

The Commitment Paradox: Aligning Employee Well-being and Organizational Productivity in the Era of Quiet Quitting

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Abstract

The phenomenon of quiet quitting has emerged as a significant challenge in modern human resource management, reflecting a fundamental shift in the psychological contract between employers and employees. This study aims to explore integrative strategies capable of aligning employee well-being with organizational productivity targets to address the commitment paradox. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach, this research integrates the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to analyze the psychological processes of employee withdrawal as a protective mechanism against emotional exhaustion or burnout. The analysis indicates that quiet quitting is characterized by minimal work effort, low emotional investment, and restricted social communication. Demographic factors, such as age (Generation Z) and organizational injustice, serve as the primary drivers of this phenomenon. The study concludes that organizations must recalibrate managerial strategies through transformational leadership, the provision of autonomy via job crafting, and the strengthening of psychological safety to foster a sustainable work ecosystem

Keywords: Commitment paradox, Employee well-being, Organizational justice , Productivity, Quiet quitting.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of shifting work behavior in the modern era has given rise to various new terms that demand a profound understanding to prevent misconceptions in human resource management. One of the most widely discussed yet frequently misinterpreted phenomena is quiet quitting. This term reflects the complex dynamics of labor relations, where the boundary between professionalism and personal well-being becomes the central point of contention.

Terminologically, quiet quitting often creates ambiguity among practitioners. Referring to academic literature, this concept does not imply that employees are resigning from their positions; rather, it represents a form of psychological withdrawal. In this state, employees consciously choose to exert effort only in accordance with the minimum standards outlined in their job descriptions (Afi, 2025). Employees who adopt this mindset continue to fulfill their formal responsibilities to maintain disciplinary compliance. However, they no longer embrace the principle of 'going above and beyond,' such as a willingness to perform voluntary overtime, engage in additional projects, or maintain an emotional attachment to the company's progress (Xueyun et al., 2023). Ultimately, this phenomenon indicates a fundamental shift in the psychological contract that binds employers and the workforce.

On one hand, organizations demand total dedication amidst global economic uncertainty. On the other hand, employees have begun prioritizing clear boundaries between professional and private life as a defense mechanism against chronic exhaustion or burnout. The global evolution of this concept reveals intriguing cultural variations, such as the 'Bailan' or 'Tangping' movements in China literally

translated as 'letting it rot' or 'lying flat' which represent forms of passive resistance against a highly competitive and production-oriented society (Xueyun et al., 2023). Analysis of various studies indicates that quiet quitting does not emerge in a vacuum. Its primary drivers include excessive workloads, a lack of career advancement opportunities, unsupportive leadership, and a misalignment of values between the individual and the organization. Furthermore, the global cost-of-living crisis and post-pandemic economic instability have exacerbated these risks, as employees perceive that their discretionary efforts are no longer adequately rewarded, either financially or emotionally (Ratnatunga, 2022).

This situation is further exacerbated by the dominance of hustle culture, which glorifies boundless productivity and, in turn, leads to emotional exhaustion or burnout. Within this dynamic, quiet quitting is frequently adopted as a deliberate coping strategy to establish boundaries between work and personal life, while simultaneously preventing more chronic declines in mental health (Galanis et al., 2023). However, while this approach may provide a temporary reprieve from stress, its long-term implications warrant caution. Such behavior has the potential to impede individual career progression and erode organizational stability, given the loss of creative capacity and collaborative spirit elements that serve as the primary engines of institutional growth (Galanis et al., 2023)

Drawing from these complexities, this study aims to explore integrative strategies capable of aligning employee well-being needs with organizational productivity targets. The primary focus is to analyze how companies can respond judiciously to the quiet quitting phenomenon to mitigate threats to both individual career sustainability and institutional stability. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide a strategic direction for organizations to deepen their understanding of integrative approaches that bridge the gap between workers' psychological well-being and corporate productivity achievements. By providing an in-depth analysis of quiet quitting as a reaction to the dominance of hustle culture, this study also seeks to unravel the complexities of the 'commitment paradox.' Such a step is crucial for mitigating risks that may impede personal career development while maintaining the resilience of organizational stability amidst the dynamics of the contemporary world of work.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research will be conducted using a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on the mechanisms through which work demands are transformed into withdrawal behaviors. The primary theoretical foundation is the integration of the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Through the JD-R framework, the study will map how excessive workloads and the pressures of 'hustle culture' interact with available organizational resources to determine levels of employee engagement. Simultaneously, COR theory will be employed to dissect the psychological processes wherein individuals engage in the conservation of mental resources as a form of self-protection when confronted with the threat of emotional exhaustion.

Data collection will be conducted through a systematic literature review and in-depth interviews to identify how employee well-being functions as a critical mediator determining the sustainability of organizational productivity. By collaborating these two theories, this research analysis will be able to comprehensively explain the internal dynamics underlying the shift in employee attitudes from total dedication to minimum work boundaries.

The JD-R framework classifies workplace elements into two fundamental dimensions: job demands and job resources. The job demand dimension represents various physical, mental, social, and structural factors that require consistent effort from employees, manifesting in massive workloads, tight time urgency, and role ambiguity. Conversely, job resources serve as supportive elements that facilitate target achievement, mitigate the impact of work pressure, and encourage individual self-development. These include the availability of job autonomy, supportive leadership, and the provision of constructive performance feedback (Chack, Bhatnagar, & Khatik, 2025)

According to this model, two distinct yet interrelated processes occur:

1. The Health Impairment Process: Excessive job demands in the absence of adequate resources gradually deplete an employee's mental and physical energy, leading to a state of burnout and, ultimately, a decline in productivity (Chack, Bhatnagar, & Khatik, 2025).

2. The Motivational Process: Abundant job resources trigger employee engagement, job satisfaction, and strong organizational commitment, which ultimately enhance performance (Chack, Bhatnagar, & Khatik, 2025).

Theoretically, quiet quitting can be viewed as a response to the failure of the motivational process and the dominance of the health impairment process; in this context, employees choose to reduce their engagement as a strategic means to limit energy expenditure amidst imbalanced demands (Kim & Sohn, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of quiet quitting involves highly complex behavioral and emotional dimensions. Based on recent multidimensional measurement instruments, this behavior is manifested through several key indicators, namely: the execution of tasks with minimal effort, a refusal to undertake new initiatives, and the restriction of social communication deemed irrelevant to core responsibilities. A fundamental distinction between formal resignation (actual turnover) and quiet quitting lies in the transparency of communication. While actual turnover is conveyed through formal procedures, quiet quitting occurs covertly. Consequently, this behavior often remains undetected by conventional performance evaluation systems, yet it possesses the potential to gradually erode the integrity of organizational culture from within

Table 1: Comparative Characteristics of Full Engagement, Quiet Quitting, and Formal Resignation

Behavioral Dimension	Full Engagement	Quiet Quitting	Formal Resignation
Discretionary Effort	Very high; frequently goes beyond formal job descriptions.	Minimal; performs only mandated tasks (Michałkiewicz, 2025).	None; total withdrawal from the role.
Emotional Investment	High; strong identification with organizational goals.	Low; mental detachment from the company's fate.	Severed; focus on transitioning out of the organization.
Contractual Compliance	Exceeds minimum contractual standards.	Meets minimum standards solely to avoid dismissal.	Cessation of all contractual obligations.
Grievance Communication	Proactive; provides constructive feedback.	Passive; utilizes silence as a response (Atiku et al., 2025).	Transparent; communicated through formal exit interviews.
Innovation Initiative	High; actively seeks new solutions.	Very low; avoids any additional tasks (Michałkiewicz, 2025).	No interest in future organizational development.

Source: Data processed by the researcher (2025)

Comparative Analysis: Work Characteristics of Generation Z and Millennials

Prior research indicates that approximately 82% of Generation Z employees exhibit a work orientation typical of quiet quitting, characterized by a focus on minimal performance and the mere

fulfillment of basic requirements (Michałkiewicz, 2025). For this generation, work is no longer considered a central identity in their lives; instead, they demand greater autonomy, flexibility, and meaningfulness in their tasks. In Indonesia, millennials within Jakarta's digital startups demonstrate a similar pattern, where organizational failure to provide psychological support and two-way feedback systems triggered emotional withdrawal in 70% of participants following chronic exhaustion (Burhanuddin, 2025).

Furthermore, tenure serves as a critical buffer. Employees with longer tenure tend to possess stronger affective commitment and a sense of career investment, making their risk of engaging in quiet quitting lower than that of newer employees with shorter tenure who prioritize work-life balance. Similarly, higher levels of education are often associated with a more robust professional identity, which may diminish the tendency toward withdrawal due to the intrinsic motivation to maintain one's professional reputation (Michałkiewicz, 2025)

Continuance Commitment as a Psychological Burden

The Three-Component Model (TCM) of commitment developed by Allen and Meyer distinguishes between affective commitment (a desire to remain), normative commitment (an obligation to remain), and continuance commitment (a perceived necessity to remain due to high sunk costs). Research indicates that affective commitment is positively correlated with both mental and physical health. However, a paradox emerges within continuance commitment (Meyer & Maltin, 2010).

In the context of a challenging labor market or a high-pressure corporate climate, an employee's decision to remain with an organization is often not rooted in genuine loyalty, but rather in economic necessity and concerns over the loss of retirement benefits. This condition gives rise to what is termed 'constrained attachment,' which is closely linked to symptoms of latent mental exhaustion. Although these individuals do not formally resign and continue to perform their duties normatively to adhere to hierarchical regulations, they undergo a profound internal process of emotional erosion (El Adraoui, 2025)

A critical danger arises when management misinterprets organizational metrics, often erroneously perceiving a low turnover rate as an indicator of robust loyalty. In reality, such an assumption may be a 'mirage' that obscures a collective psychological wound. This apparent stability in headcount is frequently merely a veil for the underlying psychological distress of the workforce. If left unaddressed, this condition may eventually trigger a precipitous decline in organizational productivity (El Adraoui, 2025).

Justice as the Foundation of Commitment

Perceived injustice among employees whether regarding the distribution of workloads, career advancement, or professional recognition serves as a primary catalyst driving individuals to restrict their performance. Consequently, organizations bear the responsibility of ensuring procedural justice in every performance appraisal and incentive distribution process. The presence of social justice within the workplace functions as a safeguard against the emergence of alienation, which frequently culminates in the phenomenon of quiet quitting. By strengthening these values of fairness, an organization possesses the potential to shift the collective mindset of its workforce: moving from a focus on mere survival toward a genuine desire to provide meaningful contributions to collective progress.

The Dynamics of Digital Startups in Jakarta

Within the context of Jakarta's startup ecosystem, quiet quitting is significantly triggered by high-pressure work environments that frequently neglect the balance between workload, material compensation, and mental health support. Findings from in-depth interviews reveal that the culture of *sungkan* an excessive deference to authority acts as a barrier to transparent discussions regarding unrealistic workloads. Consequently, dissatisfaction remains unvoiced through verbal communication, manifesting instead through passive-aggressive actions, such as the adoption of rigid working hours and a refusal to engage in creative innovation. To address this issue, effective human resource management

strategies in this sector must employ a 'glocal' approach. This strategy integrates global standards of workplace flexibility with respect for local communal values through community-based team-building activities (Burhanuddin, 2025)

Managerial Strategies: Recalibrating to Align Interests

Confronting the commitment paradox and the trend of quiet quitting necessitates a total recalibration of human resource management strategies. Traditional approaches, which focus predominantly on control and compliance, must be replaced by models that prioritize trust, autonomy, and holistic well-being

a. Recalibrating Responsibilities and Work Boundaries

The primary driver of quiet quitting is the ambiguity between core tasks and unwritten additional expectations. Managers must undertake a calibration of core responsibilities by redefining what is truly essential to a role versus what constitutes discretionary contribution. Establishing clear boundaries regarding working hours and the use of digital communication outside of the office can empower employees with a greater sense of control over their lives. This, in turn, may paradoxically enhance productivity during office hours by fostering a sense of psychological safety (Ratnatunga, 2022).

b. Transformational Leadership and Employee Empowerment

Transformational leadership, which focuses on a shared vision and individual development, has proven effective in mitigating quiet quitting. Leaders who empower their employees facilitate opportunities for job crafting, a process in which employees can proactively adjust their work elements to better align with their personal interests and professional skills. The autonomy granted through job crafting has been shown to reduce symptoms of quiet quitting by up to 50% in a short period, as employees regain a sense of agency over their professional contributions

c. The Utilization of Technology and HR Analytics

In the digital era, the implementation of technology serves as a double-edged sword. On one hand, technology facilitates flexible and hybrid work arrangements, which are highly valued by Millennial and Generation Z cohorts. On the other hand, it may induce stress through the demands of an 'always-on' culture. Innovative HR strategies involve the utilization of HR analytics to monitor early engagement indicators not for intrusive surveillance, but to identify departments or teams at risk of mass burnout before the phenomenon of quiet quitting escalates (Jayanto, Saputri, & Gumilar, 2025).

Table 2: Recommended Managerial Strategies to Mitigate Quiet Quitting

Demographic Factor	Correlation with Quiet Quitting	Explanatory Mechanism
Age (Younger/Gen Z)	Strong Positive Correlation (Xueyun et al., 2023)	Prioritization of work-life balance; rejection of "hustle culture" (Ratnatunga, 2022).
Tenure (Longer)	Negative Correlation (Michałkiewicz, 2025)	Accumulation of social capital and stronger affective commitment (Michałkiewicz, 2025).
Education (Higher)	Negative Correlation	Robust professional identity

Demographic Factor	Correlation with Quiet Quitting	Explanatory Mechanism
	(Michałkiewicz, 2025)	and high levels of intrinsic motivation (Michałkiewicz, 2025).
Role Seniority	Positive Correlation with Burnout (Saud & Rice, 2024)	Greater responsibilities and heightened pressure increase the risk of exhaustion (Saud & Rice, 2024).
Gender (Female)	Variable; often reports higher stress (Saud & Rice, 2024)	The "double burden" of navigating professional roles and domestic responsibilities (Saud & Rice, 2024).

Source: Data processed by the researcher (2025)

CONCLUSION

Analysis of the commitment paradox demonstrates that employee well-being and organizational productivity are not mutually exclusive interests. On the contrary, the mental health and fulfillment of workers serve as the primary engines for sustainable organizational performance. Consequently, addressing the quiet quitting phenomenon should not be approached by pressuring staff to work beyond their capacity; rather, it requires the creation of meaningful work, the provision of robust institutional support, and a profound respect for individual privacy and boundaries.

Organizational leaders must recognize that an employee's physical presence is by no means a reflection of their mental engagement. To avoid a destructive commitment cycle that leads to total burnout, companies must transition toward leadership styles that are more empathetic, transparent, and empowering. By prioritizing psychological safety, organizational justice, and workplace flexibility, organizations can foster a balanced ecosystem—one that is not solely focused on financial attainment but is also committed to upholding human dignity. This reconciliation is the key to resolving the commitment paradox while realizing a harmonious future of work for all stakeholders

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