



QUIET QUITTING BEYOND; UNVEILING THE HIDDEN DRIVERS EMPLOYEES DISENGAGEMENT

Vini.M.S* Dr.R.Thirumoorthy**

*Ph.D Scholar in Commerce, Park's College (Autonomous), Chinnakarai, Tirupur, Tamilnadu, India

**Associate Professor in Commerce, Park's College (Autonomous), Chinnakarai, Tirupur, Tamilnadu, India.

1. Introduction

Defining Employee Disengagement and Quiet Quitting

Employee disengagement refers to a psychological state in which employees experience a lack of emotional connection, enthusiasm, or commitment toward their work, their team, or the organization as a whole. Disengaged employees may still fulfill basic job responsibilities but do so with minimal effort, creativity, or initiative. Unlike actively disengaged employees who might undermine workplace morale, many disengaged individuals simply “check out” mentally while remaining physically present at work. Quiet quitting, a term popularized in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Resignation, describes a subset of disengagement where employees intentionally scale back their effort to perform only the duties outlined in their job descriptions. They avoid overtime, refrain from taking on additional responsibilities, and disengage from the emotional investment typically associated with high-performing, engaged employees. Importantly, quiet quitting is not about quitting a job but rather about quitting the extra, often uncompensated, labor that goes beyond basic expectations.

Relevance and Impact on Organizations

The prevalence of quiet quitting and employee disengagement poses a serious threat to organizational effectiveness. Studies by Gallup and Deloitte indicate that disengaged employees cost organizations billions annually in lost productivity, absenteeism, and reduced quality of work. In team-based or customer-facing roles, the ripple effects can be even more pronounced disengaged employees can lower morale, reduce team cohesion, and negatively influence client or customer experiences.

In a competitive, fast-changing work environment, where innovation, collaboration, and adaptability are keys to long-term success, organizations cannot afford to overlook signs of disengagement. Moreover, a disengaged workforce is more prone to high turnover rates, increased mental health issues, and a weakened organizational culture. Quiet quitting, though subtle, can spread silently through departments, resulting in systemic stagnation and eroded trust in leadership.

Statement of the problem

Employee disengagement has become a critical issue for organizations worldwide, resulting in decreased productivity, low morale, and increased turnover. Recently, the phenomenon of *quiet quitting* where employees withdraw discretionary effort and limit their work strictly to assigned duties has brought new attention to this problem. Despite the growing prevalence of quiet quitting, many organizations remain unaware of its underlying causes and fail to recognize its subtle but significant impact on performance and workplace culture.

This lack of understanding impedes the development of effective strategies to address disengagement, potentially leading to widespread dissatisfaction, diminished innovation, and erosion of organizational commitment. Therefore, this research seeks to identify the hidden drivers of employee disengagement,



especially those contributing to quiet quitting, informing leaders and HR professionals on how to better engage and retain their workforce in an evolving employment landscape.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore the hidden, often overlooked, drivers of employee disengagement, particularly those that manifest in behaviors associated with quiet quitting. Rather than attributing disengagement to employee laziness or lack of work ethic as some narratives have done this study seeks to identify structural, psychological, and managerial causes embedded in workplace systems and culture.

The paper aims to shift the focus from individual blame to organizational responsibility and to offer evidence-based insights that can help leaders and HR professionals create more engaging, sustainable work environments.

Research Questions and Objectives

This research is guided by the following key questions:

1. What are the primary organizational, psychological, and social factors contributing to employee disengagement and quiet quitting?
2. How does quiet quitting differ from traditional notions of disengagement, and what does it reveal about modern work culture?
3. What are the long-term implications of disengagement on organizational performance, innovation, and employee well-being?
4. What evidence-based strategies can organizations implement to re-engage their workforce and prevent quiet quitting?

From these questions, the research objectives are derived

- To analyze the concept of quiet quitting within the broader framework of employee disengagement.
- To identify key internal and external drivers (e.g., leadership style, organizational structure, workload) that influence disengagement.
- To evaluate the impact of disengaged employees on organizational outcomes such as performance, retention, and culture.
- To develop actionable recommendations for organizational leaders and HR practitioners to reduce disengagement and improve employee engagement.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses a contemporary and pressing issue affecting workplaces globally employee disengagement and the emerging trend of quiet quitting. By unveiling the hidden drivers behind these behaviors, the research provides valuable insights that can help organizations understand why employees withdraw effort and how this subtle disengagement impacts overall productivity, morale, and retention.

The findings will be particularly useful for organizational leaders, human resource professionals, and policymakers who seek to develop effective strategies to foster employee engagement and create healthier work environments. Additionally, by highlighting the importance of factors such as



recognition, leadership quality, and career development, this study contributes to the broader academic discourse on motivation and workplace well-being.

Moreover, the study offers practical recommendations that can improve organizational culture, enhance job satisfaction, and reduce costly turnover, thereby contributing to sustainable business success. Finally, it paves the way for future research into nuanced forms of employee disengagement, helping organizations to stay adaptive and responsive in the evolving world of work.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a **quantitative research design** to investigate the causes and implications of employee disengagement and quiet quitting. A structured survey questionnaire was administered to collect primary data from respondents.

Sampling and Participants

The sample consists of **120 employees** from various sectors, including private, public, and nonprofit organizations. Respondents were selected using a **convenience sampling technique** to capture a diverse demographic profile, ensuring a broad representation of age, gender, education, and experience.

Primary Data

Primary data were collected through a **self-administered online questionnaire** comprising closed-ended questions. The survey assessed respondents' awareness of quiet quitting, their personal engagement levels, perceived drivers of disengagement, and preferred organizational interventions. The data collected enabled quantitative analysis of patterns and trends related to employee disengagement.

Secondary Data

Secondary data were sourced from academic journals, industry reports, government publications, and reputable survey databases such as Gallup and McKinsey. These data provided theoretical frameworks, historical trends, and global statistics that contextualize and support the primary data findings.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, to summarize respondents' demographic characteristics and responses. The analysis aimed to identify significant factors influencing disengagement and validate emerging trends related to quiet quitting.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Origins and Evolution of the Term “Quiet Quitting”

The term “quiet quitting” surged in popularity in 2022, primarily through social media platforms like TikTok and LinkedIn. Though not a formally defined academic concept, it quickly gained traction as a descriptor for a subtle but widespread employee behavior: doing only what one's job requires and nothing more. The phenomenon, however, is not new. Scholars have long observed similar behaviors under different labels such as “job withdrawal,” “minimal compliance,” or “psychological disengagement” (Kahn, 1990; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).



Historically, this behavior was seen in the context of burnout or job dissatisfaction. However, the post-pandemic workplace context marked by shifting employee values, remote work, and growing distrust in corporate systems has reframed quiet quitting as a boundary-setting act rather than mere apathy or laziness (Garrad & Chamorro-Premuzic, 2022). It reflects a growing sentiment that loyalty and overwork are not always rewarded, especially when promotions, compensation, and well-being are neglected.

Quiet quitting is not about employee rebellion but rather a form of passive resistance to unrealistic job expectations or a lack of reciprocation from employers. It reveals an evolving employee-employer contract, where workers seek fulfillment, fairness, and psychological safety rather than solely financial incentives.

2.2 Theoretical Foundations: Employee Engagement and Disengagement

Several psychological and organizational theories offer frameworks for understanding employee engagement and, by extension, disengagement and quiet quitting.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943)

Maslow proposed that individuals are motivated by a hierarchy of needs—from physiological needs to self-actualization. In the workplace, engagement increases as employees' higher-level needs (e.g., esteem, belonging, and self-actualization) are met. When work fails to meet these needs, disengagement becomes likely. Quiet quitting may occur when employees' psychological needs (e.g., autonomy, recognition) are unmet despite meeting basic survival needs through their salary.

Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1959)

Herzberg distinguishes between hygiene factors (e.g., pay, job security, work conditions) and motivators (e.g., achievement, recognition, growth). A lack of motivators can lead to disengagement even when hygiene factors are present. In modern contexts, employees who quietly quit often cite the absence of intrinsic motivators—such as purpose or development—as the cause of their disengagement.

Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)

This model categorizes job characteristics into demands (e.g., workload, emotional strain) and resources (e.g., support, autonomy). High demands paired with insufficient resources lead to burnout and disengagement. Quiet quitting can be seen as a coping mechanism within the JD-R framework, where employees reduce effort to prevent burnout when resources are lacking.

2.3 Statistics on Global Disengagement Trends

Employee disengagement is a global concern with significant organizational costs. According to Gallup's 2023 State of the Global Workplace:

- Only 23% of employees worldwide are engaged at work.
- 59% are considered "not engaged," meaning they do the bare minimum required.
- 18% are "actively disengaged," meaning they are emotionally disconnected and may spread negativity.

In the United States specifically, employee engagement dropped from 36% in 2020 to 32% in 2023, reversing progress made during the pre-pandemic years. Emerging markets like South Asia and Latin



America report slightly higher engagement levels, often due to stronger community ties and workplace social structures.

The economic consequences are staggering: Gallup estimates that low engagement costs the global economy \$8.8 trillion annually in lost productivity.

In a 2022 survey by McKinsey, nearly 40% of employees reported feeling emotionally detached from their organization. A parallel LinkedIn survey found that over 50% of professionals under 35 had considered quiet quitting in the past year, suggesting generational shifts in attitudes toward work.

2.4 Differentiating Active and Passive Disengagement

Understanding the spectrum of disengagement is essential to addressing the full scope of the issue.

Active Disengagement

Actively disengaged employees are not only unmotivated but often express their dissatisfaction overtly. They may:

- Undermine colleagues
- Resist initiatives
- Spread negativity
- Exhibit frequent absenteeism

These employees can damage morale and productivity. Their disengagement is visible and disruptive, often prompting managerial intervention.

Passive Disengagement (Quiet Quitting)

In contrast, passively disengaged employees:

- Fulfill basic job requirements
- Avoid additional responsibilities
- Do not voice dissatisfaction openly
- Appear neutral or indifferent rather than disruptive

Quiet quitters often "fly under the radar," making their disengagement more difficult to detect and address. While not actively harmful, their withdrawal can silently reduce team cohesion, innovation, and productivity.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	58	48.3%
	Female	60	50.0%
	Prefer not to say	2	1.7%
Age Group	18–25 years	24	20.0%
	26–35 years	54	45.0%
	36–45 years	30	25.0%
	46+ years	12	10.0%
Educational Level	Diploma/Undergraduate	40	33.3%
	Bachelor's Degree	54	45.0%
	Postgraduate (Master/PhD)	26	21.7%
Years of Work Experience	Less than 2 years	18	15.0%



	2–5 years	42	35.0%
	6–10 years	36	30.0%
	More than 10 years	24	20.0%
Employment Sector	Private Sector	78	65.0%
	Public Sector	30	25.0%
	Non-profit/Freelance	12	10.0%

Interpretation of Demographic Profile

The sample of 120 respondents demonstrates a diverse demographic spread, enhancing the representativeness of the findings:

- Gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 50% female, 48.3% male, and a small portion (1.7%) preferring not to disclose. This supports a gender-neutral interpretation of disengagement trends.
- The age group 26–35 represents the largest share (45%), followed by 36–45 (25%) and 18–25 (20%). This distribution is relevant, as younger employees are more frequently associated with quiet quitting in existing literature, suggesting that generational expectations may be a key factor.
- In terms of education, nearly half (45%) hold a bachelor’s degree, while a significant number has either lower (diploma) or higher (postgraduate) qualifications. This suggests a reasonably educated workforce with varying levels of professional maturity and ambition.
- Most respondents have 2 to 10 years of experience (65%), indicating they are past entry-level but not yet senior. This is a critical career phase where disengagement often surfaces due to misaligned expectations, lack of growth, or unclear career paths.
- A majority (65%) work in the private sector, where performance demands and rapid changes may influence disengagement and quiet quitting more prominently than in the public or nonprofit sectors.

This demographic distribution provides a strong foundation for analyzing patterns of employee disengagement and evaluating how different groups experience or respond to organizational environments.

Table 2: Awareness and Experience of Quiet Quitting

Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Have heard of the term	108	90%
Have experienced it personally	72	60%
Have observed it in others	96	80%
Believe it is a growing trend	102	85%

Interpretation

The majority (90%) of respondents are aware of the concept of quiet quitting, suggesting strong visibility of the term in mainstream and workplace discussions. Furthermore, 60% have personally experienced quiet quitting, and 80% have observed it in others, indicating that it is not just a theoretical idea but a widespread behavioral trend. 85% believe it is on the rise, highlighting an urgent need for organizational intervention.



Table 3: Factors Contributing to Disengagement (Ranked by Frequency)

Factor	Number of Respondents Who Selected	Percentage (%)
Lack of recognition and appreciation	96	80%
Poor leadership or management	90	75%
Limited growth opportunities	84	70%
Workload and burnout	78	65%
Inadequate compensation	72	60%
Toxic work culture	60	50%

Interpretation

The top three drivers of disengagement according to the respondents are lack of recognition (80%), poor leadership (75%), and limited career growth (70%). This aligns with Herzberg's motivator factors and the JD-R model, indicating that emotional and developmental aspects of work are central to employee engagement. Workload-related stress and compensation were significant but slightly less prominent, suggesting that while material benefits matter, intrinsic motivators are more powerful in sustaining engagement.

Table 4: Engagement Level Self-Assessment

Engagement Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Highly engaged	18	15%
Moderately engaged	36	30%
Neutral/Indifferent	42	35%
Disengaged (quiet quitting)	24	20%

Interpretation:

Only 15% of respondents classify themselves as highly engaged, while a substantial 35% feel neutral, and 20% admit to quiet quitting. These findings mirror Gallup's global statistics, reinforcing the idea that a majority of employees operate below optimal engagement levels. This data underscores the need for strategic re-engagement interventions focused on workplace relationships, recognition, and development pathways.

Table 5: Preferred Interventions to Re-Engage Employees

Suggested Intervention	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Transparent and supportive leadership	102	85%
Career development programs	90	75%
Recognition and rewards	84	70%
Flexible work arrangements	78	65%
Mental health and wellness support	72	60%



Interpretation

When asked about preferred solutions, transparent leadership (85%) and career development (75%) were the most favored. This suggests employees' value clarity, trust, and opportunities for growth more than just surface-level perks. Notably, wellness support and flexibility also emerged as important, indicating a holistic view of what engagement should look like in today's work environment.

5. Findings

The analysis of data collected from 120 respondents reveals several key insights into the nature and causes of employee disengagement, including the phenomenon of quiet quitting:

1. High Awareness but Low Engagement

- A significant 90% of respondents are familiar with the concept of quiet quitting, and 60% have personally experienced it.
- Only 15% of respondents consider themselves highly engaged at work, while 55% report being neutral or disengaged, and *20% openly identify with quiet quitting behavior.

2. Core Drivers of Disengagement

- The top contributing factors to disengagement include:
 - Lack of recognition and appreciation (80%)
 - Poor leadership or management (75%)
 - Limited growth opportunities (70%)
 - Work-related stress or burnout (65%)
- These findings are consistent with motivational theories such as Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and the JD-R Model.

3. A Passive, Widespread Phenomenon

- Most disengaged employees are passively disengaged, aligning with the quiet quitting trend. They fulfill only their core responsibilities and are emotionally disconnected.
- Unlike actively disengaged employees, quiet quitters are less likely to be disruptive, making their disengagement harder to detect and resolve.

4. Demand for Sustainable Solutions

- Employees favor transparent leadership (85%), career development (75%), and mental health support (60%) as the most effective ways to re-engage them.

6. Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed for organizations, HR leaders, and policymakers:

1. Promote Transparent and Empathetic Leadership

- Train managers to practice open communication, active listening, and inclusive decision-making.
- Leadership should model engagement and recognize employee contributions regularly.

2. Invest in Career Development and Growth Opportunities

- Offer clear career paths, training programs, and mentorship to help employees progress.
- Encourage internal mobility and recognize potential before performance dips occur.



3. Improve Recognition and Feedback Systems

- Implement real-time, personalized recognition tools (both monetary and non-monetary).
- Make performance reviews more developmental rather than punitive.

4. Address Burnout and Workload Management

- Promote realistic workloads, flexible scheduling, and respect for work-life boundaries.
- Encourage the use of mental health days and wellness programs without stigma.

5. Foster a Culture of Belonging

- Prioritize team bonding, inclusive policies, and psychological safety to create environments where employees feel valued and heard.

Conclusion

This study sheds light on the growing challenge of employee disengagement, particularly through the lens of quiet quitting. The phenomenon, while often misunderstood, reflects deeper issues within organizational culture, leadership practices, and employee expectations. It is not a sign of employee laziness, but rather a response to unmet needs, lack of appreciation, and misaligned values.

By identifying the underlying drivers such as lack of recognition, poor leadership, and insufficient career development organizations can take meaningful steps to foster a more engaged and productive workforce. The solution lies not in demanding more effort, but in creating environments where employees want to contribute fully.

As quiet quitting becomes a symbol of modern workplace discontent, this research urges employers to rethink engagement strategies and prioritize employee well-being as a long-term business imperative. Future research may explore how quiet quitting differs across industries, age groups, or organizational cultures, and how remote or hybrid work models further influence disengagement dynamics.

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