know the details about this {laugh} but that's how it works so ... I think in general each section there are people ... [can't hear] have one head and that's it. there is not really a hierarchy it's pretty flat {T: okay} {mumbling}

0:13:24.6 T Which parts play the biggest role in your day to day work

0:13:34.8 C Which parts? What do you mean which... what kind of ...?

0:13:36.1 T You described a few institutes ... the professor... the director. Which of those have the most influence on your work?

0:13:50.2 C On my work? I would say ... Frits has the most influence on my work cause ... so we have the MBSD is a little bit ... well you know a little bit about the history I think also but ... we were combined we are a combined group from originally three different groups. We all did things with models and now they say it's better for the corporation if you ... that you combine one group that has more connections. but still I used to be a separate group with Frits so I see Frits a little as my real boss also in the research project and Peter Lucas which is the head of the department section then I also have to discuss with him that i'm doing the research for

this sections. If it's appointed that I do research for this section with Frits {mumbling} but paid also for general things with my system administrator . . . get {mumbling} for doing that [T: okay] So yeah it depends on the task {laugh} and I also have some discussions with Herman the education director about this system management system and stuff. So also with the education board [T: yea] so Vera Kamphuis I did some things for her also, that's all for the general support of informatics. So it depends on the task who I communicate with yeah. . . [T: okay]

0:15:34.1 T You described a few of your tasks . . . to be a bit of system administrator and to help development on projects. Does it often happen that you have to wait on someone to finish a certain task before you can continue with your task?

0:15:51.6 C If it happens I always have other things to do {laughing}

0:15:58.3 T So there is always work to do? [C jajaja]

0:16:00.9 T So there is always work to do that is not particularly part of an entire process or do you have multiple process in which there is always a piece of work to be done?

0:16:14.3 C I've always . . . a lot of things . . . central system . . . we have in informatics there is still a lot of work to do, so if I have nothing to do else I will work for that. . . So maybe I should more for that but that is no . . . So I'll always have projects which are the backup, Plan B {laughing} not the highest priority

0:16:43.5 T And the other way around, are there people that have to wait for you to finish a certain task before they can continue?

0:16:52.2 C Yeah, sometimes it is for the research project now, sometimes they want have something to do their experiment and then I give it the highest priority and put all my time to the work and . . . if they are really waiting we don't often use the nicest solutions but then we . . .

0:17:14.8 T Do you always have that freedom to distribute your time . . . to make priorities yourself

0:17:25.4 C . . . It depends. . . so it's like . . . if there is a paper deadline then I don't have a choice but if there is not a deadline then sometimes I can do that. . . but I think nowadays the pressure is more doing research support because there are also budget cuts on the university. So we have to do more the research stuff and not so much the support stuff like doing the system that I told you I'm doing for informatics now. So I think the pressure will gain more doing that but in general you are pretty free to . . . so like I have said people are not recording time how long you work but it's more like you're free to do your work as long as you deliver

0:18:34.9 T Is there anything else about the organisation you feel might be important in this interview?

0:18:43.3 C What is the general goal of this interview?

0:18:45.5 T We actually want to learn a little bit about the words you use to describe an organisation

0:18:48.3 C The words? ooh. . . my language . . . {laugh} . . . so I already said flat . . . yeah it's informal that's maybe a good word to describe it. I think . . . I am already working for pretty long here so I know all people such a long time that you don't see them immediately as a director anymore it's just a person . . . I know somebody before you was a director . . . So I think it's . . . a place where people work really hard and it's an informal organisation but it's sometimes not the most social so you have to discuss a lot but also sometimes people in their office doing individual work. . . not. . . it's not so that we are one big family and . . . that's also true but . . . but I think that's an aspect of science. It's also specializing.

0:20:10.5 Harco asked about the interview in Dutch - I explained a bit about the course

0:21:16.4 T Okay, but I'll wrap it up in English. Thank you very much for this interview. If you want I to see the transcription I can send it to you but. . .

0:21:30.6 C so you can send it now and i'll {mumbling: take a look at it}

0:21:34.6 T Alright thank you very much.