

## Organizational Factors and Safety Culture in Retaining Professional Soldiers: Evidence from The Lithuanian Armed Forces

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Linking safety culture and organizational behaviour with personnel sustainability this research examines the organizational factors influencing the retention of soldiers in professional military service within the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Retaining experienced and motivated personnel is a key determinant of military readiness and operational safety. The Lithuanian Army faces persistent challenges related to personnel turnover and decreasing commitment among professional soldiers, which may affect the stability and resilience of defence structures. The study aims to identify and model the organizational and psychosocial determinants that contribute to long-term retention in professional military service and to understand how these elements interact within the broader framework of military safety culture.

A quantitative research design was applied, using a structured questionnaire administered to professional soldiers from various units of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The survey measured key dimensions such as work environment quality, professional development, organizational support, job satisfaction, and personal values. The reliability of the measurement scales was verified using Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.679 to 0.822, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The collected data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to explore the relationships among the identified constructs.

The findings reveal that soldiers' decisions to remain in service are strongly influenced by organizational climate, perceived leadership support, opportunities for professional growth, and alignment between individual values and institutional mission. A positive safety culture, characterized by trust, open communication, and shared responsibility, was found to significantly enhance both motivation and retention. The developed conceptual model demonstrates how organizational factors contribute to sustaining human reliability and operational effectiveness within military systems.

**Keywords:** Organizational factors, safety culture, professional military service, work environment, structural equation modelling.

### 1. Introduction

Retaining professional soldiers is a critical challenge for modern militaries worldwide, where stability, readiness, and institutional knowledge hinge on sustained personnel commitment. Despite increasing professionalization and focus on operational safety, Western armed forces, including smaller NATO members like Lithuania, continue to confront voluntary turnover that

undermines readiness and escalates recruitment costs (Dabeck, 2025). The Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF), in particular, have seen a notable rise in departures among officers (+25% over three years) and non-commissioned (NCOs) officers (+6%), highlighting persistent organizational retention deficits despite successful recruitment drives (National Audit Office of Lithuania, 2025).

Academic and institutional studies underscore that organizational context, psychosocial climate, and congruence between individual and institutional values substantially influence soldier retention decisions (Bekesiene & Navickienė, 2025). Their recent empirical work involving 276 Lithuanian active-duty personnel demonstrates that ‘value of interest’, representing meaningful, purposeful engagement, directly predicts perceptions of employer attractiveness, including social, economic, and developmental dimensions. Complementing these findings, Kanapeckaitė et al. (2024) underscore the importance of cohesive teams and supportive peers in bolstering psychological resilience, commitment, and general well-being among professional soldiers.

Theoretical debates persist in the field: while some scholars emphasize structural and climate-related factors such as organizational support and leadership (Allen et al., 2003; Beus et al., 2023), others argue for a deeper understanding of generational shifts, especially among Millennials, whose retention hinges on self-realization, autonomy, and socio-cultural alignment rather than traditional military values (Balsys, 2022). Integrating safety culture into this framework, studies from other militaries suggest that leadership attentiveness to safety, risk perception, and open communication fortify both operational performance and personnel retention (Schüler et al., 2019; Wei & Kuo, 2023).

This study addresses critical gaps by examining how safety climate, safety leadership, organizational climate, perceived support, and value alignment shape retention intention in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Using structural modelling and validated measures, it introduces a conceptual framework linking organizational behaviour and safety culture to retention.

## 2. Literature Review

Retaining experienced and motivated professional soldiers is central to force readiness, operational safety, and the resilience of defence structures. In Lithuania, performance-audit evidence indicates that while volunteer recruitment has improved, retention of officers and NCOs remains a persistent challenge, with increased departures undermining workforce stability and complicating long-term staffing goals (National Audit Office of Lithuania,

2025). These pressures echo newer Lithuanian research showing that aligning organizational values with soldiers’ expectations, such as meaningful work, development paths, is increasingly critical for commitment and long-term service decisions (Bekesiene & Navickienė, 2025). Building on this context, the present study links safety culture and organizational behaviour to retention intention, using validated instruments summarized in the previous study’s measurement framework.

### 2.1. Safety Culture and Safety Climate

Safety culture, as shared values and practices prioritizing risk management, has been linked to personnel sustainability in military contexts. Evidence from an adapted NOSACQ-50 confirms a multidimensional safety climate in garrison settings, encompassing management priority, empowerment, justice, commitment, and trust (Schüler et al., 2019). Complementary studies show that safety leadership enhances risk perception and performance, with safety culture mediating these effects, creating conditions that support retention (Wei & Kuo, 2023). Together, these findings justify modeling Safety Climate and Safety Leadership as key drivers of soldiers’ intention to remain in professional service.

### 2.2. Challenges in Leadership, Organizational Climate, and Psychosocial Well-Being

Beyond safety-specific practices, broader organizational climate, cohesion, trust, belonging, and engagement, predicts psychological resilience and organizational commitment among Lithuanian professional soldiers, with team characteristics enhancing resilience and, in turn, well-being and commitment (Kanapeckaitė & Bagdžiūnienė, 2024). Additional analyses from Lithuania highlight sociocultural stressors such as inhibition and limited self-actualization that can undermine integration and commitment, highlighting the need for climate interventions that promote openness and fairness (Balsys, 2022).

### 2.3. Lack of Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support explains how the belief that one’s organization values contributions and cares about well-being has long been tied to job satisfaction, commitment, and

reduced withdrawal. Foundational work shows that supportive human resources (HR) practices (participation, fairness of rewards, growth opportunities) build perceived organizational support, which then mediates relations with satisfaction and commitment, ultimately reducing turnover (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986). In Lithuania, audit findings specifically call out career development and incentives as under-provisioned, further motivating POS-oriented interventions (National Audit Office of Lithuania, 2025).

#### 2.4. Affective Commitment and Value Congruence

Affective commitment and value congruence reflect soldiers' emotional attachment and the fit between personal values and the mission. Evidence shows that alignment increases discretionary effort and persistence, buffering turnover intentions (Allen et al., 2003). Contemporary Lithuanian work also documents generational value shifts, such as Millennials' emphasis on meaningfulness and self-realization, affecting integration and retention (Balsys, 2022). Recent empirical data in Lithuania indicate that the "value of interest" (meaningful, intellectually engaging work) predicts perceptions of key employer attributes (social, economic, developmental, application), supporting attractiveness and retention (Bekesienė & Navickienė, 2025).

#### 2.5. Sensitivity to Retention Intention

Retention intention in NATO military institutions is highly sensitive to both organizational and personal factors. Emotional attachment to service, perceived fairness, and fulfilment of psychological contracts significantly influence whether personnel remain committed. Studies show that family support and work-life balance amplify retention sensitivity, particularly among senior officers and specialized roles (Office of People Analytics (DoD), 2025; Kraak et al., 2025). Furthermore, strategic initiatives such as flexible career paths and family assistance programs demonstrate that retention intention responds positively to policies addressing lifestyle compatibility and professional development (Van Dyck, 2024). These findings underscore the need for adaptive retention strategies tailored to individual and institutional needs.

Together, these discussed findings suggest that reinforcing personal attachment, ensuring life satisfaction, and honouring stated commitments can effectively boost retention intentions in NATO forces.

### 3. Aim and Hypotheses

Based on prior empirical and theoretical studies, a theoretical model was developed to examine the factors that shape soldiers' intention to remain in service. The conceptual model was designed to test the direct effects of safety climate, safety leadership, organizational climate, perceived organizational support, and affective commitment and value congruence on retention intention. These constructs were selected because earlier research in military and high risk work settings has shown that safety related perceptions, leadership behaviour, organizational environment, perceived support, and value alignment are closely linked to motivation and long term commitment.

The primary aim of this study is to develop and empirically validate a conceptual model that explains personnel sustainability within professional military service in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Specifically, the research examines how safety culture and key organizational and psychosocial factors influence soldiers' intention to remain in service (Fig.1).

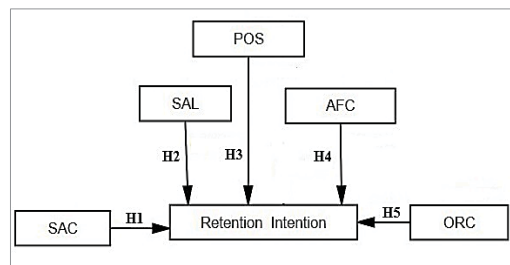


Fig. 1. Conceptual background: Safety Climate (SAC), Safety Leadership (SAL), Organizational Climate (ORC), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Affective Commitment & Value Congruence (AFC).

The conceptual model assumes that each organizational and value based factor has an independent and positive influence on retention intention. Accordingly, five hypotheses were formulated (Fig. 1):

**H1:** Safety Climate (SAC) has a positive effect on Retention Intention.

**H2:** Safety Leadership (SAL) positively influences Retention Intention.

**H3:** Perceived Organizational Support (POS) positively affects Retention Intention.

**H4:** Affective Commitment and Value Congruence (AFC) have a positive effect on Retention Intention.

**H5:** Organizational Climate (ORC) has a positive effect on Retention Intention.

Retention Intention was positioned as the main outcome variable in the model, reflecting soldiers' planned continuation of military service.

#### 4. Methodology

The analysis was based on 287 completed questionnaires obtained from active members of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Participants represented a range of military units and functional areas. Data collection took place between August and September 2025 using both electronic and printed survey forms. Participation was voluntary, and anonymity was guaranteed in order to promote open and accurate responses.

The survey questionnaire was designed to evaluate key constructs acknowledged in the literature: *Safety Climate*, *Safety Leadership*, *Organizational Climate*, *Perceived Organizational Support*, *Affective Commitment & Value Congruence*, and *Retention Intention*. Items for each construct were adapted from authorized scales used in earlier scholarships to ensure reliability and validity.

*Safety Climate* (SAC) was adapted from the Nordic Occupational Safety Climate Questionnaire (NOSACQ-50), which is widely validated for assessing organizational safety culture. For this study, the original 50-item instrument was condensed to 6 core items that best reflect the Lithuanian Armed Forces' operational context while maintaining conceptual integrity (Schüler et al., 2019).

*Safety Leadership* (SAL) was assessed through 5 items adapted from validated instruments used in military and occupational safety research, particularly the framework applied by Wei & Kuo (2023). The goal was to capture leadership behaviours that directly influence soldiers' perception of safety and their willingness to engage in risk reporting.

*Organizational Climate* (ORC) was adapted from the Defence Organizational Climate Survey (DEOCS) framework, which is widely used in military contexts to assess psychosocial factors influencing cohesion and engagement (Office of People Analytics (DoD), 2025). For this study, the original DEOCS instrument was condensed to 5 core items that reflect the Lithuanian Armed Forces' organizational environment.

*Perceived Organizational Support* (POS) was evaluated through items originally developed by Eisenberger et al. (1986), which are widely used to measure employees' perceptions of organizational care and recognition. For this study, the original 36-item instrument was shortened to 5 core items to ensure conciseness while maintaining conceptual validity.

*Affective Commitment & Value Congruence* (AFC) was primarily based on the framework proposed by Allen, Shore, and Griffeth (2003), which emphasizes the role of affective commitment and value congruence in predicting employee retention. Their model highlights how emotional attachment and alignment between individual and organizational values strengthen long-term commitment. To operationalize these concepts in a military context, 5 items were adapted to reflect soldiers' emotional connection to the Lithuanian Armed Forces and their perceived alignment with its mission and purpose.

*Retention Intention* (RET) was Retention Intention (RET) was assessed within the Lithuanian Armed Forces context. The measurement of soldiers' commitment to remain in service was aligned with established military retention practices. For example, the U.S. Status of Forces Survey (SOFS-A) frequently gauged "intention to remain on active duty" and demonstrated strong predictive validity for actual retention behaviour, forming the foundation for retention-focused research within NATO militaries (Office of People Analytics (DoD), 2025). For this study, a five-item scale was used, as similar short scales had previously been validated in artillery and medical personnel studies, where "career intentions" measured through a few Likert-type items predicted significant variance (48%–55%) in soldiers' career trajectories (Taylor et al., 2023).

All responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (1= 'Strongly Disagree', 2= 'Disagree', 3= 'Neutral', 4= 'Agree', 5=

‘Strongly Agree’). Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pilot-tested to ensure clarity and reliability.

This study applied a quantitative research design using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to test the proposed conceptual model and empirically examine the hypothesized relationships between organizational and value based factors and soldiers’ retention intention. SEM was selected because it allowed the simultaneous testing of multiple direct relationships within a single analytical framework and provides robust estimates of effect size and model fit. In the structural model, all constructs were used as observed variables represented by their measurement means. For each construct, individual questionnaire items were aggregated into composite mean scores prior to analysis. These mean scores served as the model inputs. This methodology was assumed to simplify the model structure while retaining the theoretical relationships among constructs and ensuring stable parameter estimation.

Following the scholars’ recommendations (Kline, 2023; Kanapeckaitė et al. 2022), the goodness-of-fit of the designed model was verified to demonstrate that the matrix of the constructed model was close to the matrix of the collected data sample. The main goodness-of-fit test values were chosen and include:  $\chi^2$  test, the ratio of  $\chi^2$  to degree of freedom, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the p-value for testing the null hypothesis that RMSEA is less than 0.05 (PCLOSE), the adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), Tucker–Lewis index (TLI), normed fit index (NFI), the incremental fit index (IFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). All statistical analyses were completed by using the SPSS 30v, and AMOS 30v, which were employed to test the hypothesized relationships within the planned conceptual model.

## 5. Results

The study sample consisted of 287 professional soldiers from the Lithuanian Armed Forces. The mean age of respondents was 34 years, with a median of 32 years, and ages ranged from 18 to 55, indicating representation of both younger and more experienced personnel, with a dominance of mid-career soldiers. The sample was predominantly male (80%), while females accounted for 11%, reflecting

the general gender structure of the armed forces. More than half of respondents served in infantry units (53%), followed by logistics and support units (21%), fire support units (13%), and staff positions (13%). In terms of marital status, 52% were married, 29% single, 12% living with a partner, and 7% divorced. Nearly half of the soldiers (49%) had more than ten years of service. The majority were non-commissioned officers (68%), followed by enlisted soldiers (19%) and officers (13%). This distribution indicates that the findings largely reflect the views of mid-level personnel. Non-commissioned officers play a key role in daily leadership, training, discipline, and unit management, and they are closely involved in soldiers’ motivation and retention, which makes their perspective especially relevant for this study.

The study findings outlined below were obtained through a two-phase evaluation of the complete models, following established guidelines for structural equation modelling. In the first phase, the measurement model was assessed for fit and construct validity. The second phase focused on examining the structural model and testing the proposed hypotheses. Both stages employed the maximum likelihood (ML) estimation method.

### 5.1. Empirical Assessment of Theoretical Model Validity

In the initial stage, the theoretical model was examined to evaluate its adequacy. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) showed that there were no items to be eliminated (Bekesiene et al. 2018). Correlation coefficients among all variables within the proposed model were computed. Furthermore, assessments of convergent and discriminant validity were conducted.

The initial analysis focused on evaluating the descriptive statistics and validity measures for all constructs included in the theoretical model. The mean (M) values ranged from 2.83 to 3.50, with standard deviations ( $\pm$ SD) indicating moderate variability across constructs. Composite reliability (CR) values for all variables exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70, ranging from 0.838 to 0.870, confirming internal consistency. Similarly, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50 for all constructs, supporting convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the Fornell–Larcker criterion, where the square roots of AVE (diagonal values) were greater than the inter-construct correlations,

indicating satisfactory discriminant validity (Rasoolimanesh, 2022). Correlation coefficients among constructs were generally low to moderate, with significant relationships ( $p < 0.01$ ) observed between retention intention (RET) and other variables such as safety climate (SAC), safety leadership (SAL), organizational climate (ORC), and perceived organizational support (POS). No evidence of multicollinearity was detected, as

correlation values remained below critical thresholds (Shrestha, 2020).

These statistical results (Table 1) confirm that the measurement model constructs fulfil the reliability and validity requirements, ensuring suitability for subsequent structural equation modelling.

Table 1. Preliminary data examination results.

| Variable | Descriptive |          | Discriminant Validity |       | Relationships |              |              |              |              |              |
|----------|-------------|----------|-----------------------|-------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|          | M           | $\pm$ SD | CR                    | AVE   | RET           | SAC          | SAL          | ORC          | POS          | AFC          |
| RET      | 3.50        | 0.837    | 0.866                 | 0.565 | <b>0.752</b>  |              |              |              |              |              |
| SAC      | 2.85        | 0.922    | 0.870                 | 0.528 | 0.389**       | <b>0.727</b> |              |              |              |              |
| SAL      | 2.87        | 0.933    | 0.849                 | 0.530 | 0.390**       | -0.011       | <b>0.728</b> |              |              |              |
| ORC      | 2.87        | 0.948    | 0.838                 | 0.510 | 0.400**       | -0.031       | -0.044       | <b>0.714</b> |              |              |
| POS      | 2.85        | 0.980    | 0.864                 | 0.559 | 0.404**       | 0.168**      | -0.033       | -0.044       | <b>0.748</b> |              |
| AFC      | 2.83        | 0.898    | 0.841                 | 0.516 | 0.373**       | -0.095       | 0.015        | 0.043        | -0.073       | <b>0.718</b> |

Notes: Retention Intention (RET), Safety Climate (SAC), Safety Leadership (SAL), Organizational Climate (ORC), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Affective Commitment & Value Congruence (AFC). \*\*. Correlation is significant at  $p < 0.01$  level (2-tailed). Square roots of the AVEs (**diagonal values**).

5.2. Results of Hypothesis Testing and Model Evaluation

Structural Equation Modelling was applied to test the proposed hypotheses and to assess the direct effects of Safety Climate (SAC), Safety Leadership (SAL), Organizational Climate (ORC), Perceived Organizational Support (POS), Affective Commitment & Value Congruence (AFC) on Retention Intention (RET). The analysis focused on validating whether each organizational and value related factor significantly predicts soldiers' intention to remain in service.

The structural model demonstrated strong alignment with the observed data, confirming its adequacy for hypothesis testing. Multiple fit indices indicated excellent model fit, including measures of absolute, incremental, and parsimonious fit. Indicators such as the Goodness of Fit Index (GFI = 0.983) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.992) were well above accepted thresholds, while the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation remained low (RMSEA = 0.037), supporting a close correspondence between the proposed structure and empirical data. Collectively, these results validate the robustness of the model and its capacity to explain retention

intention through organizational and safety-related factors. The consistency across fit measures reinforces confidence in the theoretical framework and provides a reliable basis for interpreting the direct effects of safety climate, leadership, organizational support, and value alignment on soldiers' commitment to remain in service. Also, the outcomes of the path analysis, including standardized estimates and significance levels, are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Standardized regression coefficients in the structural model.

| Path                 | $\beta$<br>(stand.) | S.E.  | C.R.   | p-value |
|----------------------|---------------------|-------|--------|---------|
| RET $\leftarrow$ SAC | 0.372               | 0.024 | 14.396 | ***     |
| RET $\leftarrow$ AFC | 0.406               | 0.025 | 15.724 | ***     |
| RET $\leftarrow$ ORC | 0.422               | 0.023 | 16.328 | ***     |
| RET $\leftarrow$ SAL | 0.413               | 0.024 | 15.971 | ***     |
| RET $\leftarrow$ POS | 0.396               | 0.022 | 15.334 | ***     |

\*\*\*. significant at the  $p < 0.001$

Standardized coefficients indicated that all variables demonstrated significant positive direct effects on RET, confirming their role as strong predictors: RET $\leftarrow$  SAC ( $\beta = 0.37$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), RET $\leftarrow$  SAL ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), RET $\leftarrow$  POS ( $\beta = 0.40$ ,  $p <$

0.001),  $RET \leftarrow AFC$  ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and  $RET \leftarrow ORC$  ( $\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). These results provide robust empirical support for hypotheses H1–H5, emphasizing that each factor contributes meaningfully to retention outcomes and collectively reinforces the theoretical framework outlined in this study (see Table 2).

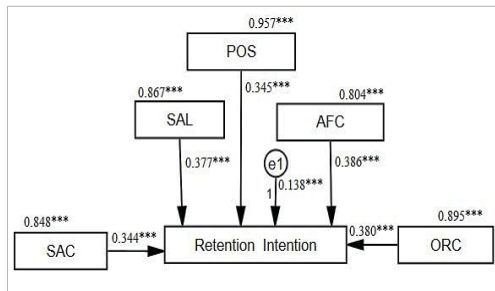


Fig. 2. Unstandardized path coefficients, all variance estimates, and their significance (\*\*\*) $p < 0.001$ .

Additionally, all variance estimates were statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ , indicating that each construct shows sufficient dispersion across respondents and contributes meaningful information to the analysis (Fig. 2). Safety Climate (SAC=0.848; SE = 0.071, CR = 11.958), Organizational Climate (ORC=0.895; SE = 0.075, CR = 11.958), and Perceived Organizational Support (POS=0.957; SE = 0.075, CR = 11.958), showed substantial differences in perceptions of safety, work environment, and organizational care. Safety Leadership (0.867; SE = 0.073, CR = 11.958) and Affective Commitment/Value Congruence (0.804; SE = 0.067, CR = 11.958) also varied notably. The residual variance for Retention Intention was low ( $e1=0.138$ ; SE = 0.012, CR = 11.958), suggesting that most variability was explained by the predictors, supporting the strong explanatory power of the structural model.

## 6. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that organizational and safety-related factors play a decisive role in shaping soldiers' retention intentions within the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Consistent with prior research, organizational climate and perceived support emerged as critical drivers of commitment, reinforcing evidence that trust, fairness, and care strongly influence long-

term service decisions (Allen et al., 2003; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Similarly, affective commitment and value congruence demonstrated significant effects, aligning with Lithuanian studies emphasizing generational shifts toward meaningful work and self-realization (Bekesienė & Navickienė, 2025; Balsys, 2022).

Safety climate and safety leadership also contributed positively, supporting earlier findings that leadership behaviors and risk management practices enhance psychological security and operational reliability (Schüler & Vega Matuszczyk, 2019; Wei & Kuo, 2023). These results underscore the interconnectedness of safety culture and organizational behavior in sustaining professional soldiers, echoing NATO-wide evidence that adaptive retention strategies must integrate lifestyle compatibility and psychosocial well-being (Office of People Analytics (DoD), 2025).

The results highlight the need for integrated retention strategies within the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Leadership should prioritize strengthening organizational climate through transparent communication, fairness, and participatory decision-making. Enhancing perceived organizational support via career development programs, recognition systems, and family-friendly policies can further reinforce commitment. Safety leadership training and continuous improvement of safety practices should remain central to operational culture. Finally, aligning institutional values with soldiers' expectations such as meaningful work and professional growth will help sustain motivation and reduce turnover, ensuring long-term force readiness and resilience.

## 7. Conclusions

The structural model confirmed that all tested components contributed meaningfully to soldiers' intention to remain in service. Among them, organizational climate and perceived support emerged as particularly influential, reflecting the importance of trust, fairness, and care within the military environment. Safety leadership and safety climate also played critical roles, highlighting how leadership behaviours and safety practices shape retention. Affective commitment and value congruence reinforced the impact of shared values and emotional attachment. Together, these factors formed a strong, interconnected foundation for

sustaining professional soldiers in the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

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