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PROFESSIONAL ENGAGEMENT OF WORKING STUDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF QUITE QUITTING

Patrycja ZWIECH

University of Szczecin; patrycja.zwiech@usz.edu.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-4053-8177

Purpose: The aim of this paper is to assess the phenomenon of quiet quitting (QQ) among working students and identify their level of professional engagement across three dimensions: detachment, lack of initiative, and lack of motivation. The study focuses on identifying the specific nature of this phenomenon in a group of young employees combining academic and professional responsibilities.
Design/methodology/approach: A mixed-methods approach was used, with the results of the quantitative section presented in this article. The standardized QQS scale (Galanis et al., 2023), comprising nine items across three dimensions, was used. The study was conducted on a sample of 93 working students aged 19-25, selected purposively. The analysis included descriptive statistics and an assessment of response distributions, including floor and ceiling effects. The study was conducted between January 20, 2025, and October 24, 2025, in Poland.
Findings: The obtained results indicate a low level of behavioral withdrawal and a lack of widespread avoidance behavior. At the same time, a moderate level of motivation and an average level of lack of initiative were observed. The greatest variability in responses concerned employee proactivity, suggesting the existence of significant individual differences in initiative-taking. The results confirm that QQ in the study group takes the form of limited engagement rather than overt counterproductive behavior.
Practical implications: Organizations should focus on strengthening employee initiative and motivation, rather than solely addressing undesirable behaviors. Activities that foster a sense of influence, fair management, and building an environment conducive to engagement are crucial.
Social implications: The results highlight the importance of work-life balance among young workers and indicate the need to adapt work models to changing generational expectations.
Originality/value: The study contributes to the development of knowledge on QQ by analysing a specific group of working students and applying a validated measurement tool in the Polish context.
Keywords: quiet quitting, employee engagement, working students, work motivation and initiative, Generation Z workforce.
Category of the paper: research paper.

1. Introduction

Recently, in the post-pandemic era, the phenomenon of Quite Quitting (QQ) has gained attention and prominence, becoming a significant topic of discussion. There has been a growing interest in this phenomenon, both in the scientific literature and on social media.

Quite Quitting is defined as employees' limited engagement in work and reluctance to take on additional or irrelevant tasks. Employees limit their efforts to the bare minimum. Several common behaviors are associated with Quite Quitting: lack of work engagement, emotional and psychological disengagement from work, minimal effort, prioritizing work-life balance, deliberately setting boundaries to preserve and prioritize personal and family life, and decreased trust in the organization, while not formally resigning (Formica, Sfodera, 2022; Srivastava et al., 2024; Pevec, 2024; Zwiech, 2024a, Patel et al., 2025).

However, QQ is not a new phenomenon. Rock and Dixit (2023) point out that QQ is a new name, a contemporary label, for a long-standing phenomenon. They argue that QQ reflects a long-standing trend in which employees withdraw from work, isolate themselves from colleagues, and adopt a passive attitude when they feel a lack of control over their roles. QQ behavior is simply a classic indicator of decreased motivation and engagement (Pevec, 2024). Thompson (2022) puts it this way: “What people are now calling “quiet quitting” was, in previous decades, simply known as “having a job”. This quote well illustrates the ongoing changes in terminology.

Bernuzzi et al. (2025), in turn, suggest that QQ is a new phenomenon that, despite some similarities to other constructs, is fundamentally different. This difference stems from the fact that it is simultaneously perceived as negative and positive. The negative aspects concern conditions that should be prevented and mitigated (from the organizational perspective), while the positive aspects concern adaptive strategies for coping with stress and burnout (from the employee's perspective). This duality highlights the need for a different approach to QQ and indicates that it should be treated as a new phenomenon.

The problem of declining work engagement, now called QQ, is therefore not new. In fact, it addresses long-standing issues in human resources management. The problem of declining engagement is fundamentally related to work ethic. It focuses on a key question: are employees fully engaged in their work, are they going beyond what is expected, or are they doing only the minimum to keep their jobs and get paid?

Particular interest in the topic of reduced work engagement emerged during the emergence of different expectations regarding work from Generation Z employees, coupled with emerging challenges in managing young employees, compounded by the pandemic and the rise of remote work. QQ's interest stems from the need for employers to adapt to the cultural shift in employee attitudes and professional expectations. A new generation discovers that it's difficult to balance

work with a well-lived life. Because they were raised in different circumstances than their predecessors, they are more self-focused and unwilling to sacrifice themselves.

Among young people, working students are particularly vulnerable to declining professional engagement and quiet quitting because they combine academic and professional demands, often with insufficient energy and social resources. In their case, QQ is influenced by, in addition to overload, burnout, and lack of support at work, also by work-study role conflict.

In this context, both the age of employees and their student status may play a role. Therefore, the aim of this study is to assess the phenomenon of quiet quitting (QQ) among working students and identify their level of professional engagement across three dimensions: detachment, lack of initiative, and lack of motivation. The study focuses on identifying the specific nature of this phenomenon in a group of young employees combining academic and professional responsibilities.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Work Engagement – the perspective of the employee and the employer

From an employee's perspective, QQ can be beneficial because it allows them to achieve higher well-being, allowing them to focus on the quality of their personal life, on opportunities for personal and social development outside the workplace, and on their own goals for self-fulfillment. In fact, QQ promotes a perspective that requires considering whether work should be the goal, the employee's highest priority, or merely a means to achieving goals related to personal life, health, family, friends, hobbies, travel, passions, self-fulfillment, etc. (Zwiech, 2024a). This phenomenon supports the need to establish clear boundaries between work and personal life. Furthermore, Bernuzzi et al. (2025) point out that well-being, burnout, and job satisfaction are key mediators in understanding QQ behavior.

From the company's perspective, QQ is perceived as a problematic phenomenon that companies must prevent. Currently, silent departures are considered one of the key challenges in human capital management. It is closely linked to a decline in employee professional engagement, which in turn translates into lower work performance (Zwiech, 2024a). Bakker and Demerouti (2017) argue that a lack of work engagement is associated with a gradual decline in organizational commitment, reflecting a disconnect from professional identity and long-term career goals. Employers view employee engagement as a lever for organizational performance, retention, and competitive advantage (Kunasz, 2025).

Zwiech (2024a) argues that silent departures are primarily the result of dissatisfaction with the workplace and wages, as well as the emergence of a new generation in the labor market, which has led to a shift in values. Employees perceive engagement as a function of their mental state, job resources, and workplace relationships. Unprofessional behavior by managers and a lack of concern for employees are key factors. Engagement is closely linked to interpersonal relationships with the immediate manager. An effective manager motivates team members, transforming them from indifferent to inspired. To better accomplish such tasks, they must be fair and treat their employees fairly and with care (Zwiech, 2024b).

Employers recognize the need to take on new tasks and efforts, which translates into new costs. They must build an organizational culture that encourages people to become more engaged. The second important change is the need to adapt recruitment criteria to those that take into account the values and expected personality traits of candidates. Combining these two aspects is crucial because those who hire seek employees with the right personality traits. And those who are hired based on character seek a culture that nurtures their identity.

QQ can also be viewed differently. The QQ phenomenon can also be beneficial for companies if it is treated as an adaptive strategy used by employees to cope with stress and burnout, which can reduce the costs of potential turnover and sick leave.

3. Methods

This study is part of a larger project, encompassing both surveys and in-depth interviews. A mixed-methods approach was used. The first stage was quantitative research, and the second was qualitative. This article describes the results of the quantitative research.

The study used the QQS scale, developed by Galanis et al. (2023). This tool assesses the level of work engagement. It is a questionnaire designed to assess the phenomenon of silent departure, understood as psychological withdrawal and the deliberate reduction of employee engagement to minimal contractual obligations within the organization. Research findings (Moisoglou et al., 2025; Galanis et al., 2025; Ventura-Silva et al., 2025) confirm the cross-cultural stability of the tool and its usefulness in various professional contexts.

The QQS has a stable three-factor structure. The scale consists of nine items grouped into three domains: detachment, lack of initiative, and lack of motivation. The first domain consists of four items, the second of three, and the third of two. The author translated nine items into Polish.

Table 1.
QQS scale by Galanis et al. (2023) - original version and translated into Polish

Item	QQS	
	English version	**Polish version**
DT_1	I do the basic or minimum amount of work without going above and beyond.	Wykonuję podstawową lub minimalną ilość pracy, nie wykraczając poza moje obowiązki
DT_2	If a colleague can do some of my work, then I let him/her do it.	Jeśli kolega może wykonać część mojej pracy, to pozwalam mu/jej to zrobić
DT_3	I take as many breaks as I can.	Robię jak najwięcej przerw, na ile pozwalają mi warunki.
DT_4	How often do you pretend to be working in order to avoid another task?	Jak często udajesz, że pracujesz, żeby uniknąć kolejnego zadania?
LI_1	I don't express opinions and ideas about my work because I am afraid that the manager assigns me more tasks.	Nie wyrażam opinii i pomysłów na temat mojej pracy, ponieważ obawiam się, że kierownik przydzieli mi więcej zadań.
LI_2	I don't express opinions and ideas about my work because I think that working conditions are not going to change.	Nie wyrażam opinii i pomysłów na temat mojej pracy, ponieważ uważam, że warunki pracy i tak się nie zmienią.
LI_3	How often do you take initiative at your work?	Jak często wykazujesz inicjatywę w pracy?
LM_1	I find motives in my job.	Odnajduję motywację w mojej pracy, czuję się zmotywowany.
LM_2	I feel inspired when I work.	Czuję się zainspirowany, kiedy pracuję.

Note: DT – Detachment; LI – Lack of initiative; LM – Lack of motivation.

Source: Galanis et al. (2023) and own translation.

Responses to statements DT_1, DT_2, DT_3, LI_1, LI_2, LM_1, and LM_2 are recorded on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), reflecting the degree of agreement. Questions DT_4 and LI_3 are scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always), reflecting the frequency of each statement. Additionally, items LI_3, LM_1, and LM_2 are reverse-scored.

A non-probabilistic, purposive sampling method was used. Inclusion criteria included: age (between 19 and 25 years), being a bachelor's or master's student, and declared employment at the time of completing the questionnaire.

The sample size was determined based on the recommendations of Hair et al. (2010), who suggest 5 to 10 participants per item. In accordance with generally accepted methodological standards (Hair et al., 2010), a proportion of 10 respondents per survey question was adopted, which ensures adequate statistical stability of the results. Therefore, for the nine-item QQS, a sample size of 90 participants would be sufficient.

Table 2.
Sociodemographic characteristics of working students sample (N = 93)

Variable	
Gender:	n (%)
Females	61 (65.6%)
Males	32 (34.4%)
Level:	n (%)
Bechelor's degree	53 (57%)
Master's degree	40 (43%)

Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

The author collected a total of 137 questionnaires, but after applying the inclusion criteria, 93 remained. The survey was conducted between January 20, 2025, and October 24, 2025, in Poland.

4. Results

The results of the descriptive analysis of the items included in the QQS questionnaire, covering three dimensions of employee functioning: detachment (DT), lack of initiative (LI) and lack of motivation (LM), are presented below. The analysis focuses on measures of central tendency, response differentiation, and the identification of floor and ceiling effects, which are important indicators of the tool's psychometric properties.

Table 3.
Statistical measures for the working students sample (N = 93)

	DT_1	DT_2	DT_3	DT_4	LI_1	LI_2	LI_3	LM_1	LM_2
mean	2.09	2.80	2.04	1.48	2.27	2.58	2.48	2.60	2.66
SD	1.01	1.17	1.06	0.67	1.15	1.11	0.88	0.94	0.93
median	2	3	2	1	2	3	3	3	3
mode	1	2	1	1	1	3	3	2	3
min	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
max	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5
floor effect	34.4%	10.8%	37.6%	60.2%	31.2%	19.4%	0.0%	1.1%	1.1%
ceiling effect	2.2%	14.0%	3.2%	0.0%	6.5%	6.5%	16.1%	11.8%	12.9%

Note: Items LI_3, LM_1 and LM_2 are scored inversely.

Source: own study based on conducted surveys.

Descriptive indicators for items DT_1 – DT_4 indicate a generally low level of self-reported avoidance behavior. Mean values range from 1.48 to 2.80, with medians primarily equal to 1 or 2. Response distributions are clearly asymmetric, with scores concentrated at the lower end of the scale. A particularly significant result is the very high floor effect, which for item DT_4 (“pretending to work”) reaches 60.2%, and for DT_1 and DT_3 exceeds 30%. This indicates that a significant proportion of respondents choose the lowest possible response category, suggesting a marginal occurrence of the analyzed behaviors in the sample. In this context, item DT_2 (M = 2.80; SD = 1.17) stands out, with a higher mean and greater variability in responses. This may indicate that delegating or transferring some responsibilities to coworkers is a more diverse behavior and potentially dependent on the organizational context. Taken together, the results for the DT statements suggest a low level of self-reported behavioral withdrawal and a lack of systematic occurrence of self-reported counterproductive behaviors.

In contrast to the DT scale, scores for items LI_1-LI_3 are moderate (M = 2.27-2.58), with medians ranging around 2-3. Response distributions are more balanced, with no clear dominance of any one category. Floor effects are relatively low, and for item LI_3 (“taking

initiative"), they are nonexistent. At the same time, the highest ceiling effect (16.1%) was observed for this item, indicating significant variation in proactivity within the study population. Items LI_1 and LI_2 reveal significant mechanisms limiting the expression of initiative, such as fear of increased workload and the belief that one has no influence on working conditions. This indicates the presence of cognitive and organizational barriers that may suppress employee activity despite the lack of overt avoidance behavior.

The results for items LM_1 and LM_2 indicate a moderate level of motivation (M = 2.60 and 2.66). Medians of 3 and a very low floor effect (approximately 1%) indicate that lack of motivation is a marginal phenomenon in the study sample. At the same time, moderate ceiling effects (11.8-12.9%) indicate that some respondents report high levels of engagement and inspiration at work, but this is not a dominant trend. The distribution of responses is relatively symmetrical, which distinguishes this scale from the clearly skewed distributions within DT.

The combination of the three analyzed dimensions allows us to capture a diverse picture of the functioning of working students from the study population. Low levels of behavioral withdrawal (DT) coexist with moderate levels of motivation (LM) and average levels of lack of initiative (LI). This configuration of results suggests that the young working students studied perform their professional duties appropriately and in line with expectations, but do not demonstrate high levels of proactivity or above-average engagement. The LI dimension seems particularly important, as it differentiates the study participants to the greatest extent and may constitute a key area for organizational intervention.

From a practical perspective, this means that the key challenge is not to reduce undesirable behaviors, but to strengthen proactivity and create conditions that encourage greater employee participation in shaping the work environment.

5. Conclusions

The study provides important conclusions regarding the nature of the quiet quitting phenomenon among young working students. The results indicate that the analyzed group does not exhibit increased avoidance behaviors or clear tendencies toward behavioral withdrawal. At the same time, levels of motivation and initiative remain moderate, suggesting that employees function at a level that meets basic professional requirements without significantly exceeding organizational expectations. A key finding is the identification of lack of initiative as the most diverse and potentially problematic dimension. This indicates that the main challenge for organizations is not eliminating counterproductive behaviors, but rather creating conditions that foster greater proactivity and cognitive engagement among employees. Organizational factors such as management style, work climate, and opportunities to influence the professional environment are particularly important in this context. The results should also

be interpreted in the broader context of generational changes and the growing importance of work-life balance. For young employees, work is increasingly a means to achieving life goals rather than their primary element, redefining the traditional approach to professional engagement. In summary, quiet quitting in the studied group does not take the form of overt withdrawal but rather manifests itself as limited engagement. This means that the emphasis must shift from control to developing a work environment that will foster employee activity, motivation and long-term engagement.

In terms of the study's limitations, it should be noted that the analyses conducted are based on declarative data, which is associated with the typical limitations of this methodology. In particular, the risk of bias resulting from the tendency to provide socially desirable responses should be considered, which can lead to overestimating positive ratings and underestimating undesirable behaviors. Consequently, the obtained results may not fully reflect the actual levels of the studied constructs. An additional limitation is the contextual nature of the analyzed phenomena. The specificity of work, organizational conditions, and factors determining employee engagement vary depending on the country and organizational culture. Therefore, the possibility of direct generalization of the results to other cultural contexts remains limited and requires caution in interpretation, especially in the case of organizations operating in an international environment.

Future research should expand analyses to include comparisons between groups of employees with diverse characteristics, particularly those combining work with education and those who are not students. This approach will enable a better understanding of differences in levels of engagement and motivation depending on the stage of professional life. Another important direction for further research is the development of longitudinal projects that will allow for capturing the dynamics of engagement over time and identifying cause-and-effect relationships, including the effectiveness of implemented organizational interventions. The current state of research in this area remains limited. The factors contributing to and barriers to engagement in remote and hybrid work settings are also insufficiently understood. In the context of ongoing digital transformation, issues related to technostress, the use of digital tools, and the growing role of artificial intelligence in the workplace are gaining particular importance. Furthermore, existing research has focused primarily on the employee perspective. Relatively little attention has been paid to employer engagement and their role in shaping a work environment conducive to professional activity. In particular, it seems justified to deepen analyses in relation to diverse and vulnerable segments of the workforce, where engagement mechanisms may differ.

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