

Volunteers' Perceived Obligations in the Estonian Defence League

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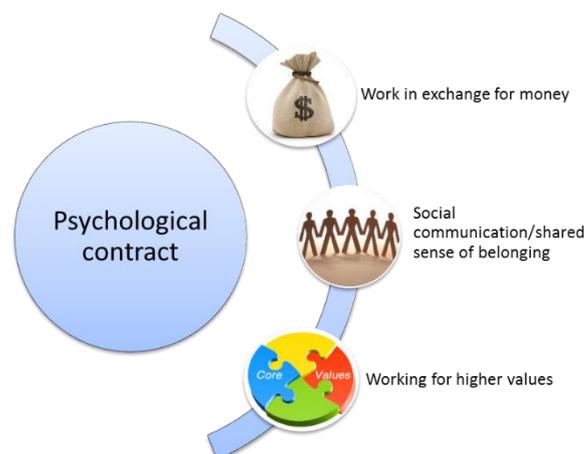
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Introduction

In recent years the volunteer sector's contribution to providing public services has increased—volunteer assistant police officers are working in the police force, rescue functions are partly performed by volunteer rescuers and the Estonian Defence League is responsible for taking over the central role in ensuring the territorial protection of the country. Considering today's geopolitical situation where the Ukrainian-Russian conflict threatens security in the entire Europe, the role of the Defence League has become more important than ever. Worry for the security of close ones has increased the number of voluntary members. When in 2013 the number of members in the Defence League and Women's voluntary defence organisation (*Naiskodukaitse*) increased by 500, in 2014 the same figure was already over a 1,000 and today there are more than 16,500 members in the Defence League and Women's voluntary defence organisation. Increase in the number of members in turn poses a challenge to the management of the Defence League, as it is their responsibility to ensure the smooth cooperation of the organisation and its members, as well as the skilful application of the volunteers' potential.

According to the social exchange theory employees have the tendency to compare their contribution into an organisation to the contribution returned by the organisation. The concept of a psychological contract is, in turn, based on the social exchange theory, which manifests in the employee's beliefs on mutual agreements with the organisation and their conditions, for example, working hours in exchange for fair remuneration, loyalty for career opportunities, helpfulness and camaraderie for mutual good relations.

FIGURE 1. The three components of a psychological contract: transaction-based, social, and value-based



The psychological contract has also been called a silent contract because its content is individual and subjective, and often not acknowledged by the parties involved. A survey carried out among Estonian enterprises in 2013 indicated that the employees' expectations and perceived obligations differ significantly

from what the leaders consider them to be.¹ At the same time, a person's commitment to the organisation, motivation, loyalty, enthusiasm and overall satisfaction all depend on the content of the psychological contract and fulfilment of expectations.² Acknowledging the content of the psychological contract and performing it becomes especially important in a volunteer organisation, where there are no written contracts and members contribute their free time and will without asking to be paid.

The content of a psychological contract largely depends on the surrounding environment, cultural, historical and organisational background, and other environmental factors.³ The current analysis brings out the perceived expectations and obligations of the voluntary members of the Estonian Defence League. It is the first research in this field and an interim result of a larger study focusing on voluntary military organisations. The interim study provides answers to the following questions.

- Which are the volunteers' expectations towards the organisation and which obligations do they perceive, or, in other words—what is the content of psychological contracts?
- Do the expectations and obligations comply with the mission of the organisation?
- Can something be done by the organisation to increase the volunteers' motivation and commitment through fulfilling psychological contracts, and what is it?

Content analysis was used in studying the psychological contracts. By nature, content analysis is processing, coding and grouping free responses given to open-ended questions on the basis of certain parameters. The main advantage of this type of analysis is that while the answers are processed, it is possible to group answers with similar content, at the same time paying attention to the few answers that come across rarely but may contain important aspects.

¹ Liina Randmann "Differences in Psychological Contracts in Estonia: The Role of Individual and Contextual Factors". Thesis for Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, Estonian Business School, 2013
http://ebs.ee/images/Teadus_ja_doktor/Publikatsioonid/PhD_theses/Randmann_Liina_PhD_2013.pdf

² Cyril van de Ven, Chapter 3E – The Psychological Contract: a Big Deal! Behavioural Sciences Service Centre, Ministry of Defence, The Hague, NLD, 2004
http://www.researchgate.net/publication/228428467_ETHE_PSYCHOLOGICAL_CONTRACT_A_BIG_DEAL

³ José M. Puente „The Psychological Contract“, HFM 180 Technical Course on Strategies to Address Recruiting and Retention in the Military, Madrid, October 2009
<http://dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a567630.pdf>

There were two questions in the questionnaire requiring free-form responses:

1. Which obligations do you feel you have towards the Estonian Defence League / Women's voluntary defence organization? Name at least three.
2. Which obligations do you think the Estonian Defence League / Women's voluntary defence organization has to you? Name at least three.

434 volunteer members from the Headquarters of the Estonian Defence League, Women's voluntary defence organization and different districts (regional unit of the Defence League) across Estonia participated in the survey.

1. Volunteer's obligations

434 volunteers responded to the first question—which obligations do you feel you have towards the Estonian Defence League / Women's voluntary defence organization? Name at least three—out of whom 305 were members of the Defence League and 129 members of the Women's voluntary defence organisation (Appendix 1, Table 1). Figure 2 shows obligations towards the Estonian Defence League perceived by the volunteers, it is followed by an explanation on a group basis.

FIGURE 2. Volunteers' obligations



1.1 Obligation to learn, participate and develop

The obligation to participate in training, military exercises and other events (competitions, leisure activities, meetings) was brought out the most often among the answers. Some answers mentioned that self-development needs to be sustainable. There were people who responded that they acquired knowledge according to the defence needs of the country (“obligation to learn how to wage war even better”, “gathering enough knowledge to protect the

country and ensure its safety”) but there were also those who found that they were obligated to acquire knowledge which would also help them in their daily activities (“implementing the knowledge in civilian life”).

1.2 Representing the organisation and passing on values

In this regard, the following characteristics were brought out: dignified behaviour, creating a positive image, being a role model for the young as well as other members of the Defence League (“I am a reflection of the organisation”), expressing and spreading patriotism (“instilling the faith in independent defence capabilities in others and raising their will to contribute to defending the country”, “showing my presence”), maintaining the good name of the Defence League (“flying the flag of the Defence League”, “wearing the uniform with pride”), spreading national-defence related ideas more widely, acknowledging and promoting the organisation and recruiting new members.

1.3 Preparedness for defence

The obligation to be ready for defence—for the defence of family, close ones, community, village and country—was brought out in the third set of answers (“in case of danger you need to contribute, not run away”, “being ready for quick action if a situation arises”, “defending the country if necessary”, “I am here to protect the independence of my country”). In some instances it was brought out that the obligation to contribute goes beyond national defence, and also requires participation in solving situations concerning natural disasters, crises and other emergency situations, involving the whole community (public and private sector, unions, groups of people).

1.4 Obligations deriving from regulations and positions

Here the respondents listed obligations deriving from laws, regulations and positions, as well as specific obligations delegated by a leader. The 48-hour participation obligation, the obligation to pay the membership fee and treat equipment with care and responsibility were highlighted, among other things.

1.5 Helping and teaching others

The obligation to contribute to educating the young was brought out here (“responsibility for raising competent future generations”), as well as passing on knowledge and experience to new members and subordinates. The obligation to diversify the organisation using personal knowledge from civilian life was also listed. Specific skills (medicine, information technology, shooting skills) as well as simply lending a helping hand when needed were named.

1.6 Responsibility, honesty, loyalty

The obligation to take responsibility was brought out the most often in this subgroup. It was followed by honesty and sincerity, loyalty, solidarity, faithfulness, responsibility (keeping one's promises), respect for one another (politeness, correct behaviour), loyalty to one's homeland and each other, patriotism and loyalty to ideas. Two answers also mentioned the obligation to keep the organisation from corrupting.

1.7 Time

The respondents considered it their obligation to find the time and be more active, in some cases it was pointed out that there is not enough time left over from family and work.

1.8 Team spirit and social life

The respondents felt the obligation to contribute to developing a team and promoting social life (creating a positive team spirit and sense of belonging, promoting cooperation, good relations). The obligation to remain motivated, motivate others, and contribute to creating a sense of belonging was pointed out.

1.9 Development of the organisation

Contributing to the development of the organisation, thinking together, making propositions, and bringing out new ideas were listed. One of the respondents felt the obligation to guide the development towards strengthening defence capabilities instead of performing ceremonies and focusing on external beauty (placing garlands and opening monuments).

1.10 Organising exercises and events

The obligations to organise or help in organising events, contribute to manning exercises, organise military competitions and youth events were brought out.

1.11 Do not perceive obligations

There were people who responded that they do not perceive having any obligations towards the Defence League ("no obligations because I am a volunteer") or could not bring out any ("no obligations yet, I just started"). The most remarkable aspect, however, is revealed from the answers where people claim that they do not perceive obligations because "everything I do, I do out of my free will, sincere wish and sense of mission". The lack of obligation was also explained by the fact that "the wish and habit of going and doing something for or in the name of the Defence League cannot be called an obligation, it has become my lifestyle" or "I do not feel any obligations towards the Defence League as an organisation. I do not feel that the Defence League is a brotherhood or an order, whose members should swear loyalty to the organisation. I take the responsibility of defending my home and family. The Defence League should grant me good possibilities for doing that by providing

training and machinery”, “I do not perceive any obligations, I do not feel that I should participate in every exercise and event if I have more important things in my personal life. And, yet, I am always there and present and I don't know why. It could be that I do it owing to my inner values”.

1.12 Health

Some of the answers brought out the obligation to keep oneself healthy both mentally and physically.

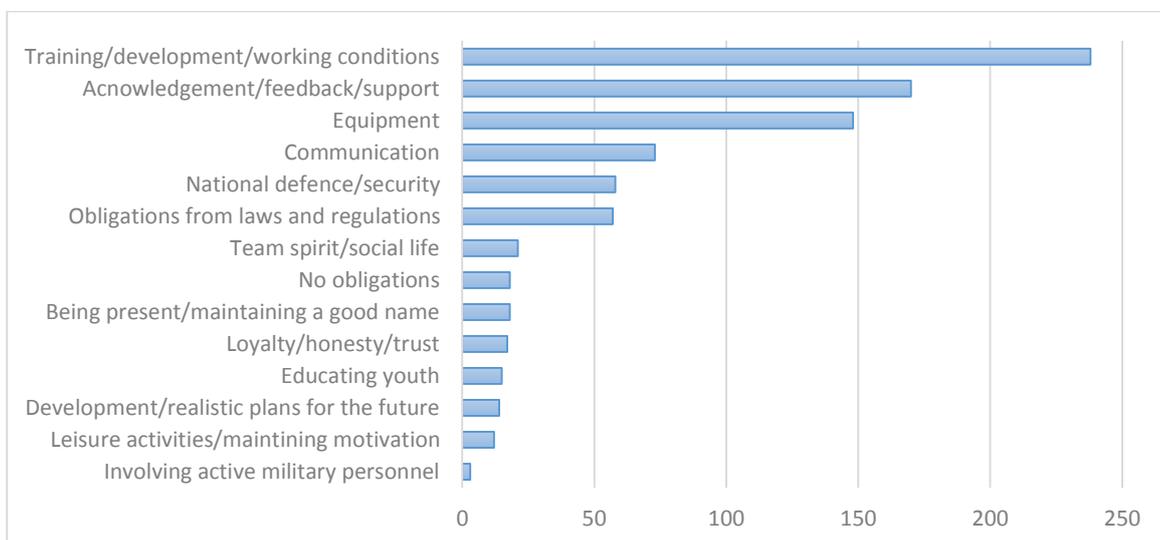
1.13 Cooperation

Some answers brought out the obligation to develop cooperation with local government units.

2. Obligations of the organisation

The second question in the same questionnaire — Which obligations do you think the Estonian Defence League / Women's voluntary defence organization has to you? Name at least three. — was answered by fewer respondents than the question concerning the perception about one's own obligations. 393 volunteers, of whom 279 were members of the Defence League and 114 members of the Women's voluntary defence organization (Appendix 1, table 2) described the obligations of the Defence League. Figure 3 shows the obligations volunteers perceive the Defence League to have, and it is followed by explanations on a group basis.

FIGURE 3. Obligations of the organisation



2.1. Training, possibilities for development and working conditions

Most of the respondents considered organising primary military training, training courses, military exercises and other events as well as offering possibilities for development and creating the corresponding working conditions to be the obligations of the organisation. Some of the respondents stressed training based on the needs of national defence and times of war (“the organisation should not be dealing with unrelated events, only combat training”) but, on the other hand, according to some respondents, the Defence League is obligated to provide knowledge outside the organisation and teach skills necessary in everyday life. In some cases, creating possibilities for practicing sports and maintaining physical fitness were brought out, as well as creating material and other possibilities for the duration of military exercises, for example, transporting to exercise sites, providing food and enough ammunition, and ensuring good health during exercises (providing medical aid).

2.2. Involvement, support and feedback

Here, it was mentioned that volunteers who contribute their scarce free time to the organisation should be treated with respect, taking into account flexible schedules and personal opportunities, skills and wishes, and they should be provided a role that is in accordance with the person's abilities (enabling the person to do what they have been trained for, for example, work as a paramedic). The principle of fair treatment on every level was brought out, also the obligations of recognition (maybe simply words of gratitude or a pat on the back), support (including moral support) and feedback on completed work ("so I know that I am needed"). It was mentioned that "actual work, not the time of being involved with the organisation should be recognised" and that "the Defence League must protect, defend, motivate and reward its active members and officials according to their activity and contribution", "without the volunteers, there would be no organisation." More personal communication and organisational activity to decrease the passivity of members ("the decrease in activity is accompanied by the danger of remaining passive for a longer period of time") were also expected.

2.3. Equipment

In case of equipment (uniform, armament, ammunition, communication equipment, protective equipment) it was brought out that at least bare necessities should be provided by the organisation (" We should not have to buy the boots ourselves", " We should receive a new uniform after completing the basic training"). Some of the respondents added that contemporary, continuous, relevant training and proper gear are necessary for completing the tasks set by the organisation.

2.4. Communication

Here, the obligation of the organisation to pass on information in a timely manner using electronic means of communication (e-mail) was brought out. Some of the respondents wished to receive information strictly relevant to them; others expected more information concerning different possibilities (changes and the decision-making process in the organisation, training possibilities and all sorts of events). The Defence League is obligated to "inform of the situation in the country and share information concerning the development of the organisation".

2.5. Providing a sense of security, national defence

Here, it was outlined that it is the obligation of the Defence League to defend statehood, provide a sense of security for the state's inhabitants, develop combat readiness, defend Estonia in case of danger, develop management capability so that it would function in a crisis, contribute more than is expected, and "avoid a new 1939." The prevention of war by demonstrating and increasing military capabilities, thus being "a deterring force of unknown size to the enemy" were listed as obligations. It was noted that the organisation

must “provide the opportunity of protecting one’s homeland” and suggestions were made on how to improve the managing structure so that the organisation would be more efficient and able to react more quickly in today’s circumstances (“Defence League as a tool”).

2.6. Obligations deriving from laws and regulations

Here, it was expected that the organisation would fulfil the obligations proceeding from laws and regulations, including reimbursing expenditure and providing social and legal safeguards but also providing compensation in the amount of the average salary in case of longer (week-long) training gatherings. The existence of clear and specific goals was also brought out.

2.7. Team spirit and social life

Here, the respondents found that it is the duty of the organisation to ensure the vitality and good cooperation of teams, and to facilitate a sense of belonging by supporting circles of friends.

2.8. No obligations

Here, the answers were “I don’t know”, or “none, since I just joined”. At the same time, the following comments deserve attention: “I have no sense of obligation towards the Defence League because I am a volunteer and perform my obligations with great joy and put my heart in them”; “It is a voluntary organisation. When I became a member, I did not expect the organisation to fulfil any obligations towards myself. The first brief contacts have given me positive experiences. This means that the Defence League is well-prepared and I do not know of any obligations to list here”; “As far as I am concerned, the Defence League has fulfilled its obligations”. One of the respondents expressed that the Defence League seems to have more rights than obligations.

2.9. Being present and maintaining a good name

Here, the obligation of showing the existence of the organisation to the community and arousing interest in becoming a member was brought out, but also maintaining and improving reputation, for example, “ensuring that the Defence League is well-known and maintaining the continuing trend that the organisation is viewed to have a positive image in the society”. The reputation was associated with one’s own reputation as a member (“improving the reputation of the Defence League, including me”, “ensuring the good reputation of the Defence League means ensuring my good reputation”).

2.10. Honesty, loyalty, trust

Here, the obligations of the organisation to be honest, loyal, transparent and open, trust its members’ competence and not grow corrupt were brought out.

2.11. Educating

The obligation of the organisation to instil patriotism in the young was stressed here.

2.12. Development

It was suggested that the Defence League needs to be capable of adapting to changes and developments coming from the surrounding environment, thereby ensuring continuity and the ability to adapt. Deriving from the aspect of the state's capabilities, the regional differences of different districts need to be taken into account. Certain and realistic future plans as well as clear aims were stressed.

2.13. Leisure activities, motivation

It was pointed out that the organisation should offer variety, adventures, different activities, useful ways of spending free time, and try to make the tasks motivating and the activities well-considered ("trying to ensure that being a member of this organisation would continue to be exciting and motivating according to possibilities").

2.14. Involving active military personnel

It was mentioned that the organisation should hire competent and active paid employees, who would contribute their free time as needed, in addition to the working hours of the volunteers, owing to their sense of mission.

Conclusion and findings

“Both have the same obligations! To defend the Republic of Estonia against enemies; to defend the local population; to pass on knowledge and skills to the younger and less experienced.”

“I have to participate in training to justify that equipment was given to me. I have to maintain and develop further the level of my training so that my fellow fighters could depend on me in battle. I have to be ready to step up when the Defence League needs me to fulfil the tasks it has been created for.”

One of the goals of the coalition agreement of the current government coalition signed in 2015 is to increase the number of the volunteer members of the Defence League up to 30, 000. Although the main reason for becoming a member is the wish to contribute to national defence and the most important motivating basic values are defending one's family and close ones, and guaranteeing the security of the country, increasing the contribution of existing members by encouraging them to be more active is as important as recruiting new members. A member's activity can be influenced through the perception of mutual obligations—the more the Defence League is aware of its members' expectations and their reasons, the more skilfully the expectations can be fulfilled, and, in turn, the members' perceived obligations used to the advantage of the organisation.

Mutual communication plays an important role in raising awareness. It is clear that these results also allow drawing conclusions based on the answers of those respondents who are presumably more active in the organisation. Therefore, it is important that information regarding volunteers (events, exercises) would reach the less active members as well in a timely manner.

The responses also highlight a lack of time (perception of obligation to “find the time”); the Defence League also has to consider regional differences between remote areas and population centres, commuting, work migration and competitive hobbies (sports, hunting, etc.). The Commanders of districts also work in their free time and of their free will, while the provision of information to units as well as the members' satisfaction with the organisation is directly dependent on them. Since the Defence League has an important role in increasing the level of security of the country, and the responsibility for ensuring territorial protection, it could be considered that the position of the Commander of a district could be a paid one.

However, most often the volunteers brought out their obligation to participate in military exercises and other events, and continue self-development, expecting the organisation to offer opportunities for development and participating in events, involvement; and to provide feedback and equipment in return.

Both new members and volunteers who have been in the Defence League for a longer period have experienced problems with elementary equipment. Some of the members buy equipment themselves but not all of them have the possibility to contribute to the organisation financially.

Since filling out fields concerning mutual obligations was voluntary, it was an interesting fact that the number of obligations members listed and perceived to have was greater than the number of obligations they perceived the organisation to have. Based on that, it could be concluded that, first and foremost, volunteers perceive their own obligations and only then do they expect the organisation to fulfil its obligations. In his inauguration address, President J. F Kennedy addressed citizens by saying: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country."⁴ This guideline is an important element of success—furthering and maintaining it is the obligation and challenge of paid personnel.

The Defence League is a voluntary organisation based on values, whose mission is to maintain the independence of the country and guarantee the security of the population. The perception of being responsible for the safety of the country and the population is reflected clearly in the respondents' answers, indicating that today's volunteers are ready to fulfil this mission. In return, the Defence League is expected to provide the possibilities and conditions for fulfilling the mission. These aspects should be taken into consideration when preparing the development plan of the Defence League for 2016–2026.

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⁴ "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." J.F. Kennedy Inaugural Address, 20 January 1961, <http://www.ifklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/BqXIEM9F4024ntFI7SVAjA.aspx>

Appendix 1. The respondents' background

TABLE 1. The respondents' background (volunteers' obligations)

Division within the organisation	Members of the Defence League 305, members of the Women's voluntary defence organization 129
Age	19 members below 20 years, 221 members aged 20–39, 164 members aged 40–59, 30 members aged 60 and above
Length of service	51 members less than one year, 192 members 1–10 years, 124 members 10–20 years, 67 members over 20 years
Education	higher 223, secondary 184, basic education 27
Family status	committed (marriage / cohabitation) 321, single (alone) 113
Rank	Private / district unit member 294, officer / non-commissioned officer 140

TABLE 2. The respondents' background (obligations of the organisation)

Division within the organisation	Members of the Defence League 279, members of the Women's voluntary defence organization 114
Age	18 members below 20 years, 202 members aged 20–39, 145 members aged 40–59, 28 members aged 60 and above
Length of service	48 members less than one year, 173 members 1–10 years, 115 members 10–20 years, 57 members over 20 years
Education	higher 210, secondary 161, basic education 22
Family status	committed (marriage / cohabitation) 289, single (alone) 104
Rank	Private / district unit member 270, officer / non-commissioned officer 123