

THE PORTUGUESE AIR FORCE'S INDEMNIFICATION POLICY: A MEASURE TO RETAIN MILITARY PERSONNEL?¹

A POLÍTICA DE INDEMNIZAÇÕES NA FORÇA AÉREA PORTUGUESA: UMA MEDIDA DE RETENÇÃO DOS MILITARES?

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Abstract

The Portuguese Air Force (PoAF) brings together two facets – military organization and military personnel –, both of which are vital to accomplish the PoAF's mission and, as such, must be optimised. Regarding military personnel, what is required is optimising an already outstanding performance, that is, to retain / capitalise on these assets for as long as possible. This study analyses retention among military personnel after the enactment of Order No. 51/2016 of 1 August, issued by the Chief of Staff of the PoAF. The order determines that officers must pay indemnities / complete an additional service time that corresponds to the complementary (CT) and specialized (ST) training they acquire throughout their career, which is financially supported by the institution. CT refers to nonmandatory training, while ST is a precondition for serving in one's area of expertise. The sample consisted of 278 career officers from the PoAF (ranks: lieutenant to lieutenant colonel). The results showed that retention increased after the order was enacted, an effect which should be analysed in more depth in the near future, after a longer period of implementation. It was also concluded that officers believe that the application of the order to CT is fair, but that it is blatantly unfair to apply it to ST because the latter consists of training / qualifications required by the PoAF.

Keywords: Retention, complementary training, specialized training, organizational commitment, indemnities, additional service time.

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Resumo

A Força Aérea (FA) congrega em si duas vertentes – a estrutura e os militares –, que, sendo vitais para o cumprimento da missão, impõem-se otimizar. Relativamente aos militares, entenda-se otimizar, ainda mais, aquele que é já, um excelente desempenho e, conseqüentemente, manter/rentabilizar este bem-valioso pelo máximo tempo possível. Este estudo analisa a retenção dos militares, decorrente da promulgação do Despacho n.º 51/2016, de 01 de agosto, do Chefe de Estado-Maior da FA. Despacho este que determina a aplicação de tempo de serviço adicional/indenização à formação complementar (FC) e específica (FE) efetuada pelos militares ao longo da carreira e suportada financeiramente pela Instituição – entendendo-se por FC a não-mandatória e por FE a mandatária para o exercício funcional do militar. Constituíram a amostra 278 Oficiais dos Quadros Permanentes da FA (postos: Tenente a Tenente-coronel). Dos resultados obtidos, concluiu-se que após promulgação do Despacho a retenção aumentou, devendo este efeito ser analisado, de forma mais aprofundada, num futuro próximo, após maior período de implementação. Concluiu-se, também, que os militares percebem a aplicação do Despacho como bastante justa, quando justaposta à FC, mas manifestamente injusta quando ligada à FE, pelo facto desta última ancorar em formação/qualificação que lhes é imposta pela própria FA.

Palavras-chave: *Retenção, Formação complementar, Formação específica, Compromisso organizacional, Indemnização, Tempo de serviço adicional.*

Introduction

The issuance of Order No. 51/2016 on 1 August by the Chief of Staff of the Air Force (CEMFA), introduced rather significant changes to the application of the Portuguese Air Force's policy on indemnities, defining that all training attended after joining the Career Staff (CS) implies an increase in the minimum service time (MST). In other words, officers must complete additional service time (AST) corresponding to the time spent attending specialized training (ST) (i.e., training required by the PoAF without which officers are barred from performing their duties and cannot maintain their qualifications) and complementary training (CT) (i.e., training that enhances officers' qualifications but that is not required to perform technical and operational duties).

In fact, until the entry into force of Order No. 51/2016, provided that the MST had been completed, the AST was not enforced and officers could separate from the military without having to pay indemnities to the National Treasury. Later, the AST began being enforced after officers completed their MST, and any officers who wish to leave the PoAF before completing their MST + AST can only do so by paying indemnities proportional to the length of service corresponding to the training attended, even in the case of mandatory training.

In light of this paradigm change, this study aims to address the PoAF's policy on indemnities, with special emphasis on the measures adopted by other institutions and

organizations to retain their employees (Cunha et al., 2012) through indemnities policies and / or instruments to mitigate early dropouts among their assets, which in this case refers to military officers, specifically PoAF career officers.

Thus, the study will attempt to understand the relationship between turnover intentions among CS officers and the indemnities policy implemented by the PoAF through Order No. 51/2016, which enacts the determinations of Ordinance No. 188/2016 of June 29, issued by the Ministry of National Defence, by identifying contributing factors and proposing measures to increase retention.

Therefore, this investigation's object of study is the role of the current indemnities policy on (actual) retention rates among PoAF officers. The research is delimited (Santos and Lima, 2016):

- In terms of time, to two corresponding periods (of one year and a half each), before and after the entry into force of Order No. 51/2016 of 1 August 2016, respectively. Specifically, the study covers the period from February 2015 to July 2016 and from August 2016 to January 2018;

- In terms of space, to the career officers category, specifically the ranks of Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel, as these ranks correspond to the officers whose turnover intentions can be affected or conditioned by the indemnities policy in force;

- Conceptually, to the analysis of a possible association between the PoAF's policy on indemnities and retention among CS officers, with particular emphasis on the extension of the minimum service time according to the training financially supported by the PoAF, both ST, mandatory for the performance of duties in their area of expertise, and CT, which, although important to enhance officers' qualifications, is optional / non-mandatory.

Therefore, the general objective (GO) of this study is to analyse the relationship between the indemnities policy implemented by Order No. 51/2016 and retention among PoAF officers. Its specific objectives (SO) are:

SO1: Comparing retention among CS officers in two corresponding periods from February 2015 to July 2016 and August 2016 to January 2018;

SO2: Analysing if the main reasons for retention among CS officers go beyond continuance commitment;

SO3: Assessing whether there are differences in the opinions of CS officers regarding the application of a indemnity to the ST and / or CT financially supported by the PoAF.

In terms of methodology, the study uses hypothetical and deductive reasoning supported by a quantitative research strategy and a case study research design, which was operationalized by collecting data through questionnaires and documentary analysis (Santos and Lima, 2016).

The methodology comprised three phases.

An exploratory phase, during which the literature review was carried out, exploratory interviews were conducted with experts in the field, and the research question (RQ), subsidiary questions (SQ), and hypotheses (H) were identified, as shown in Figure 1.

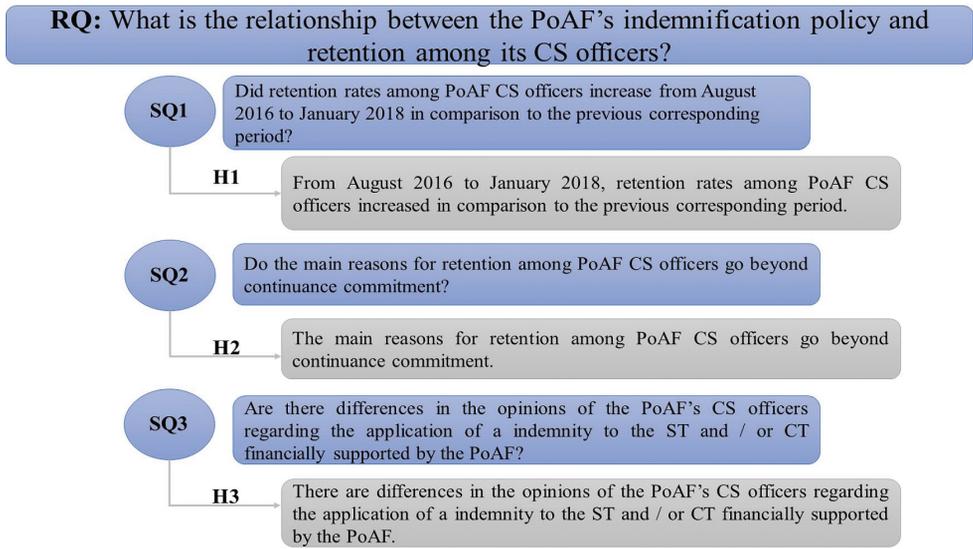


Figure 1 – Research question, subsidiary questions, and corresponding hypotheses

An analytical phase, which consisted of collecting, analysing, and presenting data.

Finally, a conclusive phase in which the findings were discussed and conclusions were drawn, including the study's contributions to knowledge, limitations, suggestions for future studies, practical implications, and recommendations.

1. Methodological and Conceptual Framework

This chapter provides a legal framework and the stateoftheart on the topic, and contextualises the organizational commitment construct and the conceptual model that will guide this study.

1.1. The PoAF's policy on indemnities

Pursuant to the recommendations of Article 80(5) and (7) of the Statute of the Armed Forces Military Personnel (EMFAR)²:

[...] qualified military personnel who have attended courses, training, or internships that make them eligible for promotion, that confer a university degree, or who have completed specialization courses are required to complete a minimum service time [MST] defined by the CoS [Chief of Staff] of their branch, which can be reduced at the request of the officer by paying the corresponding indemnities to the State.

(MDN, 2016, p.20155).

The MST, as defined in the EMFAR, is 8 years for the officer category, with the exception of the minimum service time for the pilot specialization (PILAV), which has undergone two

² Approved by Decree-Law No. 90/2015 of 29 May, cited in Ordinance No. 188/2016 of 29 June.

changes. The first took place in 2007, with the enactment of Decree-Law No. 310/2007 of 11 September, which changed the previous EMFAR and increased the MST for the PILAV³ specialty from 8 to 12 years. The second change was introduced in EMFAR 2015, which increased the MLS from 12 to 14 years.

The Military Doctors Statute is defined in a separate law⁴, which specifies that, after obtaining a specialist degree, military doctors will have to complete a MST of 10 (ten) years.

The EMFAR, specifically Article 171(4), which concerns *Early discharges from the CS*, states that “The way indemnities are calculated [...] is set annually through an ordinance issued by the member of the government responsible for national defence, based on a proposal by the CoS of the respective branch” (MDN, 2015, p.3226). The current formula is defined in Ordinance No. 188/2016 of 29 June, issued by the Ministry of National Defence and implemented in the Air Force through Order No. 51/2016 of 01 August, issued by the CEMFA.

This legislation is based on three definitions that will help explain the topic, which appear in Article 3 of Ordinance No. 188/2016 of 29 June: *course*, *course period of attendance*, and *course attendance abroad*. A course is defined as “[...] courses, training, and internships that qualify officers for promotion, [...] which grant a university degree, and specialization courses” (MDN, 2016, p.12055). The course period of attendance is defined as the period of time between the course start and end dates (MDN, 2016). The *course attendance abroad* period refers to situations in which 25% of the course takes place abroad and is financially supported by the PoAF, either exclusively or in accumulation with other duties (MDN, 2016).

Article 6(2) of Ordinance 188/2016 states that it is the responsibility of each CoS to determine and advertise the courses that imply an AST in the form of an Order. In addition to the provisions of the Ordinance, paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 of the Order also cover less clear situations such as b-learning or post-work courses and short-term courses (less than five working days) that do not require the use of the organization’s resources (aircraft, vehicles, and equipment that is costly to maintain).

With the entry into force of Order No. 51/2016, which revoked Order No. 18/06/A of 17 February, issued by the CEMFA, the PoAF effectively implemented the AST in addition to the MST. This change is the core of the issue, and was the decisive factor for the changes to the PoAF’s policy on indemnities.

On the other hand, the obligation to pay indemnities in the event of failure to complete the MST + AST reflects the need to retain CS officers, especially officers who constitute the PoAF’s most valuable assets, that is, CS officers who hold qualification / specialization courses or university degrees that grant advanced theoretical and technical knowledge, and who represent a large investment from the institution (Reis, 2017).

Therefore, because the PoAF provides its staff the training required to serve in their area of expertise, as well as to increase their accumulated knowledge (Feijoo, 2017), the PoAF is

³ As defined in Article 170(2)(a) of the previous EMFAR, approved by Decree-Law No. 236/99 of 25 June.

⁴ Decree-Law No. 519/77 of 30 November – Statute of the Military Medical Career issued by the Council of the Revolution, amended by Decree-Law No. 332/86 of 12 September, issued by the Ministry of National Defence.

entirely justified in wanting to secure a return on their investment by increasing retention, much like what happens in the private market (Reis, 2017).

For the purposes of this study, ST refers to the training military personnel are required to attend in order to perform their duties (Qualifications / Operation), and CT to the training provided to military personnel who hold a university degree (such as postgraduate degrees, MBAs, Master's degrees, and doctoral degrees), both of which are financially supported by the PoAF.

Therefore, retention plays a particularly important role in this equation and the concept of organizational commitment (OC) could be a contributing factor for the intention to remain in the CS given the current scenario (Cunha et al., 2012).

However, the PoAF is currently experiencing a decrease in the number of active duty staff, and, like most organizations, it considers that Human Resources (HR) are its most valuable asset (Rolo, 2017). In view of the decrease in personnel over recent years, even in the CS officers category, and considering the quantitative targets established by the current legislation, increasing retention among highly qualified military personnel is crucial (Madeira, 2017).

Furthermore, the private market perceives PoAF personnel as highly qualified, experienced, and competent, making them a desirable target for civilian recruitment (Reis, 2017).

Therefore, it is vital that the PoAF has the necessary tools to effectively retain its HR, which are crucial for the achievement of its mission, especially CS officers who are essential for the planning, execution, command, and control cycle. These HR have advanced theoretical and practical knowledge and outstanding know-how as a result of the experience they accumulated over time, making them indispensable for the pursuit of excellence and the full accomplishment of the PoAF's mission. They are, therefore, considered assets par excellence, and represent more than human capital since they incorporate all the knowledge they acquired, constituting an intangible asset that the PoAF must do its best to retain (Pedro, 2009).

Thus, it is important to understand these officers' opinions regarding the indemnities policy in force because the paradigm changes that took place when Order No. 51/2016 was full implemented are indeed more punitive (Madeira, 2017).

Currently (as of 9 May 2018), the Resources Division stated that a proposal to amend Order No. 51/2016 was being analysed and discussed, which could lead to significant changes regarding the type of courses covered by the order (Reis, 2018).

1.2. Organizational commitment and staff retention

One of the retention measures that an organization has at its disposal is organizational commitment. OC consists of a psychological state that binds or ties employees to their organization and influences the decision to remain (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002).

The multidimensional concept of OC (Allen and Meyer, 1990) was the starting point for the authors' three-dimensional model of commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991), which includes the dimensions affective commitment (AC), continuance commitment (CC), and normative commitment (NC).

According to Meyer and Allen (1991 cited in Fachada, 2015, p.20), commitment can be divided into:

- Affective commitment. The “want to” of commitment, which describes an employee’s “psychological state of emotional attachment to, identification with, and / or engagement in” their organization, which, in practice, translates into the perceived desire to remain in the organization;

- Continuance commitment. The “need to” of commitment, which can be described as a psychological state in which an employee’s ties to the organization are based on the economic and social costs of leaving, that is, the perceived costs of leaving the organization;

- Normative. The “ought to” of commitment, which constitutes a “[...] psychological state of attachment to the organization in which with the obligation to remain is associated to the belief [...]” that it is the right thing to do, that is, the perception of an obligation to continue employment.

AC implies greater commitment by the employees towards the organization than the other types of commitment, which imply a weaker emotional connection to the organization (Rego, Souto, & Cunha, 2007).

The concept of CC is especially relevant to this study because it is closely connected to the costs / benefits associated with the intention to remain in or leave the organization (Etzioni, 1975), that is, to a indemnities mindset.

Finally, NC reflects the “discipline” that makes an employee want to remain in their organization due to a feeling of moral obligation (Nascimento, Lopes, & Salgueiro, 2008).

Table 1 shows the three dimensions of the three-dimensional model.

Table 1 – Components of the three-dimensional model

Components	Description	Employees	Psychological state
Affective	The degree to which an employee feels emotionally connected to, identifies with, and is involved in the organization	Feel that they want to stay	Desire
Normative	The degree to which an employee has a sense of obligation (or moral duty) to remain in the organization	Feel that they ought to stay	Obligation
Continuance	The degree to which an employee remains in the organization because they are aware of the costs associated with leaving, which could stem from a lack of job options or from the feeling that leaving would entail considerable personal sacrifices	Feel that they need to stay	Need

Source: Rego, Souto, and Cunha (2007).

When an organization provides training to its employees, this increases retention and, consequently, its employees have higher AC (Virtanen et al., 2003).

AC and CC play a key role in military organizations, particularly with regard to retention (Gade, 2003 cited in Fachada, 2015, p.25). Because military personnel are asked to endure “[...] assignments / deployments away from one’s family, frequent travel and deployment, and life-threatening missions”, in order to retain its staff the military must keep them highly motivated at all times (Fachada, 2015, p.25).

Mehta, Kurbetti, and Dhankhar (2014) state that retention is a technique that organizations can use to ensure their talent remains with them. It can also be defined as the ability to ensure that military personnel stays in the Armed Forces voluntarily (Martins, 2014), as they provide the talent required to enhance and develop the different operational, financial, and strategic aspects of an organization. Therefore, any successful organization must be able to retain its most talented HR (Cunha et al., 2012).

1.3. Analysis Model

Quivy and Campenhoudt (2005, p.44) state that “[...] the best way to begin a research work in social sciences is to attempt to summarise the project in the form of a research question [...]” that allows the researcher to choose the most appropriate way to understand and assess the object of study.

Therefore, the structuring concepts of this work are defined as follows:

- **Retention.** The condition of retaining or preserving something (Law, 2015), which, according to Chiavenato (1999, p.345), can be achieved by developing / maintaining satisfaction / motivation among employees within organizations, thus enhancing their physical and psychological conditions;

- **Training.** An organized activity designed to convey information / instructions to improve the performance of recipients or to help them achieve the required level of knowledge or skills (Cascão, 2014);

- **Organizational commitment.** The “[...] psychological state that binds a person to a course of action / organization [...]”, which influences their intention to remain in the organization (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Meyer, Becker, & Vanderberghe, 2004 cited in Fachada, 2015, p.19).

In order to complete the conceptual framework of this research, concepts taken from Order No. 51/2016 will also be introduced as they greatly help explain the issue:

- **Additional service time.** The period corresponding to the courses attended by officers after joining the CS, which adds to the minimum service time and is defined in a separate law (CEMFA, 2016);

- **Indemnities.** Compensation (or protection against) for a loss or injury, breach of contract, or contingent liability (Law, 2015).

Table 2 shows the conceptual map that identifies the RQ, the three SQ, and respective H, their respective concepts and dimensions, which are associated with the indicators and data collection instruments used in the study.

Table 2 – Conceptual Map

Research Question	Subsidiary Questions	Hypotheses	Concepts	Dimensions	Indicators	Instruments
RQ: What is the relationship between the PoAF's indemnification policy and retention among its CS officers?	SQ1 – Did retention rates among PoAF CS officers increase from August 2016 to January 2018 in comparison to the previous corresponding period?	H1 – From August 2016 to January 2018, retention rates among PoAF CS officers increased in comparison to the previous corresponding period.	Retention	CS officers	Early discharge rates Actual early discharge rates Early discharge request rates	Documentary analysis
	SQ2 – Do the main reasons for retention among PoAF CS officers go beyond continuance commitment?	H2 – The main reasons for retention among PoAF CS officers go beyond continuance commitment.	Organizational commitment	Identification with the PoAF	Affective commitment Normative commitment Continuance commitment	Questionnaires
	SQ3 – Are there differences in the opinions of the PoAF's CS officers regarding the application of a indemnity to the ST and / or CT financially supported by the PoAF?	H3 – There are differences in the opinions of the PoAF's CS officers regarding the application of a indemnity to the ST and / or CT financially supported by the PoAF.	Training	Complementary training Specialized training	Additional length of service Indemnities	Questionnaires

2. Study Presentation

This chapter describes the method used in the study, analyses the data, and discusses the findings in order to assess the H and answer the RQ and its SQ.

2.1. Method

This section describes the participants, the procedure, the data collection instrument, and the data processing techniques used in the study.

2.1.1. Participants and procedure

Participants. The study sample consisted of 278 officers (corresponding to 28.3% of all “eligible”⁵ active duty staff as of 31 October 2017) – which, according to Hout (2002 cited in Santos & Lima, 2016, p.73), is a sample size that adequately represents the corresponding universe. The sample mainly comprises officers with the ranks of Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel, Junior Officers / Captains (74.1%), male (83.1%), and between 31 and 42 years of age (66.2%). Regarding the length of service after joining the CS, most officers (29.9%) have between 10 and 14 years of service, followed by officers with 5 to 9 years of service (22.7%), and finally those with 15 to 19 years of service (21.6%). Regarding their area of expertise, 45 participants are PILAV (18.67% of the total responses⁶). After entering/joining the CS, the type of courses attended by most participants (63.04%) were specialization or qualification courses to qualify them for the performance of their duties.

Procedure. The questionnaire was delivered by email between February and March 2018. Participants were duly informed about the purpose of the study and the fact that there were no correct / incorrect answers, as well as the average duration of the questionnaire. The anonymity and confidentiality of the responses was guaranteed, and permission was requested to collect / analyse the data for statistical purposes.

2.1.2. Data collection instrument

The questionnaire consisted of three sections: section A, which collects general data; section B, which covers the AST corresponding to the training attended after joining the CS; and section C, which refers to OC. The latter was measured using 18 (eighteen) items answered on a 7 (seven) -point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree” and 7 = “Strongly Agree”), which were subdivided into 3 (three) subscales: AC, NC, and CC. For example, the AC subscale contains statements such as “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in this organization”; the NC subscale, “This organization deserves my loyalty”; and the CC subscale, “I feel that I have too few options to consider leaving this organization”.

⁵ As justified in the spatial delimitation section of this study, the officers included in this study must be CS officers with ranks from Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel. Hereinafter, an “eligible” sample, population, etc. will refer to these criteria.

⁶ Because specialty was not a mandatory field, there were n = 37 missing cases.

2.1.3. Data processing techniques

The software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23, was used to process the questionnaire data, calculate Student's t tests in combination with Levene's tests, and provide descriptive measures (means, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values). In the documentary analysis, Microsoft Excel was used to compile tables containing the data collected by the Promotion and Reserves Section of the Career and Promotions Division of the Personnel Directorate.

2.2. Presentation of Data and Discussion of Results

This chapter discusses the data and findings, analyses the H and corresponding SQ, and, finally, provides the answer to the RQ.

2.2.1. Retention rates among career officers

In order to study the quantitative data concerning early discharges from the CS (Table 3), it is important to distinguish the exits that imply the payment of indemnities – Early Discharge with Indemnity (ED+I) – from those that do not – Early Discharge without Indemnity (ED-I) –, as well as requests for information on early discharge, in addition to requests that were not filed (R). The following formulas were used to calculate the rate of change:

$$- \text{ED+I rate of change: } \frac{\text{"ED+I"}_{\text{Period 2}} - \text{"ED+I"}_{\text{Period 1}}}{\text{"ED+I"}_{\text{Period 1}}};$$

$$- \text{ED-I rate of change: } \frac{\text{"ED-I"}_{\text{Period 2}} - \text{"ED-I"}_{\text{Period 1}}}{\text{"ED-I"}_{\text{Period 1}}};$$

$$- \text{R rate of change: } \frac{R_{\text{Period 2}} - R_{\text{Period 1}}}{R_{\text{Period 1}}}.$$

Table 3 – Requirements for early discharge from the CS

Situation	Entry into force of Order No. 51/2016		Rate of Change
	Before period	After period	
ED+I	6 (2ENG + 4MED)	3 (2ENG + 1MED)	- 50.00%
ED-I	12 (5ENG + 1MED + 6PILAV)	10 (1ADMAER + 4ENG + 5PILAV)	- 16.67%
R	21 (1ENG + 1JUR + 14MED + 5PILAV)	13 (8MED + 3PILAV + 1TABST + 1TPAA)	- 38.10%

Key: "ED+I" – Early discharge with indemnity; "ED-I" – Early discharge without indemnity; P – Requests for information on early discharge + Requests that were not filed.

Source: Promotion and Reserves Section of the Career and Promotions Division of the Personnel Directorate (2018).

The values presented in Table 4 were calculated using the following formulas⁷:

- Early discharge rates (EDR): $\frac{\text{“ED+I”} + \text{“ED-I”}}{N}$
- Actual early discharge rates (AEDR): $\frac{\text{“ED+I”}}{N}$

It should be noted that the AEDR differ from the EDR because they only include early discharges with indemnity.

- Early discharge request rates (ERRR): $\frac{R}{N}$
- EDR rate of change: $\frac{EDR_{\text{Period 2}} - EDR_{\text{Period 1}}}{EDR_{\text{Period 1}}}$
- AEDR rate of change: $\frac{AEDR_{\text{Period 2}} - AEDR_{\text{Period 1}}}{AEDR_{\text{Period 1}}}$
- ERRR rate of change: $\frac{ERRR_{\text{Period 2}} - ERRR_{\text{Period 1}}}{ERRR_{\text{Period 1}}}$

Table 4 – Rates of early retirement from the CS

Situation	Entry into force of Order No. 51/2016		Rate of change
	Before period	After period	
EDR	1.72%	1.24%	-27.78%
AEDR	0.57%	0.29%	-50.00%
ERRR	2.01%	1.24%	-38.10%

Key: EDR – Early discharge rates; AEDR – Actual early discharge rates; ERRR – Exit request rate.

Source: Promotion and Reserves Section of the Career and Promotions Division of the Personnel Directorate (2018).

Table 4 shows, for the period before the entry into force of Order No. 51/2016⁸, an EDR of 1.72%, an AEDR of 0.57%, and an ERRR of 1.24%. For the corresponding period after the entry into force of Order No. 51/2016⁹, the EDR, AEDR, and ERRR were 1.24%, 0.29%, and 1.24%, respectively. The values obtained by adding the “ED+I” and “ED-I” in Period 2

⁷ An “N” calculated by period, rank, specialty, and attendance of ST and CT would have been ideal, however, due to the time and size constraints of this type of study, a similarity heuristic (i.e., a mental shortcut to make decisions and solve problems quickly and efficiently, Fachada, 2014) was used in which “N = 1047”, which corresponds to the average number of CS officers eligible for this study between February 2015 and January 2018.

⁸ Hereinafter referred to as “Period 1”, which refers to the period from February 2015 to July 2016, precisely a year and a half before the publication of Order No. 51/2016.

⁹ Hereinafter referred to as “Period 2”, which refers to the period from August 2016 to January 2018, precisely a year and a half after the publication of Order No. 51/2016.

are equal to the R values for the same period (Table 3), thus, the EDR and ERRR in Table 4 correspond to the same percentage (1.24%).

Table 4 also shows a negative rate of change for: EDR and AEDR. The percentage of 27.78% the EDR represents a decrease in the number of CS officers given an early discharge in Period 2 when compared to Period 1, and the AEDR represents a 50% decrease in CS officers who were given an early discharged with indemnity.

A superficial interpretation of these results could lead to the conclusion that the 50% decrease was largely due to the entry into force of Order No 51/2016 or, in other words, that the legislation is indeed more punitive than the previous one.

However, the rigor demanded of a scientific investigation requires a more careful interpretation, which is not as clear-cut as the above conclusion but that takes into account the time constraints and the information that had to be compiled and analysed. Specifically:

- The percentages obtained for the two study periods should have been calculated using a reference universe that divided eligible CS officers into an "N" by period, rank, specialty, and attendance of ST and CT. If that had been the case, the gross values presented in Table 3 and their corresponding rates (Table 4) could have been different;

- The above Order entered into force during the period in which Decree-Law No. 310/2007 of 11 September, which changed the MST for the PILAV category from 8 (eight) to 12 (twelve) years began to be felt. If this change had not taken place, PILAV officers from three of the last five courses who joined up to October 2007 would continue to serve the 8-year MST that had been defined for them when they joined the PoAF, and would be included in the N of Period 1 (a further 24 staff) and Period 2 (a further 55 staff) along with the eligible officers from the other specialties.

Thus, the values in Table 3 and the corresponding rates in Table 4 could have been different because this specialty would have the same MST conditions as the other specialties, which might or might not have corresponded to more actual discharges.

With regard to the ERRR (Table 4), that is, requests for discharge that were not filed, which would have implied the payment of indemnities, a superficial interpretation of the available data would, again, suggest that in Period 2 there was a decrease of 38.10% in the number of CS officers who consider leaving the PoAF. However, as said above, this interpretation does not reflect the rigor demanded of scientific work because an information request can indeed reflect the intention to leave, but it can also be done to gather data and information on the situation of the requesting officer, rather than a true desire (at the time of the request, at least) to leave. Along these lines, Reis (2018) states that "the general perception is that many CS officers, despite intending to leave the military, are aware of the high costs to be paid in indemnities and of the AST, and therefore do not file any requests for information on discharge without having at least completed their MST".

In light of the above, a superficial interpretation of the data could lead to the conclusion that H1 is confirmed. However, due to the rigor demanded of a study of this type – which would require / requires an "N" by period, rank, specialty, and attendance of specialized and complementary training, and which would perhaps elevate this SQ1 to a RQ –, H1 is

only partially confirmed. Accordingly, the answer to SQ1 – “Did retention rates among PoAF CS officers increase from August 2016 to January 2018 in comparison to the previous corresponding period?”, is that the retention rate resulting from the entry into force of Order No. 51/2016 can only be fully assessed after October 2019, and that the numbers will be even more conclusive by November 2021, as the CS officers from the PILAV specialty whose ML increased from 8 to 12 years will only then meet part of the conditions for EWP.

2.2.2. Retention and organizational commitment

Reliability study. The analysis of Cronbach’s alpha values for the factors AC ($\alpha = 0.847$), NC ($\alpha = 0.594$), and CC ($\alpha = 0.749$) shows that, according to Hill and Hill (2000, p.149), and with regard to AC and CC (the scales on which this study focuses) have, respectively, good and reasonable internal consistency.

As for mean values, the affective commitment subscale obtained the highest values ($M = 5.20$, $SD = 1.21$). This is in line with Fachada’s findings (2015), and suggests that the strongest link between CS officers and the PoAF is their identification with the institution, which leads to the desire to remain.

With regard to AC, Table 5 shows, again in line with Fachada (2015), that the difference in means between Senior Officers ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.210$) and Junior Officers / Captains ($M = 5.07$, $SD = 1.228$) is statistically significant ($t = -2.886$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5 – Student’s t-test for commitment / rank

Variable		N	Média	Standard deviation	Student’s t-test		Homoscedasticity	
					T	p	Levene’s test	p
AC	Junior Officer / Captain	206	5.07	1.228	- 2.886	0.004*	0.306	0.581**
	Senior Officer	72	5.56	1.210				
NC	Junior Officer / Captain	206	3.61	0.982	- 1.356	0.176	1.126	0.290**
	Senior Officer	72	3.80	1.075				
CC	Junior Officer / Captain	206	3.84	1.212	1.847	0.066	0.391	0.532**
	Senior Officer	72	3.53	1.176				

* The difference in means is significant $p \leq 0.05$

** Levene’s test is not significant, which indicates homoscedasticity

These results are in line with Fachada (2015), whose of the PILAV universe identified the presence of an emotional bond (AC) with the PoAF, which increases with rank. Thus, similarly to the PILAV specialty, the findings presented here suggest that the main reasons for retention among respondent career officers from the different specialties relate to being happy with the

idea of remaining in the organization for the rest of their career, which officers consider very significant.

The above analysis confirms H2 and answers SQ2 – “Do the main reasons for retention among PoAF CS officers go beyond continuance commitment?” The answer is that the reasons are mainly affective and relate to identification with the organization, the desire to remain, rather than to continuance commitment, that is, the perceived costs of leaving the Air Force through an early discharge from the CS.

2.2.3. Opinions on the application of a training indemnity

Only 19.1% (n = 53) of participants stated that they had not planned to attend CT when they joined the CS, whereas most (47.1%) had plans to do so. The remaining (39.2%) answered that they had not thought about it when they joined the CS. When asked about their current intention to attend CT, 45.7% (n = 127) of participants answered “yes”, 31.3% (n = 87) gave a negative answer, and the remaining 23% (n = 64) were indecisive.

Most CS officers stated that the main reason for having changed their intentions regarding attending (choosing not to attend) CT between the moment they joined the CS and the present essentially relate to the AST and the possibility of having to pay indemnities to the PoAF.

Nevertheless, 68.3% (n = 190) of participants agree that CT should entail the payment of indemnities and 62.9% (n = 175) agree that it should add to the AST. Furthermore, the short answers section showed concern with the evaluation of CT through the assessment form introduced by Ordinance No. 301/2016 of 30 November 2016, which includes the new Regulation for the Merit Evaluation of Armed Forces Officers.

As expected, most participants (78.4%) intend to attend ST because such training is mandatory to work in an area of expertise, but find it blatantly unfair that they might have to complete AST for ST that they were “forced” to attend (55.4%). This type of training is essential for their activity in the PoAF, and without it they would lose their qualifications and be barred by the institution from continuing to serve in their area of expertise. Therefore, because it is institutionally mandated, unlike CT, ST should be exempted from any kind of indemnity.

The above confirms H3 and answers SQ3 – “Are there differences in the opinions of the PoAF’s CS officers regarding the application of a indemnity to the ST and / or CT financially supported by the PoAF?” The answer is that that officers believe that the application of a indemnity (either monetary or in additional service time) to the CT carried out during active duty service is fair, but find it blatantly unfair that the same measure be applied to ST because this type of training is essential to maintain the technical qualifications required by the organization, and because without it they are barred from performing their duties by the organization.

2.2.4. Conclusive synthesis and answer to the Research Question

To retain its military personnel, the PoAF implemented, through Order No. 51/2016 of 9 August 2016, a indemnities policy that implies the payment of indemnities or AST

corresponding to the training received and financially supported by the organization during an officer's career. Complementary training (i.e. courses that grant a university degree) and specialized training (i.e., qualification or specialization courses, which the organization requires its officers attend in order to serve in their area of expertise).

The above Order (August 2016) entered into force during the period in which the changes to the previous EMFAR began to be felt, in accordance to Decree-Law No. 310/2007 of 11 September, which changed the MST for PILAVs from 8 (eight) to 12 (twelve) years. If this change had not taken place, PILAV officers from three of the last five courses who joined up to October 2007 would "only" have to serve the 8 (eight) -year MST that they "signed up" for.

The study carried out so far provides an answer to the RQ – "What is the relationship between the PoAF's indemnification policy and retention among its CS officers?" The answer is that Order No. 51/2016 has an impact on retention, but it will only be felt in full from October 2019 onwards, and that effect will be even greater by November 2021. Ideally, a study will be conducted using an "N" per period, rank, specialty, and attendance of ST and CT, which will provide more conclusive findings regarding the impact on retention of the entry into force of the above Order.

The constraints or limitations of this study, which are completely outside the researchers' control, are compounded by the fact that, regarding feelings of commitment / attachment, officers state that identifying with the organization (affective commitment) is the main reason for their desire to remain in the institution rather than the obligation to pay indemnities (continuance commitment). Most participants believe that a indemnity in the form of indemnities or an additional service time that corresponds to the training paid for by the PoAF is fair, in the case of CT, but feel that it is blatantly unfair in the case of ST. The reason for this is that the organization requires them to attend such training, without which they are barred from performing their technical/specialized/qualified duties.

On the one hand, the fact that most participants score higher on affective commitment than continuance commitment shows that it is crucial to refrain from making superficial interpretations, as mentioned above, and that it is of the utmost importance to revisit this study after October 2019; on the other, it provides a valuable contribution in the form of measures that can be introduced by the PoAF to increase retention. As stated by Fachada (2015):

[...]rewarding work experiences, challenging assignments, career opportunities that reinforce a sense of professional accomplishment, and confirmation of initial expectations [...],access to greater specialisation and parsimonious management of assignments / deployments [are strategies] typically and positively [associated with] commitment [...] (pp.102-103).

[Furthermore,] the importance of "investing" in practices such as: providing means of support and organizational fairness, developing a type of transformational leadership in staff, managing stress factors such as ambiguity and conflicting roles, supporting the need for autonomy and individual competence as well as interpersonal relationships, providing relevant and timely feedback (performance assessments), equitable rewards, organizational support, decentralisation (where possible) of decision making and formalization of policies and procedures [...], increasing satisfaction and commitment to those (bodies and / or persons) who

are closest to them [...] such as peers and direct supervisors, their assigned service, squadron, or unit, etc. [...] and recognising high-quality performances through honourable mentions or commendations (pp. 154156).

Conclusions

On 9 August 2016, the Portuguese Air Force, through Order No. 51/2016, established a indemnities policy that implies an AST or the payment of indemnities (corresponding to the training officers receive during their careers, which is financially supported by the institution). This training can be complementary (i.e., specialization courses / university degrees, which are attended on a voluntary basis, and which grant advanced qualifications in the recipient's area of expertise), or specialized (i.e., qualification or specialization courses required by the PoAF for the technical/functional/specialized duties performed by the receiving officer, which are mandatory and without which officers are barred by the institution from working in their area of expertise).

The above Order entered into force during the period in which the changes to the previous EMFAR began to be felt, in accordance to Decree-Law No. 310/2007, which changed the MST for PILAV officers from 8 (eight) to 12 (twelve) years. If this change had not taken place, PILAV officers from three of the last five courses who joined up to October 2007 would "only" have to serve a minimum length of service of 8 (eight) years, as defined when they entered the Air Force Academy with the intent of joining the CS of the PoAF.

Thus, the fact that human resources (HR) are the most valuable asset in an organization (even more so in the case of HR with "highly specialized military and aeronautical expertise", considered high-value assets¹⁰) makes retention an even more relevant issue, which this study also addresses.

In light of the above, the general objective of this study is to analyse the relationship between the indemnities policy implemented by Order No. 51/2016 and retention among PoAF officers. This objective was operationalized in two levels. The first, more narrow, focuses on the legislation described above, specifically, on the perceptions of CS officers regarding the fairness of the measures, that is, of the indemnities associated with the CT and ST that they received throughout their careers. The broader level aims to gather further knowledge on the ties that bind officers to the PoAF, that is, their identification with the military aviation branch. In other words, to understand the type of psychological commitment / attachment that makes CS officers remain in the institution.

The methodology comprised three phases (exploratory, analytical, and conclusive) and used hypothetical and deductive reasoning, a case study research design, and a quantitative research strategy.

In terms of structure, the first chapter presented the state-of-the-art and the conceptual and methodological framework.

¹⁰ A high-value asset is an extremely valuable resource (in this case, a human one).

The second chapter analysed the three SO by analysing whether the H were confirmed, answering the SQs.

With regard to SO1, *Comparing retention among CS officers in two corresponding periods from February 2015 to July 2016 and August 2016 to January 2018*, H1 was partially confirmed, and the answer to SQ1 – in light of the rigour demanded of a scientific investigation – is that a superficial interpretation of the data (which suggests that retention increased) must be enriched with a more pondered and fuller interpretation. This will require analysing the issue after October 2019, and an even more complete and conclusive assessment should be carried out after November 2021, as the CS officers from the PILAV specialty, who saw their MST increase from 8 (eight) to 12 (twelve) years after having joined the PoAF, will only then meet part of the conditions for early discharge without indemnity; ideally, this study will include an “N” per period, rank, specialty, and attendance of ST and CT. These criteria will perhaps elevate SQ1 to a RQ.

With regard to SO2, *Analysing if the main reasons for retention among CS officers go beyond continuance commitment*, H2 was confirmed, and the answer to SQ2 is that the reasons are mainly affective and relate to officers’ desire to remain in the institution with which they identify, rather than being based on continuance commitment, which relates only to the perceived costs of leaving the CS / PoAF.

As for SO3, *Assessing whether there are differences in the opinions of CS officers regarding the application of a indemnity to the ST and / or CT financially supported by the PoAF*, H3 was confirmed and the answer to SQ3 is that officers believe that: it is entirely fair that the institution wants to secure a return on the investment made on complementary training and increase retention by introducing a monetary indemnity or an additional service time; it is blatantly unfair that, in addition to the provisions of the EMFAR (which establish different MST for different areas of specialization, such as 10 years for military doctors who complete a specialist degree and 14 years for pilots versus eight for other specialties), the PoAF does the same through the Order. Essentially, the fact that the Order is perceived as blatantly unfair has two justifications: that highly specialized training is already adequately covered by the EMFAR; that this training is mandatory and that officers who do not complete it are barred by the PoAF from working in their area of expertise.

Ipsa facto, the answer to the RQ, “What is the relationship between the PoAF’s indemnification policy and retention among its CS officers?” is that Order No. 51/2016 has an impact on retention, but it will only be felt from October 2019 onwards, and that this impact will be even greater by November 2021. Ideally, a study will be carried out that includes an “N” per period, rank, specialty, and attendance of ST and CT, making it possible to verify in a conclusive way the Order’s impact on retention. This interpretation of the data is compounded by the fact that, with regard to feelings of commitment / attachment, officers state that the main reason for their desire to remain in the institution is a feeling of identification with the institution (affective commitment), rather than to avoid paying indemnities to the PoAF (continuance commitment). This study of affective commitment provides another valuable contribution, making it possible to list concrete measures to retain

officers in the PoAF, such as: managing stress factors related to ambiguity of information; formalising policies and procedures; increasing rewarding work experiences; providing a fair rewards system; recognising high quality performances in an impartial, timely, and non-discretionary manner through honourable mentions based on objective and substantiated criteria; a parsimonious management of assignments / deployments; and providing means of support and organizational fairness.

This third and final chapter contains the study's conclusions, contributions to knowledge, and limitations, as well as suggestions for future studies, practical implications, and recommendations.

Regarding its **contributions to knowledge**, the study provides a thorough analysis of how officers perceive Order No. 51/2016 and, consequently, the PoAF's interpretation and implementation of the law's provisions. This knowledge is highly relevant and can be instrumental in understanding an issue that is currently on the agenda. The second contribution relates to the knowledge that the strongest link between CS officers and the PoAF is affective commitment, providing the institution with concrete, objective, and practical tools / strategies to introduce powerful and effective measures to retain its officers.

The main **limitation** of this study, which is completely outside the researchers' control, is the time factor. As described in the analysis of SO1, SQ1, and H1, a pondered and more conclusive interpretation of the data cannot be provided at this time, nor can H1 be conclusively confirmed. This will only be possible after October 2019, and a more rigorous confirmation will only be possible after November 2021, ideally based on an "N" that includes criteria such as rank, specialty, and type of training attended (specialized versus complementary).

As for **future studies**, the priority is the study mentioned above, which can be carried out after October 2019 or, even more conclusively, after November 2021. A possible topic of interest, which was mentioned in several short answers, is the fact that officers "must" complete a large number of complementary training courses to avoid being passed over for promotion, and that attending "so many" courses could lead to "absenteeism". Essentially, the study would provide a cost / benefit analysis for CS officers who, up to the date of publication of the new performance assessment regulation, were not required to attend a variable number of training courses, and therefore were not absent from their place of work for several periods, in comparison to CS officers who, since the Order was promulgated, are "required" to do so to avoid being passed over for someone more focused on career progression than on their current duties.

The most significant **practical implication** of this work is that it benefits the practices of the PoAF, as the organization is now more aware of possible courses of action to increase retention, specifically regarding the more rigorous timing required to understand the full impact of the Order and the type of reasons that make officers want to remain in the service of the PoAF.

In light these conclusions, the study's **recommendation** to the Resources Division is to prepare a further study on the topic. The study should focus, in the strict sense, on the additional service time and the indemnities paid for complementary training, which recipients perceive as entirely fair, rather than for specialized training, which recipients believe is blatantly unfair

for the reasons identified above. In the broad sense, the study should focus on measures to increase officers' engagement, commitment, desire, identification, etc., to the Air Force.

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