

# The Expectations of the Members of the Aspiration Country's Defense Forces towards Joining NATO

**Jaan SILVET**

Tartu University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Estonia

E-mail: jsilvet@gmail.com

Telephone: +372 56350055

## *Abstract*

*NATO has an open door policy on enlargement. Any European country in a position to further the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area can become a member of the Alliance, when invited to do so by the existing member countries. Joining NATO will certainly change the aspiration country's defense forces. The current paper analyzes the expectations that the members of aspiration country's defense forces had before joining NATO. Over 800 respondents from the aspiration country's defense forces participated in the survey. In addition, there were conducted 5 interviews with the defense forces top executives in order to understand their perspectives on future organizational developments. As a result, there exist a gap between the expectation of top executives and other respondents. Top executives had considerably high expectations on the change of mindsets and culture of the defense forces, whereas most of the other respondents expected their equipment and everyday working conditions to improve. The analyses show also some evidence of differences in expectations of respondents between different services and agencies. The article discusses the reasons for these differences to have happened and proposes some suggestions for both NATO agencies and member state's officials to improve the integration process with NATO.*

**Keywords:** *organizational change, expectations, NATO, mergers, self-fulfilling prophecy, learned helplessness*

**JEL classification:** H11, M14

## **Introduction**

NATO has an open door policy on enlargement. Any European country in a position to further the principles of the North Atlantic Treaty and contribute to security in the Euro-Atlantic area can become a member of the Alliance, when invited to do so by the existing member countries.

After the end of the Cold War, three waves of enlargement – in 1999, 2004 and 2009 – have passed, and at least one wave might come up soon. For the accession countries, joining NATO usually means a challenging transformation process. During that process, the expectations of the employees regarding the

forthcoming change have been mostly discarded or neglected. In order to build up a concept regarding the expectations within a joining country, this study would contribute in creating the practical framework before the next enlargement. As NATO still continues its enlargement processes, it is crucial to integrate the lessons learned from previous enlargements into the next rounds. The study looks the accession expectations from the organizational point of view and doesn't go to the state level.

The aim of the current study is to systematize the expectations that the members of the aspiration country's defense forces had towards the forthcoming organizational change while joining NATO, and to explain the differences in expectations.

### **1. Theoretical framework on the expectations towards the organizational change**

Psychologists have defined expectations in three ways – as an individual's subjective probability that an act will be followed by a particular outcome; as the individual's subjective probability that a given state either does or will exist; and as one person's belief that another individual will behave in a certain way (Woodman & Tolchinsky 1982). The studies on expectations fall into three broad areas each of them having the specific research questions in focus – to predict the outcome, to explain the situation in case of discrepancies between the expectations and the reality (Woodman & Tolchinsky, 1982; King 1974); and to deal with the question of controllability of the outcome and its implication for the expectations (Hayes 1991).

The first area of study – predicting the outcome - comprises many studies concerning self-fulfilling prophecy and the Pygmalion effect (Eden 1984, 1988, 1990, Henshel 1982, King 1973, 1974, Livingston 2000). Merton defined the self-fulfilling prophecy as initially false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior, which makes the originally false conception come true (Merton 1948). The Pygmalion effect is a special case of the self-fulfilling prophecy: Pygmalion was a sculptor in Greek mythology who carved a statue of a beautiful woman that subsequently was brought to life. The essence of this concept is that one person, by his effort and will, can transform another person. There are two meta-analyses on the matter that summarize the main findings (Kierein & Gold 2000, McNatt 2000).

The second area of study in the organizational research on the expectations – explaining the discrepancies between the expectations and the reality - comprises at least three different theories explaining the discrepancy effects of expectations – cognitive dissonance or assimilation theory; contrast theory; and assimilation-contrast theory (Woodman & Tolchinsky 1982). Cognitive dissonance theory posits that if there is a disparity between expectations for outcomes and the objective outcomes of the intervention, the individual is stimulated to reduce the psychological tension by changing perception of the objective outcomes to bring those more into line with initial expectations (Aronson

& Carlsmith 1962). Contrast theory assumes that if the event fails to meet expectations the individual will evaluate the outcome less favorably than if the person had no prior expectations for it (Cardozo 1965). Assimilation-contrast theory posits that performance differing only slightly from one's expectations tends to result in displacement of perceptions toward expectations (assimilation), while large variances between one's expectations and actuality tend to be exaggerated (contrast) (McClelland *et al* 1953). In the context of organizational change, the management of discrepancies between the expectations and the reality will be especially important in the cases where the organization has failed to achieve the expected outcomes, i.e. where the discrepancy is high. Otherwise the dissatisfaction of employees might be leveraged and could therefore cause a snowball effect.

The third area of the expectation studies – controllability of the outcomes – bases on the concept of learned helplessness. This theory states that when individuals are subjected to events, which are uncontrollable (that is when the probability of an outcome is the same irrespective of how they respond), they will develop expectations of non-contingency between response and outcome and these expectations will produce motivational and cognitive deficits (Hayes 1991). The motivational deficit means that subjects become passive when they experience uncontrollable events and this passivity continues over successive trials. The cognitive deficit involves a failure to learn that responding can be successful even after a response has been made that is successful in controlling the outcome. In case of an organizational change, the area of the controllability of the outcomes relates to the involvement of employees into the change planning and management processes. The more the employees feel that they had some control over the change processes the more they are motivated to participate in it.

The concept of expectations also relate to the theories of motivation. The main concept of expectancy theories of motivation is that the motivation of an individual to exert a specific amount of effort is a function of the expectation that the effort will result in a specific outcome and the sum of valence (personal utilities or satisfaction) that the individual expects to derive from the outcomes (Woodman & Tolchinsky 1982).

There have been several developments in the expectancy theory: first, the distinction between first level and second level outcomes (i.e. goal accomplishments and extrinsic rewards); second, identification of intrinsic sources of valences; third, the distinction between expectancy I, i.e. the subject's probability estimate that his/her effort will lead to first level outcomes, and expectancy II, i.e. the subject's probability estimate that first level outcome will lead to extrinsic rewards; and fourth, the incorporation of additional variables in the model to elaborate in explaining specific job behavior, such as abilities to explain job performance, and the equity concept to explain job satisfaction (Wahba, House, 1972). In a way the expectancy theories of motivation sum up the three areas of expectation studies. However, the studies conducted in this category remain mainly on the individual level and deal with interpersonal interactions. In case of organizational change, however, the focus

should be more on the organizational aspects like the differences between various levels in the organization (e.g. superiors and subordinates, support functions and core functions etc).

## 2. Methods of the study

### 2.1 Participants

The survey covered all the services and agencies of the aspiration country's defense forces. The survey was conducted in March 2004, i.e. before the enlargement of NATO.

Altogether, 569 subjects (449 men and 116 women, 4 participants did not indicate their gender) participated in the survey. It included 237 superiors (having at least one subordinate) and 316 subordinates. 16 participants didn't indicate their position. The average age of the participants was 32,6 years (SD = 10,3), ranging from 20 to 69 years. 13 participants did not indicate their age. The breakdown by age groups is given in table 1.

**Breakdown of participants by age groups**

**Table 1**

Age groups	Number of respondents	Percentage
- 30 years	310	55,76%
31-40	133	23,92%
41-50	76	13,67%
51-	37	6,65%
Total	556	

In addition, 5 interviews were conducted with the top executives of the defense forces. It included the Chief of Defense, Chief of General Staff, former Chief of General Staff, Chief of Navy and Chief of Defense League.

### 2.2 Methods of analyses

The survey had 30 statements and 7 open-ended questions. The current study concentrated on the responses of the 2 open-ended questions – “The accession to NATO influences the defense forces in the following areas:”, and “What are your expectations regarding the NATO accession?” The 30 statements have been analyzed in my previous study regarding the structure of expectations in the context of organizational change. The results of that study showed that the major categories of expectations in this defense forces were: personal development, organizational development, and the relations to the strategic environment. The responses of these 2 open-ended questions were systematized and structured based on these major categories.

The results from open-ended questions were compared and analyzed with the interviews conducted with the top 5 executives. The method was qualitative as it tried to understand and explain the differences in expectations.

### 3. Results

The main expectation of the top executives was that the identity of the members of defense forces would change. They expected that the way the employees would define themselves in 3-5 years period was not anymore through local but rather through global terms - if NATO has a problem outside of the state's territory, then the employees should feel that it is their problem as well. The expressed ideas were the following: "NATO and our policies and activities should be combined in every branch and every department"; "every platoon commander should understand that we belong to NATO"; "our identity will be broader"; "our center of gravity should shift from our own security to the world's security and to the security of NATO. This idea was dominantly present during all the conducted interviews; therefore, it could be taken as one of the most important statements of the top executives while talking about joining NATO.

The next often mentioned topic stated by the top executives was the organizational development. It was brought up as follows: "besides the implementation of plans we should bring in the topic of organizational development"; "we should first define our role and functions inside NATO, and after that we should determine the organizational structure, which is best for these roles and functions"; "we should meet NATO standards in our activities". This topic was expected to come out before conducting the present research because the structure of the defense forces and different tasks from Partnership Goals were common topics in almost every meeting with NATO officials before joining NATO. The first Force Structure Review was finished in 2001. The second and even more comprehensive plan was about to be approved by the government and sent to NATO.

The issue of employees' well-being was brought out quite rarely. One top executive mentioned that "we should from now on pay more attention to our employees as some of them haven't even been able to take out their vacations due to their duties and have worked with the high sense of responsibility." Another top executive remarked that "we should develop our officers in order to give them possibilities to get good experiences from international missions and international staffs". The focus of top executives was clearly more on external relations, identity change and organizational matters rather than on personnel development matters. Probably they didn't see the latter topic as an issue as compared to former topics.

The employees had a totally different focus. Without any doubt, the biggest expectation of the employees was the rise of their salary. In total, 127 respondents out of 569 mentioned it in their answers. No other topic could get even close to that number. The next often mentioned topic – better training – was mentioned by 62 respondents. Cooperation on the international level, i.e. the topic

most important for top executives, was mentioned only by 25 respondents. Therefore, it could be assumed that the hottest issue for employees was not the NATO or the integration efforts, but their own well-being. In addition to salary, 20 respondents expected their working environment to improve and 42 expected their personal professional and career opportunities to increase. These numbers cannot be added up as many respondents who expected for better working environment or/and better career opportunities, had mentioned also the need for better salary. Nevertheless, the whole picture showed very clear evidence that the enhancements in personal development category were the biggest expectation at all.

The next often mentioned topic by the employees was organizational development. Within this topic, the most often mentioned subjects were:

**Subjects under the organizational development topic**

**Table 2**

<b>Subjects</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
training	62
equipment	37
vehicles	19
exercises	15
organizational structure	13
weaponry	12

Although there were no absolute division among the respondents on these topics, the general patterns showed some evidence that these topics were usually service specific, i.e. the respondents from navy expected new ships, respondents from army expected their weaponry to improve and employees from logistic center expected better vehicles and weaponry. As training was the biggest peace time task for all the services and agencies, the high number of expectations regarding the training is understandable. To generalize this result, it can be said that the expectations regarding the organizational development was related to everyday working environment of the respondents.

Looking at the results, it can be said that there exist a gap between the expectations of the top executives and the expectations of the employees regarding the accession to NATO.

**4. Discussion**

Comparing the results obtained from the interviews and from questionnaires, it can be concluded that the organization has big communication problems, both in terms of communicating the vision of its top executives to employees, and also understanding the problems of its employees. Identity change due to accession to NATO hasn't been probably even communicated or has done in a way that was not convincing for employees. It might be also that the personal level problems of the employees were so deep that they were already inclined to

believe that the outer environment would improve their working conditions. It was unlikely that these issues haven't reached to the top executives; however, it seems that these signals were not taken seriously enough. This issue emphasizes the theoretical gap of expectation studies – in the context of the organization the expectations of the individuals should also be in harmony with each other in order to reach common goals.

The expectation gap might have occurred because there were quite big changes in work routines during the accession period; new way of thinking had to be implemented in quite a short period of time. During the Partnership and Review Process (PARP) NATO assigned aspiration countries to prepare several reports. The information that was requested by NATO was not easily obtainable from the existing databases. Therefore, it demanded quite a heavy workload from staff officers. In addition, some staff officers didn't possess sufficient English language skills to understand the requirements; therefore it imposed more workload for those who had the necessary languages skills. In brief, the accession process kept higher staffs under constant time pressure, so they had very little time for the communication inside the organization. This might be one of the reasons for this gap. It shows that during the accession period besides the reports on weaponry, personnel, finances etc, NATO could ask for information about the expectation of employees regarding the accession or to force the higher staffs otherwise to plan some of their time on change management.

Another generalization that could be made based on the expectations of the respondents in the category of organizational development (both from the interviews and from the questionnaires) is that the expectations were usually quite narrowly concentrated on the everyday work environment and very little on the organization as a whole. The top executives who had very close contacts with NATO agencies and had to organize every day their staffs in a way that could meet the required standards, had the expectations that their people should have the ability to think on the NATO Military Committee level and should think during their everyday work in the context of NATO. The people on the ground, who didn't have everyday contacts with their NATO partners, didn't probably even know what to expect from NATO. The only knowledge and basis for their expectations came from their own contacts with NATO and this was mainly on the level of joint exercises or individual trainings. These topics were also reflected in their responses. Interestingly enough, the international missions were mentioned together with the higher salary and 19 out of 22 respondents, who mentioned the international missions in their responses, were troops from army, i.e. from the service, which mainly covered the international missions. The respondents from navy expected more joint exercises as they already held international mine hunting exercises every year. The respondents from air force expected that they could get an integrated air picture from NATO etc. Basically, the contacts that the employees had had during the accession period with NATO determined their expectations on the organizational level. Therefore, in future accessions, NATO could try to get connected with as many levels and agencies of the aspiration countries defense

forces as possible in order to make the employees understand what to expect from NATO. Certainly, this should be the task of higher staffs, but as higher staffs are very busy with their own changes, it might be beneficial if NATO agencies instructed the defense forces on this level.

The issue of gap in expectations and understandings is an interesting side-result of the present survey. Although in any bigger organization the information flow is far from perfect, the occurred situation should have raised an alarm in the heads of top executives. The state's economy in general was growing quite fast and the average salaries in the state were growing even faster. As employees expected higher salaries because of the accession to NATO, it might mean that they didn't have much hope from defense forces itself anymore. It reflects the theory on learned helplessness in a way that employees didn't perceive anymore the contingency of asking for better working conditions and actually receiving them from their own organization. Although in any organization people want to get higher salaries, it is unlikely that accession to NATO could affect the level of salaries in the defense forces. The defense budget is decided by the state and the only area that NATO could support financially was investments in the areas where NATO and the member state had common interests (e.g. air fields, radars etc). Therefore, it can be said that these kinds of expectations were ungrounded and they couldn't have come from higher staffs or from NATO officials. It is difficult to prove the direct impact of these unmet expectations on work performance and/or motivation; however, at the end of 2006 the chief of personnel department in general staff had to admit publicly in the biggest daily newspaper that the defense forces are running out of officers. In addition to officers, there was a high deficit of other employees as well. The main reason for the employees leaving the defense forces was salary. Defense forces don't talk very often publicly about their problems; therefore it can be assumed that in that case the problems have reached to a critical level. The result supports the contrast theory in a sense that the respondents might have exaggerated the variances between their expectations and the actuality. Therefore the situation for them might have looked even worse than it actually was. The question remains – could this situation be avoided. As the survey was conducted in the beginning of 2004 and the article in the newspaper was published in 2006, it can be assumed that the non-contingency between the desired outcome of employees and their efforts lasted at least for 3 years. The motivational and cognitive deficits that occurred due to this non-contingency might have led to the situation where it attracted already the public's attention. My assumption is that although public service can never compete with private sector on the level of income, some of the problems could have certainly be avoided if top management had asked for and dealt with the expectations of their employees.

One reason of this gap might come from the previous weak connectedness to NATO structures. There were only a few structures that had an everyday link to some NATO bodies. Mainly the general staff dealt with NATO everyday planning activities, sometimes service staffs were included. In army, out of seven training centers, only one center dealt with peace keeping missions. Another trained

specialists for missions, but the others had a very weak linkage to NATO. Therefore, the understanding of being the NATO member state in general stayed on the political level, i.e. it meant that NATO will provide the security guarantee for the state. No other strategic level visions were given in the answers of the employees.

### **Conclusions**

The aim of the current study was to systematize the expectations that the members of the aspiration country's defense forces had towards the forthcoming organizational change while joining NATO and to explain the differences in expectations.

The expectations of the top management differed a lot from the expectations of the employees. The top management was more focused on the identity change, whereas employees expected their everyday working conditions to improve. The most common expectation of the employees was the rise of salary. Such a difference in expectations and therefore probably also the level of unmet expectations on the employees level might have caused the situation where the defense forces had to admit publicly in 2006 that there was a high deficit of officers wanting to work for defense forces.

The result shows that there was a gap between the expectations and understandings of top management and the employees. It indicates that the communication inside the organization while preparing for the change was not sufficient. The ideas of the top management either didn't reach to the lower levels or were not convincing. One reason for this gap of expectations and understandings might also be due to very high time pressure for the higher staffs during the accession period. The higher staffs might not have been ready for such an amount of new requirements, so they were busy fulfilling them instead of selling their ideas to employees. What NATO side could do during the next enlargement processes is to interact more directly with all levels of the aspiration countries defense forces so that the understanding of NATO system would be easier to explain.

In conclusion, during the big organizational changes the time pressure for the top management, which is conducting the change, takes a lot of energy and doesn't allow dedicating sufficient time on communicating the change. Therefore, the expectations towards the outcome of that change might differ significantly along the organizational hierarchy. If such a gap is big, then the consequences of unmet expectations might lead to organizational crisis in terms of leaving the job or unfulfilling the organizational tasks. Therefore, if the management knows better the expectations of the members of the organization, then it is possible to be proactive in foreseeing the forthcoming challenges.

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