The human capital management perspective on quiet quitting: recommendations for employees, managers, and national policymakers

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this Real Impact Viewpoint Article is to analyze the quiet quitting phenomenon from the human capital management perspective.*

Design/methodology/approach – *The methods comprise the analysis of 672 TikTok comments, the use of secondary data and literature review.*

Findings – *Quiet quitting is a mindset in which employees deliberately limit work activities to their job description, meet yet not exceed the preestablished expectations, never volunteer for additional tasks and do all this to merely maintain their current employment status while prioritizing their well-being over organizational goals. Employees quiet quit due to poor extrinsic motivation, burnout and grudges against their managers or organizations. Quiet quitting is a double-edged sword: while it helps workers avoid burnout, engaging in this behavior may jeopardize their professional careers. Though the term is new, the ideas behind quiet quitting are not and go back decades.*

Practical implications – *Employees engaged in quiet quitting should become more efficient, avoid burnout, prepare for termination or resignation and manage future career difficulties. In response to quiet quitting, human capital managers should invest in knowledge sharing, capture the knowledge of potential quiet quitters, think twice before terminating them, conduct a knowledge audit, focus on high performers, introduce burnout management programs, promote interactional justice between managers and subordinates and fairly compensate for "going above and beyond." Policymakers should prevent national human capital depletion, promote work-life balance as a national core value, fund employee mental health support and invest in employee efficiency innovation.*

Originality/value – *This Real Impact Viewpoint Article analyzes quiet quitting from the human capital management perspective.*

Keywords *Human capital, Social exchange theory, Knowledge loss, Quiet quitting, The Great Renegotiation, The Great Resignation*

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1. Introduction

> Many say that academics are truly blessed because they are evaluated based on three criteria: contribution to research, teaching, and service. They may quiet quit two of these areas and excel at the other and yet be considered a valuable member of the scholarly community and have a strong sense of professional accomplishment. Those working in the corporate world do not have this luxury.

The totally unexpected COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns have dramatically altered the fabric of the contemporary workforce [1]. Since March 2021, the Great Resignation – a phenomenon wherein workers in many industries started voluntarily quitting their jobs in

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massive numbers – has triggered a variety of unanticipated impacts for individuals, organizations and entire nations (Cook, 2021; Perry, 2021; Sull *et al.*, 2022; Serenko, 2023a). As a result, in the future, we are likely to witness a growth in the popularity of the knowledge worker followed by an increasing need for personal knowledge management tools. At the same time, organizations may experience knowledge depletion, undermined knowledge transfer processes, lower business process efficiency, inhibited internal knowledge flows, damaged informal friendship networks and difficulty attracting and retaining high-quality employees. On a global scale, countries may experience a loss of their national human capital (Serenko, 2023a). However, the transformation of the contemporary workforce has not stopped there: it seems that the worker revolution has progressed from the Great Resignation to quiet quitting – a recent term popularized by TikTok user Zaid Khan (@zaidleppelin) in his short 17-second video posted on July 25, 2022 (Khan, 2022), where he said:

> I recently learned about this term called quiet quitting where you are not out right quitting your job, but you are quitting an idea of going above and beyond. You are still performing your duties, but you are no longer subscribing to the hustle culture mentality that work has to be your life. The reality is, it's not, and your worth as a person is not defined by your labor.

Within weeks, the video received 3.5 million views and almost half a million likes. Most importantly, it attracted the attention of the mainstream media and generated a discourse of Brobdingnagian proportions among human capital managers. Immediately, the arguments supporting both sides – employees' right to limit their duties to formal job descriptions vs blaming the new, lazy generation of workers for ignoring organizational priorities – appeared in prestigious outlets, including *USA Today* (Moniuszko, 2022), *The New York Times* (Krueger, 2022) and *Harvard Business Review* (Zenger and Folkman, 2022). Moreover, empirical evidence points to the emergence of the quiet quitting phenomenon: according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS, 2022b), unit labor costs in the business sectors skyrocketed by 12.7% and 10.2% in the first and second quarters of 2022, respectively, which represents the largest increase since 1982. At the same time, labor productivity (output per hour) decreased by 7.4% and 4.1% in the same quarters, which reflects the largest decline since 1948. In other words, as the cost of labor soared, productivity declined on a virtually unprecedented scale. While there may be various reasons behind this observation – e.g. high turnover rates, supply chain problems, ineffective remote hiring decisions, difficulties transitioning to a hybrid work mode, postpandemic stress, etc. (Rosalsky and Selyukh, 2022) – one very likely culprit is the tendency of employees to reduce the amount of effort they put into nonpaid work activities and the lower enthusiasm with which they perform their duties: the phenomenon now referred to as quiet quitting.

But, is quiet quitting a real trend or an apocryphal social media sensation? A recent survey of more than 15,000 full- and part-time US workers by Gallup concluded that, since the second half of 2021, the proportion of disengaged and psychologically detached workers has been continuously increasing (Harter, 2022). As of June 2022, a staggering 50% of the entire workforce might be classified as quiet quitters. Even managers are not immune because they experienced the largest drop in engagement. Other polls by ResumeBuilder.com (ResumeBuilder, 2022) and Kelowna Now (Kelowna Now, 2022) report the number of quiet quitters standing at 26% and 63%, respectively.

As such, quiet quitting has already affected the functioning of the contemporary organization, and, in response, human capital managers should develop and implement policies to address this issue. However, a clear, uniform definition of quiet quitting, its antecedents and its consequences have yet to be established. Moreover, it is not apparent whether this is a totally new phenomenon or "an old wine in a new bottle." Therefore, the purpose of this Real Impact Viewpoint Article is twofold. The first is to explore the quiet quitting phenomenon, develop its definition and compare it with the concepts previously documented in management scholarly writings. The second objective is to develop

recommendations for employees, human capital managers (e.g. Chief Human Capital Officers, Chief Human Resources Officers, Chief People Officers and Directors of People Analytics/Systems) and national policymakers (e.g. members of government bodies who vote on and/or assist in the development of public policies, such as Senate/Congress/ Parliament Members, ministers and their advisors) to help them better adapt to the changes caused by the quiet quitting trend.

The rest of this Real Impact Viewpoint Article is structured as follows. The next section reports the results of a brief empirical study that analyzed a number of TikTok comments on Zaid Khan's popular video. This section also reviews 14 related concepts and explores the origin of quiet quitting. Section three provides recommendations for workers, managers and policymakers and section four concludes the paper.

2. Understanding the quiet quitting phenomenon

2.1 TikTok comments analysis

Within several weeks after it was posted, the TikTok video by Zaid Khan that sparked the quiet quitting movement received more than 4,000 comments. Of these, 2,000 random comments were downloaded by means of ExportComments.com and subjected to content analysis techniques (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The purpose was to create general, high-level categories pertaining to the definition of quiet quitting, its antecedents and its consequences. Presently, extracting knowledge from big social media data is considered a valid empirical method in various research domains (He *et al.*, 2017; Latino *et al.*, 2018). In total, 672 comments were found to contain data relevant to the understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Examples of excluded comments are "Yes," "This is very important information," "Make it a sound," "Thank you!" and tagging other TikTok users. The comments were analyzed by two coders who had extensive doctoral-level training in qualitative research, and who achieved an acceptable level of coding reliability. All discrepancies were discussed and reconciled by the coders during face-to-face meetings.

2.1.1 Definition. Data analysis revealed that quiet quitting is defined as a mindset in which employees deliberately limit all work activities to those of a formal or informal job description, meet yet not exceed the preestablished expectations, set up boundaries, never volunteer for and ignore (if possible) all additional tasks and do all this in a manner that merely maintains their current employment status and prioritizes their well-being over larger organizational goals. This mindset is represented by the following comments:

> This is me with my job. I get what needs to be done and nothing more (greetthemorningsun).

> [. . .] yes! That's exactly what I've been doing. no more working before 8am. I actually take a break mid day. and I shut down before 5. nothing extra (snowlover.23).

Quiet quitting is not a new behavior: in their posts, more than half of TikTok users admitted to engaging in it. Some stated that they had been doing quiet quitting for years and even decades, such as the following: "I invented this at my very first job back in 1998 lol" (johnnyxdrama).

At the same time, though, many indicated that they started quiet quitting recently, mostly after switching to remote work or working on premises during COVID-19 because "Covid has rewritten the rules in the workplace for sure" (donnyden723). As *2livefree* indicated:

> I started quiet quitting during COVID. When I was going into work during COVID while everyone else worked from home and didn't get paid extra.

Many perceived quiet quitting as an extension of the Great Resignation when, instead of voluntarily terminating their employment, workers decided to stay yet modify their performance in a way that suited them:

> Not everyone was able to be part of the GREAT RESIGNATION, so we quietly quit (chicago_dog).

> [. . .] this is the real great resignation (im_nathan_turner).

Some believed that quiet quitting is, in fact, a normal behavior and doing so accurately fulfills employees' obligations with respect to the terms of their employment agreement: they meet the expectations of their employers and perform all tasks that they are formally supposed to do while "going above and beyond" is not part of their duties. As *ankitpsk11* put it, "Lol this is just how people should work normally. Weird to stigmatize it by calling it that [. . .]." In addition, many blamed the North American hustle culture in which people devote an excessive amount of time and effort to their jobs at the expense of their personal lives. In contrast, they suggested that limiting work activities to a job description is a common practice in Europe. For example:

> In Europe they call that [quiet quitting] working (charlesedgarcheeserton3).

> Americans live to work, Europeans work to live. Point is, I think this concept is particularly important for Americans (as an American now in Europe) (londonlain).

At the same time, not everyone was supportive of the quiet quitting paradigm as a way of working. A sizable minority of quiet quitting opponents believed that deliberately engaging in it is morally wrong because this dangerous mindset may spread into future jobs, other activities and even life matters and deprive people of job and life satisfaction due to their inability to realize their full potential. For instance, it may be difficult for some workers to do a job they are not passionate about and develop a sense of personal accomplishment and self-respect. At some point, if they quiet quit, they may lose their job or ruin their chances of promotion as the following comment indicates:

> [. . .] and then you realize you've been in the same position for 10 years and wonder why you weren't promoted (jloui85).

2.1.2 Antecedents. Further analysis revealed that quiet quitting was driven by three major factors. First and foremost, people were not extrinsically motivated to put additional time and effort into their jobs, and they simply wanted to stop this "endless unpaid overtime" (soul.incarnate). As *alexhamame* noted:

> Yup! I'm not getting paid extra if I do extra work so why would I.

Indeed, unexpectedly for them, many overachievers were simply "rewarded" with more tasks, new responsibilities and higher performance expectations rather than with promotions and financial compensation, for example:

> Going above and beyond is more work and more expectations with the same end results as being mediocre and hitting average quotas at my job. . .. so. (blueyurtsiren).

Moreover, the perception of being easily replaceable further reduced workers' motivation to "go the extra mile" to help their organization to meet its goals:

> Do enough to keep the job. These companies could careless about you your replaceable at their will! (liciarenee).

Second, people chose to quiet quit due to the high psychological costs of their jobs as they needed to take care of their mental health, reduce stress, eliminate pressure, avoid further burnout and achieve a work-life balance. In this, they believed that "going above and

beyond" had put them under tremendous psychological pressure. By cutting out (mostly unpaid) work-related duties and overtime, they were able to engage in hobbies, spend time with family and friends or simply relax. As *sumcanadian* said, "we work to live, we don't live to work. never forget that." Many also indicated that their perceptions of self-worth and self-identity were not defined by their job – "I work to make the money I need. Nothing more. My job doesn't define my worth" (tkhinthe408).

Third, people often held grudges against their managers or their entire organization. This may have been, for instance, because of a conflict with a manager or a belief that they were unfairly denied a well-deserved promotion:

> [. . .] my job has a new boss who wants to write people up for ridiculous things like going to the bathroom. before, I would work ot [overtime], now I refuse (vanillaspiced).
>
> After I got passed up for a promotion twice, I did this [quiet quit]. I will perform my job duties & take my PTO [paid time off] when I want with no remorse (betafish613).

Other less salient factors promoting quiet quitting included a perception of a worker-employer value misalignment and the employees' (mistaken or not) belief that, from the perspective of their entire organization, their contribution made no difference.

2.1.3 Consequences. The negative consequences of quiet quitting were often detrimental. For example, many quiet quitters considered leaving or had already left their job because it was mentally difficult for them to remain with their current employer while engaging in quiet quitting. For many, quiet quitting was a temporary measure until they find a more satisfactory employment arrangement elsewhere. As *user9735001113733* noted:

> Same. I checked out for like 3 months until I found a better job working less hours for double money.

Many quiet quitters who did not want to voluntarily leave their present job were quickly labeled by their management as underperformers and terminated. From the managers' perspective, merely fulfilling job duties without taking initiative, working overtime and "going above and beyond" was not considered satisfactory job performance. As one commenter noted:

> I got fired for this [. . .] I was doing exactly what my job required but because I was no longer going above and beyond 'I wasn't performing' (gangstaboo3000).

Others were formally reprimanded (e.g. written up by HR), got demoted and/or were denied promotions and raises. Occasionally, other employees got frustrated with their coworkers who quiet quit because they had to complete the unfinished tasks, and sacrifice their own time and effort. Some also highlighted the "stickiness" of the quiet quitting mentality because it tended to spread into nonwork-related activities and persist for a long time.

At the same time, quiet quitting had positive impacts on employees. First, in addition to improving their mental state and personal life, some workers found that quiet quitting made their present job more pleasant and satisfactory. For instance:

> I decided to do this [quiet quitting] about a year ago and life has been great. I enjoy going to work now because it's exponentially less stressful (vernondylan).
>
> I quiet quit my job about 2 years ago and I immediately fell back in love with it (theproblemwithashley).

Second, unexpectedly, engaging in quiet quitting had a positive impact on some workers' careers. Instead of voluntarily terminating their employment or being fired, they were promoted and/or given a raise. For instance, as *feyrapup* described his/her quiet quitting experience:

> Started this after I got passed up for a promotion in 2019. Continued to get great reviews and raises and praise [. . .] just got a promotion [. . .].

2.2 Related concepts

To fully comprehend the nature of the quiet quitting phenomenon, it is important to compare it with other related concepts that have been previously documented in the academic and practitioner literatures. As indicated in Table 1, a number of associated terms have previously appeared. An analysis of these terms indicates that most of them differ from quiet quitting at least to some degree. While some terms are dramatically different, others overlap yet are not

Table 1 List of related concepts

Term	*Description*	*Quiet quitting*
Anti-work	This questions the very need for paid human labor because it is considered a form of exploitation or slavery which is corruptive to workers' mental state, their personality and the entire society (Alliger, 2021)	Quiet quitting embraces the idea of paid employment and does not routinely consider it a form of exploitation
Cyberloafing or cyberslacking in the workplace	Employees use information technologies to access social media, websites, games, etc., for nonwork-related purposes during paid work hours (Tandon *et al.*, 2022). It is often driven by technology addiction (Serenko and Turel, 2022)	Quiet quitting does not promote engagement in nonwork-related activities during work hours
Clock-watcher	This is an employee who constantly keeps track of the passage of time and works only during formal (paid) working hours (Boyer *et al.*, 1986)	While quiet quitters limit their work to formal business hours, they may not obsess with the passage of time
Employee withdrawal	This is a condition in which workers who have become disenchanted with their organization psychologically withdraw from work and exhibit lateness, absenteeism and turnover (Beehr and Gupta, 1978)	Even though some quiet quitters may have a negative sentiment toward their employer, they do not have to be late, absent or intend to resign
Malicious compliance/ obedience	This features employees' willfully blind compliance with the formal rules and supervisors' directives despite their awareness that doing so may result in failure or harm (DuBose and Mayo, 2020)	Quiet quitting does not assume a willfully blind compliance with all directives, especially the damaging ones
Phoning it in	This covers performing work duties without enthusiasm and with poor effort (Merriam-Webster, 2023)	For quiet quitting, the degree of effort should suffice to complete the required tasks
Quitting in place; quit and stay; checking out; quit, but stayed; soft quitting	These are conditions in which employees express little interest in their organization's activities, distrust their leaders, engage in absenteeism, underperform and exhibit low morale (Herndon, 1992) but perform minimal duties merely to avoid being terminated	Quiet quitters may still trust their superiors and refrain from deliberately counterproductive work behavior
Retired in place or retirement in place (RIP)	This is a slang term for a worker who contributes as minimally as possible merely to avoid being fired while waiting for approaching retirement and pension benefits (Farlex Financial Dictionary, 2009)	Even though some quiet quitters leave or are terminated, many do not passively wait for retirement
Retired on active duty (ROAD)	Similar to "retired in place," this term is used in the US military	Same as RIP
Sabotage	This includes employees' intentional actions to disrupt, damage and subvert the functioning of their organization and/or harm other workers, customers and stakeholders for their personal purposes (Crino, 1994)	Causing harm is not an intention of workers engaged in quiet quitting
Shamming or Skating (US Military)	This refers to avoiding boring tasks and exercises without getting caught (military.com, 2023)	Quiet quitters tend to avoid unpaid duties rather than boring activities
Tang Ping ("Lying Flat" in Mandarin)	This is a social protest movement in China to defy proclaimed social values associated with the highly competitive organizational environment in which everyone is expected to work hard for very long hours. Instead, people prioritize their lifestyle and mental well-being over economic materialism. As a result, people leave their jobs to pursue hobbies and personal interests while trying to minimally sustain themselves (Jingyi, 2022; Yuan, 2022)	While quiet quitters also prioritize their well-being over economic benefits, they remain employed and do not pursue a minimalistic lifestyle
Work disengagement	This refers to employees' physical, cognitive and emotional uncoupling and distancing of themselves from their work roles (Kahn, 1990)	Quiet quitters do not have to distance themselves from work and/or their employer
Work-to-rule	This is an intentional collective disruption of an organization's operations called by an organized body (e.g. a labor union) when employees come to work but limit their activities to duties that are formally described in their contract and/or collective agreement while exclude all other tasks (e.g. staying overtime) (Johnson, 2011)	Despite quiet quitters' desire to limit their tasks to formal duties, quiet quitting is not an organized movement with the purpose of disrupting an organization's functioning

Source: Author's own work

identical. For instance, work-to-rule, malicious compliance/obedience and sabotage are conscious actions to disrupt the normal functioning of one's organization, while employees engaged in quiet quitting do not deliberately intend to harm their employer and/or other stakeholders. The anti-work notion questions the need for work from a societal perspective and equates paid employment to slavery while quiet quitting does not. Unlike workers who "phone it in," quiet quitters may still be passionate about their profession. At the same time, the terms quitting in place; quit and stay; checking out; quit, but stayed; and soft quitting overlap considerably with quiet quitting, but these are not well-established in the academic literature and, therefore, are difficult to define precisely. Nevertheless, the presence of these terms shows that the ideas behind quiet quitting are not entirely new and, in fact, go back for decades.

2.3 The origin of quiet quitting

On the one hand, most of the previously documented concepts differ from the notion of quiet quitting at least to some extent. On the other hand, their drivers are remarkably similar. As documented in Section 2.1.2 of this Real Impact Viewpoint Article, quiet quitting is driven by the workers' lack of extrinsic motivation, psychological costs resulting from their job and conflicts. In a similar vein, most of the behaviors presented in Table 1 are also triggered by identical factors perceived as intolerable. In particular, the literature posits that the anti-work movement and Tang Ping (in China) emerged from the unbearable psychological costs associated with employment, which creates internal dissonance and causes a never-ending feeling of burnout (Alliger, 2021; Jingyi, 2022; Yuan, 2022). In China, the 996 working hour system in which people are expected to work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. for six days per week – an astonishing 72 h weekly – pushes employees to their limits and deprives them of having any kind of personal life (Yuan, 2022). Even though the Chinese top court recognized the 996 working hour system as illegal in August 2021 (Huang, 2021), the excessive work culture is still considered acceptable and often even necessary – and this inspired the Tang Ping social movement. Similarly, work-to-rule and malicious compliance/obedience mostly stem from employee-employer disagreement over compensation, and employee sabotage is often driven by interpersonal conflict (Serenko, 2019; Serenko and Abubakar, 2023). Likewise, the roots of employee withdrawal and work disengagement may be traced to workers' disappointment with the overall direction of their organization as well as burnout.

In all this, organizations have traditionally exhibited the same problems for decades and even centuries, and their employees have developed various strategies to alleviate pressure and restore justice. But what triggered the sudden emergence of, and growing attention to, the quiet quitting trend in the summer of 2022? This Viewpoint argues that the synergy of four salient factors may explain this phenomenon:

1. a shift in the employer-employee social exchange;
2. the changing perception of work security and future employment opportunities;
3. the unique attributes of the quiet quitting meme; and
4. an availability of the meme dissemination channels.

First, employees have recently altered their perceptions of the fairness of the social exchange processes between them and their organizations. The COVID-19 lockdowns offered people a unique opportunity to reconsider their relationship to work, reexamine their lives and redefine their priorities. By eliminating commute time during remote work and spending more time at home, many understood how burned out they had been before the pandemic: they started questioning life's meaning and realized that they should work to live, not live to work. Many understood that they dramatically over-contributed to their organization by "going above and beyond" and made personal sacrifices for the sake of receiving minimal extrinsic rewards, which, from the perspective of social exchange theory, represents an unfair exchange of value.

Social exchange theory is best described as a set of propositions, hypotheses and frames of reference on processes between the entities (e.g. employers-employees) that explain how individuals behave within a social system (e.g. an organization) (Homans, 1961; Blau, 1964; Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). The theory views employer-employee interactions as a series of sequential transactions in which both parties exchange resources (money, promotions, awards, benefits, etc. vs physical and mental contributions) through a reciprocal process. Social exchange is considered a two-way, mutually beneficial process that consists of a set of interdependent, consecutive transactions in which both parties are motivated by their self-interest. Thus, employees' decision to contribute to an organization's success depends on their perception of the fairness of the direct and indirect compensation relative to their investment of time and effort. Since for many workers, the pandemic experience dramatically increased the perceived value of their time and effort, the incremental compensation (if any) they received for "going above and beyond" was deemed insufficient to justify this behavior, and many decided to limit their contribution to the list of tasks they were formally supposed to do and were compensated for.

Second, from February to August 2022, the unemployment rate remained extremely low in most countries. For instance, in the USA, it stayed under 3.9% (BLS, 2022a), which made it difficult for organizations to attract high-quality human capital. As a result, organizations tried to retain their existing workforce, which increased the bargaining power of their workers. Given this power shift, employees became more confident that they would face no or minimal repercussions if they start restricting their activities to a formal job description.

Third, the fast dissemination of the quiet quitting phenomenon may be understood by analyzing the social contagion effect (i.e. the process through which emotions spread from one person to another) and the attributes of the meme (i.e. a unit of transmission: in this case, the quiet quitting term). The application of the memetic stance as a lens of analysis (Marsden, 1998a; Marsden, 1998b; Marsden, 2001) shows that this term possesses four key attributes – appeal to extreme, highly memorable, negative emotions; resistance to disconfirmation; ease of execution; and high memorability – which synergistically facilitated its exponential growth in popularity in mere weeks.

Quiet quitting is often positioned as a response to a covert form of exploitation because many organizations founded their business models on a dangerous assumption that constantly requires their workers to "go above and beyond" for no additional compensation (O'Connor, 2022). Bad impressions and negative stereotypes are highly memorable. As a result, it becomes easy for employees to relate to quiet quitting due to its negative emotional appeal. The notion of quiet quitting is also resistant to disconfirmation because it becomes difficult for workers to change their minds after observing others' (fair) response to presumed injustice, and the more that people contemplate this idea, the more likely it is to spread among their like-minded peers. Moreover, it is relatively easy for workers to engage in quiet quitting: it is always easier to reduce one's work effort rather than to increase it. A misnomer, the term is somewhat confusing because employees are not actually quitting their jobs as one may logically assume, yet this has created a unique, highly memorable "brand" for the term. In fact, "quiet quitting" sounds more appealing, interesting and neutral than most of the previous terms mentioned in Table 1. Therefore, "quiet quitting" has quickly spread through the process of emotional contagion wherein the sentiment associated with quiet quitting served as a stimulus for the imitative emotional state of contemporary workers who, in turn, continued spreading it within their own communication networks.

Finally, while social media had already become one of the key communication and information dissemination tools for both business and personal purposes before the COVID-19 pandemic (Del Giudice *et al.*, 2014; Scuotto *et al.*, 2017), its use dramatically increased when people were confined to the boundaries of their homes working remotely during lockdowns, and this trend persisted afterwards. As a result, ideas now spread much faster than ever before, making it easier to reach millions of like-minded workers.

As a result of the synergistic interaction of the four salient factors discussed above, the quiet quitting term has rapidly gained momentum and created a shift in employees' mindsets. However, how should employees, human capital managers and national policymakers react to this unexpected evolution of the contemporary workforce? The following section presents a number of pertinent recommendations.

3. Recommendations

3.1 Insights for employees

- *Maximize your efficiency.* Employees should realize that spending less time at work (mostly because of avoiding overtime) does not necessarily mean a lower output. In a similar vein, avoiding "going above and beyond" should not result in lower productivity. Instead of putting extra time and/or effort, workers should pause, identify the major business processes and practices and find ways to improve or even reengineer them to maximize their efficiency. For instance, to accelerate the completion of repetitive tasks, knowledge workers may introduce robotic process automation – an information system that may be programmed to repeat user actions during routine computer operations (Syed *et al.*, 2020). Because many organizations still lack formal knowledge management practices and tools, employees are advised to take initiative and rely on various personal knowledge management techniques to accumulate, retain and apply their professional knowledge in the workplace to further boost their efficiency and avoid knowledge duplication. Even though the purpose of personal knowledge management is to help individuals grow, learn and manage their careers (Pauleen, 2009; Jones *et al.*, 2016), it may, nevertheless, be effectively used in contemporary organizational settings – in particular, during remote work.
- *Find ways to manage stress and avoid burnout.* Employee burnout associated with "going above and beyond" is one of the major reasons for employees' dissatisfaction with their jobs, decreased performance and voluntary turnover (Brewer and Shapard, 2004). It is also a key driver for quiet quitting: it is natural for workers to decrease their effort when they feel that the amount of work exceeds their physical and cognitive resources, and it becomes too difficult for them to complete all tasks within an allocated timeframe. Unfortunately, many organizations still lack in employee burnout prevention and management programs. This, however, does not give workers an excuse to disengage and quiet quit. Instead, they should realize that, at the end of the day, it is their responsibility to arrange a productive, stress-free, working environment, to draw a line between work and home and to seek formal or informal mental help if needed. For instance, they may turn work stress into eustress, which is stress that creates a challenge or an opportunity, enhances mood, boosts job satisfaction and is perceived positively (Tarafdar *et al.*, 2019).
- *Get ready to face the criticism of fellow coworkers.* When workers quiet quit, someone still has to complete their tasks, and, most likely, it is their coworkers who will have to carry the burden. This may be particularly noticeable in teamwork settings, where underperformers (from the manager's perspective) are easy to identify. As such, it may be difficult for a single team member to decrease his/her effort with impunity unless all team members collaborate and uniformly adjust their work behavior.
- *Brace yourself for potential termination or resignation.* In many cases, engaging in quiet quitting may go against the hustle culture practiced by an organization. As a result, the absence of "going above and beyond" may be quickly spotted by management and labeled as underperformance and lack of initiative, eventually leading to termination. If not forced out by management, quiet quitters may find it mentally exhausting to be emerged in an organizational culture that contradicts their principles and work preferences, a reality which may eventually lead to voluntary resignation.

- *This may ruin your career prospects.* The problem is that quiet quitters may irreparably damage their chances of promotion and internal career growth. In addition, they may not be able to secure a positive reference from their manager: this would undermine their attempt to obtain a desirable position at another organization.
- *It may be difficult to escape a quiet quitting mindset in the future.* While quiet quitting may seem to be beneficial for some employees in particular organizational environments, practicing it for a long time may spread the quiet quitting mentality to other nonwork-related tasks and personal activities including hobbies. In addition, some people may find it difficult to turn off their quiet quitting mindset when moving to other organizations in the future.
- *Surprisingly, you may actually be promoted.* One of the unexpected outcomes of quiet quitting is not what most people would expect: it is a promotion and/or a raise. Three explanations for this counterintuitive phenomenon are offered. First, putting in long hours and working overtime may reduce employee productivity and efficiency due to exponentially growing fatigue, stress and idle time (Shepard and Clifton, 2000). Second, engaging in many activities simultaneously requires multitasking, which diminishes the accuracy and quality of the output (Adler and Benbunan-Fich, 2012). Third, quiet quitting may help employees restore their mental capacity. Overall, this may lead to a better long-term job performance which management may subsequently notice and reward.

3.2 Insights for human capital managers

- *Formalize, promote and invest in knowledge sharing activities.* In the postpandemic world, knowledge sharing has become the backbone of remote and hybrid work models (Weiss *et al.*, 2021). Without proactive human capital management practices, quiet quitting may lead to a knowledge sharing disaster due to two major factors. First, the key assumption behind interemployee knowledge sharing is their engagement in active socializing (Nonaka and Konno, 1998). When quiet quitters (in many cases, rightfully) reduce the amount of time spent at work, they may have less time to socialize with their coworkers, which, in turn, may impede knowledge exchange processes. Second, knowledge sharing among coworkers is often regarded as a voluntary activity which does, in fact, require "going above and beyond," and it is likely that many quiet quitters reduce their knowledge sharing activities to a bare minimum or completely eliminate them.
- *Urgently capture the knowledge of employees identified as quiet quitters.* Each employee possesses vital knowledge that may not reside with other organizational members. Because quiet quitters are at a high risk of voluntarily leaving an organization, their unique knowledge may be lost unless it is proactively captured before their departure. Therefore, managers should find ways to identify their unique knowledge and find ways to retain it.
- *Think twice before terminating a quiet quitter.* Both academic and practitioner knowledge management literatures are rife with examples of organizations that suffered tremendous losses and damaged reputations because of their inability to properly manage employees' knowledge. For instance, NASA lost most of the knowledge about manned Moon travel that it had developed during the Apollo Missions in the 1960s–1970s, and it has had to relearn everything from scratch (Jennex, 2006). Human capital managers should keep in mind that, as a terminated worker leaves, so does his/her knowledge.

- *Conduct a knowledge audit.* The purpose of a knowledge audit is to identify all knowledge assets of an organization, study its current knowledge management practices and find ways to maximize knowledge use efficiency to achieve the overall organizational objectives (Handa *et al.*, 2019). A major part of a knowledge audit focuses on a company's human capital which "comprises the knowledge, skills, experiences and abilities of the members of the organization" (Mention and Bontis, 2013, p. 288). Special attention should be paid to the human capital possessed by the workers identified as current or potential quiet quitters. After this, their knowledge should be captured and transferred to other organizational members to ensure its future retention.
- *Attract and retain high performing employees.* In most areas of human activities, there are outliers whose performance dramatically exceeds that of an average person. For instance, in academia, most scientific progress is driven by a small group of highly productive and influential researchers (Parker *et al.*, 2010; Serenko *et al.*, 2022) and, in computer programming, productivity may often differ by a factor of ten (Sackman *et al.*, 1968). Staffing an organization with a few high performing workers may be more efficient than using a larger number of underperformers and/or quiet quitters.
- *Introduce burnout management programs.* Because burnout is one of the key drivers of quiet quitting, it behooves organizations to develop and launch dedicated employee burnout prevention initiatives. For this, evidence-based practices suggest that human capital managers should introduce stress management interventions, allow workers to actively shape their work assignments, offer social support, involve employees in decision-making and introduce high-quality performance management practices (Gabriel and Aguinis, 2022).
- *Promote interactional justice between managers and their subordinates.* Interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal and informational exchanges between organizational decision-makers (i.e. managers) and their subordinates (i.e. workers) (Bies, 2015). A lack of interactional justice may lead to a conflict which, in turn, may trigger workers' quiet quitting behavior. Thus, human capital managers should promote fair interpersonal encounters between decision-makers and their subordinates by developing and implementing related policies.
- *Review employee contracts to ensure that workers are fairly compensated for "going above and beyond."* Another driver of quiet quitting is an unfair perception of workers' investment of time and effort vs the tangible and intangible rewards provided by their organization. Recently, it has been suggested that the Great Resignation may turn into the Great Renegotiation to allow employees to get higher pay, better benefits, more vacation time and work-from-home options (Rosalsky, 2022). In addition, new and renegotiated contracts should ensure a fair compensation for "going above and beyond" and cover the terms of the employment agreement and management expectations in detail.

3.3 Insights for national human capital policymakers

- *Proactively prevent further depletion of the national human capital.* National human capital is a main driver of national wealth creation. It comprises the skills, education, expertise, knowledge, wisdom, motivation, entrepreneurship and competence of all members of the nation, as well as their ability to realize national tasks and achieve national objectives (Bontis, 2004; Lin and Edvinsson, 2011). The Great Resignation has already created an ebb of national human capital due to an outflow of qualified labor from the job market, while quiet quitting has reduced the productivity of remaining workers. In other words, the present labor force is smaller and less productive than only a few years ago, which may dramatically undermine national competitiveness and even potentially trigger a global recession. Policymakers, therefore, should find ways to prevent further depletion of their national human capital.

- *Promote work-life balance as one of the national values.* In recent years, the issue of work-life balance has attracted the attention of policymakers on the global level (Crompton and Lyonette, 2006). For instance, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) includes work-life balance as one of eleven components comprising the Better Life Index – a social indicator measuring national economic and social progress (OECD, 2022). In several European countries – e.g. Denmark, France and Latvia – workplace burnout may be considered an occupational disease, and workers who experience it may be eligible for compensation (Lastovkova *et al.*, 2018). In addition to these notable efforts, work-life balance should be promoted as one of the core societal values, and people should be exposed to these ideas early in life. As such, the entire society should accept the notion that people's lives span far beyond their workplace and their worth should not be defined by their jobs or material possessions.
- *Provide government-funded employee mental health support.* The burnout caused by the contemporary hustle culture may have a negative impact on employees' mental states and even exacerbate their mental disorders. The economic burden of mental health problems has been well-documented in the extant literature (Dewa *et al.*, 2007; Chopra, 2009). For instance, Canada loses $4.5bn annually from decreased productivity resulting from presenteeism, absenteeism and disability costs associated with mental health issues (Dewa *et al.*, 2004). Thus, governments are advised to improve their employee mental health support programs so that workers may use these services as an alternative to quiet quitting.
- *Support innovation that facilitates employee efficiency.* It is hard to deny the fact that quiet quitting will reduce the national gross domestic product (GDP) of many countries. To bring their GDP back on track, governments should help their businesses increase their efficiency to compensate for the loss of productivity. For instance, they may allocate grants supporting employee efficiency research and offer tax incentives for businesses making use of related technologies and practices. Such grants should go beyond the common themes of energy efficiency, lean manufacturing and best IT practices and focus specifically on employee productivity enhancement.

4. Conclusion

In the contemporary volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, many principles developed by management pioneers almost a century ago no longer apply (Diefenbach and Deelmann, 2016). In today's unique workforce, five generations – the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z – work together to spearhead the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is characterized by increasing mobile interconnectivity and smart automation powered by artificial intelligence (Schwab, 2016). In addition to technology-driven pressures to develop innovative solutions and business models (Corallo *et al.*, 2019; Latino *et al.*, 2022), societal and environmental factors also continuously shape the nature of the contemporary workforce (Rotatori *et al.*, 2021). Among the recent changes, perhaps the most salient are the Great Resignation and quiet quitting, which challenge the assumptions underlying the hustle culture.

On the one hand, employees have the right to limit their work contributions to a formal job description and expect a fair compensation for "going above and beyond." On the other hand, quiet quitting is a double-edged sword because engaging in this behavior may both improve and jeopardize one's professional career. Organizations risk losing their human capital, which may be impossible to replace later. Their knowledge flows may also deteriorate because knowledge sharing is generally considered a voluntary activity, and it is difficult to make workers do so unless they are intrinsically motivated. The quiet quitting movement may also affect entire nations – for better or worse, only time will tell.

As a matter of course, employees who decide to engage in quiet quitting should explore new ways to become more efficient, avoid burnout and manage future career difficulties because they may be terminated or forced to resign. In response to quiet quitting, human capital managers should invest in knowledge sharing activities, capture the knowledge of potential quiet quitters, think twice before terminating them, conduct a knowledge audit, focus on high performers, introduce burnout management programs, promote interactional justice between managers and subordinates and fairly compensate their employees for "going above and beyond." Policymakers should prevent national human capital depletion, promote work-life balance as a national core value, fund employee mental health support and invest in employee efficiency innovation.

The idea behind quit quitting is not new: employees have always tried to make their work easier by using a variety of (often questionable) means. Nevertheless, our society has now reached a point where human capital managers do not have the luxury of passively reacting to pressures. Instead, they should accept the notion of the impending paradigm of the Great Renegotiation and develop management practices that benefit both organizations and their employees. Researchers are recommended to launch empirical investigations to better understand the underlying causes of quiet quitting. For instance, they may explore the role of personality traits (Matzler *et al.*, 2011), mental problems (Issac *et al.*, 2021; Kmieciak, 2022; Serenko, 2023b), organizational and national culture (Del Giudice, 2012) and management-employee relations (Serenko and Abubakar, 2023), in the context of quiet quitting. Given the novelty and significance of this phenomenon, future research avenues are virtually unlimited.

Note

1. While the arrival of COVID-19 was totally unexpected, the possibility of its emergence had been well-documented in the scientific literature yet ignored by global health organizations and government bodies before the virus appeared on a massive scale. E.g. see Cheng, V.C.C., Lau, S.K.P., Woo, P.C. Y., and Yuen, K.Y. (2007), "Severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus as an agent of emerging and reemerging infection," Clinical Microbiology Reviews, Vol. 20 No. 4 pp. 660-694.

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