

# Interview Assignment

**Kavien Suleiman**



Name Interviewee:	Mr. Chris Baltussen
Profession:	CEO of VluchtelingenWerk Limburg
Email:	cbaltussen@vwlimburg.nl
Date & Time:	Wednesday 21 October, 2015 09:00 until 10:30
Location:	VluchtelingenWerk Roermond Looskade 8, 6041 LE Roermond
Interview questions:	Appendix A

# Summary of Interview

During my secondary school, I have done an internship at VluchtelingenWerk Roermond & Venlo, in which I learned a lot about the complicated and time-consuming processes which go along with the asylum procedure. I've followed several courses during my internship, and developed my communicative and administrative skills.

I contacted Mr. Chris Baltussen, CEO of VluchtelingenWerk Limburg, and asked him if I could interview him about policy-procedures. Besides his very full schedule, especially at these days, he made time for me so that I could interview him at VluchtelingenWerk Roermond.

Mr. Baltussen is already eight years the CEO of VluchtelingenWerk. He gets the most energy to achieve results on a regional scale, which in the context of our deep and powerful world seem very tiny, but they are worth every penny. He gets a lot of satisfaction to see people retain their positive energy and make a new positive start in their life's. Furthermore he seeks to bring people together, so they can share their culture and knowledge, and from this first step very fertile things can be created.

The current conflicts in the Middle-East create many refugees fleeing war and violence. Their main destination is Europe, and unfortunately there is no collective policy to shelter and counsel these people. It questions the workability of the European Union, since the elite political culture in Brussel seeks to achieve a federal system in the future, but lack a firm European border surveillance, in order to regulate the refugee crisis.

When people arrive here in the Netherlands, after a long and exhausting journey, they will go through a detailed asylum procedure led by the Immigratie- en Naturalisatiedienst. This is where VluchtelingenWerk comes into the picture; they start informing, stimulating and cooperating with the asylum seekers, and guide them through the bureaucratic labyrinth. The asylum seekers need to create a solid foundation, in order to build up a fertile life here in the Netherlands, and VluchtelingenWerk contributes to the creation of that foundation.

VluchtelingenWerk is an NGO and actively assists refugees to become an interactive citizen of the Netherlands. The most important obstacle in the Netherlands is the difficult Dutch language, and in his opinion Dutch society is sometimes too critical about the refugees.

A few years ago VluchtelingenWerk particularly focussed on the legal procedures within the asylum process, and on the social support to the refugees. Then he was convinced that he could contribute much more to the refugees with the special expertise in his organisation.

In order to define the problems and possibilities he gave an external agency the task to perform an environmental analysis, so he could exactly determine how VluchtelingenWerk could make an contribution.

In the beginning he was contracted by three municipalities, and as a consequence he created a business model. He created a model that gave VluchtelingenWerk four core-tasks; legal support, integration, language development and employment participation. He first implemented this policy in regional area of Limburg, and now all regional organs of VluchtelingenWerk use this model.

He also conducted a market survey, and discovered that there was a lot of competition from other public and private companies. Especially for the language development and

employment participation. Since the national government did cut their budgets in those ular fields, there was a huge market to set in. VluchtelingenWerk has approximately 25 % marparticket share in the Netherlands for the integration process.

VluchtelingenWerk Nederland consists of 12 members. The National Office is mainly focussed on lobbying for national and European support and subsidies. VluchtelingenWerk is also one of the founders of the Postcode loterij, which is a lottery in the Netherlands, and therefore is an important charity partner. VluchtelingenWerk Nederland receives quite some donation money and has many donors who give generously. The National Office has also a partnership with the ministry of justice, from which it receives subsidy to provide legal support to the refugees in the asylum procedure. It also receives an interpreters budget.

In return VluchtelingenWerk reports its findings of the asylum centres to the minister of Justice. The provincial parts of VluchtelingenWerk mainly receive money from the municipalities and the provincial councils, and all cash flows are strictly separated.

Mr. Baltussen noticed that he recognized a lot of steps of the Bardach model in creating policies for VluchtelingenWerk. The first thing that he does when he must create new policies is to look into the future, and to determine what obstacles and advantages exist. Secondly, he always makes an environmental analysis and an internal analysis, in order to get a clear picture of the situation. After that he looks what particular requirements are needed from different parties, and he always keeps the strong skills of his organisation in mind. He never makes judgements and considerations by itself, but always discusses this with the various levels of the organisation.

Once a year there is an staff-assembly in which the policy of VluchtelingenWerk is critically analysed and improved, and in which everyone can make its contribution. He regards customer satisfaction as one of the essential points to keep improving his polices. Creativity and flexibility are key requirements of the employees from VluchtelingenWerk.

He strictly distinguishes internal and external policies and the criteria he uses to measure the performance of its organisation. There is a low sickness-absence in his organization and a high employer satisfaction, and these elements show that VluchtelingenWerk Limburg is performing very well. Furthermore, he finds it very important to stay closely to the core business of VluchtelingenWerk. He also emphasizes that it is very important to have an solid infrastructure within the organisation, in order that he can make his decisions based on long-term results. So the cost-effectiveness is also an essential criteria for his evaluation of the alternative decisions he can make.

Social justice and political acceptability are also key elements in his judgement, because VluchtelingenWerk stand in the middle of society and is in some ways also dependent on political recognition and support.

In addition, he finds it very important to always stay calm and look to a problem from different perspectives. He is also very pragmatic in his approach.

Public and political opinion have a lot of influence on his work, because VW stands in the middle of diverse and nowadays a polarizing society. Sometimes the polarizing debates are difficult and spread a lot of anger among society, but he always tries to absorb it in a positive way, in order to use it as an advantage for his organizations aspirations.

In addition, he also wants to use the media attention in a positive way, because he sees it as an possibility to create more understanding and solidarity.

He has to make many considerations, especially for subjects that are politically sensitive. Very often there is a lot of political attention for these topic's, but the problem is that he can't achieve substantial results with only opinions and one-liners from politicians.

He needs to keep his organization running effectively, and therefore he needs to attract financial resources. And this is exactly where the problem often lies, because the Dutch state is cutting in budget's and is reticent to give the needed subsidy.

He senses substantial differences in the various political levels about the asylum polices. The local politics often lack the specific knowledge and facts to make decisive decisions in this field. Furthermore, they are very concerned over their own local affairs, like building a sports hall and creating public goods and services.

The national politics are mainly focussed on their own political profit, in order to become the most powerful political party, and keep the electorate satisfied. In other words, the only focus on the short term. And that's why, particularly at this moment, no substantial decisions are made on the refugee topic. The coalition between VVD and PVDA makes it even more complicated, but still as a CEO he has to deal with this complex political playground.

However, the provincial politics are more reliable and respected, because they focus on the long term results, instead of only react on atrocities. He also detects this stable process in the European Union; however, it is difficult to achieve uniformity between the 28 European member states. Hereby, he specially emphasizes the democratic principles should be respected, and that patience is key in these developments, in order to repel extreme movements and parties. He has a very intent relationship with the regional authorities and regards them as reliable and dedicated partner.

He must always be flexible and be prepared to work with other parties, because VluchtelingenWerk is not operating in the commercial markets. He needs to switch a lot between different levels, because in politics one is inclined to impeach each other. For example, the local authorities sometimes blame the European Union for a existing problem, while they can effectively solve the problems by implementing good polices.

He differentiates responsibility and accountability on different levels. For example, within the organisation he is responsible to ensure that there is enough money to pay the salaries of the employers. He has to run the company and to keep it financially healthy.

Moreover, imaging and profiling are key aspects of his job as a CEO, because the outside world has to recognize VWL as an reliable partner. In the media he tries to lay the focus on the positive advantages, rather than putting emphasis on the negative sides.

He regards the policy as an instrument to guide the organisation to the right direction, in order to achieve the most effective results.

He also states that there are clear economic benefits to the refugee crisis, because it revives the housing market and provides substantial employment in the construction sector. Populist movements often use the arguments that the refugees steal their jobs, so he has to prepare and have a strong reply to that.

Furthermore, he doesn't think that VluchtelingenWerk is an indispensable organization in the Netherlands, because other parties will fill the gap. However, VW has a lot of specialized knowledge, national networks and relations with third parties, because it stands very close to the target audience. In this way VW can distinguish itself from other companies and strengthen its position.

According to Mr. Baltussen the integration process proceeds smoother and more effectively, when refugees have a strong relationship with a Dutch native individual. He also states that there is a well-developed voluntary structure in the Netherlands. He mentions that in Germany there is not such a structure; as a consequence, all people point their fingers to the government. Therefore, a lot of volunteers in Germany want to help, but because it lacks an organizational structure, it's not as effective as it could be.

## Appendix A: Interview Questions

- 1: You are the CEO of VluchtelingenWerk. What do you like most about your work ?
  - What does give you the most energy ?
- 2: How long are you CEO of VluchtelingenWerk ?
- 3: What do you find most difficult in your work ?
- 4: How do you cope with responsibility and accountability ?
  - Does it cause obstacles and discouragement, or does it give you more motivation and freedom to take the best decisions ?
- 5: What are the Core tasks of VluchtelingenWerk ?
- 6: What is essential about VluchtelingenWerk ?
- 7: Is VluchtelingenWerk Indispensable in Dutch society ?
- 8: How do you collaborate with the other regional organs of VluchtelingenWerk ?
- 9: Do you use any kind of models in your work while making policy ?
- 10: Are you familiar with the Bardach model ?
- 11: Is there a difference between the procedures of making internal or external policy ?
- 12: To what extent do financial limits play a role ?
- 13: To what extent do time limits play a role ?
- 14: To what extent do rational limits play a role ?
- 15: Does the national policy influence your work ?
  - The VVD and PVDA want to implement a sober refugee policy. Effect ?
- 16: To what extent do the local, regional and national politics influence your work ?
- 17: Do the provincial politics in Limburg implement a certain policy that is compatible with the policy of VluchtelingenWerk Limburg ?