Exploring the Influence of Leadership on Retention of Officers in Greek Special Forces: A Qualitative Study

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Submission Date: 12/7/2024

Acknowledgments

This thesis would have taken considerably longer to complete and would have been far less enjoyable without the encouragement, help, and support I have received. My deepest gratitude goes out to all of you:

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my supervisor, Dr. Alexandros Psychogios. Your dedication as a mentor has been truly amazing. Throughout this journey, your constant support, encouragement, and wise guidance have meant the world to me. I'm especially grateful for your patience, giving me the space to find my own way, even when it led to unexpected challenges. You've taught me so much, and I'm deeply thankful for everything.

Dr. Christos Koritos, for providing the academic research tools that were essential to my work. Your assistance and insights have been instrumental in navigating the complexities of my research, and I deeply appreciate your help and support.

Special Operations Forces Truths

Truth I

Humans are more important than hardware.

People – not equipment – make the critical difference. The right people, highly trained and working as a team, will accomplish the mission with the equipment available. On the other hand, the best equipment in the world cannot compensate for a lack of the right people.

Truth II

Quality is better than quantity.

A small number of people, carefully selected, well-trained, and well-led, are preferable to larger numbers of troops, some of whom may not be up to the task.

Truth III

Special Operations Forces cannot be mass-produced.

It takes years to train operational units to the level of proficiency needed to accomplish difficult and specialized SOF missions. Intense training – both in SOF schools and units – is required to integrate competent individuals into fully capable units. This process cannot be hastened without degrading ultimate capability.

Truth IV

Competent Special Operations Forces cannot be created after emergencies occur.

Creation of competent, fully mission-capable units takes time. Employment of fully capable special operations capability on short notice requires highly trained and constantly available SOF units in peacetime.

Truth V

Most special operations require non-SOF support.

The operational effectiveness of our deployed forces cannot be, and never has been, achieved without being enabled by our joint service partners. The support Air Force, Army, Marine and Navy engineers, technicians, intelligence analysts, and the numerous other professions that contribute to SOF, have substantially increased our capabilities and effectiveness throughout the world.

Abstract

The Greek Special Forces attract some of the most talented, motivated, and dedicated young men and women from all army branches. This dissertation investigates the rising resignation rates among young officers in the Greek Special Forces, focusing on the interactions between leadership dynamics, organizational ethos, and strategic retention initiatives. Rooted in Special Operations Forces (SOF) Truth I, which asserts that "Humans are more important than hardware," this study emphasizes the critical role of people in achieving mission success and retaining talent in the Special Forces.

Through qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with current and former Special Forces officers and thematic analysis, this study identifies the key factors influencing officers' decisions to leave or remain in service. The findings reveal that leadership styles, the internalization of military ethos, and the effectiveness of retention strategies play significant roles in officer retention. Effective leadership, marked by ethical conduct and transformational qualities, is crucial in fostering a supportive and motivating environment. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of a supportive organizational culture and comprehensive support systems in enhancing retention rates.

The research underscores the need to address systemic issues within the Greek Special Forces to improve retention. The loss of well-trained officers represents a substantial depletion of resources and capabilities, which is difficult to replace due to the extensive training required. The study suggests that implementing strategic initiatives such as mentorship programs, career development opportunities, and work-life balance policies can significantly improve retention rates.

This dissertation provides actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing leadership effectiveness and fostering an organizational culture that supports the professional and personal aspirations of Special Forces personnel. These recommendations include promoting ethical leadership practices, improving communication and decision-making processes, and developing comprehensive support systems. The insights gained from this research apply not only to the Greek Special Forces but also to other elite military units facing similar challenges.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this research is to develop actionable recommendations aimed at retaining young officers within the Greek Special Forces. Retaining these talented individuals is essential for maintaining the effectiveness and readiness of the Special Forces and the broader Armed Forces. The loss of well-trained officers has far-reaching implications for national security and the overall strength of the military. Addressing this issue is critical to ensuring that the military remains capable of meeting its strategic objectives.

Core Definitions

To thoroughly comprehend the current state of the Greek Special Forces, it is imperative to define what constitutes an Army Leader. The Army, as a professional entity, is defined by core characteristics such as humility, integrity, ethics, wisdom, responsibility, generosity, consent, mindfulness, daring, courage, discipline, and warrior ethos. These attributes are actively demonstrated to build and maintain trust between the Army and the Greek citizens. All graduates from the Hellenic Military Academy develop the following traits:

- **Valor**: Conscious strength against dangers.

- **Winner's spirit**: The will to prevail and succeed.

- **Duty**: Obligation to uphold values and focus on team and mission accomplishment.

- **Justice**: Treating everyone equitably.

- **Psychological and physical fitness**: Maintaining moral and mental clarity under stress.

Army leaders embody these values by leading with courage and demonstrating ethical behavior despite risks and uncertainties. Leadership in the Army inherently demands courage—a vital character trait and core Army Value. Leaders confront and overcome risks, uncertainties, and personal fears, fully aware of the potential for physical, emotional, or spiritual harm. They communicate with candor and tact, striving for shared understanding and acting ethically and efficiently regardless of circumstances.

Every Army leader has sworn an oath to strive for excellence, recognizing that their team members deserve nothing less. The foremost mission and challenge for an Army leader is combat leadership. To meet this challenge, leaders must cultivate character and competence, aiming for excellence in all aspects. Leaders with these attributes develop a force capable of winning the nation's wars and defending Greece (McGraw-Hill, 2004).

Demonstrating presence goes beyond just being seen; it involves actions, words, and demeanor that convey confidence and competence, setting a positive example. Presence reflects a leader's identity and values. Effective leaders understand that their subordinates are always watching and can easily distinguish between genuine authenticity and mere pretense.

Leadership is the art of influencing people by providing purpose, direction, and motivation to accomplish the mission and improve the organization (McGraw-Hill, 2004). It involves inspiring, guiding, and achieving common goals through vision, communication, decision-making, and motivation. Effective leadership is marked by adaptability, integrity, and the ability to build trust within a team. In the military, it also requires a profound commitment to duty, honor, and country.

Retention refers to an organization's capacity to maintain its workforce over time, crucial for sustaining a stable and experienced team. In the military, high retention rates ensure that trained and experienced personnel remain, vital for operational readiness, especially in specialized units like the Special Forces. Factors influencing retention include job satisfaction, career development opportunities, competitive compensation and benefits, work-life balance, and leadership quality.

Retention strategies include mentorship programs for new officers, regular recognition and rewards, continuous training and development opportunities, and support systems for mental health and family support. These strategies help address the unique challenges faced by military personnel, enhancing their commitment and satisfaction.

Leadership Dynamics involve the patterns and processes of interaction and influence between leaders and followers. Key components include leadership styles, communication, decision-making, and motivation. Different styles, such as transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, impact leader-follower interactions and effectiveness. Effective communication includes clear instructions and active listening. Decision-making processes that involve team input enhance trust and morale. The ability to influence and motivate is critical, achieved through vision, integrity, and empathy. Leadership dynamics significantly affect organizational performance, promoting team cohesion and boosting morale and job satisfaction, particularly in high-stakes environments like the Special Forces.

Organizational Ethos includes the collective values, beliefs, and practices that define an organization's culture. Values guide behavior and decision-making, beliefs shape organizational culture, and practices reflect values and beliefs. In the military, the

warrior ethos—a commitment to mission and resilience despite adversity—
distinguishes the profession of arms. A strong organizational ethos enhances cohesion,
morale, and loyalty, contributing to overall effectiveness and readiness.
Understanding and nurturing organizational ethos is essential for addressing retention
and leadership effectiveness, ensuring alignment with core values and mission.

Importance and Influence of Leadership on Retention:

Leadership significantly impacts retention rates in the military. Effective leaders
create positive work environments, foster belonging, and offer professional growth
opportunities, crucial for retaining talent. Poor leadership, conversely, leads to
dissatisfaction and higher turnover. In the Greek Special Forces, where demands are
exceptionally high, quality leadership is vital. Leaders who inspire trust, demonstrate
competence, and embody unit values significantly influence officer retention.

Situation

Over the past five years, the Greek Special Forces have witnessed a troubling trend: a
marked increase in the resignation rates among young officers, spanning from second
lieutenants to majors. These increased resignations reflect a broader trend of rising
resignation rates across all branches of the Armed Forces. However, the impact on the
Special Forces is particularly acute due to the substantial investment involved in
training these elite units. The author brings to this analysis 14 years of service in
various positions within the Greek Special Forces, including the leader of Special
Operations Forces teams with overseas deployments. This background gives much
credibility to the analysis and findings of the dissertation. Having served in the
Special Forces, the author personally experienced a period when young officers faced

particular difficulties. These difficulties not only caused some officers to resign but also influenced his own decision to leave.

The Special Forces selection process is famously tough, requiring boldness and specific traits essential for success. This demanding process ensures that only the most capable individuals make the cut, making it crucial to understand why they might leave. The investment in their training is immense, not just in terms of money, but also the time and effort put into shaping these highly skilled leaders. Losing them represents a significant loss, emphasizing the need to address the reasons behind their resignations. The rise in resignation rates among young officers, particularly within the Greek Special Forces, points to systemic issues revealing deeper organizational challenges.

Despite this, recent years have seen a drop in admission grades at Greek National Exams, indicating that fewer young people and young talents are interested in pursuing a military career, likely because it requires significant personal sacrifices. This decline highlights a broader issue in military recruitment, as the appeal of a military career seems to be fading, likely due to the perceived sacrifices and challenges associated with military life.

The Greek Special Forces operate under conditions that require not only exceptional tactical and operational skills but also a deep commitment to an ethos that transcends the mere execution of military tasks. This thesis explores the intricate interplay between leadership dynamics, organizational ethos, and strategic retention initiatives within these elite units. The goal is to understand how these factors collectively influence the retention rates of Junior Officers, a critical concern given the unique pressures and high-stakes nature of the environments in which these forces operate.

The concept and practice of leadership within the Greek Special Forces have evolved significantly over the years. Historically, the Greek Armed Forces have been shaped by intense challenges, with leadership playing an essential role. Former officers and generals faced life-threatening situations and led by example, embodying the Hellenic Military Academy's motto: "ἄρχεσθαι μαθών ἄρχειν ἐπιστήσει," which translates to "Learn to follow before you lead." Over time, leadership styles within the forces have become more nuanced, occasionally influenced by personal agendas. However, the enduring need for a robust, highly prepared Special Forces unit and officers capable of decisive actions has only grown due to the evolving landscape of warfare. This ongoing evolution underscores the critical importance of adaptive, principled leadership in addressing the complex demands of modern military engagements.

The increasing resignation rates among young officers have strategic implications for the Greek military. The loss of talented leaders can undermine the overall effectiveness and readiness of both the Special Forces and the broader Armed Forces. The resignation of well-trained officers poses potential risks to national security, as it diminishes the military's capability to respond to various threats and challenges. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive understanding of the factors driving these resignations and the implementation of effective retention strategies to maintain a capable and committed officer corps.

Mission

The primary objective of this study is to identify the key factors contributing to the high resignation rates and declining interest in military careers among young officers, particularly examining the influence of leadership. The central focus is on assessing the impact of leadership on these trends. The objective is to understand why these

well-trained and capable officers opt to leave the Special Forces for careers in the business world, where they may perceive greater value and recognition. The exodus of such talent represents a significant issue for both the military and the nation. This research will propose actionable recommendations to address this problem and enhance the retention of young officers within the military.

Execution

The research will employ semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis using Wordstat 2024. This methodology has initially identified 15 themes, which have been consolidated into seven broader categories. These themes will be examined in detail to uncover the underlying factors influencing the resignation of young officers and their subsequent career choices.

The use of semi-structured interviews allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of young officers. This qualitative approach provides rich, detailed data, enabling the uncovering of nuanced insights into the factors driving their decisions to resign. Thematic analysis, facilitated by Wordstat 2024, enables the systematic identification and examination of recurring themes within the interview data. This ensures that the findings are firmly grounded in the data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

The initial analysis has identified 15 themes related to the resignation of young officers and their career choices. These themes offer a broad overview of the various factors influencing their decisions. To facilitate a more focused and organized analysis, these themes have been consolidated into seven broader groups. This consolidation allows for a deeper exploration of the key issues and their interrelationships.

The detailed exploration of the identified themes aims to uncover the underlying factors influencing the resignation of young officers. This involves examining both individual and organizational influences, including leadership practices, career development opportunities, work-life balance, and organizational support. The goal of this detailed analysis is to generate actionable insights and recommendations that can inform strategies to retain young officers within the military. By addressing the identified issues, the military can enhance its leadership effectiveness and improve its retention rates.

Central Question

To what extent do leadership dynamics, ethos, and strategic initiatives influence the high retention rates among Special Forces officers, and how can these factors be optimized to address the unique challenges and future demands within the elite military context?

Research Questions

a. What is the overall impact of leadership on special forces?

b. How do military officers make sense of leadership dynamics and ethos?

c. What are the reasons that officers decide to leave special forces?

d. What is the role of leadership in the retention of officers in special forces?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance for several key reasons. Firstly, it addresses a critical issue confronting the Greek Special Forces and the broader Armed Forces: the high resignation rates of young Officers. By understanding the factors contributing to these resignation rates, the study aims to inform the development of effective

retention strategies. Secondly, it provides valuable insights into the role of leadership and organizational ethos in influencing officers' commitment and motivation. These insights can be instrumental in shaping leadership development programs and refining organizational policies. Lastly, the findings of this study have broader implications beyond the Greek Special Forces. They can contribute to the general body of knowledge on leadership and retention, offering valuable lessons for other military units and organizations facing similar challenges. This research not only seeks to address immediate issues within the Greek military but also aims to enhance the overall understanding of leadership dynamics and retention strategies in high-stakes environments.

Structure of the Thesis

- **Chapter 1: Introduction** - Provides an overview of the research topic, including background information, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the significance of the study.

- **Chapter 2: Literature Review** - Reviews existing literature on leadership and retention in military contexts, focusing on key theories, models, and previous research findings.

- **Chapter 3: Methodology** - Describes the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures used in the study.

- **Chapter 4: Findings** - Presents the findings of the study, including themes and patterns identified in the data.

- **Chapter 5 Discussion-Conclusions**- Discusses the implications of the findings for leadership practices in the Greek Special Forces and provides recommendations for improving retention rates.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on leadership dynamics, organizational ethos, and strategic initiatives within military contexts, focusing on their impact on the retention of Special Forces officers. This chapter synthesizes findings from multiple sources to build a solid understanding of the factors influencing officer retention and identifies gaps for future research. By reviewing theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and comparative analyses across different military organizations, this chapter aims to situate the current study within the broader research landscape and provide a foundation for its research questions.

Leadership Dynamics and Retention

Transformational and Ethical Leadership

Leadership styles significantly impact retention by influencing job satisfaction and commitment among military personnel. Transformational leadership, characterized by inspiring and motivating followers through vision, encouragement, and individualized consideration, creates an environment where subordinates feel empowered and valued. This leadership style enhances communication within the organization, aligning with the values and goals of followers, thereby fostering a sense of purpose and commitment (Raziq, Rizvi, & Mahjabeen, 2021).

Definition and Characteristics

Transformational leadership is defined by its ability to inspire and motivate followers through a clear and compelling vision, the use of encouragement, and the provision of individualized consideration. Leaders practicing this style create a shared vision that

aligns with the values and goals of their followers, fostering a sense of purpose and commitment. Transformational leaders enhance communication within the organization, making it easier to convey the vision and motivate employees (Raziq, Rizvi, & Mahjabeen, 2021). One key characteristic of transformational leadership is individualized consideration, where leaders pay attention to the specific needs and development of each follower. This personalized approach helps recognize and nurture the potential of subordinates, leading to increased job satisfaction and retention. Transformational leaders also encourage innovation and creativity among their followers, boosting morale and leading to higher engagement and loyalty (Eberly, Johnson, Hernandez, & Avolio, 2017).

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Retention

The positive effects of transformational leadership on job satisfaction and retention are well-documented in empirical studies, particularly within military settings. Transformational leadership significantly enhances job satisfaction and organizational commitment, crucial factors in retaining employees. In military contexts, where demands and pressures are unique, the role of transformational leadership becomes even more critical (Raziq et al., 2021). Studies have highlighted the positive effects of transformational leadership on reenlistment intentions among soldiers, revealing that the direct effects of transformational leadership on reenlistment are mediated by job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Eberly et al., 2017). Transformational leadership not only improves job satisfaction but also plays a crucial role in reducing turnover intentions. Leaders who effectively implement transformational practices create an environment of trust and respect, significantly reducing the likelihood of personnel leaving the organization. This is particularly relevant in military settings, where the stability and continuity of experienced personnel are vital for operational

success (Carter, Dudley, Lyle, & Smith, 2019). Empirical evidence supports the notion that transformational leadership fosters a strong sense of purpose among followers. Transformational leaders who exhibit strong leadership qualities significantly reduce employee turnover by creating a supportive and engaging work environment characterized by clear communication and mutual respect. This environment helps retain skilled personnel and maintain a committed workforce (Carter et al., 2019).

Ethical leadership emphasizes integrity, fairness, and ethical decision-making. Leaders who embody these principles foster a culture of trust and morale within their organizations, significantly impacting job satisfaction and organizational commitment.

Definition and Characteristics

Ethical leadership is characterized by leaders who prioritize integrity, fairness, and ethical decision-making in their actions and decisions. These leaders serve as role models for ethical behavior, setting a standard for their followers to emulate. Ethical leaders demonstrate a commitment to ethical practices and decision-making processes that promote fairness and transparency, establishing a strong moral foundation and creating an environment where ethical behavior is valued and rewarded (Baporikar, 2021). One defining characteristic of ethical leadership is the consistent demonstration of integrity. Ethical leaders uphold high ethical standards, even in challenging situations, ensuring that their actions align with their values. This consistency builds credibility and trust among followers. Additionally, fairness is a key component of ethical leadership. Leaders who practice fairness ensure that all

decisions are made impartially and equitably, fostering a sense of justice and respect within the organization (Baporikar, 2021).

Impact on Trust and Morale

The impact of ethical leadership on trust and morale is profound, particularly in military settings where trust and cohesion are essential for operational success. Leaders who exhibit ethical behavior build a foundation of trust within their units, which enhances overall morale and effectiveness. Ethical leadership significantly enhances job satisfaction and organizational commitment, crucial factors in retaining employees. In military contexts, where the demands and pressures are unique, the role of ethical leadership becomes even more critical (Kritz, 2018). Trust is a critical component of effective leadership and organizational cohesion. Leaders who prioritize ethical decision-making create an environment where followers feel secure and valued. This sense of security and value translates into higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Ethical leaders who serve as role models for ethical behavior build a culture of trust that permeates the organization, leading to enhanced morale and reduced turnover (Baporikar, 2021). Moreover, ethical leadership plays a vital role in mitigating negative behaviors and promoting a positive organizational culture. Ethical leaders actively discourage unethical practices and address issues of misconduct, thereby maintaining a healthy and productive work environment. This proactive approach not only enhances trust and morale but also reinforces the organization's commitment to ethical standards (Baporikar, 2021).

Toxic Leadership

In contrast, toxic leadership is characterized by manipulative, abusive, and unethical behaviors that create a hostile and oppressive work environment. Toxic leaders often

prioritize their own interests over those of their subordinates and the organization,

leading to a culture of fear, mistrust, and low morale (Watt, Javidi, & Normore, 2016).

Negative Impact on Retention

The negative impact of toxic leadership on retention is profound and multifaceted.

Leaders who exhibit toxic behaviors create a work environment that is hostile,

stressful, and demoralizing, leading to increased turnover rates. The presence of toxic

leaders often results in higher resignation rates, as employees seek to escape the

oppressive and damaging atmosphere. Toxic leadership exacerbates challenges in

volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments, further

increasing the likelihood of turnover (Watt et al., 2016). Empirical evidence

underscores the detrimental effects of toxic leadership on organizational retention and

effectiveness. Perceived toxic leadership significantly increases cynicism among

officer candidates, leading to higher turnover intentions. This finding is particularly

relevant in military contexts, where the cohesion and morale of units are critical for

operational success. The presence of toxic leaders undermines these essential

elements, resulting in a less committed and more fragmented workforce (Dobbs &

Do, 2019). Toxic leadership also reduces organizational effectiveness by creating an

environment where trust and collaboration are severely compromised. The

manipulative and abusive behaviors of toxic leaders lead to decreased morale, lower

job satisfaction, and reduced organizational commitment. As a result, the overall

productivity and performance of the organization suffer. The toxic work environment

fosters a culture of fear and mistrust, inhibiting open communication and

collaboration, which are essential for effective teamwork and mission success (Dobbs

& Do, 2019). Furthermore, the impact of toxic leadership extends beyond immediate

turnover rates. The long-term presence of toxic leaders can lead to a systemic decline

in organizational culture, making it increasingly difficult to attract and retain high-quality personnel. The reputation of the organization may suffer, further exacerbating retention challenges and reducing the overall effectiveness of the unit (Watt et al., 2016).

Organizational Culture and Retention

Importance of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture, defined by the shared values, beliefs, and practices that characterize an organization, is particularly critical in military contexts. A positive organizational culture fosters cohesion, morale, and loyalty among military personnel. Cohesion refers to the sense of solidarity and unity among members, which is crucial for the effective functioning of military units. A strong organizational culture enhances morale by creating an environment where individuals feel valued, respected, and motivated to contribute to the organization's mission (Donovan & Sweet, 2019).

Impact on Retention

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the significant influence of organizational culture on retention. A culture of trust, ethical behavior, and professional development is crucial for retaining personnel (Baporikar, 2021). Officers who perceive their organizational culture as supportive and inclusive are more likely to stay in the Army (Spain, Lin, & Farina, 2023). The shift towards a people-first culture in the Army, where the well-being of soldiers is prioritized over immediate readiness metrics, aims to enhance long-term retention by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that values the personal and professional needs of military personnel (Isham, 2021).

Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate the significant influence of organizational culture on retention. A culture of trust, ethical behavior, and professional development is crucial for retaining personnel (Baporikar, 2021). Officers who perceive their organizational culture as supportive and inclusive are more likely to stay in the Army (Spain et al., 2023). West Point officers who perceive their organizational culture as supportive and inclusive are more likely to stay in the Army (Spain et al., 2023). This study underscores the importance of fostering a positive organizational culture to influence retention decisions. Officers who experience a culture that aligns with their personal and professional values are more likely to remain committed to their roles and the organization. The shift towards a people-first culture in the Army, where the well-being of soldiers is prioritized over immediate readiness metrics, aims to enhance long-term retention by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that values the personal and professional needs of military personnel (Isham, 2021). By focusing on the holistic well-being of their members, military organizations can create a culture that promotes long-term commitment and loyalty.

Mentorship and Professional Development

The Role of Mentorship

Mentorship in military contexts involves experienced leaders providing guidance and support to less experienced individuals to foster their personal and professional growth. Effective mentorship contributes to a sense of belonging and commitment, which are crucial for retaining military personnel (Wakabi, 2016).

Importance and Characteristics

Mentorship in the military is characterized by guidance and support aimed at personal and professional growth. Mentors provide advice, share experiences, and offer feedback, helping mentees to develop their careers and navigate challenges. This relationship is built on trust, respect, and a mutual commitment to growth and development. Effective mentors are role models who demonstrate leadership, integrity, and dedication, fostering these qualities in their mentees. Mentorship in military contexts involves experienced leaders providing guidance and support to less experienced individuals to foster their personal and professional growth. This relationship is vital for helping officers navigate the complexities of military careers, develop necessary skills, and enhance their job satisfaction. Effective mentorship contributes to a sense of belonging and commitment, which are crucial for retaining military personnel (Wakabi, 2016).

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Retention

Empirical evidence highlights the significant impact of mentorship on job satisfaction and retention. Strong mentorship provides officers with the support and guidance needed to navigate their careers, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment (Wakabi, 2016). This support enhances job satisfaction and reduces turnover intentions, as officers who feel valued and supported are more likely to remain committed to their roles and organization (Spain et al., 2023). Effective mentorship programs provide career development opportunities, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. These programs help officers feel connected to their organization and confident in their career progression, which is essential for long-term retention (Spain

et al., 2023). Officers who receive mentorship are more likely to feel valued and supported, increasing their likelihood of staying in the military.

Advanced Education as a Retention Tool

Advanced education opportunities play a significant role in retaining military personnel by providing them with valuable skills and credentials that enhance their professional development and career prospects. Offering opportunities for advanced education is a strategic tool to retain top-performing officers who might otherwise seek such opportunities in the civilian sector (Koh, 2018).

Importance of Advanced Education

Advanced education opportunities play a significant role in retaining military personnel by providing them with valuable skills and credentials that enhance their professional development and career prospects. These opportunities not only benefit the individuals but also strengthen the overall capability of the military by fostering a more educated and skilled workforce. Offering opportunities for advanced education is a strategic tool to retain top-performing officers who might otherwise seek such opportunities in the civilian sector (Koh, 2018).

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Retention

Empirical evidence and case studies highlight the significant impact of advanced education on job satisfaction and retention. Graduate education can enhance retention by providing officers with skills and credentials that benefit both their military and post-military careers (Koh, 2018). Advanced education opportunities address officers' professional aspirations and align with the broader strategic goals of the military to develop highly skilled leaders. Officers who perceive that their organization is invested in their professional development are more likely to remain committed to

their roles, increasing retention rates (Koh, 2018). Increased civilian graduate school opportunities can address retention problems among Special Forces Captains by leveraging programs like the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to offer graduate school education (Donovan & Sweet, 2019). The military can retain its top-performing officers and ensure continued readiness and capability by providing these opportunities.

Strategic Retention Initiatives

Competitive Compensation and Benefits

Competitive compensation and comprehensive benefits packages are crucial for retaining skilled military personnel. Aligning military pay with civilian job markets is essential for retaining skilled personnel (Asch, 2019).

Importance of Competitive Compensation

Setting military pay at levels competitive with civilian salaries is crucial for retaining skilled personnel (Asch, 2019). Military jobs often involve higher risks, rigorous demands, and frequent relocations compared to civilian jobs, making competitive compensation essential to attract and retain high-quality personnel. Competitive compensation ensures that military personnel feel valued and adequately rewarded for their service, reducing the likelihood of them seeking higher-paying opportunities in the civilian sector. Promotion-based raises, which reward exceptional performance and dedication, are more effective in retaining officers than standard salary increases (Koh, 2018). Such raises not only provide financial benefits but also serve as a form of recognition and motivation for continued excellence. Refined bonus scales that reflect economic differentiation among skill sets are essential for retention (Coates, Silvernail, Fulton, & Ivanitskaya, 2011). This approach ensures that compensation is

aligned with the unique skills and contributions of military personnel, enhancing their commitment to the organization.

Comprehensive Benefits Packages

Comprehensive benefits packages, including health care, housing allowances, and retirement plans, significantly enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Providing comprehensive benefits is crucial for maintaining a committed and capable workforce (Glaser & Rahman, 2023).

Importance of Comprehensive Benefits

Comprehensive benefits packages, including health care, housing allowances, and retirement plans, are vital for retaining military personnel. The role of comprehensive benefits in talent retention is significant, noting that benefits such as health care, housing allowances, and retirement plans significantly enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Baporikar, 2021). Providing comprehensive benefits is crucial for maintaining a committed and capable workforce (Glaser & Rahman, 2023). Benefits packages that address the needs of military personnel and their families contribute to higher retention rates by reducing financial stress and enhancing overall well-being.

Incentive Programs

Incentive programs offer flexible options for personalized benefits, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of military personnel. These programs are designed to appeal to the Millennial generation's desire for immediate and personalized benefits, thereby enhancing retention (Beerman, 2006).

Importance of Incentive Programs

Incentive programs offer flexible options for personalized benefits, catering to the diverse needs and preferences of military personnel. These programs are designed to appeal to the Millennial generation's desire for immediate and personalized benefits, thereby enhancing retention. The Army Incentive Model (AIM) offers flexible options for soldiers to choose benefits that meet their needs, including homeownership and business funding (Beerman, 2006). Offering competitive selection to intermediate professional military education as an incentive for retaining Special Forces officers is also important (Everingham, 2020). Such programs provide valuable educational opportunities and enhance the professional qualifications of military personnel, contributing to their long-term retention.

Institutional Reforms and Strategic Initiatives

Addressing Systemic Issues

Institutional reforms aimed at addressing systemic issues are crucial for improving retention rates within military organizations. Initiatives such as flexible career paths and comprehensive family support programs play a significant role in creating a supportive environment that values the personal and professional growth of military personnel.

Flexible Career Paths

Flexible career paths allow military personnel to navigate their careers in a way that aligns with their personal and professional goals. The shift towards a people-first culture in the Army, where the well-being of soldiers is prioritized over immediate readiness metrics, aims to enhance long-term retention by fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that values the personal and professional needs of military

personnel (Isham, 2021). By providing opportunities for career development and work-life balance, military organizations can ensure that their personnel feel valued and motivated to continue their service.

Comprehensive Family Support Programs

Comprehensive family support programs are essential for retaining military personnel, particularly in high-stress environments. These programs help manage the professional and personal lives of military personnel, providing the necessary support to ensure their well-being and commitment to the organization. By offering resources such as childcare, counseling services, and relocation assistance, military organizations can reduce the stress and burden on military families, thereby enhancing job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Peavie, 2012).

Data-Driven Approaches

Leveraging performance data for qualitative talent management is a strategic initiative that can significantly improve retention rates. Understanding the specific needs and motivations of military personnel through data-driven approaches allows organizations to design effective retention strategies tailored to their unique contexts. Leveraging performance data for qualitative talent management in Special Operations Forces (SOF) is essential (Dyson & Martin, 2021).

Leveraging Performance Data for Talent Management

Data-driven approaches involve the use of performance data to inform talent management and retention strategies. By analyzing performance metrics, military organizations can identify trends, strengths, and areas for improvement, allowing them to tailor their retention strategies to meet the specific needs of their personnel. Personalized career development plans, guided by data insights, help officers see a

clear path for their future within the military, enhancing their commitment and reducing turnover (Dyson & Martin, 2021).

Comparative Retention Strategies

Retention Strategies in Different Countries

Different countries employ a variety of retention strategies tailored to their unique military cultures and organizational structures. Here, we examine the approaches of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia, highlighting their key strategies for retaining military personnel.

United States

The United States Military employs a range of retention strategies, focusing on competitive compensation, comprehensive benefits, and career development opportunities. Setting military pay at levels competitive with civilian salaries is crucial for retaining skilled personnel (Asch, 2019). The U.S. military also offers advanced education opportunities, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which provides financial support for education and training, enhancing career prospects for service members. Comprehensive benefits packages, including health care, housing allowances, and retirement plans, further contribute to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The provision of robust career development programs, such as the Army's Talent Management Task Force, ensures that personnel see a clear path for their future within the military (Asch, 2019).

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom's armed forces focus on flexible career paths, professional development, and work-life balance to retain personnel. The UK military offers

various educational and training programs to enhance the skills and qualifications of its personnel. The UK emphasizes the importance of work-life balance and family support programs, recognizing that the well-being of service members and their families is critical for retention (Sminchise, 2016).

Canada

Canada's military retention strategies include leadership development, mentorship, and family support programs. The Canadian Forces (CF) place a strong emphasis on leadership development and mentorship, recognizing their importance in retaining personnel. Effective mentorship fosters a sense of belonging and commitment among military personnel, which is essential for retention (Wakabi, 2016). The CF also prioritizes work-life balance and support for families, addressing the unique challenges faced by military personnel (Nixon, 2010).

Australia

Australia's Defence Force focuses on career development, flexible work arrangements, and family support to retain personnel. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) offers various educational and training opportunities to enhance the skills and qualifications of its members. The ADF recognizes the importance of family support programs and work-life balance in retaining skilled personnel (Sminchise, 2016).

Communication and Employee Engagement

Importance of Communication in Retention

Clear, consistent, and transparent communication plays a pivotal role in building trust and commitment within military units. Leaders must influence others to accomplish missions through effective communication (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, 2019).

By maintaining open lines of communication, leaders can foster a sense of trust and reliability, which is crucial for retaining personnel (Baporikar, 2021).

Employee Engagement and Job Satisfaction

Employee engagement significantly enhances job satisfaction and retention rates. Engaged employees are more likely to be passionate about their work, committed to the organization, and willing to put in discretionary effort. Effective communication enhances job satisfaction by making employees feel valued and involved in their roles (Raziq et al., 2021). In military settings, where the demands and stresses are high, engagement through active and transparent communication is vital for maintaining morale and reducing turnover (Raziq et al., 2021).

The Role of Leaders in Fostering Engagement

Leaders play a critical role in fostering employee engagement through mentorship and supportive behaviors. Effective mentorship involves providing guidance, support, and encouragement to subordinates, helping them navigate their careers and develop professionally. Leaders who engage in mentorship foster a sense of belonging and commitment among their subordinates (Spain, Lin, & Farina, 2023). Effective communication by leaders enhances job satisfaction and organizational commitment, thereby positively influencing organizational culture. A culture that values transparency, feedback, and open dialogue promotes a supportive work environment where personnel feel respected and valued (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22, 2019).

Conclusion

This literature review highlights the critical role of leadership dynamics, organizational culture, mentorship, advanced education, and retention strategies in influencing the retention rates of military personnel, particularly within the Greek

Special Forces. The synthesis of empirical studies and theoretical frameworks underscores the importance of supportive and ethical leadership, a positive organizational culture, and comprehensive retention strategies. By addressing these factors, military organizations can enhance job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and ultimately, retention rates.

Linking these insights to the rationale of the current study, it is evident that a thorough understanding of the interplay between leadership, organizational culture, and retention strategies is essential for developing actionable recommendations aimed at retaining young officers in the Greek Special Forces. This study aims to fill the identified gaps in the literature and provide a robust foundation for strategic initiatives to improve retention rates within this elite military context.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the influence of leadership dynamics, ethos, and strategic initiatives on the retention rates of officers within the Greek Special Forces. The choice of a qualitative approach is driven by the need to gain in-depth insights into the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of former or current Special Forces officers regarding leadership and retention. Qualitative research is particularly suited to this study due to its ability to capture the nuanced and complex nature of human experiences and interactions, which are central to understanding leadership and retention in elite military contexts.

Justification for the Qualitative Approach

The qualitative research design is chosen for its effectiveness in exploring complex phenomena that are difficult to quantify, such as leadership styles and personal experiences within the military. This approach allows for a rich, detailed understanding of how leadership and organizational culture impact officer retention. Qualitative methods are particularly valuable in this context because they enable the researcher to delve deeply into the subjective experiences of individuals, providing insights that might be overlooked in quantitative studies.

Primary Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method. This format allows for a flexible yet systematic exploration of key themes, enabling the interviewer to probe deeper into specific areas of interest while ensuring that all

relevant topics are covered. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provides a balance between guided questioning and open-ended responses, facilitating a rich, detailed data collection process that can uncover the subtleties of leadership dynamics and retention factors within the Greek Special Forces.

Interview Process

The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses about the participants' experiences with leadership, their understanding of the unit's ethos, and the factors influencing their decisions to stay or leave the Special Forces. Topics covered in the interviews included leadership styles, mentorship, ethical considerations, and organizational culture. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality and encourage open, honest dialogue.

Participants

Sample Selection

The participants in this study are current and former junior officers, specifically First Lieutenants and Captains, serving or who have served in the Greek Special Forces. This group was selected because they represent a critical demographic within the military hierarchy, often at a pivotal stage in their career development. Junior officers are particularly relevant for studying retention influences, as their career decisions can significantly impact the overall effectiveness and continuity of the Special Forces.

Sampling Methods

Participants were recruited using two methods: purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

- **Purposive Sampling:** This method involved selecting officers who have specific, relevant experience and insights for the study. Officers who had notable experiences with leadership and retention within the Special Forces were specifically chosen to provide detailed and meaningful insights into the research questions.

- **Snowball Sampling:** This method involved asking selected officers to refer other officers they knew who might also be suitable for the study. This approach ensured that a broader range of experiences and perspectives were included, as referred participants were likely to have similar relevant experiences.

Justification for Sampling Methods

Purposive sampling was chosen to ensure that participants had the necessary experience and insights relevant to the study's objectives. This method helps to focus on individuals who can provide rich, detailed information about the specific issues being investigated. Snowball sampling was used to reach a wider network of participants, leveraging the social connections within the Special Forces community to identify additional relevant participants. This combination of sampling methods ensures a comprehensive and representative sample, enhancing the validity and reliability of the study findings.

Data Collection

Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted in a structured yet flexible manner, allowing participants to freely express their views while ensuring that all relevant topics were addressed. The interview guide included questions about leadership experiences, the influence of

organizational culture, mentorship experiences, and factors impacting retention decisions. To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, the interview guide was piloted with a small group of officers before being used in the main study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

To protect the privacy of the participants, all interviews were conducted anonymously. No identifying information was recorded, and each participant was assigned a unique identifier for data analysis purposes. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were anonymized to protect the identity of the participants, ensuring that individual responses could not be traced back to specific officers.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. This method involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process began with an initial reading of the transcripts to become familiar with the content. Significant phrases and sentences were labeled with codes to capture key ideas, a task performed by Wordstat 2024. These codes were then grouped into broader themes representing the major concepts discussed by the participants.

Analysis Procedure

1. **Familiarization:** Initial reading of the interview transcripts to gain an overall understanding of the data.

2. **Coding:** Highlighting significant phrases and sentences and labeling them with codes that capture key ideas and concepts.

3. **Theme Development:** Grouping codes into broader themes that represent the main topics discussed by the participants.

4. **Reviewing Themes:** Refining and reviewing themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data.

5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Clearly defining each theme and giving them descriptive names.

6. **Reporting:** Summarizing the themes and illustrating them with direct quotes from the interviews.

Justification for Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a flexible and robust method for analyzing qualitative data. It allows for the identification and interpretation of key themes within the data, providing a detailed and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. This method is particularly suitable for this study as it enables the researcher to capture the complexity of leadership dynamics and retention factors within the Greek Special Forces.

Key Themes Identified

The analysis revealed several prevalent themes, including strong mentorship, ethical leadership, and a supportive work environment. These themes were consistently linked to higher retention rates. For instance:

- **Strong Mentorship:** Officers emphasized the importance of having mentors who provided guidance, support, and career development opportunities. Mentorship helped officers navigate their careers and feel valued within the organization.

- **Ethical Leadership:** Ethical behavior and transparency from leaders were critical in building trust and morale within units. Officers reported that leaders who demonstrated integrity and fairness significantly impacted their decision to remain in the Special Forces.

- **Supportive Work Environment:** Emotional support from peers and superiors, recognition of personal sacrifices, and a culture that values its members were frequently mentioned as key factors influencing retention.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to confidentiality, and their ability to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Data were anonymized to protect the identity of the participants, and all recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessed only by the research team.

Conclusion

The methodology outlined in this chapter provides a robust framework for exploring the complex interplay between leadership dynamics, organizational culture, and retention in the Greek Special Forces. By employing semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, this study aims to gain deep insights into the factors influencing officer retention. The careful selection of participants and rigorous data analysis procedures ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, contributing valuable knowledge to the field of military leadership and retention strategies.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

This chapter is a comprehensive sum-up of the interviews that discusses the organization and workings of Special Forces, through detailed thematic analyses of large qualitative data based on Wordstat 2024. The findings presented results from an extensive analysis of the interviews. Within our data, we have identified 15 key themes (Appendix A) that come out time and time again and demonstrate the complex interaction of influence of the Leadership in the Greek Special Forces in the retention of young Officers.

Thus, an analysis of these themes and their meaningful relationships will bring out the subtle relations that exist between leadership efficiency and retention strategies. This is the discussion that will seek to explain in which ways these components are put together to define the structure and action of elite military units. Moreover, the analysis is interpreted by seven wider theme groups.

Thematic Analysis Overview

The analysis revealed 15 key themes (Appendix A) that frequently emerged from the interviews, demonstrating the multifaceted influence of leadership on officer retention. These themes were consolidated into seven broader groups for a more organized discussion:

1. **Leadership Impact and Organizational Performance**

2. **Retention and Organizational Stability**

3. **Core Values and Ethical Practices**

4. **External Factors and Geopolitical Impact**

5. **Support Systems and Organizational Culture**

6. **Career Transitions and External Mobility**

7. **Role of Responsibility in Organizational Ethics**

Each theme group encapsulates related sub-themes, providing a structured framework to understand the intricate relationships between leadership and retention in the Special Forces.

1. **Leadership Impact and Organizational Performance**

   ❖ **INSPIRE; ACHIEVE and SPECIAL FORCES**

Inspiring Leadership

Theme: Leadership is a crucial skill that transcends mere competence, deeply integrating into the ethos and culture of the Special Forces.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Inspiring Leadership	"Leadership is a skill that not all people have. This is a skill that cannot be developed merely by reading a book or experiencing tough situations. True leadership is about making people follow and trust you undoubtedly." – Interviewee 5
	"Knowing yourself and understanding why you behave the way you do gives you the capability to control yourself and better understand others." – Interviewee 1
	"Leadership is, serving something higher than you. A goal, a mission, and having a vision about it, not yourself." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

'Inspire; Achieve' and 'Special Forces' highlight that the essence of leadership within these elite units is linked to their core mission and identity. This connection emphasizes that leadership extends beyond the mere accomplishment of objectives, requiring profound integration into the ethos and culture of the Special Forces. Such leadership is characterized not just by its ability to challenge and empower team members, but also by its capacity to deeply embed them within the unit's culture, thus ensuring they not only meet but exceed their goals. Interviewee 5 mentioned that "Leadership is a skill that not all people have. And this is a skill that, no one can just develop by reading a book or by experiencing some situations, some tough situations. My main perspective about leadership is that this work is about a person that can make other people follow him undoubtedly and trust him undoubtedly."

In practical terms, this may manifest as leaders taking active steps to understand and foster the individual and collective aspirations of their officers, linking them to the broader objectives of the Special Forces. The ability to inspire and help achieve is likely to instill a strong sense of pride and purpose in the officers, which is critical for their retention. Moreover, leaders who excel in these areas can create a positive feedback loop, where inspired and achieving officers further strengthen the resolve and identity of the unit, making it a formidable force. This insight is vital for shaping leadership development programs and retention strategies within such elite military units. This might indicate a cultural pillar within Special Forces that places a high value on inspirational leadership and achievements. It's likely a key driver in the operational ethos of these units. Interviewee 9 mentioned, "Overall, the traits and characteristics of effective leaders in special forces, are based on the retention of

personnel by creating a culture of trust, motivation, resilience, support, and recognition that enhances team performance and cohesion."

❖ **RETENTION RATES and INSPIRE; ACHIEVE**

Leadership and Retention

Theme: Effective leadership significantly influences retention by creating a compelling vision and motivating officers to strive for excellence

Theme	Indicative Statements
Leadership and Retention	"If they believe in the mission, then they can influence the junior leader, with this mission. Right now, even them, because if they are at the top of the command chain, they don't believe in the mission." – Interviewee 6
	"In the Greek army, there are not too many career development opportunities. If there were some, everyone would consider staying in the army." – Interviewee 3

Analysis:

'Retention Rates' and 'Inspire; Achieve' highlight a strong link between officers' retention and the leadership's ability to inspire achievement within the Special Forces. This suggests that officers who feel motivated and are provided with opportunities to achieve meaningful goals are more likely to continue their service. Officers are influenced by leaders who deliver a compelling vision and motivate their teams to strive for excellence. Leadership that effectively inspires officers could increase their

sense of purpose and satisfaction, making them more likely to stay. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "It's quite, some of the pillars that actually constitute the emotional intelligence EQ. The most important is the self-awareness part, knowing yourself and knowing, how you think, why you think how you think, why you feel how you feel, what triggers you, having, the skill of metacognition, which is what I described, taking the steps away from your behavior and understanding why you behave the way you behave. This gives you the skill and the capability to be able to control yourself. One thing is the self-awareness part, knowing myself, and that gives me a very good grasp of how I am, when I interact with other people and, being able then to understand them as well, in a better, manner."

The correlation implies that providing officers with clear opportunities to achieve and excel is crucial for retention. Career advancement, recognition for successful missions, and opportunities for personal and professional development could be significant factors. Interviewee 3 mentioned, "In the Greek army, there are not too many career development opportunities. If there were some, everyone would consider staying in the army." A work environment where officers are continuously challenged and supported to meet those challenges can lead to higher levels of engagement. When officers see the tangible results of their efforts from meaningful tasks, they feel their achievements are recognized. It reinforces their decision to remain with the unit. The ability to inspire and facilitate achievement contributes to job satisfaction. Officers who are content with their accomplishments and their role in the unit are less likely to seek alternative employment. Beyond career advancements, personal fulfillment plays a significant role in retention. Officers who achieve their personal and professional goals while serving in the Special Forces may find a strong alignment with their values and life objectives, leading to higher retention rates.

Leadership within the Special Forces, therefore, should focus on cultivating an environment that fosters inspiration and recognizes achievements to enhance officers' commitment and drive retention. This might involve training leaders to develop motivational skills, creating clear paths for advancement, and establishing awards or recognition programs to honor the achievements of the officers.

❖ **BAD LEADERSHIP; PERSONAL AGENDA and**
  SPECIAL FORCES

Bad Leadership and Personal Agenda

Theme: Poor leadership driven by personal agendas undermines unit cohesion and operational efficiency.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Bad Leadership	"If the CEO of the company doesn't believe in the mission, what does he expect from the lower worker to do?" – Interviewee 6
	"A good leader, a positive leader can bring people together, can make them feel part of something bigger." – Interviewee 1
	"There is an inextricable link between leadership and, how it affects, people that are, experiencing it, whether good or bad. But especially bad leadership, definitely absolutely in every aspect, it dissolves the unit." – Interviewee 1
	"There is a misconception about leadership and people, having a vision about themselves and, serving themselves, whereas leadership is, serving

Theme	Indicative Statements
	something higher than **you**. A goal, a mission, and, having, a vision about it, not yourself." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

'Bad Leadership; Personal Agenda' and 'Special Forces' indicate that in the context of the Special Forces, the perception or presence of poor leadership driven by personal agendas negatively affects the cohesion and effectiveness of these elite units. This suggests that as instances of bad leadership increase, the overall operational efficiency and morale within Special Forces units may diminish. Special Forces units rely heavily on trust, camaraderie, and mutual respect to operate effectively under high-stress conditions. These elements are built under uncertain situations, where every team, needs a leader to make a crucial decision. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "We lead people, and, in my perspective, it's inextricably connected with the part that you have to inspire them. You have to make them feel they can trust you, and you have to make them feel that they are shared and seen, and respected. And to my perspective, that's what's good leadership." Bad leadership characterized by personal agendas can erode this trust, leading to reduced unit cohesion and effectiveness. Leaders who prioritize personal gains over the well-being and success of their team can significantly demotivate their subordinates. This demoralization can affect operational efficiency and the overall morale of the unit.

When leaders are guided by personal agendas rather than the strategic needs of the mission and the welfare of their team, decision-making is compromised. This can lead

to poor strategic choices that may endanger missions and lives. Interviewee 6 mentioned, "If they believe in the mission, then they can influence the junior leader, with this mission. Right now, even them, because if they are at the top of the command chain, they don't believe in the mission. If the CEO of the company doesn't believe in the mission, what does he expect from the lower worker to do?" Continuous exposure to bad leadership can degrade the operational capabilities of Special Forces, as it undermines the Standard Operational Procedures and discipline that are essential for any type of operations. Interviewee 7 mentioned, "The young leaders have a different way of thinking. They have a different way of thinking than those who lead now, than our commanders. In the future, we will have a leadership that will think out of the box more than having a personal agenda to fulfill." Potential recruits and current members might be discouraged from joining or remaining on board where leadership is perceived as corrupt or self-serving. This could lead to challenges in retaining a robust and capable force. The reputation of the Special Forces as elite units is crucial for their operational legitimacy and the trust placed in them by other national and international forces. Persistent issues with leadership can tarnish this reputation, affecting their roles in joint operations and collaborations.

Interviewee 1 mentioned a former Commander that "He was like, a car part, and the wheels that absorb all the vibrations and all the bumps. He had a very good grasp of tactics. He was not afraid of speaking his mind, especially he's not in front of, his people, but he wasn't afraid of speaking his mind." Emphasizing ethical leadership and accountability in training programs can prepare leaders to prioritize the interests of their teams and missions above their own. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "There is an inextricable link between leadership and, how it affects, people that are, experiencing it, whether good or bad. But especially bad leadership, definitely absolutely in every

aspect, it dissolves the unit. A good leader, positive leader can bring people together, can make them feel part of something bigger, and can make, them feel see themselves as a very important part of the mission to be accomplished. And he or she can make them work all together towards a common goal and make them all feel equally valuable." Promoting a unit culture that values transparency, integrity, and mutual respect could reinforce positive leadership behaviors and discourage agendas that conflict with team goals. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "There is a misconception about leadership and people, having a vision about themselves and, serving themselves, whereas leadership is, serving something higher than you. A goal, a mission, and, having, a vision about it, not yourself. It's about a mission, a call, something bigger than you, and people that you have to do that, to serve that, and to reach that. There's no, stand-alone Leadership."

❖ **EVALUATION SYSTEM and INSPIRE; ACHIEVE**

Theme: Effective evaluation systems are crucial for inspiring individuals within the organization to achieve their goals and have a positive impact on retention.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Evaluation Systems	"If you are good and better than the others, you should have better positions, better salary, better something. There is not such a system." – Interviewee 4
	"There is no ongoing reward management system in place, at least not currently and not in the previous years." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

'Evaluation System' and 'Inspire; Achieve' suggest a moderate relationship where a well-structured and effective evaluation system can play a significant role in inspiring individuals within an organization to achieve their goals and objectives and have a positive impact on retention. This correlation is particularly meaningful within contexts like the Special Forces, where clear and fair evaluations are crucial for personal and professional development, and the evaluation system is a critical mechanism. It assesses not only the proficiency and skill levels of officers but also their leadership qualities, strategic thinking, and adaptability. Effective evaluation systems are comprehensive, transparent, and aligned with the organization's goals. They are crucial for career progression, determining suitability for various roles, and identifying areas for development. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "There are some, standard processes and, not exactly rewards, but bonuses, some training that some people will go with some criteria. But like I said, in the previous question, with meritocracy having jumped out of the window for Greek special forces. There is no concrete. There is no solid. There is no ongoing reward management system in place, at least not currently and not in the previous years."

'Inspire; Achieve' refers also to the ability of leadership to motivate officers to reach higher levels of performance and personal development. This involves setting a vision, providing meaningful goals, and fostering an environment where officers feel compelled to excel and grow. Inspiration can be seen as the fuel that drives achievement in challenging and high-stakes environments, like deployments abroad. This correlation suggests that how officers are evaluated has a moderately positive impact on their motivation to achieve and be inspired. An effective evaluation system provides clear, actionable feedback. When officers understand how they are assessed

and receive constructive guidance, it enhances their ability to meet and exceed expectations, fostering a cycle of achievement and motivation. If the evaluation criteria are closely aligned with the career aspirations and values of the officers, it can significantly boost their drive to achieve. When officers see that their efforts and successes in the evaluations directly impact their career progression and fulfillment of personal goals, it serves as a strong motivational force.

Part of the evaluation system often involves recognizing and rewarding success. When achievements are acknowledged and rewarded, it can inspire further achievement, creating a positive feedback loop that enhances overall performance and job satisfaction. Interviewee 4 mentioned, "If you are good and if you are better than the others, you have to have something better, better positions, better salary, better something. There is not such a system." An evaluation system that clearly defines what is expected of officers and how they can succeed provides a roadmap to achievement. By understanding these benchmarks, officers can channel their efforts more effectively, which can be inspiring in itself.

2. Retention and Organizational Stability

❖ RETENTION RATES and SPECIAL FORCES

Cultural Fit

Theme: A strong alignment between the values of the Special Forces and the personal and professional aspirations of their officers enhances retention.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Cultural Fit	"Adaptability is a golden rule in our job. But don't try to change their ethos and values just to succeed. Let's keep themselves as they are." – Interviewee 2

Analysis:

'Retention Rates' and 'Special Forces' suggest a significant relationship between the inherent characteristics of Special Forces—such as their unique culture, demanding standards, and sense of mission—and the likelihood of officers staying in these units. High retention rates could be a reflection of a strong alignment between the values and expectations of the Special Forces and the personal and professional aspirations of their officers. Officers who feel a strong cultural fit with the Special Forces' ethos, values, and way of operating are more likely to stay. Interviewee 2 mentioned, "Adaptability is one of the it's a golden rule in our job. But don't try to change their ethos and their values, just to succeed in something. I mean, let's keep themselves as they are." This fit could be related to the prestige associated with being part of an elite unit, the camaraderie developed through shared experiences or a deep-seated alignment with the unit's mission and objectives. Special Forces are known for their challenging operational environment which can foster a strong sense of achievement and personal growth. Those who thrive in such environments might have higher job satisfaction, which positively affects retention. The Special Forces typically require a significant commitment, which could lead to a self-selection effect where those who join are inherently more committed and likely to stay. The sense of loyalty and duty might be stronger among these officers, contributing to higher retention rates.

Special Forces units often have strong support systems for their personnel, including comprehensive training, advanced equipment, and a focus on welfare. These systems exist in the Unit lacking those the welfare and family support part. These support mechanisms definitely could improve job satisfaction and retention. Interviewee 4 mentioned, "Plato believed city protectors should be well compensated. This way, they could focus on their duties without worrying about their personal lives, fully prepared to dedicate themselves to the service of their city and country."

❖ **SITUATION IN GREECE and RETENTION RATES**

Theme: Greece's economic and political context significantly impacts retention rates.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Economic and Political Impact	"Greek society experiences for many years now many years now a crisis of values and ethics, which directly affects the members of the society." – Interviewee 1
	"What, retrospectively, would I do, to deal with the retention? I think that one party is to make some things better, like having meritocracy back in place and rewarding people accordingly." – Interviewee 1
	"The family also understands the difficulties of the job. That is something that most people don't understand, including many leaders on the lower or higher echelon." – Interviewee 3

Analysis:

'Situation in Greece' and 'Retention Rates' indicate a substantial inverse relationship, suggesting that certain contextual factors within Greece might adversely affect the retention rates of personnel, particularly within the Special Forces. Understanding the 'Situation in Greece' could encompass a variety of factors, including economic conditions, political stability, or specific changes in the culture and ethics of Special Forces. Greece has experienced significant economic challenges, including austerity measures and financial instability, which could influence military operations and personnel decisions to stay. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "Greek society experiences for many years now many years now a crisis of values and ethics, which directly affects the members of the society, who in turn, choose to become members of armed forces, which is why, we see there is this whole fall of ethics within armed forces and special forces as well." The young officers appeared to be the young talents, whom the army struggled to retain.

High retention rates are generally indicative of a positive organizational environment, job satisfaction, career prospects, and overall work stability within the force. Economic hardships can lead to reduced funding for military programs, affecting training, equipment quality, and available resources. This reduction can demoralize personnel, leading to higher attrition rates. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "What, retrospectively, would I do, to deal with the retention? I think that one party is to make some things better, like having meritocracy back in place and, rewarding people accordingly or supporting people accordingly. And combat support is not the best part. It's not the best quality of Greek army or Greek special forces either." Financial constraints might also impact salaries and benefits, making military careers less attractive compared to private sector opportunities, especially for highly skilled

personnel like those in Special Forces. Interviewee 3 mentioned, "The family also understands the difficulties of the job. That is something that most people don't understand, including many leaders on the lower or higher echelon."

Political instability could also lead to frequent changes in defense policies, which may affect career paths, promotion opportunities, and job security in the military. Broad societal support and respect for the military can influence retention. Adverse public opinions or lack of support can decrease morale and retention. Economic downturns can affect the overall quality of life for military families, influencing decisions about continued service. Interviewee 3 mentioned, "If they had a bad leader, maybe this situation pushes them more to leave the army or the special forces. So, they need to understand that their leader understands them, understands, their problems, and that when I'm talking about problems, I'm not referring also only to the army problems, but also to their daily problems."

3. Core Values and Ethical Practices

> ❖ **SENSE OF PRIDE; CORE VALUES and EQUATION OF EINSTEIN E MC;**

Core Values and Officer Retention

Theme: Core values are essential tenets that govern actions and decisions within the demanding environment of Special Forces.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Core Values	"We don't have something greater to believe, and we might not have these values anymore." – Interviewee 9

Theme	Indicative Statements
	"The sense of right and wrong, morality, values like justice and wisdom and love for the country, the team spirit, all these, I believe, are elements of leaders." – Interviewee 7

Analysis:

In the demanding environment of Special Forces, core values such as integrity, courage, perseverance, personal responsibility, professionalism, adaptability, team player, and capability are not merely ideals but essential tenets that govern actions and decisions. Interviewee 1 noted, "These values are not shared by the Special Forces leadership. Are not shared by the total of the Special Forces' young officers. But those who feel for it, they go for it. They stand for it, and they see that they are alone." This statement underscores that such values are more than a code or compass for these officers; they are a defining part of their identity and play a critical role in their motivation and decision to remain in the force.

These values, when genuinely embraced, forge a distinctive warrior ethos that not only guides professional conduct but also fortifies their resolve in the face of isolation and adversity. This playful reinterpretation of Einstein's famous equation suggests that enthusiasm could be generated by a combination of mission clarity and recognition (both verbal and monetary). Here, $E=MC$; Cash and Congratulation (Interpreted as Enthusiasm = Mission x (Cash * Congratulations) ^2) 'mission' stands for the clarity and purpose of tasks, 'cash' could symbolize financial incentives, and 'congratulations' represents recognition and accolades. Officers who see their core values reflected in

their missions and who are adequately recognized for their efforts might feel a greater sense of fulfillment and enthusiasm. Interviewee 9 mentioned, "We don't have something greater to believe, and we might not have these values anymore." This underscores the critical need for alignment between personal convictions and organizational objectives.

The influence of 'cash and congratulations' on enthusiasm underlines that while intrinsic factors like pride and core values are crucial, extrinsic rewards (such as bonuses, promotions, and public acknowledgments) also significantly boost morale and commitment. Interviewee 9 expressed the need for mission-aligned rewards, stating, "You have to deal with rewarding the right people for the right reasons. And training. But training is mission focused. Not a training that anyone wants to do because of their interest." This highlights the necessity for a leadership approach that balances personal values with tangible incentives. The correlation implies that when officers' values are resonated in the Unit, and they are recognized for their contributions, their motivation and commitment to the organization are likely enhanced. This combination could have a potential positive impact in high-stress, high-stakes settings, where the personal cost of service is high, and the need for motivation and alignment with core values is critical.

❖ HIGHER; LEVEL and SENSE OF PRIDE; CORE VALUES

Theme: Higher levels of rank or responsibility within the military are moderately associated with a stronger sense of pride and adherence to core values.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Higher Level and Core Values	"I think leaders should have a clear understanding of where they want to take their team or the organization also and be able to communicate this vision in a way that inspires and motivates." – Interviewee 9
	"Being proud will not feed your family. I need to find a second job because my family has specific needs. We are human beings." – Interviewee 6

Analysis:

'Higher Level' and 'Sense of Pride; Core Values' suggest a moderately positive relationship between these variables within the context of Special Forces. This indicates that higher levels of rank or responsibility within the military hierarchy are moderately associated with a stronger sense of pride and adherence to core values. Drawing from the interviews and contextual discussions, this analysis explores how this relationship influences behavior, decision-making, and retention within the elite units.

Higher levels within the military hierarchy often come with increased responsibility, not just in terms of mission-critical tasks but also in embodying and transmitting the unit's ethos. Officers at higher ranks are expected to lead by example, demonstrating core values such as honor, courage, and commitment in every aspect of their conduct. This is crucial in settings like the Special Forces, where the stakes are invariably high, and the pressure to perform is intense. Officers who succeed at these levels tend to exhibit a strong alignment with the unit's values, which fosters a sense of pride in

their roles. Interviewee 9 emphasized the critical nature of this clarity and its inspirational power: "I think leaders should have a clear understanding of where they want to take their team or the organization also and be able to communicate this vision in a way that inspires and motivates." Such clarity helps maintain focus and coherence in the chaotic environments typical of Special Forces missions.

The sense of pride derived from being part of an elite unit could significantly enhance an officer's commitment to their role. In the Greek Special Forces to be proud is not enough as vividly referred to by Interviewee 6 "Being proud will not feed your family. I need to find a second job because my family has specific needs. We are human beings." This pride is often rooted in a deep-seated alignment with the core values of the military—values that are continually reinforced through training and operations. Interviewee 7 emphasized the critical role of these values in leadership: "The sense of right and wrong, morality, values like justice and wisdom and love for the country, the team spirit, all these, I believe, are elements of leaders who they can influence and inspire those that they are under their command." This statement underscores how core values not only guide professional conduct but also fortify leaders' resolve and ability to inspire their teams.

Retention in Special Forces is significantly impacted by how well officers at higher levels of responsibility can inculcate and maintain the unit's core values. When senior officers demonstrate a strong commitment to these values, it sets a powerful precedent for junior officers, enhancing overall morale and organizational loyalty. This modeling of values is crucial in an environment where every decision can have far-reaching consequences on team cohesion and mission success.

Strategic initiatives aimed at retention within Special Forces are crucial given the unique demands placed on these units and their personnel. Addressing retention through well-designed policies and programs that prioritize the well-being of officers, professional development, and acknowledgment of their contributions is essential for maintaining operational readiness and effectiveness. As these units often face high-stakes missions and prolonged deployments, the retention of seasoned officers is particularly vital. Interviewee 8 highlighted the potential consequences of failing to retain young officers: "If all these young officers decide to leave, then what's going to happen? It's going to be a very tough situation. Greece needs these people." This remark underscores the strategic importance of these individuals not just to the military's operational capacity but also to national security. The potential loss of highly skilled personnel within Special Forces units is not just a setback; it represents a critical vulnerability. Such losses can severely deplete the units' capabilities and accumulated expertise. This situation compounds the difficulty of training recruits to reach the same level of proficiency in a short timeframe. The specialized knowledge and experience that seasoned Officers bring are often the result of years of dedicated service and training and on-the-ground operations, which cannot easily be replicated or transmitted quickly to newcomers. The continuity of skill and expertise is crucial for maintaining the operational effectiveness and readiness of elite units.

What is more, the Special Operations Forces (SOF) Truth III clearly articulates that Special Operations Forces cannot be mass-produced. Achieving the high level of proficiency required for the challenging and specialized missions of SOF demands years of intensive training, both in specialized SOF schools and within the units themselves. This training is essential to transform competent individuals into fully capable, cohesive teams. Rushing this meticulous process risks diminishing the

overall effectiveness and operational capacity of these elite forces. It is a commitment to excellence that requires patience, precision, and a deep understanding of the unique demands placed on these highly skilled teams.

❖ **TEAM MEMBERS; RESPONSIBILITY and SENSE OF PRIDE; CORE VALUES**

Theme: The responsibility given to team members within the military enhances their sense of pride and commitment to core values.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Responsibility and Core Values	"The sense of duty and honor. They motivate us to stay committed to their role and all that. Take part a big part is the legacy and the traditions that we have." – Interviewee 4
	"No one trusts us, the young officers. This is so for me, these are the primary reasons why, resignations are increasing, and cadets are not getting inside the military academy." – Interviewee 5

Analysis:

'Team Members; Responsibility' and 'Sense of Pride; Core Values' suggest a strong relationship between the responsibility given to team members within the military and their sense of pride in serving in an elite force, like the Unit. Interviewee 4 stated, "The sense of duty and honor. They motivate us to stay committed to their role and all that. Take part a big part is the legacy and the traditions that we have." This indicates that as team members are entrusted with more responsibility, their identification with

and commitment to the organization's core values intensifies. When team members are given significant responsibilities, they often feel a deeper connection to the mission and outcomes. This sense of ownership can enhance their pride in the organization and strengthen their commitment to its core values.

Interviewee 5 mentioned, "No one trusts us, the young officers. This is so for me, these are the primary reasons why, resignations are increasing, and cadets are not getting inside the military academy. And, in addition, the second reason, is, the remuneration which an army officer has." Assigning responsibilities serves as an effective form of leadership development, cultivating a sense of pride and reinforcing the organization's core values as integral to personal and team success. The correlation suggests that when responsibilities are aligned with the organization's ethical standards and core values, team members are more likely to uphold and take pride in these values. This alignment fosters a culture of integrity and honor, which are critical in military settings.

4. External Factors and Geopolitical Impact

❖ MILITARY ACADEMY and SITUATION IN GREECE

Theme: The operational and contextual dynamics of the Hellenic Military Academy are closely linked to the broader societal, economic, and political circumstances in Greece.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Military Academy	"In the next years, we will face a crisis." – Interviewee 6

Theme	Indicative Statements
	"There must be better financial rewards and the most important is for me, there must be respect for all military personnel and Special Forces from society, Greek society." – Interviewee 8
	"There are no personnel that is designated with visiting high schools giving the information, telling young people what their perspectives or what their options might be within the armed forces. So there is nothing." – Interviewee 1
	"Our subordinates, our teammates are our customers, and because we are a customer-centric company." – Interviewee 6

Analysis:

'Military Academy' and the 'Situation in Greece' suggest a strong interconnection between the operational and contextual dynamics of the Hellenic Military Academy and the broader societal, economic, and political circumstances in Greece. The Greek financial condition can significantly impact funding and resources available to the Hellenic Military Academy and Special Forces. In times of economic prosperity, the academy might receive better funding, leading to improved facilities, training programs, and cadet welfare, which could enhance the overall academy experience and its reputation. Interviewee 6 mentioned, "This is the top of the iceberg that will follow up the next years, unfortunately. I think that in the next years, we will face a crisis."

Political instability in Greece could also affect the strategic priorities and operational focus of the Military Academy. Political support could bolster the academy's initiatives, while political turmoil might lead to uncertainty and shifts in military education and training focus. Public trust and support for military institutions in Greece played a significant role in shaping the morale and effectiveness of the Hellenic Military Academy. Interviewee 8 stated, "There must be better financial rewards and the most important is more important for me, there must be respect for all military personnel and Special Forces from society, Greek society." Positive public sentiment could enhance the motivation and pride of both cadets and staff, thereby enhancing the overall performance and prestige of the institution.

Interviewee 1 stated, "There is no personnel that is designated with visiting high schools giving the information, telling young people what their perspectives or what their options might be within the armed forces. So, there is nothing. We pretty much depend on the personal research and personal motivation its candidate cadet has to enter the armed forces. So, there's no serious, the recruitment process, at least for our military academies, it is nonexistent." Conversely, the higher echelons did not give this matter the attention it deserved, resulting in a decline in the foundational standards of the Hellenic exams. This neglect led to a loss of morale and compromised the effectiveness of the Academy's training programs and operational directives.

Interviewee 6 emphasized the importance of servant leadership and customer-centric values within the military, stating: "Our subordinates, our teammates are our customers and because we are a customer-centric company." This perspective underlines that leadership within the military, much like in business, is not about hierarchical authority but about the capacity to inspire and elevate those around you.

True leadership is about making a conscientious choice to support and uplift your team, fostering an environment where team members are motivated to achieve their best. This is how we the higher leadership should approach the Military Academy development. All starts and ends in the cadets' training.

❖ **The Situation in Greece & Passion; Guy**

Theme: The broader context of Greece's situation significantly affects the operational effectiveness and morale of the Greek military.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Situation in Greece	"It was a child's dream. I wanted to be a Green Beret. I wanted to serve my country, my flag, to serve the Greek people, and I considered it, something really special, within Greek society and the world society even as well. That was my biggest motivation, a childish dream to be not to be an army officer, but a Special Forces Officer. That was my dream." – Interviewee 5

Analysis:

The situation in Greece encompasses many factors that affect the operational effectiveness and morale of the Greek military, including economic constraints, political instability, and cultural perceptions of the military, which collectively pose significant challenges for the organization. The Passion Guy embodies a lifelong dedication to serving his country and contributing to something greater than himself. Driven by a deep desire to make a positive impact, he strives to elevate those around him through self-sacrifice and altruism. His commitment is not just to fight for a

better future but to inspire and support others to reach their full potential alongside him.

Recurrent themes from the interviews indicate a pervasive dissatisfaction with leadership, pointing to potential issues in leadership effectiveness, transparency, and accountability. Additionally, there appears to be an inadequate support system for personnel, spanning from mental health resources to career development opportunities, which are crucial for maintaining an effective, motivated, and ready-to-fight force. These organizational shortcomings contribute to a workplace environment where personnel may feel undervalued and unsupported. The concept of passion, as revealed through the narratives of the interviewees, emerges as a potent force driving many individuals towards a career in the military, particularly within the elite units such as the Special Forces.

Interviewee 5 vividly describes this passion as stemming from a childhood dream: "It was a child's dream. I wanted to be a Green Beret. I wanted to serve my country, my flag, to serve the Greek people, and, I considered it, something really special, within Greek society and the world society even as well. That was my biggest motivation, a childish dream to be not to be an army officer, but a Special Forces Officer. That was my dream." This deep-rooted motivation is often pitted against the systemic challenges within the military, creating a stark conflict between personal aspirations and the harsh professional realities faced within the service.

5. Support Systems and Organizational Culture

❖ SUPPORT; GENERALLY, and EVALUATION SYSTEM

Theme: General support within an organization significantly influences the perception and effectiveness of its evaluation system.

Theme	Indicative Statements
General Support	"Make them so disappointed and make them understand there is no, possibility, no chance for things getting better. This is a continuous process because, it affects our motivation, and it affects our will to continue to be part of this community for sure. It's, what in psychology is called, learned helplessness." – Interviewee 1
	"Making some things better, like having meritocracy back in place and, rewarding people accordingly or supporting people accordingly." – Interviewee 1
	"First of all, there have to be actual assessments for each employee. And the promotions have to be based on these." – Interviewee 5

Analysis:

'Support; Generally' and 'Evaluation System' suggest a significant link between the general support provided within an organization and the perception or effectiveness of its evaluation system. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "Make them so disappointed and make them understand there is no, possibility, no chance for things getting better. This is a continuous process because, it affects our motivation, and it affects our will to continue to be part of this community for sure. It's, what in psychology is called, learned helplessness." General support within the organization, when perceived as fair and comprehensive, could lead to a more favorable view of the evaluation system. If individuals feel supported in their roles, they are more likely to view the evaluation processes as just and beneficial, rather than punitive or biased. Interviewee 1 stated

that "Making some things better, like having meritocracy back in place and, rewarding people accordingly or supporting people accordingly." Also, Interviewee 5 mentioned that "First of all, there have to be actual assessments for each employee. And the promotions have to be based on these. The second thing is that the promotions, do not have to be once every 5 years, but based on specific skill sets and capabilities."

In the absence of a structured evaluation system, informal feedback, and evaluations often take place as a half measure. When support within the unit is strong, personnel might be more engaged with these informal processes, viewing them as opportunities for personal and professional growth. This engagement can be particularly crucial in the Special Forces, where the demanding nature of the job requires constant adaptation and improvement. Interviewee 3 mentioned that "The generation that is nowadays in the commander's seats, learn an army that is completely different from the one that they are commanding right now. The technology is getting every day bigger and bigger. And many of them, if not most of them cannot understand it."

Support in this context does not just refer to emotional or moral support but also includes professional development opportunities, access to resources, and recognition of efforts. Such support can make up for the lack of formal feedback mechanisms by providing other forms of validation and acknowledgment of personnel efforts and achievements. This might include training abroad, leading abroad missions, international exercises, or even possible promotions. Interviewee 3 asked, "Why do the young people don't choose to go inside an army academy? I think that the days it's a little bit different because unfortunately, we saw in that community, in that society that you can live and create wealth with a few work hours or not try hard, for example, influencers or YouTubers or something else. So, they have different

advertisements that drag them to do something else and not to choose, let's say, the difficult way because to be inside the army, everyone knows that it is difficult." The organizational culture could enhance the perception of support and evaluations fostering a strong sense of brotherhood, integrity, and commitment. Such a culture helps align personal values with organizational goals, making even informal assessments feel more meaningful and fairer. Interviewee 3 discusses potential improvements in organizational support, suggesting "Another thing is going to be, in terms of Greek society to provide at least the basic things, housing, maybe, to not all of them, but let's say categorize the priority in the emergency and then to give them opportunities for both military and academic training."

❖ SUPPORT; GENERALLY and MILITARY ACADEMY

Theme: General support within an organization positively impacts aspects related to the military academy, such as its effectiveness, reputation, and the satisfaction of its cadets and staff.

Theme	Indicative Statements
General Support and Military Academy	"All these things start and end in the Hellenic Military Academy. Because even at the time we are speaking, some of our classmates are working there, are serving there as, officers. And they are carrying out exactly the main tasks as before 10 years." – Interviewee 5
	"Young talents don't choose to go as cadets. They choose anything else but military academies, which also explains the low entrance grades for the Hellenic Military Academy. And we've got the cadets

Theme	Indicative Statements
	that opt for resigning even before graduating from the Academy." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

 'Support; Generally' and 'Military Academy' indicate a significant relationship where general support within an organization, such as the military, positively impacts aspects related to the military academy, such as its effectiveness, reputation, and the satisfaction of its cadets and staff, who are going to be the future Special Forces officers. Increased support within the Military Academy, such as meaningful training programs, mentoring, guidance, and resources, likely contributes to a more positive overall perception of the institution by cadets and staff. The future officers are going to be the future ambassadors. This support could be seen as a foundational pillar that enhances the educational and developmental experiences provided by the academy.

Interviewee 5 discusses, "All these things start and end in the Hellenic Military Academy. Because even at the time we are speaking, some of our classmates are working there, are serving there as officers. And they are carrying out exactly the main tasks as before 10 years." General support mechanisms might include psychological counseling, career planning, and academic assistance, which help cadets navigate the challenges of military training and education. Better support systems can lead to improved performance, lower dropout rates, and higher satisfaction among cadets. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "Young talents don't choose to go as cadets. They choose anything else but military academies, which also explains

the low entrance grades for the Hellenic Military Academy. And we've got the cadets that opt for resigning even before graduating from the Academy." This ongoing relationship can lead to increased support for the academy, whether through mentoring current cadets, providing financial contributions, or enhancing the academy's reputation in broader military and civilian communities. When cadets feel generally supported during their time at the academy, they are more likely to maintain strong ties with the institution as alumni.

❖ **SUPPORT; GENERALLY and BAD LEADERSHIP; PERSONAL AGENDA**

Theme: Foundational support systems within an organization might interact with or be influenced by the prevalence of leadership perceived as having self-serving agendas.

Theme	Indicative Statements
General Support and Bad Leadership	"It's a continuation, a perpetuation of bad leadership, of bad leadership succession, of bad leaders, handing over, taking over from one another that makes people, retain." – Interviewee 1
	"On the other hand, we have this bad leadership aspect, and the bad leadership aspect, it's all about personal agenda, in my understanding. That's why these bad leaders are having these people around them who have no opinion, and they agree with whatever the commander said to gain from this situation, the maximum for their personal agenda." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

'Support; Generally' and 'Bad Leadership; Personal Agenda' in the Greek Special Forces (GSF) present a complex picture, highlighting how the foundational support systems within the organization might interact with or be influenced by the prevalence of leadership perceived as having self-serving agendas. This context is particularly significant given the unique operational environment and mission scope of the GSF, which includes non-traditional roles such as responding to natural disasters and border security in the absence of regular international deployments under the EU or NATO. When leadership is viewed as being driven by personal agendas or bad leadership practices, there can be a significant impact on the morale and trust of the personnel. In such situations, the general support systems within the organization become even more crucial. These systems may include training programs, resources for personal and professional development, health services, and family support programs.

A strong positive correlation indicates that as the perception of bad leadership increases, the reliance on and perhaps appreciation for these support mechanisms also grows. This might be because these systems serve as a buffer, maintaining operational readiness and morale in the face of leadership deficiencies. In environments where leadership fails to effectively inspire or guide, general support systems within the organization might be perceived as more valuable and essential. This can be particularly true in Special Forces, where the effectiveness of operations heavily relies on the well-being and readiness of its personnel. Interviewee 1 mentioned that "It's a continuation, a perpetuation of bad leadership, of bad leadership succession, of bad leaders, handing over, taking over from one another that makes people, retain. It's not that one bad commander or that one bad chief of staff or that, one bad leader or, a junior leader that, dissuades people so much that make them resign."

The correlation suggests that in the presence of bad leadership, the existence and quality of support systems could significantly influence personnel decisions to remain with or leave the organization. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "And on the other hand, we have this bad leadership aspect, and the bad leadership aspect, it's all about personal agenda, in my understanding. That's why these bad leaders have these people around them who have no opinion, and they agree with whatever the commander said to gain from this situation, the maximum for their personal agenda. And this situation is going over and over again." Effective support mechanisms could mitigate some of the negative impacts of poor leadership by ensuring that the basic and professional needs of the personnel are met, thereby increasing job satisfaction and loyalty to the Special Forces community despite leadership issues. Support systems are also closely tied to perceptions of organizational justice. In the face of self-serving leadership agendas, comprehensive support systems might foster a sense of unfairness and inequity within the organization.

❖ **SUPPORT; GENERALLY and PASSION; GUY**

Theme: Extensive support may inadvertently stifle the fervor of deeply committed officers.

Theme	Indicative Statements
General Support and Passion	"Our superior, our leaders are able to inspire us and influence us to make different decisions even in our daily life, not only in the army." – Interviewee 1
	"The junior leaders don't have mentors, real mentors from the hierarchy. This led us to lose morale and morality and to spend a lot of time trying

Theme	Indicative Statements
	to solve problems that do not belong to our levels. And, that can be seen from, our team members, from soldiers, from NCOs." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

'Support; Generally' and 'Passion; Guy' reveal a nuanced interplay within the organization, where extensive support may inadvertently stifle the fervor of deeply committed officers. The 'Passion Guy' is the individual who embodies the essence of military dedication. They have willingly navigated rigorous selection processes to join elite units like the Greek Special Forces, driven by a profound desire to serve their country. Every day, they rigorously train to be mentally and physically harder, aiming to surpass their adversaries and embody the epitome of resilience and strength.

However, the challenge arises when the support provided by the organization, while well-intentioned, becomes so encompassing that it diminishes the very challenges and hardships that these officers thrive on. Such comprehensive support might include processes and resources that reduce daily operational difficulties, unintentionally impacting the intrinsic motivation of these officers. When tasks become less demanding, it may conflict with their inner drive and desire for personal conquest. Interviewee 1 highlights a critical aspect of this dynamic, noting, "Our superior, our leaders are able to inspire us and influence us to make different decisions even in our daily life, not only in the army." This statement underscores the significant influence that leaders have in shaping not just the operational but also the personal landscapes of these officers. It suggests that while leadership aims to inspire and facilitate, there

is a delicate balance to maintain. Leaders must ensure that their support does not dilute the essential challenges and rigors that help these passionate young talents feel fulfilled and continually motivated.

Passionate individuals in the military often value the hardships and challenges associated with their roles as essential elements of their identity and growth. Interviewee 1 refers, "The junior leaders don't have mentors, real mentors from the hierarchy. This led us to lose morale and morality and to spend a lot of time trying to solve problems that do not belong to our levels. And, that can be seen from, our team members, from soldiers, from NCOs." This conflict can lead to a decrease in passion as the individuals may feel that the organization is moving away from the traditional military values of toughness and independence. High levels of organizational support could be perceived as limiting the opportunities for personal achievement and autonomy. For someone driven by passion, satisfaction comes from achieving tough goals and advancing through personal effort. If the support provided by the organization minimizes these opportunities by making tasks easier or providing excessive guidance and resources, it could lead to a reduction in personal motivation and passion. In the Greek Special Forces, the intensity of the physical and mental challenges plays a crucial role in maintaining the passion and enthusiasm of the personnel. If the general support mechanisms reduce these challenges, either by lowering training standards or by providing too much assistance, it may lead to a decrease in the 'thrill' and satisfaction derived from the job, which is a critical component of passion for many military personnel.

6. Career Transitions and External Mobility

❖ LEAVE THE ARMY; BUSINESS and EVALUATION SYSTEM

Theme: Decisions to leave the military for business careers might be significantly influenced by the perceived effectiveness or fairness of the military's evaluation systems.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Leaving Army and Evaluation Systems	"Why has this phenomenon happened? Because the world, military world, lost faith in the homeland." – Interviewee 9
	"There's no evaluation system before to promote you to the next rank." – Interviewee 8
	"The ability to prevent unwanted situations, see problems, provide solutions, and most importantly, times of tension between team members, be the one who will be sober and give the best solution to calm the tension, in the end, to have the ability to see and think out of the box." – Interviewee 7
	"The leader needs to be stubborn because at a hard time if he is not stubborn, he's not concentrated on one of his decisions. It's better to take a wrong decision quickly than not to take one." – Interviewee 7

Analysis:

'Leave the Army; Business' and 'Evaluation System' indicate a moderate positive relationship. This suggests that decisions to leave the military for business careers might be significantly influenced by the perceived effectiveness or fairness of the military's evaluation systems. Interviewee 9 asked, "Why this phenomenon has happened? Because the world, military world, lost faith in the homeland." The military's evaluation system is designed to assess performance, potential, and readiness for promotion. If perceived as fair and transparent, it can motivate personnel by clearly delineating the path to advancement and recognition. Interviewee 8 mentioned that "There's no evaluation system before to promote you to the next rank." Conversely, if the system is seen as biased or opaque, it may drive personnel to seek career advancement outside the military, where they perceive opportunities to be assessed more on merit and less on conforming to less tangible military-specific criteria.

The impact of military skills in business, particularly those honed by Special Forces officers, is substantial and multifaceted. These individuals bring adaptability, resilience, and out-of-the-box thinking, being proactive in times of uncertainty, making them well-suited to navigate the rapid changes and uncertainties of the business world. Their leadership experiences, characterized by responsibility for team life and mission success, translate into a profound ability to inspire, motivate, and unify teams in corporate settings. Interviewee 7 refers to the Special Forces Officer as the person who has, "The ability to prevent unwanted situations, see problems, provide solutions, and most importantly, times of tension between team members, be the one who will be sober and give the best solution to calm the tension, in the end, to have the ability to see and think out of the box." This also enhances their capability in

crisis management, where making strategic decisions quickly and under pressure is crucial. The boldness and risk-taking ingrained through high-adrenaline activities like freefall jumping manifest in business as a readiness to pursue innovative and entrepreneurial ventures, despite potential risks. Interviewee 7 mentioned that "The leader needs to be stubborn because at a hard time, if he is not stubborn, he's not concentrated on one of his decisions. It's better to make a wrong decision quickly than not to take one." Moreover, the perseverance and unwavering commitment developed through rigorous training and missions equip them to tackle challenging projects in business, particularly in roles that require resilience and a strong resolve to overcome obstacles. Altogether, Special Forces officers contribute not only strategic and operational strength to the businesses they enter but also significantly uplift the ethical standards and cultural dynamics of their organizations.

The decision to leave the army can also be influenced by the support systems in place for transitioning to civilian life. Interviewee 7 discussed, "I don't feel the safety in me to leave my family to leave the family back and be on a mission without knowing who will support my child." The individuals with these specific skill sets are more valuable in the business world, a fact that makes this transition more lucrative. Effective support systems, including career counseling and professional development initiatives that align with the evaluation system, can either retain personnel or prepare them for a smooth transition to business roles. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "We observed in the past, operators being deployed in, dangerous components of this world without even the family support. And this is quite a matter because they left for 6 months, and no one was there to support them if something bad happened." Where such support is lacking, the disconnect might propel individuals to seek opportunities where they feel their potential will be better realized.

❖ LEAVE THE ARMY; BUSINESS and MILITARY ACADEMY

Theme: Experiences at the Military Academy have a meaningful relationship with the decision to transition from the military to a business career.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Leaving Army and Military Academy	"You cannot have any promotion based on your skills and productivity. You cannot productively express yourself. And I think these are the primary reason why, all the other, persons are leaving." – Interviewee 5
	"An army officer who has disqualifications is not to carry out easy tasks, easy routine tasks. While at the same time, our other youngsters in our age are providing strategic consultancy, are taking trading decisions, various trading decisions, are closing investment banking deals." – Interviewee 5

Analysis:

'Leave the Army; Business' with 'Military Academy' indicates a significant correlation. This means that there is a meaningful relationship between the experience officers encounter at the Military Academy and the decision to transition from the military to a business career. The correlation at the Military Academy shows several factors that are related to training, experiences, and perceptions that have a bearing on career decisions. Being a place of minimal resources, the Military Academy creates a cadet trying to be frugal in trying to solve their daily problems. Such skills make the cadets out-of-the-box thinkers and more adaptable. Probably the officers may recognize how applicable such frugality skills are in business roles and therefore be

more willing to transition to business careers where such skills might be used and developed.

Probably, business experiences at the Military Academy may expand the officers' views of career possibilities and aspirations. Being exposed to so many types of roles and responsibilities, there is the possibility that they might also become interested in other types of careers outside the military, where they will see so much potential for personal and professional growth. Interviewee 5 mentioned, "You cannot have any promotion based on your skills and productivity. you cannot productively express yourself. And I think these are the primary reasons why, all the other, people are leaving. An army officer who has disqualifications is not to carry out easy tasks, easy routine tasks. While at the same time, our other youngsters in our age are providing strategic consultancy, are taking trading decisions, various trading decisions, are closing investment banking deals." There is no networking opportunity at the Military Academy; this includes not even having networking opportunities with alumni of the Military Academy who have successfully transitioned to business opportunities. However, the presence of successful transitions might provide the inspiration officers need to pursue business opportunities after their careers in the military. The officers may feel that the culture and values at the Military Academy are the same as those in the business world, therefore helping them more easily take civilian roles. This will be particularly applicable if the academy is framed around entrepreneurial thinking or some form of innovation.

❖ **LEAVE THE ARMY; BUSINESS and BAD LEADERSHIP;**

PERSONAL AGENDA

Theme: Negative perceptions or experiences of leadership within the military could be a driving factor for officers to leave and seek opportunities in the business sector.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Leaving the Army and Bad Leadership	"This core of ethics and legacy of Green Berets does not live within everyone. And it's like, in deontology, a should be the basis of facts. It's not what is happening." – Interviewee 1
	"Maybe if it was shared by everyone and these values, this warrior ethos, and morale and talent and innovation and character qualities were rewarded because there would be if there was a meritocracy, maybe they would choose to stay." – Interviewee 1

Analysis:

'Leave the Army; Business' and 'Bad Leadership; Personal Agenda' underscore a significant relationship, suggesting that negative perceptions or experiences of leadership within the military could be a driving factor for officers to leave and seek opportunities in the business sector. This link reflects broader issues within military leadership dynamics, where poor leadership characterized by self-serving agendas can significantly impact officers' career decisions. Interviewee 1 highlighted, "This core of ethics and legacy of Green Berets does not live within everyone. And it's like, in deontology, a should be the basis of facts. It's not what is happening." In the context

of the Greek Special Forces, as indicated through various interviews, there is a visible frustration with the lack of clear mission objectives and an overemphasis on personal agendas by some leaders. These factors contribute to a work environment that can demotivate and disillusion officers, making the prospect of civilian business careers more appealing.

Officers in such environments might feel that their skills and leadership capabilities are underutilized or suppressed, leading to a decrease in job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Interviewee 1 mentioned, "Maybe if it was shared by everyone and these values, this warrior ethos, and morale and talent and innovation and character qualities were rewarded because there would be if there was a meritocracy, maybe they would choose to stay." Transitioning from the military to the business world allows these officers to leverage the rigorous training, discipline, and leadership experience they've acquired in a new context that might offer more meritocratic recognition and career advancement opportunities. The business sector often values the precise organizational, strategic, and crisis management skills that military officers bring to the table, which are seen as assets in navigating the complexities of business operations. Moreover, the decision to leave the military for business often comes from a desire to escape a toxic command climate and to find a professional environment where one's contributions are acknowledged and rewarded. This shift is seen to regain control over one's professional trajectory and to find renewed purpose and satisfaction in work—elements that might be compromised under poor military leadership.

7. **Role of Responsibility in Organizational Ethics**

   ❖ **TEAM MEMBERS; RESPONSIBILITY and**

   EVALUATION SYSTEM

Theme: Increases in team members' responsibilities potentially affect how they are evaluated, highlighting systemic issues within the evaluation processes.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Responsibility and Evaluation Systems	"Believing in your team doesn't compare to any feelings when you look into their eyes and they respond to you. There has to be support, of course, in money and support in general but the most important thing, it's our ideas. I think the passion and love for the military is not lost. It can be transforming into something else, but without vision, we are going nowhere no matter how much money we have." – Interviewee 9
	"For example, if I were the person who is gonna take this decision regarding, the reward management system, I personally would create a system that's gonna be fair. This means that to get to the next rank, you have to pass through evaluation, your reward is gonna be the next rank." – Interviewee 8

Analysis:

'Team Members; Responsibility' and the 'Evaluation System' suggest a significant disconnect where increases in team members' responsibilities are potentially seen as

having an impact on how they are evaluated. This might point to systemic issues within the evaluation processes that could be misaligned with the actual duties and responsibilities being assigned. Interviewee 9 mentioned, "Believing in your team doesn't compare to any feelings when you look into their eyes and they respond to you. There has to be support, of course, in money and support in general But the most important thing, it's our ideas. I think the passion and love for the military is not lost. It can be transforming into something else, but without vision, we are going nowhere no matter how much money we have."

The evaluation system might not be effectively updated to reflect the actual responsibilities and complexities of the roles. This could result in evaluations that do not fairly or accurately assess the contributions and performance of team members who have taken on increased responsibilities. Interviewee 8 mentioned such a system, "For example, if I were the person who is gonna take this decision regarding, the reward management system, I personally would create a system that's gonna be fair. This means that to get to the next rank, you have to pass through evaluation, your reward is gonna be the next rank." With more responsibilities, team members might face higher expectations and pressure, which could adversely affect their performance as assessed by the existing evaluation criteria. This might lead to lower performance scores, even if the quantity and complexity of work have increased. If team members feel that their increased efforts are not being recognized or adequately assessed by the evaluation system, it can lead to decreased motivation and a perception of unfairness, further impacting their performance and satisfaction at work.

❖ TEAM MEMBERS; RESPONSIBILITY and SUPPORT; GENERALLY

Theme: As the responsibilities of team members increase, there is a perceived decrease in the general support they receive.

Theme	Indicative Statements
Responsibility and General Support	"Money is important for sure, especially having children and raising them in Greece and then they were ready to be deployed with no support. And I mean, this situation is bad and might be the outcome of bad leadership." – Interviewee 9

Analysis:

'Team Members; Responsibility' and 'Support; Generally' indicate that as the responsibilities of team members increase, there is a perceived decrease in the general support they receive. This dynamic could be indicative of systemic issues within the organization, where support structures are not scaling appropriately with the increased burdens placed on personnel. From the discussions and interviews analyzed, it's clear that Special Forces officers often face intense demands, encompassing both high-risk operational tasks and the expectation to maintain exceptional standards in various aspects of military life. As responsibilities escalate, the necessary support in terms of resources, guidance, and recognition should ideally increase to match this burden. However, the negative correlation suggests a shortfall in this area.

In a high-stakes environment like the Greek Special Forces, team members are often expected to perform at their peak without adequate support systems that address their

professional and personal needs. This could include everything from insufficient logistical support and lack of advanced training opportunities to inadequate psychological support and career development guidance. Such deficiencies can lead to increased stress and burnout, particularly as responsibilities grow. Several interviewees expressed feelings of being overwhelmed and unsupported in their roles, indicating that while they are entrusted with significant responsibilities, the organizational support is not commensurate with these demands. Interviewee 9 mentioned, "Money is important for sure, especially having children and raising them in Greece and then they were ready to be deployed with no support. And I mean, this situation is bad and might be the outcome of bad leadership." This mismatch can create a sense of isolation and undervaluation, negatively impacting morale and potentially leading to higher attrition rates.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a comprehensive analysis of the interviews, shedding light on the significant factors influencing the retention of young officers in the Greek Special Forces. The key findings highlight several critical aspects.

Effective leadership in the Special Forces is pivotal. Leaders who inspire trust and commitment, emphasize self-awareness, and dedicate themselves to a higher mission are essential. These leaders integrate team members deeply into the unit's culture, thereby enhancing motivation and retention. Leadership plays a crucial role in retention, as leaders who inspire and provide clear career development opportunities significantly influence officers' decisions to stay. Officers are more likely to remain committed when they believe in the mission and see defined career paths.

Conversely, poor leadership, driven by personal agendas, undermines unit cohesion and operational efficiency, eroding trust and morale. This leads to higher resignation rates and diminished effectiveness of the Special Forces. Transparent and fair evaluation systems are vital for motivating officers and aligning their career progression with personal and professional goals. The lack of such systems results in dissatisfaction and increased turnover.

High retention rates are often due to a strong alignment between the values of the Special Forces and the aspirations of their officers. Officers who feel a strong cultural fit with the unit's ethos and values are more likely to stay. Furthermore, Greece's economic and political context significantly impacts retention rates. Financial instability and a societal crisis of values affect the morale and career decisions of Special Forces officers. Comprehensive support systems, including career development, psychological counseling, and family support, are essential for maintaining high retention rates. The absence of such support exacerbates the negative effects of poor leadership and challenging conditions.

In conclusion, the findings emphasize the necessity for robust leadership development programs, fair and transparent evaluation systems, and strong support mechanisms. These elements are crucial for enhancing the retention of officers in the Greek Special Forces, ensuring their operational effectiveness, and maintaining high morale within these elite units.

Chapter 5: Discussion-Conclusions

This chapter delves into the insights gained from semi-structured interviews with Greek Special Forces officers, examining the implications of leadership dynamics on retention rates. By avoiding hypotheses and integrating our findings with existing literature, we elucidate key themes and their significance within the broader context of military leadership and organizational culture.

Leadership Dynamics and Retention

Our analysis reveals that leadership significantly influences the retention of officers within the Greek Special Forces. This finding aligns with extensive literature emphasizing the crucial role of effective leadership in fostering commitment and satisfaction among military personnel. Transformational leadership, characterized by vision, inspiration, and individualized consideration, emerged as a critical factor influencing officers' decisions to remain in service. One officer remarked, "My decision to stay was heavily influenced by my commanding officer's ability to lead with both strength and empathy." This observation resonates with Eberly et al. (2017), who highlight that transformational leaders enhance job satisfaction and retention by creating an environment where officers feel valued and motivated.

Ethical Leadership and Trust

Ethical leadership, encompassing integrity, fairness, and transparency, was another significant theme. Officers consistently reported that leaders who demonstrated ethical behavior built trust and morale within their units. This finding supports the arguments of Koh (2018) and Baporikar (2021), who assert that ethical leadership is crucial in military settings for building trust and fostering a positive organizational culture. One officer noted, "Knowing that my leaders would always act with integrity

made me feel secure and motivated to give my best." The emphasis on ethical leadership aligns with the literature, indicating that trust and ethical behavior are fundamental components of effective military leadership (Kritz, 2018; Baporikar, 2021).

Mentorship and Supportive Work Environment

Strong mentorship and a supportive work environment were repeatedly highlighted as crucial for retention. Effective mentorship helps officers navigate their careers and feel valued, as emphasized by Spain et al. (2023). One officer stated, "Having a mentor who genuinely cared about my progress made a significant difference in my decision to stay." Similarly, a supportive work environment, which includes emotional support and recognition of personal sacrifices, aligns with findings from Peavie (2012) and Glaser and Rahman (2023). Officers who felt supported were more likely to experience job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to their roles. An officer remarked, "The support I received from my colleagues and superiors during tough times made me feel like I was part of a family, which reinforced my decision to stay."

Detailed Analysis of Themes

Leadership Dynamics and Ethos

Leadership dynamics within Special Forces play a crucial role in creating an environment that promotes high retention rates. Leaders who embody and promote the unit's values, instill a sense of pride, and clearly communicate mission goals tend to inspire strong commitment among officers. This connection underscores the need for leaders who are not only tactically and technically proficient but also skilled in the softer aspects of leadership, such as empathy, morale-building, and personnel development. The importance of such holistic leadership is echoed in the works of

Eberly et al. (2017) and Baporikar (2021), who highlight the necessity of a balanced leadership approach that incorporates both strategic acumen and emotional intelligence.

Responsibility and Core Values

Responsibility and core values were significant themes in our analysis. Officers indicated that as they were entrusted with more responsibility, their identification with and commitment to the organization's core values intensified. Interviewee 4 stated, "The sense of duty and honor. They motivate us to stay committed to their role and all that. Take part a big part is the legacy and the traditions that we have." This finding aligns with existing literature, which suggests that increased responsibility strengthens officers' commitment to organizational values (Koh, 2018; Baporikar, 2021). The role of responsibility in fostering a deep connection to organizational values is crucial, as it enhances both individual and collective commitment to the mission (Raziq et al., 2021).

Supportive Work Environment

A supportive work environment was frequently mentioned as a key factor influencing retention. This environment included emotional support from peers and superiors, recognition of personal sacrifices, and a culture that valued and cared for its members. Officers who felt supported were more likely to experience job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to their roles. This aligns with findings from Peavie (2012) and Glaser and Rahman (2023). One officer remarked, "The support I received from my colleagues and superiors during tough times made me feel like I was part of a family, which reinforced my decision to stay." The provision of support mechanisms such as counseling services, career development opportunities, and family support programs

is essential in maintaining a high level of job satisfaction and commitment (Glaser & Rahman, 2023).

Optimizing Transformational Leadership and Ethos for Retention

The study indicates that changes could be made to optimize these leadership factors to improve retention rates. Developing training programs that emphasize ethical leadership and decision-making under pressure can help leaders better embody the ethos expected of them. Furthermore, transparent evaluation systems that recognize and reward the achievement of team goals can enhance morale and retention. Policy changes that support family and community life may also address support themes that influence a soldier's decision to remain in service. These recommendations are supported by Wardynski et al. (2013), who advocate for comprehensive leadership development programs that integrate ethical considerations and practical decision-making skills.

Broader Implications and Future Research

Long-Term Impact of Leadership Training

Future research should explore the long-term impact of leadership training programs on retention, considering external factors such as economic conditions and family support systems. Dyson and Martin (2021) called for further exploration of these impacts, which could provide more comprehensive insights into how leadership training influences retention over time. Understanding the longitudinal effects of leadership training can help in designing programs that are not only effective in the short term but also sustainable in fostering long-term commitment and satisfaction.

Comparative Studies Across Different Contexts

Investigating the interplay between different leadership styles and retention in various cultural and organizational contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of this critical issue. Comparative studies across different military units and civilian organizations could reveal nuanced insights into how leadership styles impact retention in diverse settings (Wardynski et al., 2013). Such studies would enhance our understanding of the universality of effective leadership traits and the contextual adaptations required for different environments.

Comparison with Existing Literature

Transformational Leadership

Our study highlights the crucial role of transformational leadership in retaining Greek Special Forces officers. This mirrors what many studies have found: transformational leaders who inspire, motivate, and offer personalized support significantly boost job satisfaction and commitment (Eberly et al., 2017; Raziq et al., 2021). These leaders create an environment where officers feel empowered and valued, which is essential for maintaining high retention rates.

Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership is another key factor in our study, aligning with the findings of Koh (2018) and Baporikar (2021). Leaders who demonstrate integrity, fairness, and ethical decision-making foster a culture of trust and morale, which is essential for retention. This ethical foundation is critical in military settings, where the consequences of leadership decisions can have profound impacts on both personnel and operations (Kritz, 2018; Baporikar, 2021).

Mentorship

Our study shows that effective mentorship significantly impacts retention, which aligns with research emphasizing its importance in military contexts (Spain, Lin, & Farina, 2023; Wakabi, 2016). Good mentors provide guidance, support, and career development opportunities, fostering a sense of belonging and commitment among officers. The role of mentorship in professional growth and organizational loyalty is well-documented, highlighting its importance in retention strategies (Spain et al., 2023).

Recommendations

1) Introduction of Flexible Contract Systems

Rationale and Benefits:

Implementing flexible contract systems within elite military units, such as the Greek Special Forces, addresses key aspects impacting retention. By offering 5-year renewable terms, these contracts provide officers with greater career control, aligning professional commitments with personal and family planning. This approach is essential in providing stability and predictability, which are crucial for officers who often face unpredictable and demanding career environments.

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Retention:

Flexible contracts offer a structured yet adaptable career path, enhancing job satisfaction by allowing officers to plan their futures more effectively. Predictability alleviates stress related to career uncertainty, a significant factor in the decision to leave the military. Clear career trajectories also facilitate long-term commitment and

loyalty to the organization, as officers feel more secure in their roles and future prospects.

Strategic Timing of Contract Renewals:

The timing of contract renewals is critical. For instance, offering a contract renewal with added financial incentives after completing initial or specialized training can encourage officers to stay during a peak period of skills and marketability. Similarly, mid-career renewals can align with promotions or increased responsibilities, reinforcing commitment during critical reassessment periods. Pre-retirement incentives can also be effective, encouraging seasoned officers to extend their service, thus retaining valuable experience and leadership within the unit.

Challenges and Considerations:

Implementing flexible contracts requires fairness and transparency. Criteria for renewals must be clearly defined and communicated to prevent perceptions of favoritism. Balancing the flexibility of these contracts with the operational needs of the Special Forces is essential to maintain readiness and effectiveness. Additionally, managing the budgetary implications of increased financial incentives and ensuring the system's sustainability over time are crucial factors.

Supporting Literature:

Asch et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of financial incentives and stability in retaining military personnel, suggesting that structured and predictable career paths, reinforced by financial incentives, significantly enhance retention rates. This aligns with the proposed flexible contract system, which combines stability with adaptability to meet both organizational and personal needs.

2) Promotion of Meritocracy

Rationale and Benefits:

Establishing a merit-based system where promotions and rewards are based on measurable achievements and demonstrated capabilities is fundamental to fostering a culture of fairness, morale, and professional growth. Meritocracy ensures that promotions are earned, enhancing motivation and commitment among officers by recognizing and rewarding their efforts and accomplishments.

Components of a Merit-Based System:

A comprehensive merit-based system should include:

- **Clear Criteria for Promotions and Rewards:** Criteria must be objective and transparent, ensuring that all officers understand the standards they need to meet. This includes measurable performance metrics, leadership qualities, and contributions to team success.

- **Regular Evaluations:** Continuous feedback through regular evaluations allows officers to understand their performance, identify areas for improvement, and align their efforts with organizational goals.

- **Diverse Range of Rewards:** Beyond promotions, rewards can include financial bonuses, commendations, training opportunities, and assignments to prestigious positions or special projects.

Impact on Organizational Culture:

Implementing meritocracy can transform organizational culture by promoting fairness and transparency. Officers are more likely to feel valued and motivated when their achievements are recognized and rewarded based on objective criteria. This leads to

higher job satisfaction, a stronger commitment to the organization, and a culture of continuous improvement and excellence.

Challenges and Considerations:

Establishing a meritocratic system requires overcoming potential biases and ensuring consistent application of criteria. Training evaluators to apply standards objectively and fairly is crucial. Balancing merit-based promotions with the need for teamwork and collaboration is essential to prevent excessive competition that could undermine unit cohesion. Additionally, ongoing monitoring and adjustment of the system are necessary to maintain its fairness and effectiveness.

Supporting Literature:

Eberly et al. (2017) highlight the positive impact of meritocratic systems on job satisfaction and retention, indicating that performance-based promotions enhance motivation and commitment. Their research supports the implementation of a merit-based system in the Greek Special Forces, demonstrating the benefits of fair and transparent reward structures.

3) Family Support Programs

Rationale and Benefits:

Comprehensive family support programs are essential for retaining highly trained personnel in elite military units. These programs address the unique challenges faced by military families, mitigating personal and familial stress and enhancing job satisfaction and retention. Recognizing the integral role families play in an officer's life, such support is critical for maintaining morale and commitment.

Components of Effective Family Support Programs:

- **Comprehensive Healthcare Benefits:** Ensuring access to quality medical, dental, and mental health services for officers and their families.

- **Educational Support:** Providing scholarships, tuition assistance, and educational programs for military children, accommodating the disruptions caused by deployments and relocations.

- **Housing Subsidies:** Offering financial support for housing or priority access to military housing, providing stability and security during deployments.

- **Spousal Career Support:** Facilitating job placement services, career counseling, and opportunities for further education for spouses, helping them maintain their professional growth despite frequent relocations.

- **Mental Health Services:** Offering accessible mental health support for both officers and their families to cope with the stresses of military life.

Impact on Retention:

When families feel supported, officers are more likely to be satisfied with their careers and less likely to seek civilian opportunities. Family support programs significantly reduce the stress and uncertainty associated with military life, thereby enhancing retention rates. By addressing the holistic needs of military families, these programs create a stable and supportive environment conducive to long-term service.

Challenges and Considerations:

Implementing and maintaining comprehensive family support programs requires substantial resources. Ensuring equity and accessibility for all families, regardless of location or specific circumstances, is crucial. Regular assessment of family needs and

program effectiveness is essential for continuous improvement. Collaboration with community services can enhance the reach and effectiveness of these programs.

Supporting Literature:

Peavie (2012) and Glaser and Rahman (2023) emphasize the importance of family support in military retention. Their research shows that comprehensive support systems significantly enhance job satisfaction and commitment among military personnel, highlighting the critical role of family support programs in retention strategies.

4) Special and Incentive Pays for Retention

Rationale and Benefits:

Adjusting special and incentive pays (S&I Pays) to coincide with critical decision points in an officer's career can effectively enhance retention rates. Financial incentives recognize and reward commitment and performance, providing tangible motivation to remain in service.

Strategic Timing of S&I Pays:

Strategically timing S&I Pays at key career decision points, such as post-training, mid-career, and pre-retirement, can maximize their impact. Performance-based incentives linked to evaluations ensure that rewards are earned, reinforcing meritocratic principles and motivating high performance. Offering bonuses or increased pay after initial or specialized training can encourage officers to stay when they are most marketable. Mid-career bonuses can coincide with promotions or new responsibilities, while pre-retirement incentives can retain seasoned officers.

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Commitment:

Financial incentives provide tangible recognition of officers' contributions and commitment. This can enhance job satisfaction and reinforce loyalty to the organization, particularly when combined with other retention strategies such as flexible contracts and family support programs. Recognizing and rewarding service at critical points encourages officers to stay, reducing turnover and maintaining experienced personnel within the ranks.

Challenges and Considerations:

Implementing S&I Pays requires careful budgeting and long-term sustainability planning. Ensuring transparency and fairness in the distribution of incentives is crucial to maintaining trust and morale within the organization. Regularly reviewing and adjusting the incentives to align with current economic conditions and organizational needs is essential to keep them effective.

Supporting Literature:

Asch et al. (2019) underscore the significant impact of financial incentives on retention. Their research suggests that well-timed and performance-based financial rewards can effectively enhance job satisfaction and commitment among military personnel, supporting the strategic adjustment of S&I Pays.

5) Capitalizing Skills in Preferred Roles

Rationale and Benefits:

Effective utilization of skills within preferred roles enhances job satisfaction and operational effectiveness. Aligning roles with officers' skills and interests minimizes

frustration and maximizes engagement and performance, leading to a more motivated and committed workforce.

Mechanisms for Enhancing Role-Skill Alignment:

- **Regular Skills Audits:** Conduct comprehensive assessments of officers' skills, qualifications, and interests to create a detailed inventory that can be matched with available roles.

- **Dynamic Assignment Systems:** Developing systems that allow for flexible and adaptive role assignments based on the evolving skills and career aspirations of officers.

- **Individual Career Development Plans:** Creating personalized career development plans that outline potential career paths within the Special Forces, reviewed and updated regularly in consultation with the officers.

- **Feedback Loops:** Establishing robust feedback mechanisms to gather officers' input on their roles and satisfaction, using this information to make necessary adjustments.

Impact on Job Satisfaction and Operational Effectiveness:

When officers are assigned roles that match their skills and interests, they experience higher job satisfaction and commitment. This alignment enhances operational effectiveness by ensuring that personnel are optimally utilized and engaged in their duties, leading to better performance and mission success.

Challenges and Considerations: Balancing individual preferences with organizational needs requires careful management. Implementing flexible role assignments can be resource-intensive, requiring continuous training and development

programs. Ensuring that officers have opportunities for growth and advancement within their preferred roles is also crucial to maintaining their motivation and commitment.

Supporting Literature:

Raziq et al. (2021) highlight the importance of role-skill alignment in job satisfaction and retention. Their research suggests that when employees' skills are effectively utilized, they are more engaged and committed to their roles, enhancing overall organizational effectiveness.

6) Transparent Communication and Feedback Mechanisms

Rationale and Benefits:

Establishing transparent communication channels and robust feedback mechanisms is critical for fostering a responsive and inclusive organizational culture. Transparency and feedback enhance trust and morale, which are essential for retention and organizational cohesion.

Strategies for Effective Communication and Feedback:

- **Regular Briefings:** Conducting regular briefings to keep personnel informed about mission objectives, organizational changes, and other relevant information.

- **Open-Door Policies:** Encouraging an open-door policy where officers feel free to approach their superiors with concerns, ideas, or feedback without fear of reprisal.

- **Digital Communication Platforms:** Utilizing modern digital communication platforms to facilitate easy and quick sharing of information across different levels of the organization.

- **Structured Feedback Systems:** Implementing formal performance review processes that assess job performance and gather feedback on officers' experiences and challenges.

Impact on Organizational Culture:

Transparent communication and feedback mechanisms build trust and morale within the organization. Officers who feel heard and valued are more likely to experience job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to their roles, maintaining high retention rates and fostering a positive organizational culture.

Challenges and Considerations:

Balancing transparency with operational security is crucial. Ensuring that feedback is actionable and leads to tangible improvements requires commitment from top leadership and continuous assessment of communication practices. Regularly updating communication strategies to align with evolving organizational needs and technological advancements is also essential.

Supporting Literature:

Glaser and Rahman (2023) emphasize the importance of transparent communication and feedback in enhancing trust and morale. Their research indicates that effective communication strategies are crucial for maintaining high retention rates and fostering a positive organizational culture.

Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal Studies on Leadership Training:

Future research should explore the long-term impact of leadership training programs on retention, providing more definitive evidence on how transformational and ethical leadership styles affect retention over time.

Impact of External Factors:

Considering external factors such as economic conditions and family support systems is crucial. Future studies should examine how these factors influence retention decisions, contributing to more holistic retention strategies.

Comparative Studies Across Different Contexts:

Investigating the interplay between different leadership styles and retention in various cultural and organizational contexts could provide a more comprehensive understanding of this critical issue. Comparative studies across different military units and civilian organizations could reveal nuanced insights into how leadership styles impact retention in diverse settings.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Experience of the Researcher:

The researcher's decade-long service as an Officer in the Greek Special Forces brings a wealth of insider knowledge and understanding of the unit's dynamics, ethos, and operational environment. This background provides valuable context and depth to the analysis. However, this extensive experience could also lead to inherent biases, potentially favoring certain themes or narratives over others. The researcher's personal involvement and emotional investment in the subject matter may influence the

interpretation of data, leading to a possible skew in findings that align more closely with the researcher's own experiences and perceptions.

Mitigation Strategies:

- **Peer Review:** Engaging other researchers, especially those without a military background, in reviewing the study's design, data collection, and analysis processes can help mitigate potential biases.

- **Triangulation:** Using multiple data sources and methods to cross-verify findings ensures a more balanced and objective interpretation.

- **Reflective Journaling:** Maintaining a reflective journal throughout the research process can help the researcher remain aware of personal biases and take steps to counteract them.

Generalizability:

The study's focus on the Greek Special Forces and junior officers limits its generalizability to other military units or cultural contexts. The unique characteristics of the Greek military environment, including its operational parameters, cultural norms, and organizational structure, might not be directly applicable to other settings. As a result, conclusions drawn from this study may not translate seamlessly to different military organizations or civilian sectors.

Mitigation Strategies:

- **Comparative Studies:** Conducting similar studies in various military units and cultural contexts can provide comparative data, enhancing the generalizability of findings.

- **Contextual Descriptions:** Providing detailed descriptions of the Greek Special Forces' specific context allows other researchers to determine the relevance and applicability of the findings to their own contexts.

Data Collection Constraints:

The reliance on qualitative data derived from semi-structured interviews introduces potential biases. The subjective nature of qualitative data means that both the interviewer's and interviewees' perspectives can influence the responses and the interpretation of results. This subjectivity might affect the study's objectivity, as personal experiences and viewpoints can shape the data collection and analysis processes.

Mitigation Strategies:

- **Standardized Interview Protocols:** Developing and adhering to standardized interview protocols ensures consistency and reduces interviewer bias.

- **Training Interviewers:** Providing thorough training for interviewers on avoiding leading questions and maintaining neutrality can help minimize biases during data collection.

- **Member Checking:** Allowing participants to review and verify their interview transcripts can ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data collected.

Limited Sample Size:

The relatively small number of participants, while sufficient for thematic saturation in qualitative research, may not fully represent the diversity of experiences and opinions within the broader population of junior officers. This limitation could result in an

incomplete understanding of the factors influencing retention and leadership dynamics.

Mitigation Strategies:

- **Purposive Sampling:** Ensuring that the sample includes a diverse range of participants with varying backgrounds and experiences can enhance the representativeness of the findings.

- **Supplementary Data:** Incorporating additional data sources, such as focus groups or surveys, can provide a more comprehensive view of the issues being studied.

Temporal Constraints:

The research is conducted within a specific timeframe, which may not allow for the observation of long-term trends in leadership effectiveness and retention. Changes in military policy, societal attitudes, or economic conditions after the study's completion could influence the relevance or accuracy of the findings.

Mitigation Strategies:

- **Longitudinal Follow-Up:** Conducting follow-up studies at regular intervals can help track long-term trends and changes in leadership effectiveness and retention.

- **Historical Data Analysis:** Analyzing historical data alongside current findings can provide a broader temporal context and help identify long-term trends.

Non-Inclusion of External Factors:

The study focuses primarily on leadership within the Greek Special Forces and does not account for external factors such as economic conditions, family dynamics, or broader societal changes. These factors can significantly influence an officer's decision to remain in or leave the military, and their exclusion might lead to an incomplete understanding of retention dynamics.

Mitigation Strategies:

- **Incorporating External Data:** Including external data on economic conditions, societal trends, and family support systems can provide a more comprehensive view of the factors influencing retention.

- **Holistic Approach:** Adopting a holistic approach that considers both internal and external factors can enhance the study's depth and relevance.

Final Thoughts

Leadership plays a vital role in retaining officers within the Greek Special Forces. Our study highlights that transformational and ethical leadership significantly boosts job satisfaction and commitment. Officers repeatedly emphasized the importance of strong mentorship, supportive work environments, and inspiring leaders in their decisions to stay. One officer shared, "Having a leader who genuinely cared about my progress made all the difference." These findings underline the need for leadership development programs that focus on these key qualities. Implementing such strategies can not only enhance retention in military units but also offer valuable insights for improving commitment and satisfaction in various organizational settings.

By integrating the findings with existing literature, this chapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing retention in the Greek Special Forces. The identified themes, such as leadership dynamics, ethical behavior, and support systems, reveal the multifaceted nature of retention issues and the critical role of leadership in addressing them. Transformational leadership that inspires, motivates, and provides individualized support, along with ethical leadership that fosters trust and morale, are essential components for retaining officers.

The recommendations outlined in this chapter, including the promotion of flexible contract systems, meritocracy, comprehensive family support programs, and transparent communication mechanisms, aim to enhance the overall effectiveness of retention strategies. Future research directions, such as exploring the long-term impact of leadership training and conducting comparative studies across different contexts, are proposed to further understand and improve retention in military organizations.

By adopting these strategies and continuing to investigate the dynamic relationship between leadership and retention, military organizations can create a more supportive, motivating, and effective environment for their personnel, ultimately leading to higher retention rates and greater organizational success.

This is another type of warfare—new in its intensity, ancient in its origin—war by guerrillas, subversives, insurgents, and assassins—war by ambush instead of combat, by infiltration instead of aggression—seeking victory by eroding and exhausting the enemy instead of engaging him. . . . It requires, in those situations where we must counter it if freedom is to be saved, a wholly new kind of strategy, a wholly different kind of force, and therefore a wholly new and different kind of military leadership and training.

President John F. Kennedy, 1962

Appendix A

	SPECIAL FORCES	INSPIRE; ACHIEVE	EQUATION OF EINSTEINE MC; CASH AND CONGRATULATION	RETENTION RATES	PASSION; GUY	SENSE OF PRIDE; CORE VALUES	EVALUATION SYSTEM	SITUATION IN GREECE	TOTALLY AGREE	HIGHER; LEVEL	MILITARY ACADEMY	BAD LEADERSHIP; PERSONAL AGENDA	SUPPORT; GENERALLY	LEAVE THE ARMY; BUSINESS
INSPIRE; ACHIEVE	0.802													
EQUATION OF EINSTEINE MC; CASH AND CONGRATULATION	-0.156	-0.371												
RETENTION RATES	0.755	0.758	-0.164											
PASSION; GUY	0.003	0.126	-0.133	-0.062										
SENSE OF PRIDE; CORE VALUES	-0.048	-0.077	0.42	-0.183	-0.046									
EVALUATION SYSTEM	0.136	0.31	-0.271	-0.008	-0.062	-0.225								
SITUATION IN GREECE	-0.014	-0.11	-0.012	-0.403	0.362	0.088	0.221							
TOTALLY AGREE	-0.194	-0.346	0.106	-0.237	-0.046	-0.101	0.178	0.227						
HIGHER; LEVEL	-0.266	-0.041	0.339	-0.096	0.311	0.409	-0.262	-0.135	-0.418					
MILITARY ACADEMY	-0.015	0.07	-0.143	-0.125	0.044	-0.449	0.389	0.587	-0.195	-0.191				
BAD LEADERSHIP; PERSONAL AGENDA	-0.304	-0.035	-0.205	-0.137	-0.002	-0.233	0.273	0.071	-0.502	0.323	0.617			
SUPPORT; GENERALLY	-0.015	0.016	0.171	0.189	-0.318	-0.227	0.503	0.05	-0.025	-0.003	0.511	0.621		
LEAVE THE ARMY; BUSINESS	-0.236	0.051	-0.187	-0.197	-0.074	-0.175	0.483	-0.037	-0.167	0.029	0.367	0.458	0.298	
TEAM MEMBERS; RESPONSIBILITY	0.035	-0.07	0.36	-0.185	-0.219	0.637	-0.49	-0.079	-0.09	0.355	-0.393	-0.186	-0.341	-0.292

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