A NEW TERM FOR AN EXISTING CONCEPT: QUIET QUITTING- A SELF-DETERMINATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a great number of impacts on individuals' both work and life domains. Lockdowns, restrictions, orders regarding staying at home and remote working conditions have led to many psychological repercussions. Most employees suffered from severe burnout, high levels of stress and role conflicts due to disorganizing work-life domains. Even though most restrictions have been removed and individuals have been trying to adapting the new normal, resonations still can be observed in the business world. As one of the trend topics that emerged recently, quiet quitting refers to the rejection that work should be at the heart of the personal life. In line with this idea, employees do the bare minimum for their work without any extra effort and contribution. Put differently, by becoming quiet quitters, employees react to the hustle culture which has become a current issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. By doing this, employees believe that they recalibrate their disrupted work-life balance and maintain their well-being. Although quiet quitting has emerged as such a new workplace concept, especially among Gen Z, the idea of doing the bare minimum for work has been conceptualized under different names in the organizational behavior literature. Accordingly, this study firstly aims at examining the term quiet quitting conceptually by considering similar concepts in the existing literature. Secondly, it is intended to present a theoretical foundation for why quiet quitting has become so popular in working life as a reflection of the COVID -19 pandemic. For this purpose, several propositions are stated based on self-determination theory by considering the context of remote working circumstances. In addition, managerial suggestions are presented to avoid and combat this phenomenon in work life. Lastly, the potential directions for future studies are proposed.

Keywords: Quiet quitting, remote working, self-determination theory

1. INTRODUCTION

The outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis created many challenges and shifts in human life. Stay-at-home orders and social distancing restrictions led to several psychological issues such as stress, anxiety, depression and fear (Kloutsiniotis et al., 2022). Besides the psychological impacts on social lives, the working settings were dramatically affected as well. The COVID-19 pandemic triggered the beginning of a new era- working away from the office. Although it is not a new work arrangement, remote working became very prevalent during the pandemic. Many organizations had to switch to remote work as the nature of the work allows (Arunprasad et al., 2022). Despite creating advantages such as flexibility and increased productivity, remote work also caused negative impacts such as heavy workload, being exposed to hustle culture and

blurred boundaries between work and family domains (Baumann & Sander, 2021; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021; Yuningsih, 2022). Especially the clashes of the roles, expectations and responsibilities of both work and life domains led to negative work attitudes and outcomes such as burnout, turnover intention and disengagement (Moyo, 2020; Stankevičiūtė, 2022). These negative outcomes triggered an anti-work movement called the "Great Resignation" in job markets all around the world. Coined by Anthony Klotz- an associate professor of organizational behavior at University College London, the Great Resignation refers to massive and voluntary job separations of employees (Kuzior et al., 2022). With the Great Resignation movement, massive numbers of employees either quit or changed their jobs in 2021 (Serenko, 2022). This movement possibly influenced Gen Z employees the most. Gen Z employees' sense of belonging and loyalty to their organization has decreased since they were deprived of socialization after work because of social distancing restrictions (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022).

Since not all employees cannot have the option of leaving their jobs, a new employment trend has been spread recently following the Great Resignation movement (Pearce, 2022). To recalibrate work and life domains, employees have started to become "quiet quitters". Quiet quitting, which is a very trendy topic in the business world nowadays, refers to doing the bare minimum for the work without any extra effort and contribution (Christian, 2022; Tapper, 2022). Although the quiet quitting concept has drawn tremendous attraction from the mainstream media, the scientific community has scarcely tackled this issue and presented a comprehensive approach. Accordingly, this paper aims at examining the quiet quitting concept by presenting conceptual and theoretical perspectives. To our knowledge, the present study is one of the first attempts to thoroughly examine the quiet quitting term. In accordance with the purpose of the study, we first examine the quiet quitting term as a concept. Secondly, we utilize self-determination theory to elucidate why quiet quitting has become so popular in working life as a reflection of the COVID -19 pandemic.

2. QUIET QU1TTING: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

In the summer of 2022, the quiet quitting concept has become very popular in mainstream media. Many online platforms and journals such as Harvard Business Review, Forbes, World Economic Forum, the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times published several articles about the quiet quitting concept. Indeed, the attention of the media depends on social media posts indicating that work should not be at the heart of life. Considered a continuation of the anti-work movement- the Great Resignation, quiet quitting has started to spread in many countries such as the US, China and UK. Some journal articles labeled quiet quitting as a new and real phenomenon, on the other hand, some of them highlighted that it is a fake or an old idea. While the discussions on whether quiet quitting is a fake or real trend continue, Gallup shared the findings regarding the employee commitment to the organization for 2022. According to the findings, half of the US workforce is alleged to be quiet quitters (Harter, 2022). Moreover, the results revealed that Gen Z has more tendency to quiet quitting (Harter, 2022). Parallel with Gallup's results, we could observe that quiet quitting has become viral mostly among Gen Z. Why the idea of quiet quitting has been embraced mostly by Gen Z is an important point to be pondered. In fact, other generations also engaged in quiet quitting before or during the COVID-19 pandemic, but Gen Z raised their voice. Gen Z is defined as

impatient, brave and not afraid to pioneer (Baldonado, 2018). Since they can break down the existing ideas (Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015), we could state that they have enough courage to voice quiet quitting more than other generations. Compare to Gen Z, Gen Y is more loyal and respectful to authority and also obeys the leaders (Weerarathne et al., 2022). Thus, we believe that due to some characteristics of Gen Z, they stand out and pioneer in quiet quitting.

Quiet quitting is defined as doing the bare minimum for the work and not going above and beyond. (Christian, 2022; Tapper, 2022). Quiet quitters don't accept the expectation of giving their all or putting in extra hours (Zenger & Folkman, 2022). Moreover, they don't take on additional work or duty which is not paid or rewarded (Hart, 2022). They actually react to the hustle culture mentality by not making an extra effort (Hart, 2022). The main drivers of quiet quitting are being lack of a clear purpose, fair recognition and the desire to maintain a work-life balance (Esteveny, 2022). Considering the COVID-19 pandemic blurred the boundaries of work and life domains, quiet quitting may be evaluated as an option for recalibrating the disrupted work-life balance, maintaining well-being and spending time on things that are more meaningful to employees. Loss of loved ones, the fear of being infected, loss of freedom, feeling of loneliness and ambiguity regarding the direction of disease negatively influenced most humans due to the pandemic (Li & Wang, 2020; De Jong et al., 2020). These factors caused a sense of emptiness and a loss of meaning in life (De Jong et al., 2020). Accordingly, the pandemic has created great awareness that nothing is more important than the personal physical, mental, and emotional health (Afrahi et al., 2022). This situation might have triggered the idea of "work should not be at the center of life". Thus, individuals may question the meaning of their lives and decide to spend their time on more precious things than work. By quiet quitting, individuals may think that they are able to tackle the issues, protect their overall health and live more 'meaningfully'.

Although quiet quitting has become one of the hottest topics and has been launched as a new concept recently, its main idea is not new actually. The idea of quiet quitting has been conceptualized under different names in the field of organizational behavior for decades. The concept of disengagement, which is defined as distancing the self emotionally, cognitively, or physically from work (Afrahi et al., 2022), is a very close and similar concept to quiet quitting. Kahn (1990) defined work disengagement as a detachment from work roles and duties. According to Kahn (1990), individuals have disengagement as a defense mechanism to calibrate themselves for dealing with both internal ambivalences and external conditions. With work disengagement, employees protect themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during work role performances (Kahn,1990). In addition, disengaged employees are less interested in their work and their loyalty level is usually low (Aslam et al., 2018). Considering the main descriptions and discourses of the disengagement concept, we could state that quiet quitting is a very close term to it.

Another term similar to quiet quitting is withdrawal behavior. Withdrawal behavior refers to an employee action that includes putting psychological or physical distance between the self and the work environment (Rosse & Hulin, 1985). With withdrawal behavior, employees intend to avoid the work environment, tasks, or the organization (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991). Moreover, they minimize their time spent on specific work duties and attention to the

job (Hanisch & Hulin, 1991; Carpender & Berry, 2014). Same to disengagement, withdrawal behavior is also defined as a defensive action to cope with daily setbacks at work and work-family balance issues (Jo & Lee, 2022). Depending on the conceptualization of withdrawal behavior, we may contend that quiet quitting has very similar characteristics to withdrawal behavior.

The other term resembling quiet quitting is job neglect. Job neglect is conceptualized as including the actions such as withholding effort and diminishing participation in work-related tasks (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). As one of the responses to job dissatisfaction, job neglect is a kind of decision about 'self-limiting'(Kidwell & Bennett, 2001). When employees neglect their job, they don't struggle for their organization anymore, don't make any extra effort and use their work time for personal issues. Moreover, they let the circumstances deteriorate through reduced interest or effort in work (Lee & Varon, 2020). When we compare quiet quitting with job neglect, we could state that they have common points but, job neglect is a more negative attitude towards the organization.

When we make an overall evaluation, we believe that quiet quitting is not a new workplace concept but rather a renamed term based on the combination of existing concepts. We could conclude that the term quiet quitting has very similar characteristics to some concepts such as disengagement, withdrawal behavior and job neglect which were defined in the field of organizational behavior already. Although it has been spread during the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that no matter how we name it; employee action including doing the bare minimum for work is a reality of work life. Poor management practices including lack of support, leadership and recognition, inadequate communication and unfair workplace practices could lead to quiet quitting.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The COVID-19 pandemic has had many global impacts. Many countries had global economic recessions, issues with health systems and disruptions in several sectors and labor markets. Moreover, the challenges due to restrictions regarding social distancing caused several shifts in work life. One of the major shifts in work environments was that many organizations around the world transitioned to remote work by means of constantly growing technology. Accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work arrangement is seen as the future of work. At the individual level, remote work arrangements have some advantages such as providing flexibility and increased productivity (Ipsen et al., 2021). On the contrary, remote work during pandemic restrictions caused many disadvantages including heavy workload, role ambiguity, being exposed to hustle culture, being lack of support and visible leadership and blurred boundaries between work and family domains (Baumann & Sander, 2021; Ipsen et al., 2021; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021; Yuningsih, 2022). In particular, the clash of work and family roles paved the way for negative work attitudes and behaviors such as burnout and turnover intention (Moyo, 2020; Stankevičiūtė, 2022). As mentioned before, quiet quitting has become one of the trend work attitudes of employees who desire to eliminate the negative impacts of remote work, recalibrate the work-life balance and maintain well-being.

As stated in the previous section, the idea of quiet quitting referring to only performing the tasks in the job description and not doing more is not a new idea. The issue related to quiet quitting that we should examine is why it has become so popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. The present study utilizes self-determination theory to unveil the drivers of quiet quitting in the context of remote work arrangements in the era of the pandemic.

Self- determination theory, which is a meta-theory of motivation, focuses on growth tendencies and innate psychological needs (Ryan & Deci 2000). One of the main premises of the theory is that humans have a natural inclination and progression toward psychological growth, internalization and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van den Broeck et al., 2016). To supply the nutriments for psychological growth, internalization and well-being, the theory postulates that basic psychological needs should be satisfied (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Gagne & Deci, 2005). As a central mini-theory of self-determination theory, basic psychological-need theory suggests that three basic needs- competence, relatedness and autonomy are fundamental for facilitating optimal functioning of the natural inclination for psychological growth, internalization and well-being (Ryan & Deci 2000).

Competence refers to a sense of mastery and the need for effective achievement and growth (Ryan & Deci, 2020). The competence need includes a natural human inclination to explore and manage the environment (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). In addition, individuals are satisfied when they get feedback and feel that they can overcome the challenges with their mastery and influence their environment (Thibault Landry & Whillans, 2019). The need for relatedness refers to the desire to be connected closely with others (Legault, 2017). This need includes a sense of belonging and being respected (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Individuals are satisfied when they believe that they love and care about others and also are loved and cared for by others (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Lastly, autonomy refers to the desire to self-organize experience and behavior based on volition (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The autonomy need is satisfied when individuals have a sense of volition and ownership in their own choosing actions relevant to their personal values (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Self-determination theory could provide a framework for a better understanding of the reasons why employees tend to quiet quitting in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic. The theory suggests that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs enhances self-motivation, well-being and job performance (Deci et al., 2017). On the contrary, the failure to satisfaction of these needs leads to a lack of work motivation, and poorer mental and physical health consequences (Baumann & Sander, 2021). With the acceleration of remote or hybrid work arrangements due to the pandemic, organizations may be insufficient for providing support to meet the basic psychological needs of their employees. Based on the self-determination theory, we first contend that remote work arrangements may lead to a decrease in the sense of competence of employees. Obtaining spontaneous feedback and information, which is restricted due to remote work, is vital for the satisfaction of competence needs (Baumann & Sander, 2021). Ryan and Deci (2020) also stated that employees feel competence when a well-structured work environment provides positive feedback and opportunities for growth. It can be expressed that remote work arrangements limited proper feedback flows and growth opportunities due to the social distancing restrictions. In addition, remote work reduced the visibility of achievements

which is essential for the satisfaction of competence needs (Baumann & Sander, 2021). Furthermore, since competence need includes the sense of overcoming challenges (Thibault Landry & Whillans, 2019), individuals may have trouble dealing with the issues such as conflicts of roles, uncertainties, or the blurred boundaries between work and life that emerged from the pandemic and remote work arrangements. So, they may think that they cannot manage their environment and they are incompetent. Being a lack of competence sense, employees may lose their work motivation and passion, which in turn may result in quiet quitting. According to the arguments, the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 1: Employees whose competence needs are not met due to remote work arrangements may tend to quiet quitting.

One of the most influenced basic needs may be relatedness due to remote work arrangements. Social distance restrictions and stay-at-home orders hindered face-to-face relationships. With the transition to remote work practices, individuals suffered from not socializing at work which is an important source for engaging in social relationships. Even though communication technologies facilitate networking, technostress emerging from excessive usage of ICT made employees lonely (Taser et al., 2022). As a consequence of being lack of interaction and connection, employees felt isolated (Gagné et al., 2022). The feeling of being excluded and isolated affected employees' sense of belonging and job performance negatively (Gagné et al., 2022). At this point, employees who lost their belonging and connectedness to the organization may tend to quiet quitting. Based on the arguments, the following proposition is suggested:

Proposition 2: Employees whose relatedness needs are not met due to remote work arrangements may tend to quiet quitting.

Job autonomy is a controversial topic to be evaluated during the COVID-19 pandemic. A considerable number of studies revealed that remote work arrangements increased the sense of control and job autonomy because of flexibility (e.g., Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Wang et al., 2021; Gagné et al., 2022). On the other hand, several research suggested that remote work arrangements could reduce the sense of autonomy (e.g., Fana et al., 2021; Lange & Kayser, 2022). Managers and organizations sometimes may make employees deprive of autonomy by closely monitoring them, which in turn creates a lack of managerial trust resulting in decreased autonomy of employees (Gagné et al., 2022). In addition, if working hours and availability are fixed to provide the proper workflow, employees may feel deprived of autonomy during remote working (Lange & Kayser, 2022). Especially managers checking what had been done and by whom may lessen the perception of autonomy, which in turn reduces job performance (Fana et al., 2021). At this point, we contend that remote work may cause decreased autonomy due to close monitoring, which in turn may lead to quiet quitting.

Proposition 3: Employees whose autonomy needs are not met due to remote work arrangements may tend to quiet quitting.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the concept of quiet quitting both conceptually and theoretically. By reviewing the existing literature, it can be stated that quiet quitting is a new term that has been already conceptualized under different names in the organizational behavior field. Disengagement, withdrawal behavior and job neglect are inferred to be very similar concepts to quiet quitting. In the present study, we also presented a theoretical foundation for quiet quitting by utilizing self-determination theory in the context of remote work. Based on the theory, we suggested that being lack of satisfaction of basic psychological needs may lead to quiet quitting.

Since quiet quitting is very prevalent in the business world nowadays, organizations should take preventive measures to eliminate it. Organizations should be aware that employees have a life outside of work and care about their effort for balancing work and life domains. Furthermore, supportive managerial practices can be a solution to prevent quiet quitting as they can facilitate the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, which in turn strengthens employee engagement at work. Moreover, job crafting can be suggested to overcome quiet quitting issues. Designing one's own job may create satisfaction of basic psychological needs. By crafting their jobs, employees may feel competent, connected and autonomous, which in turn eliminates the tendency to quiet quitting. In addition, building a trusting relationship could be a way out for avoiding quiet quitting. It may strengthen the bonds between employees and managers and increases the sense of belonging to the organization. Lastly, providing visible leadership and justice at the workplace can help to avoid quiet quitting. As the research about quiet quitting is limited, future studies could examine the factors causing quiet quitting or its consequences. In addition, the different quiet quitting tendencies of generations could be investigated.

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