

Preface

When my masters' thesis supervisor asked me to write a PhD proposal in 2002, I was surprised (and honoured), as I did not regard myself as suitable: were PhD candidates not always the smartest students? Besides, I wanted to gain experience in practice, not sit in a dark room at some university, so I took up a role as a CSR consultant at a big firm in The Netherlands. Nevertheless, only a year later, a vacancy for PhD candidate at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, financed by TNO Quality of Life, for research related to Corporate Social Responsibility immediately appealed to me. But why did this appeal to me now (and not one year ago) and why would I leave my fixed position at the firm with nice benefits? Reflecting on these questions, I slowly understood that I have always been interested and driven by one subject in my studies and work: the role of business in developing countries. The position at the consultancy firm did not allow me to gain experience in this issue nor deepen my knowledge. A PhD research would allow me to at least deepen my knowledge. I would never be satisfied or happy if I would continue. So, I happily turned in my lease car and company phone and started this journey on 1st of January 2004, without really knowing what I was getting myself into.

I found it such a luxury to have the time to read and study and be paid for it at the same time. My supervisor and promoter, Professor Gerard Zwetsloot, ensured that he spoke with me regularly and challenged me to build further on my initial ideas. I realised that the link with practice would be key: what would the world gain if I stayed within my (not so dark) room at the university? A unique opportunity presented itself through the then chairwoman of ESM: Professor Jacqueline Cramer. She managed to introduce me to a couple of Dutch multinational companies, of which one was Shell. There was immediately a click with the people from Shell: we were interested in the same issues and dilemmas. Soon after, I started conducting my PhD research at Shell, an enormous international company that I had always followed closely since my studies, which I regarded as a frontrunner on CSR and which was dealing with many complex problems in the developing world. A dream come true; the possibility to work in practice and having the time to reflect at the university at the same time.

Performing action research at Shell was an amazing journey: I was able to move relatively freely throughout the company and met many interesting people, which led to one insight after the other. I learned about the dilemmas and issues that the Shell companies were facing around the world and the drive of many people to resolve them for the better of all stakeholders. Combining this with work at the university and TNO was not always easy. Several times, I wished I had more time to spend on coordinating the interfaculty course 'development questions' at university (as I enjoy working with students) or diving deeper in the research on 'good employership' for TNO. After two years, I therefore stopped most activities and focussed on writing my PhD. It felt good to write down what I had experienced as an action researcher, so others could learn from this as well.

When I completed writing my PhD in the beginning of 2009, the legal department of Shell had to review the material for publication. I was not highly surprised of their advice not to publish it in the form as it was then, as I learned over the years that human rights is a highly politicised (and increasingly legalised) subject of discussion, especially between international NGOs and multinational companies. Thus, we had to embark on an extensive process of finding a way to marry the demands of the Erasmus University and Shell. This was a searching process for everyone involved and far from easy, but I also realised that this was new experience that came with the form in which I performed my PhD research. In that sense, this was also an interesting process from which others can learn. In

sum, I feel privileged that I had the opportunity to have had this experience and would recommend it to all PhD researchers in CSR.

There are many people to thank that have all contributed to this journey. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor and promoter, Professor Gerard Zwetsloot. I always found it amazing that he could immediately pinpoint the questions and issues that I was struggling with, made them explicit and developed a way forward together by asking the 'right' questions. Gerard, I experienced our cooperation during my PhD from the beginning to the end as very pleasant and I especially appreciated your support in the end process. Secondly, I would like to thank Professor Jacqueline Cramer for her initiative (and courage) to bring a PhD researcher in contact with several multinational companies and the 1,5 years of supervision before she became the Dutch Minister of Environment and Planning. Jacqueline, you form an inspiration with your enthusiasm and hard work. Thirdly, I would like to thank TNO Quality of Life for financing this PhD.

Then, I would like to thank the other PhD candidates and researchers at ESM for providing a supporting and social network. Although I was not around that often, I enjoyed working at ESM where I found the necessary peace and quiet and good talks about research contents and methodologies. I especially like to thank Angela for providing me with the necessary support during the writing process (especially in our room at the singel in Rotterdam) and protecting me from myself sometimes, but also Fatma, Karen, Igor, Jacko and Sumet for making ESM always feel like a welcome place.

The list continues with many people within Shell that I am eternally grateful for supporting my research. I would like to start with Monique de Wit and Joppe Cramwinckel, who dared to invite me into Shell and guided my ways within this complicated organisation. I have learned a lot from you both (and hope to continue doing so), you supported me when I needed it and we became friends in the process. After the first half year in Shell, Helen Sullivan started to supervise and cooperate with me closely, who remains my informal mentor and good friend until this day. Helen, thank you for all your support and always believing in me! This also counts for Albert Wong, as he supported and involved me in the ethical dilemmas and management issues the company was facing around the world, from which I learned enormously. Further, I would like to thank Richard Dion and Bert Fokkema for their support during my research, but especially for their support in the end process. Richard, keep on challenging! Bert, thanks for your always down to earth and practical support: it helped me a lot. Also, I need to thank the people who made me feel part of a team: Marjet, Wilma, Kylie, Oké, and many others.

Finally, I want to thank my parents for providing me with the support base during all my studies and equipping with the much needed perseverance and confidence to complete a PhD. Mirjam, my dear sister, thanks for helping me out with the formatting of and design of this PhD. And last but not least, of course, my dear Julius, as you supported me during the many weekends and evenings that I spent behind the computer (or thinking). Lieve Juul, thank you for always listening to my stories and putting them into perspective. I could have never completed it without you.