

## THE QUIET QUITTING PHENOMENON FROM A HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

Karolina DRELA

University of Szczecin, Institute of Management; karolina.drela@usz.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0003-0358-7938

**Purpose:** The purpose of this article is to introduce the phenomenon of quiet quitting and to identify the risks of this phenomenon to organisations.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The research methods used in the article include: critical analysis of primary literature and secondary data analysis.

**Findings:** The results of the research presented in the article indicate that understanding quiet quitting allows organisations and managers to achieve sufficient management and improve work culture, helps employees avoid burnout, but can put their careers at risk, however, it is detrimental to organisations. The risk of quiet quitting in the organisations of the time was determined to be very high and the risk factors associated with quiet quitting were presented. It is shown that it can be a predictor of actual employees leaving their place of employment.

**Research limitations/implications:** As the issue under study is broad and multifaceted, the article only discusses the main problems associated with quiet quitting.

**Originality/value:** The issue of quiet quitting presented in the article has not been investigated to date. Exploring selected aspects of 'quiet quitting' may broaden contemporary organisations' understanding of the phenomenon and the problems associated with it.

**Keywords:** quiet quitting, organisational development, work engagement, human capital management, labour market.

**Category of the paper:** Research paper.

### 1. Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments took quarantine and isolation measures as part of their health measures, and businesses had to move to a remote working model. As a result, most business and service processes were redesigned under remote working. After the COVID-19 pandemic, a new danger emerged for companies, which began to return to normal working hours.

During the pandemic, some workers saw how their working arrangements could be changed to remote or flexible working, while experiencing virtual burnout and blurred boundaries between work and home. Other workers, including many social workers, were referred to as

„essential workers” and placed huge and often dangerous demands on their personal work. Post pandemic demands to return to work, coupled with a work culture that provided little pay or development opportunities, left many workers disillusioned and discouraged. This led to the Great Resignation, where those who could afford to leave their jobs did so. For those who could not leave their jobs or chose not to, the alternative was to leave quietly (Espada, 2022).

A new trend in organisational behaviour that will have a profound impact on today's companies and even shake up the business world (Harter, 2022; Daugherty, 2022), called „silent resignation”, is that employees do not officially leave their jobs. It is, however, a new kind of job flight experienced by employees who only minimally fulfil their responsibilities towards their job, by deliberately slowing down their work pace and avoiding taking on additional responsibility for the development of the organisation (Hancock, Schinger, 2005, p. 2022).

The increase in voices associated with the concept and its potential negative impact on individuals, businesses and the economy has necessitated a detailed examination of the concept. The variation in definitions and interpretations of the concept causes quiet quitting to deviate from the issues and problems found in the work environment to which it refers (Yikilmaz, 2022). The purpose of this article is therefore to introduce the phenomenon of quiet quitting and to identify the risks of this phenomenon to organisations. Therefore, the following research question is posed: is the 'quiet quitting' of an employee beneficial to the organisation.

## 2. Literature review

In the literature, quiet quitting is believed to have been first defined and presented by Mark Boldger, at the 2009 Texas A&M Economic Symposium in Texas, USA (Yikilmaz, 2022; Arnet, 2022; Urban Legal Recruitment, 2022). The use of this concept was intended to explain the „declining passion for achievement” in economic processes in Venezuela, implying a „demonisation of profit, entrepreneurship and productivity”. More recently, the concept became a related topic with a video on TikTok (2022), where Zaid Khan (@zaidlepplin) from New York highlighted it in a post. Sharing the video helped gain a viral identity for the concept. Tiktokker @zaidlepplin's posts, such as „Work is not your life” and „Your value is not defined by productivity”, caused significant repercussions across multiple social media outlets. Extensive discussions have started to take place among audiences, both in the business community and on various social media platforms. The fact that the concept is open to discussion on a wide scale has resulted in it being defined from different points of view (Yikilmaz, 2022).

Quiet quitting („silent quitting”), according to the Cambridge Dictionary (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024), is an activity that involves doing the work that an employee has to do in order to keep his or her job, but doing so without much enthusiasm or effort, and without

accepting additional tasks. Thus, it can be said that the so-called „silent quitting” describes a situation in which an employee mentally and emotionally „leaves” his or her job - doing the bare minimum to cope in the workplace. This is a phenomenon that has been present in the labour market for years, but it is only in the 21st century that it has been named as such (Formica, Sfodera, 2022).

A similar definition is provided by A. Kruk (2022), noting that it is a situation where an employee comes to work but mentally shuts down and does the bare minimum to survive. The employee does not literally quit his or her job, but deliberately reduces it (Scheyett, 2023). Thus, he or she does not take on any additional responsibilities, does not show creativity, and does not want to take an active part in the development of the organisation (Walker, 2022). It should be added that signs of „silent resignation” can take different forms depending on the reasons why the employee is „withdrawn” (Kruk, 2022). For example, if an employee is genuinely unhappy at work, the signs may be more noticeable than in the case of someone whose goal is only to pursue a better work-life balance. Thus, it should be emphasised that quiet quitting is an approach to work in which employees do not take the initiative to take action, do not become emotionally involved in their duties, avoid taking on new challenges and are unwilling to take on responsibility for large projects (Kuchta, 2023).

An apt addition to the previous definitions was provided by Serenko (2024), where he considered quiet quitting to be a mindset in which employees deliberately limit job activities to those contained in the job description, perform to predetermined expectations but do not exceed them, and never volunteer for additional tasks. Workplace tasks are performed only to maintain their current employment status, putting their well-being above organisational goals (Serenko, 2024). Employees quietly quit due to poor extrinsic motivation, often job burnout and animosity towards managers or the organisation. It is noteworthy that quiet quitting helps employees to avoid job burnout, but engaging in such behaviour may jeopardise their careers. It is emphasised that quiet quitting refers to a situation in which employees begin to give up their commitment to their work and perform additional duties, but that professional burnout defines a psychological condition characterised by feelings of fatigue, apathy, frustration and significantly reduced job satisfaction (Nabiałek, 2023). Quiet quitting may be a common outcome of occupational burnout. The literature suggests that the incidence of 'quiet quitting' increased dramatically after the end of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (Constantz, 2022; Le, Hancer, Chaulagain, Pham, 2023; Resume Builder, 2022).

It must be emphasised that, contrary to expectations, the concept of „silent resignation” does not involve the employee leaving work. It involves the employee in the workplace focusing on work-related processes within a time frame set by the employer and being away from work during off periods. In contrast, „quiet dismissal”, as opposed to quiet quitting, is a process that ensures that the employee voluntarily leaves the job by providing only minimal pay and benefits. Therefore, the concept of quiet quitting is that the employee performs at a basic level and continues to work in a way that saves opportunities in the workplace.

Fully engaged employees are critical to the success of any organisation. When quiet quitting occurs and employees „quietly leave” and are not fully present mentally and emotionally, the costs are borne by „everyone” - the company, the „quitting” employee and other colleagues. However, there are ways of dealing with this problem that are beneficial to both the individual and the organisation (Urban Legal Recruitment, 2022).

### **3. Methods**

The purpose of this article is to introduce the phenomenon of quiet quitting, which is becoming increasingly popular in today's business world, and to identify the risks of this phenomenon for organisations. Therefore, the following research question was posed: is the quiet quitting of an employee beneficial to an organisation? The answer to the research question and the formulated objective was achieved through a critical analysis of the primary literature and secondary data analysis. The research used an analysis of the available source literature. The stages of the research process included: an assessment of the current state of knowledge on quiet quitting and the research carried out related to quiet quitting. Theoretical issues were considered on the basis of an analysis of the available source literature on quiet quitting, job burnout and related interdisciplinary concepts. As a result of the analysis, the author identified the risk factors and risks associated with employee quiet quitting.

The theoretical issues were considered on the basis of an analysis of the available literature on quiet quitting, job burnout and related interdisciplinary concepts. As a result of the analysis, the author identified the risk factors and hazards associated with employee quiet quitting, presented tabularly. In order to achieve the research objective, the article is divided into two parts: the first part presents an overview of the information on quiet quitting in the light of different definitions, defines the concept of quiet quitting from work and explains how it occurs, the second part presents the results of research related to quiet quitting. The conclusions combined with suggestions for the business world to prevent „silent quitting” are presented at the end of the article. As the issue under study is broad and multifaceted, the article only discusses the main problems related to quiet quitting.

### **4. Quiet quitting research**

Prior to the pandemic, employee engagement rates were increasing across the globe, probably as a result of organisations understanding the impact of engaged employees on the bottom line and motivating them accordingly. On the one hand, people quietly quitting their

jobs have a negative impact on their organisations and colleagues, who have to make up for the pocovid backlog by choosing to only do enough work to „survive”. On the other hand, some believe that quietly quitting work is a good thing and a long overdue response to the culture of overwork that is still the norm in most industries. Therefore, when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out and most people were forced to work remotely, they experienced more flexibility and a better work-life balance.

The hallmarks of „silent departure” are, for example: increased isolation and withdrawal from the team, lack of interest in learning or sharing ideas, increased levels of absenteeism, being late for work and leaving early, strict adherence to duties and working hours, a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the organisation, lack of enthusiasm and passion, not volunteering for leadership roles within the company, staying silent in meetings even when there are workflow issues, not responding to emails, messages and phone calls outside of working hours, isolating oneself in the work environment, avoiding social events and taking more time off than usual (Hetler, 2022; Robinson, 2022). Table 1 shows the risk factors associated with quiet quitting.

**Table 1.**

*Risk factors associated with the quiet quitting of an employee*

<b>Risks</b>	<b>Impact on the organisation</b>
loss of productivity	slowdown of current work, prolongation of product and project delivery times, reduced business performance, increased operating costs, reduced quality of products and services produced
low staff morale	dysfunctional team cohesion, reduced ability of employees to work together effectively, reduced productivity
staff absenteeism (holidays, sick leave, illnesses)	increased personnel costs, reduced business profitability, disrupted workflow within organisations, impeded teamwork, reduced ability to produce products or services, increased recruitment and training costs
poor quality of work	poor quality of goods and services produced, decreased accuracy, speed, efficiency, excellence and customer satisfaction with the work performed by employees, decreased reputation and revenue of the business, decreased operating income due to product cancellations or returns
negative customer comments	reduced business reliability, brand value and customer loyalty, sales and profitability of the business

Source: own compilation based on (Pedriquez, 2022; Hafat, Ali, 2022; Walker, 2022; Daugherty, 2022; Robinson, 2022; Harper, 2023; Srivastava, Kanpura, 2014; Martel, Dupuis, 2006; Matsuoka, 2022).

In order to deal with an individual who „quietly” gives up, managers must first discover the reason for this (whether the employee is struggling with personal issues, feels unrecognised at work or simply wants to achieve a better balance between work and home). Managers should create space for both those who choose to simply meet the organisation's expectations, e.g. due to increased family responsibilities or other personal factors, and those who want to exceed expectations, be creative and advance their careers. In contrast, quiet quitters need to understand the potential consequences for their career, such as limited promotion opportunities, reputational issues and possible termination, among others. Organisations could clearly define and communicate the desired work culture, building trust and ensuring that managers are well

equipped to manage employees, whether they work remotely or onsite (Urban Legal Recruitment, 2022)

For example, a study conducted in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic found that half of the participants are considered to have quietly quit (Constantz, 2022). Another study also found that 80% of those who quietly quit were burned out (Resume Builder, 2022). Since the COVID-19 pandemic caused a huge increase in burnout among employees (Alkhamees et al., 2023; Westphal et al., 2022; Galanis et al., 2021), an increase in the incidence of silent quitting also seems justified. Moreover, the literature points to a negative association between job burnout and work engagement, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Adanaqué-Bravo et al., 2023).

A Gallup Institute report (Gallup, 2022) shows that only 15% of employees are actively engaged at work, meaning that up to 85% may be quietly quitting their jobs (Alexis, 2022). The figures are slightly better for the United States, where 31% of employees are engaged at work, about twice the global average. Perhaps surprisingly, the employee engagement rate in Western Europe is very low at 13%. All these figures have seen a steady decline over the past decade.

Low employee engagement costs the global economy \$8.8 trillion (Espada, 2022), or 9% of global GDP. The regions with the highest levels of employee engagement are South Asia (33%), the United States and Canada (31%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (31%). The global increase in employee engagement was driven by growth in South Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Engagement levels in the US and Canada have recently declined. The European region has the lowest employee engagement (13%). Globally, 31% of managers are engaged compared to 20% of individual contributors. Employees (Harter, 2023) exclusively remote (30%) are more engaged than fully stationary (21%) and hybrid employees (24%). There is no doubt that „silent quitting” will have a major impact on many labour markets around the world.

Some employees wanted better pay, others wanted longer breaks. However, the most common responses related to their line manager or leadership: a change or approachability of the boss, a suitable atmosphere and a good working environment where everyone treats each other equally and with respect, fair treatment of all employees, being able to express their opinions without fear of consequences at work. In general, most people like their job but would like to change the way their supervisor treats them (Clifton, 2023).

Looking at the research, it is clear that there is a perception of employees feeling „dissatisfied and discouraged” at work, experiencing burnout in the face of intense workloads and expectations, and reducing the intrusion of work into the rest of life in terms of work-life balance. The concept of quiet quitting is increasingly common in today's labour markets. Rather than actually changing jobs, employees stay in their jobs and quietly quit, performing in a way that meets the requirements of the job with minimal results (Yildiz, 2023). The risk of quiet quitting in the organisations of the time is very high.

## 5. Conclusions

In the case of quiet quitting, employees remain at work but are frustrated, have lost their passion for their work and try to work as little as possible. Quiet quitting can be seen as a harbinger of employee turnover. It is quite likely that employees who „Quiet Quit” will leave their jobs because they feel that the culture of their work is bad. Thus, quiet quitting may be a predictor of actual employee quitting.

Understanding quiet quitting allows organisations and managers to achieve sufficient management and improve work culture. The trend of quiet quitting follows the Great Resignation phenomenon that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu-Lastres, Wen, Huang, 2023). Financial difficulties, especially after the pandemic, are forcing employees to stay at work, who now choose to prioritise their personal lives over their careers to achieve a better work-life balance (Zuzelo, 2023).

Several researchers have already noted that quiet quitting poses a serious threat to work productivity because it triggers a toxic workplace culture (Formica, Sfodera, 2022; Hamouche, Chabani, 2021; Serenko, 2023; Forrester, 2023; Lu et al., 2023). In this context, employees' attitudes towards work may be altered and disrupted, resulting in dissatisfaction, lack of commitment and intention to change jobs. Thus, identifying those who quietly quit their jobs is essential to reduce their discouragement and dissatisfaction and increase their passion for delivering quality work. Quitting quietly helps employees to avoid burnout, but can jeopardise their careers (Serenko, 2023), however, it is disadvantageous to the organisation.

However, Espada (2022) states that quiet quitting work, which cannot be eliminated for a long time, negatively affects work-life balance and work motivation. Therefore, certain precautions should be taken.

Employees involved in 'silent quitting' should become more productive, avoid burnout, prepare for termination or resignation and cope with future work difficulties. In response to silent departures, human capital managers should invest in knowledge sharing, capture the knowledge of potential silent departures, think twice before terminating them, conduct knowledge audits, focus on high performers, introduce burnout management programmes, promote interactional justice between managers and subordinates and fairly reward „going above and beyond”. Policy makers should prevent the depletion of national human capital, promote work-life balance as a core national value, fund support for employee mental health and invest in innovation in employee productivity (Serenko, 2024).

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