QUIET QUITTING: A CONCEPTUAL INVESTIGATION

Res.Asst.Dr., İbrahim YIKILMAZ [1],

[1] Kocaeli University, Department of Business Administration,

- ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1051-0886

ABSTRACT

You may have found yourself in the middle of an extensive discussion about “Quiet quitting” or reading the comments about Quiet quitting that went viral in your business and social media. Actually, Quiet quitting is not a new concept, it was introduced by Economist Mark Boldger at the Texas A&M Economics Symposium in 2009. However, Zaid Khan from New York attracted attention to this concept with a Tiktok post, causing this concept to fall like a lightning bolt into the middle of daily life. Contrary to expectations, the concept of Quiet quitting is not related to the employee quitting the job. It is related to the fact that the employee at the workplace focuses on work-related processes within the time interval defined by the employer and is away from work during non-work periods. For better understanding, Quiet quitting can be expressed as the opposite of “Quiet firing”. Quiet firing, on the other hand, in contrast to Quiet quitting, is the process of ensuring that the employee leaves the job voluntarily by giving only the minimum wage and benefits. Therefore, the concept of Quiet quitting is that the employee performs at a basic level and continues to work in a way that will save his/her capacity in the workplace. Although the concept of "quiet quitting" includes "silence", the rise of voices related to the concept in every platform and its potential negative effect on individuals, businesses and economy necessitated a detailed examination of the concept. The abundance of definitions and interpretations of the concept causes the concept to move away from the issues and problems in the workplace environment it refers to. In this context, the concept of Quiet quitting is discussed in detail in this study. A holistic approach has been tried to be followed by considering the extant literature and various sources regarding the development, definition, and possible effects of the concept. It is thought that the current study will be an important guide with the concept-oriented analysis it offers to future studies on the rapidly spreading concept of Quiet quitting. In addition, it is evaluated that the study will play an important role in raising the awareness of the top management about the concept in developing a sustainable management practice, with the determination of how the employees develop a defense mechanism against the increasing expectations in the workplace environment.

Keywords: Quiet Quitting, Quiet Firing, Quiet Hiring

ÖZET

Muhtemelen iş çevrenizde ve sosyal medyada viral olan “Quiet quitting (Sessiz İstifa)” kavramına ilişkin yorumları okurken yada bunun hakkında kapsamlı bir tartışmanın ortasında

kendinizi bulmuş olabilirsiniz. Aslında Quiet quitting (Sessiz İstifa) yeni bir kavram olmayıp, 2009 yılında Economist Mark Boldger tarafından Texas A&M Economics Symposium'da ortaya atılmış bir kavramdır. Ancak New York'lu Zaid Khan'ın bir Tiktok paylaşımı ile bu kavrama dikkatleri çekmesi, gündelik yaşamın ortasına bir yıldırım gibi düşmesine sebebiyet vermiştir. Beklenenin aksine "Sessiz İstifa" kavramı çalışanın işten çıkması ile alakalı değildir. İşyerinde çalışanın işveren tarafından kendisine tanımlanmış saat aralığında iş ile ilgili süreçlere yeterli ölçüde odaklanması ve iş dışı sürelerde ise işten uzaklaşması ile alakalıdır. Daha iyi anlaşılması adına Sessiz İstifa, "Quiet firing (Sessiz İşten Çıkarma)" kavramının tam zıttı olarak ifade edilebilir. Quiet firing (Sessiz İşten Çıkarma) ise sessiz istifanın aksine iş görenin çalışanına sadece minimum seviyede maaş ve yan haklar vererek onun kendi isteği ile işten çıkmasını sağlama sürecidir. Dolayısıyla Sessiz İstifa kavramı işgörenin temel düzeyde performans sergileyerek işyeri ortamında kişisel kapasitesinden tasarruf edecek bir şekilde iş hayatına devam etmesidir. "Quiet quitting (Sessiz İstifa)" kavramı "sessizlik"i içermekle birlikte, kavramla ilgili seslerin her platformda yükselmesi ve ekonomi, işletme ve bireyler üzerindeki muhtemel negatif etkileri, kavramın detaylı bir şekilde incelenmesini gerekli kılmıştır. Nitekim kavrama ilişkin tanım ve yorumların bolluğu, aslında işaret ettiği işyeri ortamındaki konu ve sorunlardan uzaklaşmasına neden olmaktadır. Bu kapsamda çalışmada Sessiz İstifa kavramı detaylı bir şekilde ele alınmıştır. Kavramın gelişimi, tanımı ve muhtemel etkilere ilişkin birikmiş literatür ve çeşitli kaynaklar gözetilerek bütüncül bir yaklaşım izlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Mevcut çalışmanın hızlı yaygınlaşan Quiet quitting (Sessiz İstifa) kavramına ilişkin daha sonra yürütülecek çalışmalara sunduğu kavram odaklı inceleme ile önemli bir rehber olacağı düşünülmektedir. Ayrıca çalışmanın çalışanların işyeri ortamında artan beklentilere karşı nasıl bir savunma mekanizması geliştirdiğine yönelik tespitleri ile, üst yönetimin sürdürülebilir bir yönetim uygulaması geliştirmelerinde kavrama ilişkin farkındalıklarının arttırılmasında önemli rol üstleneceği değerlendirilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Quiet Quitting (Sessiz İstifa), Quiet Firing (Sessiz İşten Çıkarma), Quiet Hiring (Sessiz İşe Alım)

1. INTRODUCTION

Quiet Quitting has come to the fore as a concept that has recently been mentioned on all kinds of platforms and triggers broad social movements and inquiries. When Googletrends, which offers instant search data, is examined (www.trends.google.com), the concept has come to the fore more than ever and has been intensively examined between 25 July and 10 October 2022 around the world. In addition, it is revealed by the data that it attracted attention in 2004 and 2009 at a level of 1% compared to the interest in 2022. Therefore, it is clear that the concept has been mentioned before, even if it had a limited effect for a period (1% compared to today). Some sources claim that Quiet Quitting was first introduced by Mark Boldger at the Texas A&M Economics Symposium (Arnet, 2022; Fresh Headline, 2022; Urban Legal Recruitment, 2022). Hitt (2022), on the other hand, shares that as an economist living in Texas, Mark Boldger is working on a concept that refers to the phenomenon of "Quiet Quitting". It is shared that the first use of the concept was used to explain the "*declining passion for achievement*" within the economic processes in Venezuela, an understanding that represents the "demonization of profit,

entrepreneurship, and productivity". After the concept was introduced in 2009, it has become a viral topic in the last period with the "Tang Ping (lying flat)" movement in China in April 2021 and the TikTok video in 2022. In particular, Gallup Report shared that almost half of the US workforce has a tendency to Quiet Quitting, and it has become a topic of discussion in wider masses (Harter, 2022). The concept of quiet quitting is not actually a situation of quitting a job on the basis of the components of the word, on the contrary, it is a behavior taken as a precaution against the problems caused by quitting the job. Although it has various definitions according to the limited point of view of the subject, it is the employee's protection from burnout and similar processes by performing with the minimum level of productivity required by the job and keeping his/her well-being at a good level by taking care of the work-life balance. In this way, employees perform a kind of defense mechanism against diversified job expectations and increasing workload. For a better understanding of the concept, it is the opposite of the process of waiting for the employee to leave the job voluntarily by offering excessive workload and limited economic rights due to the employer's dissatisfaction with himself/herself, which is defined as Quiet Firing. Therefore, Quiet quitting is a behavior in today's “hustle culture” developed by the employee and Quiet Firing by the employer. These concepts are a situation where both the employee and the employer suffer, the total business performance decreases for everyone, and causes significant economic losses on a global scale. In this context, it is a concept that should be considered in detail.

The popularity of the concept of Quiet Quitting and the fact that the discussion ground is social media has led to different definitions and interpretations. In addition to this, no comprehensive or empirical study on the concept could be found in the investigations made in various academic databases (Webof Science, Scopus, Ulakbim…etc.). This situation necessitates a holistic examination of the concept through existing resources since the concept points to an important issue regarding the psychological and physiological well-being and performance of the employee and is a newly developed concept. In this context, the study aims to conduct conceptual research on the concept of Quiet quitting. A detailed examination of the concept of Quiet quitting has been made through the available resources, and it has been presented collectively. It is thought that the study will be an important guide with the concept-oriented analysis it offers to future studies on the rapidly spreading concept of Quiet quitting. In addition, it is evaluated that the study will play an important role in raising the awareness of the top management, with the silent scream of the employees being heard against the increasing expectations and the determinations about how the employees develop a defense mechanism.

2. THE CONCEPT AND DEVELOPMENT OF QUIET QUITTING

Some sources claim that Quiet Quitting was first introduced by Mark Boldger at the Texas A&M Economics Symposium (Arnet, 2022; Fresh Headline, 2022; Urban Legal Recruitment, 2022;). Hitt (2022), on the other hand, stated that the symposium in question was not actually a form of that scale and that an economist living in Texas, Mark Boldger, was working on a concept that referred to the phenomenon of "quiet quitting" and that it was leaked to the internet by his publisher. Therefore, the concept was expressed by Mark Boldger with or without his knowledge, although it is not as important and official as the symposium, in an environment where some economic discussions were expressed. The reason for mentioning the concept is

that quiet quitting is a issue that develops when socialism and a management style with a social understanding are adopted. In other words, when this type of management practice is chosen, an understanding that "profits, entrepreneurship, and productivity are demonized" is supported, so the issue is an explanation for "decreased passion to achieve and have" within the economic processes in Venezuela. Subsequently, the concept became a viral topic with the "Tang Ping (lying flat)" movement in China in April 2021 and the TikTok video in 2022. It has become even more common with the finding of Gallup Report that almost half of the workforce in the USA tends Quiet quitting (Harter, 2022). Particularly, Tiktokker Zaid Khan's (@zaidlepplin) sharing of a video was effective in gaining a viral identity of the concept. Tiktokker @zaidlepplin's posts like "*Work is not your life " and your worth is not defined by productive output"* caused significant repercussions on many social platforms. Comprehensive discussions were carried out by large audiences, both in the business environment and on various social platforms. The fact that the concept is open to discussion on a large scale has caused it to be defined from different angles. When the discussions are examined, it is seen that the employees' being in *"dissatisfaction and disengagement"* towards the work, experiencing burnout in the face of intense workload and expectations, and limiting the interference of work to the rest of life in terms of work-life balance. Again, instead of leaving the job, it is handled as preventing the problems that may arise by staying at the job and putting forward performance in a way that meets the requirements of the job with the minimum performance. As a matter of fact, although the concept seems to mean quitting the job, the situation it refers to is that the negative situations created by the job are confined to working hours in a way that cannot interfere with the rest of life while continuing to work instead of quitting the job.

To explain the process of the development and definition of the concept a little more, it is shared that the emphasis on the concept in definitions made on various platforms such as TikTok and Twitter is an expectation of withdrawal from an ambitious and intense work schedule rather than being on the eve of a resignation (Constantz, 2022). As stated earlier, "Tang Ping" or "Lying flat", which came to the fore in 2021 before the "quiet quitting" movement, emerged as an advanced movement against a more hardworking and production-oriented society understanding in China. The environment in which the workers live in China includes a serious cost of living, rising housing prices, and long working hours. The following posts about life experience in this environment offer important clues: Wu Qiang "*Chinese youngsters, or in general the working population, have experienced huge social and political changes in the past nine years, [leading them to realize] that there is neither the possibility for initiating a revolution nor the freedom of expression. Under such a condition, lying down has become the only option,"* and Luo Huazhong *"I haven't been working for two years, I have just been hanging around and I don't see anything wrong with this. Pressure mainly comes from comparisons with your peers and the values of the older generation. These pressures keep popping up…But, we don't have to abide by these (norms). I can live like Diogenes and sleep inside a wooden bucket, enjoying the sunshine. I can live like Heraclitus in a cave, thinking about the "logos." Since this land has never had a school of thought that upholds human subjectivity, I can develop one on my own. Lying down is my movement. Only through lying flat can humans become the measure of all things"(Li, 2022).* In the aforementioned posts, Li (2022) emphasized that the main topic was "hustle culture" and the destructive burden of working "996", that is, 6 days a week work between 9-9 pm in China. Bao (2022) revealed that

this "996" situation in technology companies in China disrupts the work-life balance of employees and causes many negative situations such as "gender inequality" due to working hours.

The situation in China has emerged as the silent scream of individuals against the expectations of the government. It is already seen from statistical data that especially young people (Generation Z) face serious unemployment in China (www.datawrapper.net). As of July 2022, this rate has reached approximately 20%. Despite the increasing competition in the economic problems and the increasing population, the unemployment of individuals now takes away their desire to work in this system and makes their struggle meaningless. In this framework, the new generation, who thinks that they cannot achieve results, is disengaged from life and the business world with the "lie flat" movement. A similar situation is also valid for the other economic power of the world, the USA. Within the scope of the latest data, it is seen that the Z generation feels very unprepared and vulnerable (51%) regarding the future of the USA. This situation is not so optimistic (44-41%) for other generations (X and Y) (www.datawrapper.dwcdn.net). Therefore, it is expected that a similar trend will spread by finding ground in the USA, that is, the Quiet Quitting approach will be adopted. Granger (2022) emphasizes that employees in today's business world focus on two new issues. These topics are the "*balance and avoiding burnout*". In this new framework, it is shared that the employees reconsider their lives and make their evaluations within the framework of these two parameters as much as possible. It is seen the name of this new approach is defined as Quiet quitting. Within the framework of this concept, the main issue is that the employees want to perform their jobs with the required amount of performance, neither too much nor too little.

It seems that the busy work life, increasing workload, hustle culture, and warnings about its possible consequences were put forward before the Chinese “Lie flat” in 2021 and the Quiet Quit in 2022. As a matter of fact, as Harfoush (2019) states in her book “Hustle and Float: Reclaim Your Creativity and Thrive in a World Obsessed with Work”, the relationship between the expectations in the business world and the employee have changed significantly. Especially to keep up with the knowledge economy of the culture, the constant to-do list, the expectation of not leaving unread mail, and the changing customer expectations cause the employees to work harder, work faster, and produce more. In this process, continuous creative solutions and product expectations negatively affect mental and physical health. The new work order with two poles puts a significant strain on the employees. The fact that an employee is both productive and creative, and this situation becomes an expected normal, creates a workforce that is stuck and worn out. Again, it is emphasized in the book that within our working culture, the employee experiences conflict between what s/he wants to do and what s/he should do, and employees are stuck in this conflict (Harfoush, 2019). Hybrid and virtual business models, which remove the uncertainty and work-life limit added to all this business understanding and working culture by the pandemic, cause the employee to be more exhausted and to be stuck between the life they want to live and the life they live. At this point, the silent scream of the employees appears as “Quiet quitting”.

2.1. Is Quite Quitting A Reflection of A Real Issue?

Quiet Quitting is discussed in various media, and a significant amount of comments are made on this subject. However, there is a significant interest in the concept, some authors state that

the issue does not reflect a reality in the business world. Green Carmichael (2022) states that after the “Lying Flat” movement in China, the concept of quiet quitting began to spread, but this issue had no equivalent in the business world. It is stated that the existing posts are formed in social media channels where employees can express their voices comfortably and represent the fantasy world of the employee. Therefore, she claims that this situation has no actual reflection in the real business world. However, contrary to the situation, there are some reports and evaluations that the adoption of quiet quitting behavior is a very real issue both in the business world and in employee life.

A study by Gallup (2022) of 15,091 full- and part-time U.S. employees provides an important picture of the employee quiet quitting trend. In the report, it was shared that during the pandemic process, more expectations were made in terms of workload, especially from young employees with relatively better technology use capacities, and this situation significantly affected the work-life balance of the employees. In the report, it has been determined that 18% of the employees are "*actively disengaged*" in this intense working tempo. Also, it has been revealed that when 35 years of age and under are selected as young employees, this rate reaches 24% and they behave in an *“actively disengaged*” position at the work. Another important finding regarding the perceptions of the employees at work is the rate of those who claim that they do not receive any support for their personal development in the workplace. The rate of those who claim that employees under the age of 35 are not provided with support and learning opportunities for their personal development is 10% higher than those over the age of 35. This situation prevents employees from building a future for themselves in the work and reduces their commitment. Again, it is seen that working in a remote or hybrid system, which has become even more widespread due to the pandemic and various job expectations in the last period, is 12% less accepted by the group (young people) under the age of 35 compared to the other group. Contrary to expectations, this situation reveals that young employees are more "disengaged" in a remote or hybrid working model. This result reveals that businesses that adopt remote and hybrid business models make an important mistake. More than 70% of remote and hybrid employees share that they do not have a clear idea of what is expected of them within the scope of their job description. In other words, it is seen that businesses do not draw a job definition and framework in favor of the employee when they adopt a remote or hybrid business model. When quiet quitting is considered as a decrease in the employee's work-related performance and engagement, it is seen by the data in the report that work engagement decreased with the remote working period. In Figure 1, employee engagement status in the US according to years is shared.

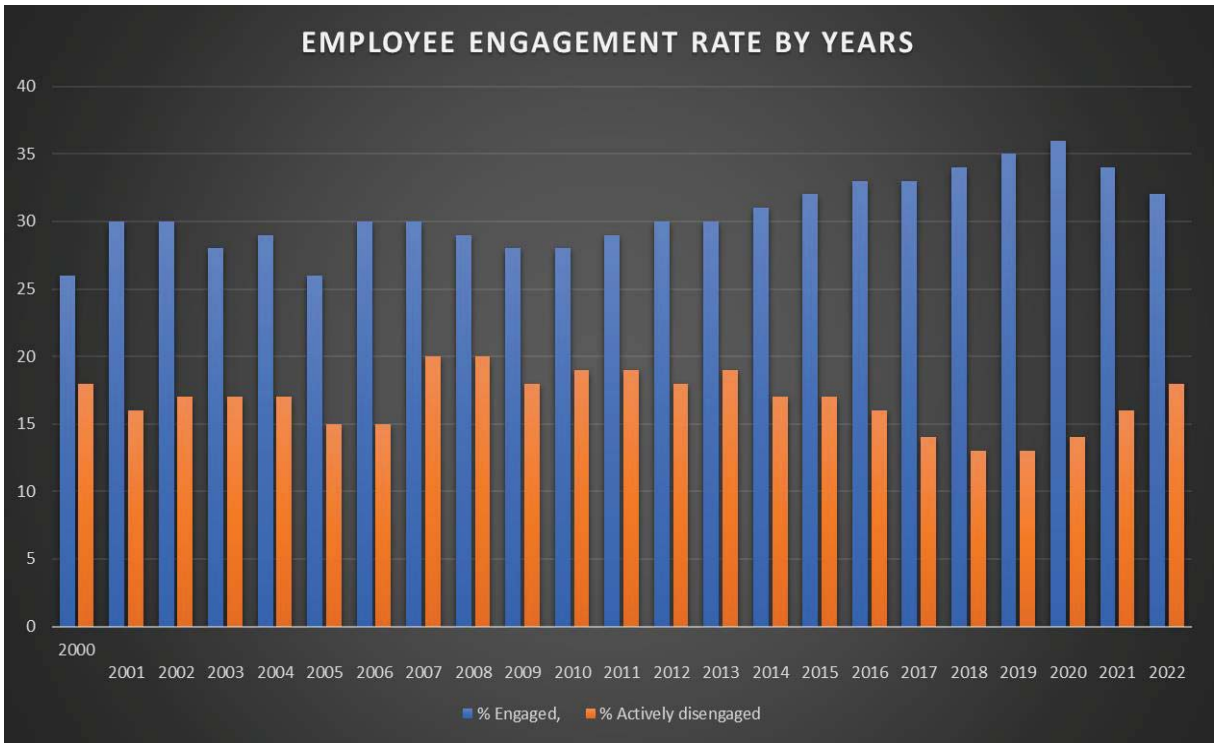


Figure 1: Distribution of Employee Engagement rates of employees by year (US)
Source: Prepared by the author considering the data presented by the Gallup survey (2022).

When Figure 1 is examined in detail, it is seen that the number of "actively disengaged" has increased since 2020. In this context, it reveals that the issue of quiet quitting is not a subject within the fantasy of the employee, but a subject that should be emphasized by both academy and top management.

Another study that offers striking results regarding the concept of quiet quitting is the study of the Axios/Generation Lab poll. The study, which examines the 18-29 age group in detail as an age range, offers important results for Quiet quitting (Pandey, 2022). The number of this social segment, which was born after 1995 and defined as the Z generation (18-27 years old), is increasing day by day in business life. The determination in the report for these employees, who are expected to produce creative business ideas and solutions, points to an important issue. It has been determined that 82% of the Z generation in the workforce have a job-oriented perspective to work with minimum performance and fulfill the minimum job requirements. In addition, it was shared that the expectations and career goals of the participants in the study, contrary to expectations, are not among the important issues compared to other issues in their lives. It was shared that the subjects that they care about and that are at the top of the list are spending time with their family, and close friends, hobbies, taking care of health, and the job is only seen as a job. It is clear that the adoption of the quiet quitting behavior, which can be considered as limiting the effect of business life on private life within the usual employee approach, creates a significant difference in expectations in the new employee profile. Employees now emphasize the need to establish a balance between work and life.

When the Quiet Quitting is considered as a low rate of work engagement, it has a very high cost for the economy. According to The State of Global Workplace Report (2022), this rate is set as US$7.8 trillion--11% of GDP globally. Therefore, the concept of Quiet Quitting is an important issue that needs to be addressed for businesses and economies. In the report, the perceptions of

the employees regarding the work under various headings were examined and it was shared that the work engagement status on a global scale was at the level of 21% and the level of meaning in their work was low.

If the concept of quitting is considered as a defense mechanism developed by employees to protect their well-being, the Global Workforce Resilience Report (2020) offers important findings in this regard. The study, which was carried out on 17,012 participants with a large-scale sample, examined what is the issue that will contribute to the increase in the well-being of the participants. In this context, it was shared that they experienced a significant workload and stress and did not know how to manage it. It was shared that 63% of the participants needed support for the development of their well-being levels.

2.2. The Concept Of Quiet Quitting With The Most Inclusive Definition

In addition to what the concept fully covers, there are determinations that the basic logic of the employees who take action with this concept actually shapes the future. Arianna Huffington's post on Linkedln *"Quiet quitting isn't just about quitting on a job, it's a step toward quitting on life."* emphasizes this point. In other words, the concept indicates that there are some problems in the business culture that need to be addressed and that employees are starting to give up on their business life, where they spend a significant part of their lives. It is determined that the concept of quiet quitting will be experienced more intensely in the coming periods. McGregor (2022) shared that the quiet quitting behavior will spread with increasing momentum after the pandemic. Therefore, it would be appropriate to define the concept of quiet quitting in its inclusive form and to deal with it in future research. All definitions mentioned in the study and associated with the concept of quiet quitting regarding employee comments have been dealt with collectively and a framework definition and concept have been tried to be created. In this context, the concept of quite quitting could be defined as follows:

Due to the hustle culture experienced by the employee in business life, Quiet quitting is the new generation employee withdrawal by exhibiting low work engagement and dissatisfaction against workplace issues (stress, anxiety, workload, lack of support, anger, etc.) that will reduce well-being, cause work-family conflict and burnout and social, economic and psychological issues caused by being unemployed.

3. CONCLUSION

In the recent period, the pandemic, globalization and technological developments and some changes experienced in the nature of work and increasing expectations have built the hustle culture. This changing business culture necessitates the employee to be constantly productive, efficient, and dynamic. However, the continuity of these expectations and the fact that the performance exhibited was not valued enough by the enterprises caused unemployment and future anxiety among the employees. In addition, the increase in competition for those working in the business world and the decrease in their earnings paved the way for them to exhibit quiet quitting behavior. Quiet quitting behavior, which has repercussions on a global scale with the pandemic period and has become an increasing employee behavior by considering the findings in the reports, appears as an issue that should be emphasized. Quiet quitting is a new employee

withdrawal developed against workplace issues that will reduce well-being by meeting the requirements of the job at a minimum due to the hustle culture in business life, and cause work-family conflict and burnout. In addition, it is avoidance of the social, economic, and psychological issues caused by being unemployed by exhibiting low work engagement and dissatisfaction at work. Therefore, it is important to develop a new management approach for changing conditions with this new employee withdrawal. As a matter of fact, with quiet quitting, employees and businesses in the short term, and society in the medium and long term may experience irreversible and harmful experiences far beyond our expectations. To reduce the number of employees who adopt Quiet quitting, first of all, an effective communication method should be developed, performance should be rewarded with a fair wage, the job should be meaningful for the employee, and the support and development opportunities needed in the workplace should be provided. In addition, the selected remote or hybrid work style should have a detailed job description and provide the necessary flexibility to the employee. Also, policies may be adopted in the organization, which is defined as "quiet hiring" adopted by some technology companies, and enable employees who perform above the expected can earn more income and have career development opportunities.

Quiet quitting is a concept that is spoken very loudly by the employees, although it contains silence in terms of the words that make it up, and it indicates an important issue. This is an issue that poses a significant threat to the world economy, business performance, and the long-term level of meaning of life for the employee. Therefore, it is clear that the issue of Quiet Quiting should be on the agenda of top management and academicians immediately. Due to the newness of the concept, a very limited number of studies have been reached in various indexes. In this context, it is considered that it would be appropriate to study the concept in academia to determine the current situation in enterprises and to increase awareness of this issue for effective management practices.

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