

IN UNIFORM WITHOUT COMMITMENT? GENERATIONAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO QUIET QUITTING FROM MILITARY SERVICE

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Purpose: The phenomenon of quiet quitting has been the subject of focused analysis for several years, serving as a starting point for a deeper understanding of contemporary employment mechanisms. In the context of the Polish Armed Forces, as a public institution with a mission-driven character, this issue takes on particular significance, affecting morale, operational effectiveness, and personnel stability. The aim of the conducted research was to identify and monitor indicators that support the strengthening of soldier engagement in service. These studies not only enhance the understanding of organizational loyalty mechanisms within the military but also enable the diagnosis of potential risks associated with psychological disengagement from service.

Design/methodology/approach: The article presents the results of empirical studies conducted in 2019/2020 and 2023, aimed at identifying factors that may contribute to the phenomenon of quiet quitting in the military.

Findings: A comparative analysis revealed a high degree of consistency in the cluster structure of resignation reasons, independent of generational affiliation. The factors were categorized into two groups: those related to the employer and those related to the nature of the work. The results confirm that the decision to continue military service depends not only on financial aspects, but also on a sense of purpose, available career paths, the quality of interpersonal relationships, and the alignment of organizational values with individual attitudes and generational expectations. The identified indicators provide a foundation for designing effective human resource management strategies in the military, particularly in the context of increasing security threats and the need to maintain a high level of personnel engagement.

Research limitations/implications: Due to the non-representative nature of the research sample, the results have limited generalizability.

Social implications: The obtained results were analyzed with consideration of generational differences among the surveyed soldiers, which led to the rejection of the hypothesis that the reasons for leaving military service vary depending on generational affiliation (Generations X, Y, Z).

Originality/value: The research findings hold both cognitive and practical value. They enhance the understanding of the psychosocial determinants behind decisions to leave military service,

which in turn may inform the development of effective human resource management strategies within the armed forces.

Keywords: quiet quitting, military service, engagement.

Category of the paper: Research article.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of quiet quitting, understood as the withdrawal of employees from active engagement in professional duties while formally remaining within the organization, has garnered increasing attention across both private and public sectors. In the case of public institutions such as the Polish Armed Forces, this issue assumes particular significance due to their mission-driven nature, hierarchical structures, and the critical importance of personnel continuity and high morale for national security. Unlike market-based organizations, public institutions are characterized by limited flexibility in human resource management, strong regulatory constraints, and the necessity to fulfill tasks regardless of staffing conditions.

Considering the war in Ukraine and the tangible threat of destabilization along Poland's eastern border, the resilience of the Polish Armed Forces as a public organization has become increasingly vital. This necessitates not only the expansion of human resources but also the sustained commitment of military personnel. One of the potential threats to the operational effectiveness of the armed forces is a decline in soldier motivation, particularly in the context of structural changes following 2015, which saw an almost complete turnover of command staff. These transformations may have influenced perceptions of organizational stability, trust in leadership, and the meaningfulness of service, especially among younger generations of soldiers.

This article presents the findings of two empirical studies conducted by the author at the turn of 2019/2020 and 2023. The aim of these studies was to identify and monitor indicators conducive to strengthening soldiers' engagement in military service. These investigations not only enhance our understanding of the mechanisms underlying organizational loyalty within the military but also facilitate the diagnosis of potential risks associated with psychological disengagement from service.

The research findings possess both cognitive and practical value. They contribute to a deeper understanding of the psychosocial determinants influencing decisions to leave the service, which in turn may inform the development of effective human resource management strategies within the armed forces. Identifying risk factors associated with quiet quitting enables the implementation of preventive measures, such as the adjustment of career development pathways, command support programs, and strategic internal communication. In the context of growing demand for highly qualified and motivated military personnel, the application of the findings presented in this article may provide substantial support for the long-term personnel policy planning of the Polish Armed Forces.

2. Quiet Quitting - Literature review

Since 2022, the issue of quiet quitting has increasingly attracted scholars from various disciplines, who have sought to explain and assess the scale of this phenomenon across different sectors. The term quiet quitting gained widespread attention on social media following the viral TikTok video posted in July 2022 by 24-year-old software engineer and musician Zaid Khan (Scheyett, 2022; Çimen, Yılmaz, 2023). Since then, the popularity of the concept, particularly within corporate environments, has evolved into a broader cultural phenomenon (Salvucci, 2023). The heightened interest in quiet quitting can be attributed to the pandemic period and the accompanying shift in employee value systems (Christian, 2022).

The term quiet quitting is often used interchangeably with silent resignation (Lipiński, Koczy, 2023), which underscores that the phenomenon should not be mistaken for actual employee turnover, but rather for a decline in engagement with professional responsibilities (Anand et al., 2023). Although these individuals do not formally resign, they psychologically distance themselves from discretionary tasks (Rugiubei, Cruceanu, 2024). As Z. Khan emphasized: “I recently learned about the term ‘quiet quitting,’ where you’re not outright quitting your job, but you’re quitting the idea of going above and beyond. You’re still performing your duties, but you’re no longer subscribing to the mentality that work is life. The reality is that work is not life. Your worth as a person is not defined by your job” (Khan, 2022).

As work ceases to be a central value, it no longer provides satisfaction, and employees increasingly seek to delineate the boundaries between their personal and professional lives (Jackowska, 2023). Lu et al. (2023) define quiet quitting as a situation in which employees perform only the minimum required tasks and are psychologically detached from their work. Similarly, Öztürk et al. (2023) highlight the reduction of responsibility for work outcomes, while Galanis et al. (2023) emphasize the absence of formal resignation despite inappropriate workplace behavior. Molchan & Clore (2023) associate quiet quitting with a loss of motivation, lack of communication with colleagues, and organizational isolation, describing it as a scenario in which the employee “slips out the back door” at the end of the workday.

Although quiet quitting has become a subject of focused research in recent years, it would be erroneous to consider it a completely new or previously unnoticed phenomenon. Yasemin & Sürmeli (2023) identify its roots in the need to improve work-life balance, with employees adopting quiet quitting as a strategy for maintaining well-being (Bakotic, 2023). Niko (2022) also points to employees’ experience of a lack of meaning, usefulness, and agency in their work. Some researchers interpret quiet quitting as a manifestation of occupational burnout (Hamouche et al., 2023), while others link it to excessive work-related stress (Morrison-Beed, 2022; Loewy, Spintge, 2022). Moczyłowska (2024) emphasizes the emotional dimension of the phenomenon, noting that quiet quitting is reflected in a decline in emotional engagement with tasks and

interpersonal relationships. Emotional involvement is replaced by rational calculation: “I do only what is required - nothing more” (Bell, Kennebrew, 2023), which aligns quiet quitting with the concept of social loafing (Bell, Kennebrew, 2023).

A high proportion of employees experiencing quiet quitting signals a crisis in management, not only in the areas of motivation and employee experience, but also in recruitment and development practices. It is also important to consider the potential for quiet quitting to spread from one employee to others, particularly when it involves supervisors whose lack of motivation and engagement often contributes to diminished commitment among subordinates. Researchers confirm that leadership positively influences work engagement (e.g., Decuyper, Schaufeli, 2021), thereby serving as a potential remedy for quiet quitting. This was corroborated by Gigol, who demonstrated the positive impact of servant leadership on work engagement and reduced turnover intention. Furthermore, the author noted that servant leadership, through its effect on engagement, mitigates both quiet quitting and the intention to leave the organization. He also emphasized that quiet quitting does not directly lead to turnover intention, thereby challenging its association with occupational burnout (Gigol, 2023).

Not only servant leadership but also transformational leadership may contribute to reducing turnover intention among employees (Saira et al., 2020), further underscoring the importance of supervisor-subordinate relationships and the need to enhance leadership competencies. As Mousa et al. (2020) point out, job satisfaction is directly linked to managerial behavior, and leadership that neglects the emotional context of work contributes to shifts in employee behavior. This leads to what is referred to as a leadership crisis (Zenger, Folkman, 2022). Additionally, quiet quitting can be associated with a loss of trust in supervisors and a reluctance to exert effort when employers fail to prioritize employee well-being (Caldwell et al., 2023).

Gigol (2023), based on the results of his empirical research, defined quiet quitting as a phenomenon of active disengagement from work, stemming from a deliberate employee attitude. He conceptualizes it as a strategy of aligning one’s professional activity with working conditions and personal preferences, which corresponds with Detert’s perspective that frames quiet quitting as a form of calibrated contribution (Detert, 2022).

Referring to Gigol’s findings, it is pertinent to invoke the *Job Demands-Job Resources Theory* developed by Bakker and Demerouti. According to this framework, every job entails risk, both in terms of professional demands (*demand factors*) and the availability of resources necessary to perform the work (*resource factors*). Job demands and resources are two key dimensions influencing organizational performance and employee well-being, particularly in the context of burnout and work engagement (Bakker, Demerouti, 2017). Demands are associated with physical, emotional, and cognitive effort, often leading to stress, whereas aspects such as social support, autonomy, and development opportunities are considered job resources. These resources help employees cope with demands, support learning and growth, and facilitate goal achievement. Therefore, investing in job resources can be viewed as a strategic approach to mitigating the prevalence of quiet quitting (Rahmadara, Rachmawati, 2025).

The causes of quiet quitting can also be interpreted through the lens of *Social Exchange Theory*, which posits that employees reduce their level of engagement when they perceive an imbalance between their contributions and the benefits received. Arar et al. (2023) highlight the phenomenon of trust and engagement erosion, often resulting from perceived injustice related to workload, compensation, or recognition, despite adherence to social norms of fairness.

In professions that rely heavily on teamwork, quiet quitting poses an even greater threat. Employees exhibiting this behavior may show limited interest in assisting colleagues, reduced engagement in their own responsibilities, and a tendency to perform only the minimum required by their job descriptions. Furthermore, the negative consequences of quiet quitting include diminished motivation for professional development and learning, weakened organizational ties, and a decline in loyalty toward the employer (Ng, Stanton, 2023).

Quiet quitting can thus be linked to *toxic organizational cultures*, where relationships based on mutual respect and shared values deteriorate (Lyons, 2022). In such environments, employees may fear coming to work, feel unable to be honest with their supervisors, and perceive the organization as treating them unfairly (Mirza, 2019). This treatment undermines the organization's ability to retain top talent and contributes to dysfunctional behaviors (Appelbaum, Roy-Girard, 2007).

However, it is important to note that quiet quitting may also have positive aspects. Its emergence on a larger scale reflects employees' growing need to safeguard their mental health and prevent burnout (Zhang, Rodrique, 2023). Serenko (2022) argues that by maintaining a healthy balance between work and other life domains, employees become more assertive and consistently set boundaries, which serves as a preventive measure against pathological organizational dynamics. As Moczydłowska & Moczydłowska emphasize: "Quiet quitting does not exclude greater engagement or the willingness to devote additional time to tasks when employees believe in the value of a specific project or the mission of the organization, care about the people they work with or serve, or genuinely enjoy solving the problems their work presents" (2024, p. 34).

Therefore, a key strategy for reducing the incidence of quiet quitting is to improve working conditions and foster a sense of purpose by highlighting the significance of specific tasks and the role of employees in project success.

Certain professions such as those of soldiers, police officers, firefighters, and physicians, require intense physical and psychological effort and may also be emotionally taxing, leading to stress. In these roles, the interaction between job demands and resources is particularly critical. An increase in professional demands, such as workload, cognitive challenges, and emotional requirements, may result in psychological stress, burnout, and psychosomatic symptoms. However, this outcome is not inevitable; it depends on the availability of job resources. Hence, it is essential to equip employees with diverse skills, provide constructive feedback, and offer *developmental feedback*. Enhancing job resources serves as a buffer against

the adverse effects of demanding work conditions, thereby preventing disengagement and quiet quitting.

It is also crucial to emphasize that without an individualized approach to employees and an understanding of their emotional states, addressing disengagement becomes exceedingly difficult. The expression and scope of quiet quitting vary depending on social norms, cultural context, organizational structures, and perceptions of professional boundaries. The causes of quiet quitting are also individually determined and may stem from internal factors (such as personal values, personality traits, and experiences), environmental factors (such as family circumstances), and organizational factors (such as leadership quality, organizational culture, motivational systems, and development opportunities). Therefore, conducting in-depth research within specific professional groups is essential to identify the primary drivers of quiet quitting and to develop targeted intervention programs tailored to the organization, the nature of the work, and the employees themselves.

3. Methods

The findings presented in this study constitute part of the research material collected within two scientific projects conducted at War Studies University. The first project: *Shaping Soldier Engagement in the Armed Forces: An Organizational Perspective*, was carried out between 2019 and 2020. The second, titled *Changes in Personnel Policy in the Armed Forces and Soldier Engagement in Service*, was implemented in 2023. The primary objective of both projects was to analyze the factors influencing soldier engagement and to identify barriers that may lead to resignation from military service.

Both studies employed the same research procedure. Data were collected using a proprietary questionnaire composed of closed-ended questions. The respondents were soldiers participating in educational programs at War Studies University both in degree programs and specialized training courses. The sample was selected purposefully, based on the assumption that participants had at least several years of service experience and had held command or specialist positions within the structures of the Polish Armed Forces. This approach enabled the collection of perspectives from individuals qualified to assess the organizational conditions of service and personnel policy within the military.

In total, 158 soldiers participated in the first edition of the study (2019/2020), and 159 in the second (2023). In both cases, the sample was predominantly male - 85.4% in 2019 and 84.8% in 2023. The majority of respondents held command positions - 58.2% in 2019 and 66.5% in 2023. In the 2019 study, the average length of service was 17 years (ranging from less than one year to 40 years), while in 2023 it was 13 years (ranging from less than one year to 36 years). These data confirm that the analysis focused on an experienced professional group

capable of accurately diagnosing both the motivations for continuing service and the reasons for resignation.

In the analysis presented in this article, particular attention was given to responses to the question: *What factors could lead you to leave military service in the Armed Forces?* in which respondents could indicate up to five key factors. The results were analyzed with consideration of generational differences among the surveyed soldiers, to test the hypothesis that *the reasons for leaving military service vary depending on generational affiliation (Generations X, Y, Z)*.

4. Results

Statistical analyses were conducted using JASP version 0.19.3 and IBM SPSS Statistics version 29.0. In the first step, a hierarchical cluster analysis was performed to identify the most coherent groups of reasons for leaving military service based on data from 2019/2020 and 2023. The purpose of this clustering was to group similar reasons indicated by respondents, thereby revealing patterns in the factors contributing to resignation from service. The analysis employed the agglomerative *Ward.D2* method, which minimizes the total within-cluster squared distances, promoting the formation of clusters with similar sizes and compact structures. Binary distance was used as the similarity measure, appropriate for dichotomous (0-1) data. The analysis was conducted separately for the datasets from 2019/2020 and 2023.

The survey used in this study was a proprietary tool developed specifically for this project. Its purpose was to obtain descriptive and exploratory data related to the specific research context of reasons for leaving the service. Because the survey is not a standardized tool, full validity and reliability analyses were not conducted.

Based on visual inspection of the dendrograms, a two-cluster solution was selected, as it clearly separated distinct groups of reasons at a higher level of the hierarchy. This approach was deemed to best reflect the structure of similarities among the reasons for leaving military service. The two-cluster division was identified for both the 2019 dataset (Figure 1) and the 2023 dataset (Figure 2).

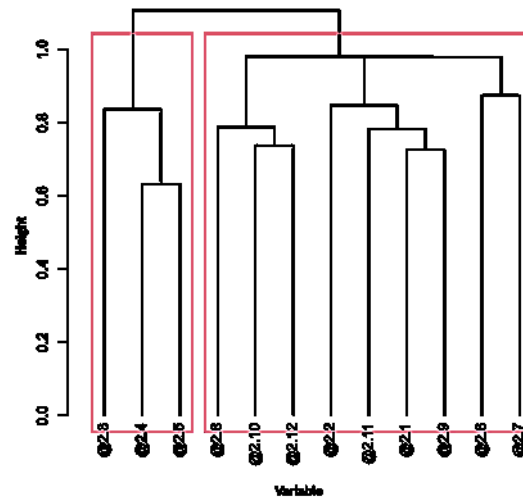


Figure 1. Dendrogram illustrating clusters of resignation factors in military service – data from 2019/2020.

Source: Own research results.

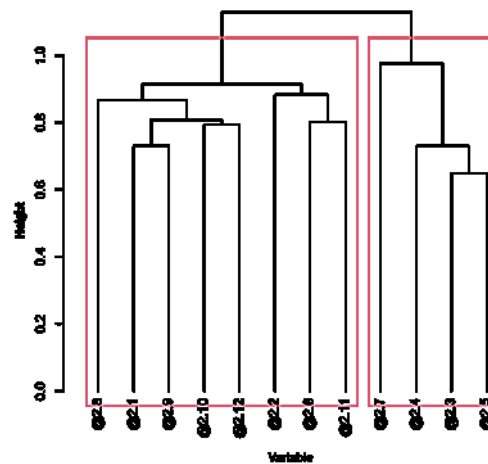


Figure 2. Dendrogram illustrating clusters of resignation factors in military service – data from 2023.

Source: Own research results.

Both cluster solutions proved to be similar. For the 2019 dataset, the division was as follows:

Cluster 1. Employer-related reasons:

- Perception of the Armed Forces as an unattractive employer in the labor market.
- Low base salary relative to military rank.
- Unattractive financial and non-financial benefits (e.g., salary supplements, military pension system).

Cluster 2. Work-related reasons:

- Discrepancy between the declared mission and values of the Armed Forces and their actual implementation.
- Limited organizational development opportunities within the military.
- Lack of career advancement in command roles within the prestigious profession of soldiering.

- Possibility of working in a low-prestige team, as soldiers are perceived in the labor market.
- Low attractiveness of tasks performed by soldiers.
- Uninteresting working conditions and repetitive tasks.
- Unengaging training and unclear rules for acquiring practical military qualifications.
- Lack of career progression and opportunities to attain higher ranks and positions.
- Limited access to contemporary knowledge and modern work tools.

For the 2023 dataset, the division was as follows:

Cluster 1. Employer-related reasons:

- Perception of the Armed Forces as an unattractive employer in the labor market.
- Low base salary relative to military rank.
- Unattractive financial and non-financial benefits (e.g., salary supplements, military pension system).
- Possibility of working in a low-prestige team, as soldiers are perceived in the labor market.

Cluster 2. Work-related reasons:

- Discrepancy between the declared mission and values of the Armed Forces and their actual implementation.
- Limited organizational development opportunities within the military.
- Lack of career advancement in command roles within the prestigious profession of soldiering.
- Low attractiveness of tasks performed by soldiers.
- Uninteresting working conditions and repetitive tasks.
- Unengaging training and unclear rules for acquiring practical military qualifications.
- Lack of career progression and opportunities to attain higher ranks and positions.
- Limited access to contemporary knowledge and modern work tools.

The only difference between the two datasets concerned the classification of the reason “Possibility of working in a low-prestige team, as soldiers are perceived in the labor market”. In the 2019/2020 data, this factor was assigned to the work-related cluster, whereas in the 2023 data, it was included in the employer-related cluster. No other differences were observed. It can be concluded that the first cluster encompassed reasons related to financial and institutional aspects, while the second cluster included reasons associated with the nature of the work.

The comparative analysis of the 2019/2020 and 2023 results demonstrated a high degree of consistency in the cluster structure identifying reasons for leaving military service. In both editions, two main clusters were distinguished. The first group included employer-related factors, primarily financial and institutional in nature, while the second group referred to work characteristics, including the sense of purpose, opportunities for professional development, and the quality of daily work experience. The only difference between the years

was the reassignment of the factor concerning work in a low-prestige team - from the work-related cluster in 2019/2020 to the employer-related cluster in 2023. This may indicate a shift in the social perception of the military as an institution or a change in how sources of professional dissatisfaction are interpreted.

Subsequently, a comparative analysis of the identified clusters was conducted based on generational affiliation. For the 2019 dataset, a chi-square test of independence revealed no significant relationship between the choice of reason cluster and generational affiliation, $\chi^2(2) = 1.82$; $p = 0.403$; $VC = 0.11$. Generation Z respondents selected work-related reasons slightly more often than the other two generations. The results of the analysis are presented in Figure 3.

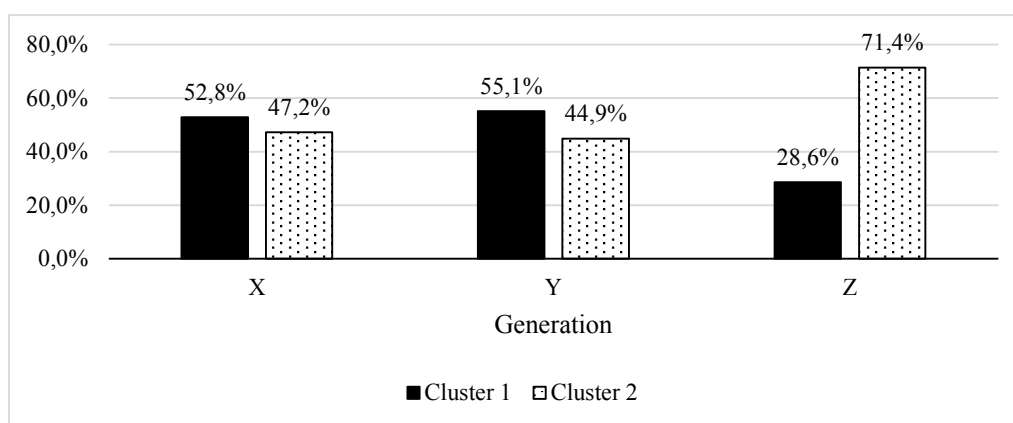


Figure 3. Percentage distribution of resignation reasons by generation – 2019/2020 dataset.

Source: Own research results.

Analogous analyses were conducted for the 2023 dataset. The results again indicated no statistically significant relationship between the selection of resignation reason clusters and generational affiliation, $\chi^2(2) = 0.05$; $p = 0.977$; $VC = 0.02$. Across all generations, respondents slightly more frequently selected reasons related to the employer and slightly less frequently those associated with the nature of the work itself. The results of these analyses are presented in Figure 4.

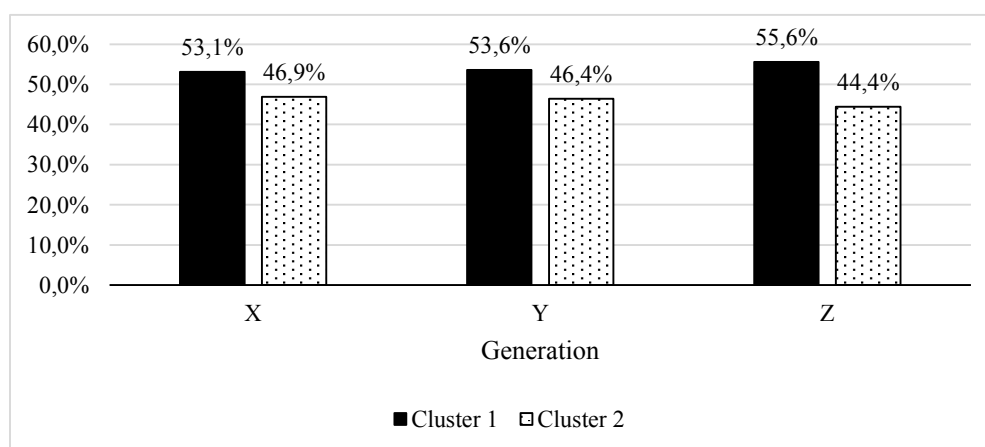


Figure 4. Percentage distribution of resignation reasons by generation – 2023 dataset.

Source: Own research results.

The presented results did not confirm the research hypothesis, generation did not prove to be a significant factor differentiating the structure of reasons for leaving military service. This may indicate the universal nature of the determinants of professional dissatisfaction within the Polish Armed Forces. Accordingly, it is reasonable to adopt the conceptual framework suggesting that the decision to continue or terminate service is influenced by financial factors, the quality of interpersonal relationships, available career paths, and the overall perception of the military institution as a workplace.

The identified indicators capture the complexity of decision-making mechanisms and situate them within a broader organizational and social context, representing a valuable contribution to the development of personnel policy in the defense sector.

The analyzed reasons for leaving military service, if sustained over a longer period, may contribute to actual resignations among soldiers. Nevertheless, it remains indisputable that these factors significantly determine the scale of the quiet quitting phenomenon, which, given the nature of military service as a profession of public trust, constitutes a negative development.

5. Conclusions

The phenomenon of quiet quitting is subject to detailed analysis across various industries and professions. Researchers seek to identify its causes and potential consequences, while also undertaking efforts not only to estimate its scale but to pinpoint changes in the work environment that could reduce or eliminate its occurrence. Quiet quitting manifested through reduced engagement, lower activity levels, and a lack of job satisfaction, is frequently associated with leadership crises and toxic organizational cultures. Referring to *Social Exchange Theory*, it can be argued that employees decrease their level of engagement when they perceive an imbalance between their contributions and the benefits received. Drawing on the *Job Demands-Job Resources Theory*, particular emphasis should be placed on the importance of maintaining adequate job resources in relation to demands. Job resources must be carefully nurtured to enhance employees' capacity to cope with professional demands, while simultaneously supporting their development, learning, and goal attainment.

The research findings indicate that addressing the phenomenon of quiet quitting requires not only personnel-related actions but also the reinforcement of leadership at all levels of command. This involves the development of communication competencies, empathy, and motivational skills within a structure based on discipline and command. In the context of Poland's NATO membership and the ongoing war in Ukraine, the stability of personnel and the maintenance of high morale among soldiers become particularly significant. This calls for an effective system of psychological and organizational support. It is also recommended to implement mechanisms for the early identification of professional withdrawal symptoms,

especially in units with elevated combat readiness. Further research should focus on analyzing the relationship between leadership style and soldiers' engagement levels, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of preventive measures undertaken within NATO structures. Another important direction involves examining how the experience of real military threat influences the redefinition of loyalty, motivation, and the sense of purpose in service among soldiers of different generations.

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