

Quiet Quitting vs. Active Disengagement: Understanding the Modern Employee Mindset

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Received: 26 March 2026;

Revised: 12 April 2026;

Accepted: 26 April 2026

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ABSTRACT- Technology, remote work, globalization and changing expectations of employees have had a huge impact on the modern-day workplace. Quiet quitting and active disengagement are among the growing trends in the workplace and have become a major concern for organizations across the world. Quiet quitting is when employees do only what they are supposed to do, and they do not do any discretionary work above and beyond the call of the duty. Active disengagement occurs when employees emotionally detach, lose motivation, and engage in negative behavior in the workplace. The study examined the distinction between quiet quitting and active disengagement, and the drivers, organizational impact and implications for employee engagement

This research design is qualitative and conceptual based on secondary data from academic journals, organizational reports, employee surveys and workplace studies. The results suggest that burnout, poor leadership, lack of recognition, poor work-life balance and limited growth opportunities at work are the key drivers of employee disengagement. The study also finds that quiet quitting is usually associated with boundary-setting and work-life balance, while active disengagement is an indicator of deeper dissatisfaction and emotional disconnection from the organization's goals.

This paper says both behaviors are bad for organizational productivity, employee morale, workplace culture and long-term sustainability. However, active disengagement is more serious problem for an organisation as it has adverse effects on teamwork and relationships at workplace. The research points to the importance of supportive leadership, recognition of employees, flexible work policies, mental health support and the opportunities for career development to improve employee engagement. The research finds that organizations should implement employee-centered management practices to build a positive and sustainable workplace environment to reduce disengagement.

KEYWORDS- Quiet Quitting, Active Disengagement, Employee Engagement, Burnout, Workplace Culture, Organizational Behavior, Employee Mindset.

I. INTRODUCTION

Technology, globalization, remote working culture and changing employee expectations are rapidly changing the modern workplace. In the last few years there have been more evident shifts in attitudes regarding work commitment, productivity and organizational loyalty in organizations all around the world. Two workplace trends that have been getting a lot of attention are “quiet quitting” and “active disengagement.” Quiet resigning is when employees accomplish the task allocated and no discretionary extra effort. Active disengagement is reflected in emotional detachment, less motivation, and bad job habits. These trends have accelerated since the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made workers rethink work-life balance, mental health and professional responsibilities.

Quiet quitting does not necessarily mean quitting or doing a poor job. Instead, it speaks to employees' efforts to draw boundaries between work and home life. Many employees don't see heavy workloads and overtime as signs of dedication or success. But they are more focused on mental health, flexibility and personal gratification. Active disengagement, conversely, is a severe organizational challenge where workers become emotionally disconnected from their surroundings. This can have damaging effects on team spirit and output. Such behaviors can have a big impact on organizational performance, employee retention, workplace culture and innovation. These behaviours manifesting in the workplace have posed challenges for organisations in maintaining employee engagement and productivity. Burnout, poor management, lack of recognition, lack of career advancement, and a poor organizational culture are all common reasons why employees become disengaged. Therefore, it is important that managers, human resource professionals, and organizational leaders understand the differences between quiet quitting and active disengagement. This study seeks to explore the causes, implications and organizational impact of these modern employee mindsets while exploring strategies that organizations can adopt to improve engagement, motivation and long-term workforce sustainability.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement and workplace behavior have emerged as prominent research areas in contemporary organizational studies. Recently, there has been a lot of talk about the concepts of quiet quitting and active disengagement due to changing employee expectations, workplace stress, and shifting organizational culture. Various factors affecting employee motivation, work commitment and psychological attachment to organizations have been studied by researchers.

Quiet quitting is often defined as a work-related behavioral pattern where employees confine their work effort to the responsibilities stated in their job descriptions and refrain from any extra discretionary effort.

Harris [1] adopted the concept of commitment as our conceptual lens for explicating how employees' quiet quitting is manifested and utilize a longitudinal, qualitative research design to gauge outcomes.

Similarly, Kumar [2] discusses the need for transformation of conventional HR approaches to tackle the origins of disengagement such as burnout, work-life conflict and shifting employee goals. This review synthesizes results from current studies and case studies and offers practical advice to HR practitioners to enhance authentic engagement, enhance well-being and reduce turnover risks in an evolving work environment.

Several studies have identified burnout and workplace stress as major causes of employee disengagement. Ng et al. [3] which describes as a formal clinical syndrome arising from occupational stress characterised by (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalisation and (3) loss of professional fulfilment[9][10] and associated with psychiatric sequelae such as depression, anxiety and suicidality in medical practitioners and adverse effects on patient care[11].

According to Afrahi r [4], work disengagement has been examined by reviewing and synthesizing previous studies to better understand its underlying assumptions and dimensions. The study makes three significant contributions. First, it emphasizes that disengagement should be studied as an independent concept because it can function as a coping mechanism in response to workplace stress and organizational pressures. Second, the authors develop a typology of antecedents associated with disengagement that aligns with existing theoretical frameworks. Third, the study proposes a distinction between engaged, not engaged, and disengaged employees in order to explain different levels of work dedication and to support the development of evidence-based human resource interventions.

Kim et al. [5] examines 36 peer-reviewed articles that address leadership strategies for engaging employees in non-traditional work arrangements. Grounded in the job

demands-resources model, self-determination theory, and social exchange theory, we examine the role of leaders as a major driver and mediator of job demands and resources.

Moreover, Employee disengagement has been described by theoretical views[6] such as the Job Demands–Resources Theory and Social Exchange Theory. These ideas state that too many job expectations and too little organizational support generate discontent, burnout and emotional retreat in employees.

Rathod et al.[7] research examines the numerous problems involved with the adoption of AI, and discusses significant ways for minimizing AI related anxiety among individuals and businesses.

Work by Saraiva et al. [8] is focused on enhancing employee happiness, motivation and organizational commitment, especially for Gen Y and Z personnel. Organisations need to be aligned to the changing expectations of the modern workforce, or they will face negative repercussions such as decreased productivity, increased staff turnover and weaker organisational performance, and in the long term, will not be able to continue competitiveness.

Saraiva et al. [9] explore this trend in the context of contemporary workplace dynamics, considering relevant literature and existing research. The results indicate that quiet resignation is not a new labor phenomenon, but has been quietly happening in workplaces for a long time. It also discovered that a variety of organizational and workplace characteristics can contribute to employees engaging in quiet quitting practices. “The research also reveals that the trend is not just for the younger generation but is also relevant for employees of all ages and professions.

In summary, the current evidence indicates that quiet quitting and active disengagement are associated but different occurrences at work. Quiet leaving is a type of boundary setting and reduction in discretionary effort, while active disengagement is a more severe emotional and psychological detachment from organizational goals. Organizations are encouraged to adopt employee-centric management techniques to enhance workplace happiness, employee well-being, and the long-term viability of the organization, as emphasized in the literature.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between workplace stress factors, employee dissatisfaction, quiet quitting behavior, and active disengagement. It talks about how organizational issues such as burnout, poor management, not enough recognition and the work/life balance impact on reduced employee engagement and organizational performance.

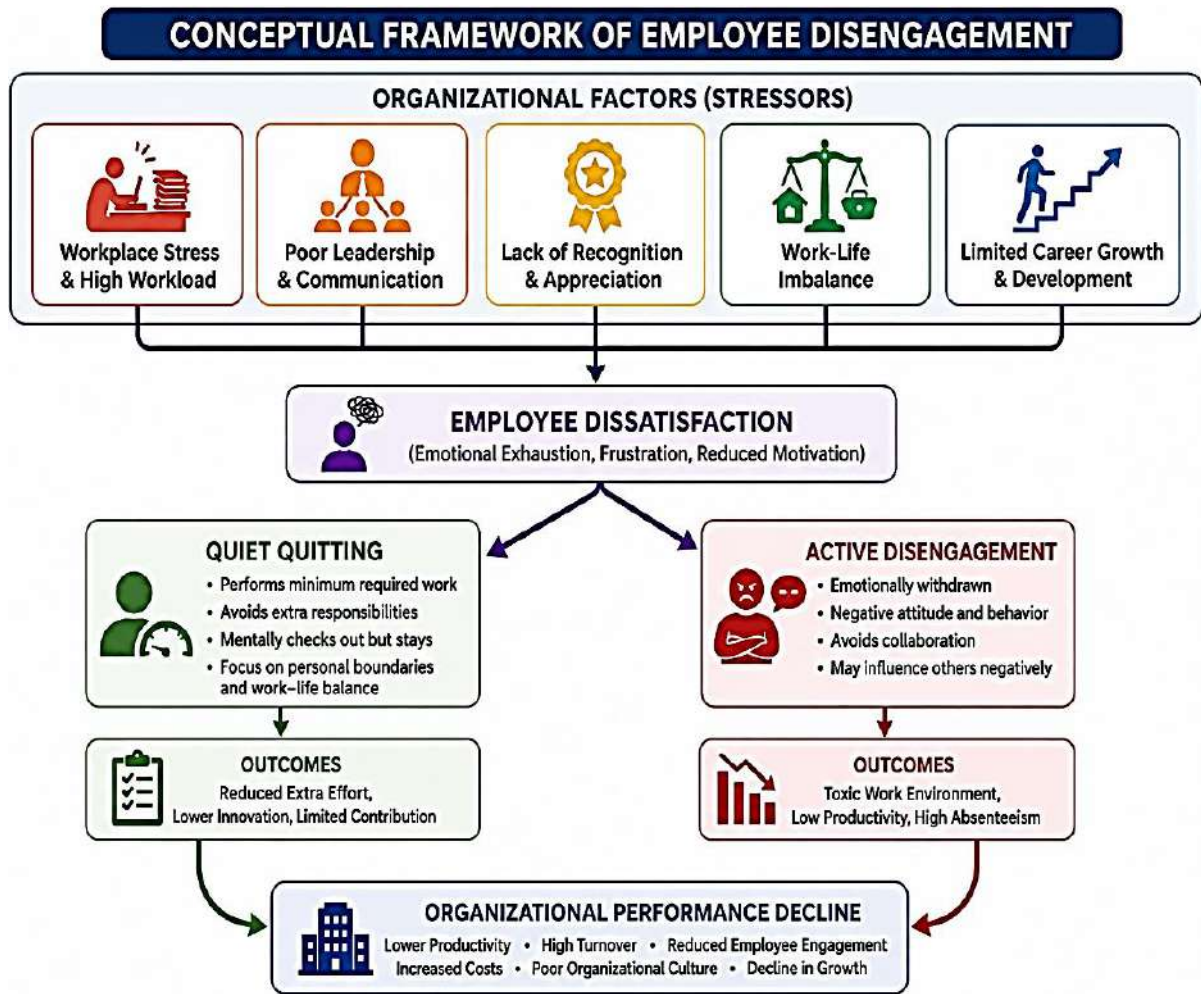


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of Employee Disengagement

We illustrate the conceptual connection between workplace stressors, employee dissatisfaction, quiet quitting, active disengagement, and decline in organizational performance in Figure 1. It explains how negative working conditions affect the behavior of employees and eventually impact the productivity and culture of organizations.

The framework identifies several major workplace stressors at the top. These include burnout and work stress, poor leadership and management, lack of recognition and rewards, work-life imbalance, and limited career growth opportunities. These organizational factors are the main causes of dissatisfaction of employees.

The second level of the framework deals with employee dissatisfaction which includes emotional exhaustion, frustration, low motivation and feeling undervalued. This dissatisfaction leads to two different behavioral responses from employees: quiet quitting and active disengagement. Quiet quitting on the left means employees do the bare minimum, avoid extra duties and focus on their well-being and work-life balance. These employees are functional, but they limit discretionary effort and innovation in the organization.

Active disengagement on the right side is a more serious condition, in which employees become emotionally detached, display negative workplace attitudes, reduce cooperation, and may negatively influence coworkers. The behavior leads to absenteeism, negativity in the workplace, and increased turnover.

Finally, besides quiet quitting, active disengagement creates the deterioration of organizational performance such as lower productivity, lower employee engagement, bad organizational culture, increased operational costs, and slower organizational growth. The framework shows the direct effect of workplace stress and dissatisfaction on the employee's behavior and organizational outcomes.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study uses a qualitative and conceptual research approach to investigate the emerging phenomena of quiet quitting and active disengagement at the workplace. The research is primarily focused on understanding employee behaviors, organizational factors, and workplace trends that affect the mindsets of modern employees. The descriptive research design is used to analyze the relationship between employee engagement, workplace culture, leadership practices and organizational outcomes. Secondary data for this study were collected from a diverse range of academic and professional sources including peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, organisational reports, business magazines, employee engagement surveys and human resource management studies. In order to get a complete picture of the topic, we performed a systematic review of the literature on workplace disengagement, burnout, employee motivation, organizational behavior and post-pandemic work culture.

The data collection process consisted of searching reliable and up-to-date sources that discussed the idea of quiet quitting, active disengagement, employee well-being and workplace satisfaction. The data collected was categorized into major themes including causes of disengagement, organizational impact, influence of leadership, work-life balance and employee motivation. Findings were systematically analysed and organised using thematic analysis. This method assisted in identifying recurring patterns, similarities and differences between quiet quitting and active disengagement behaviors (See the below Figure 1).

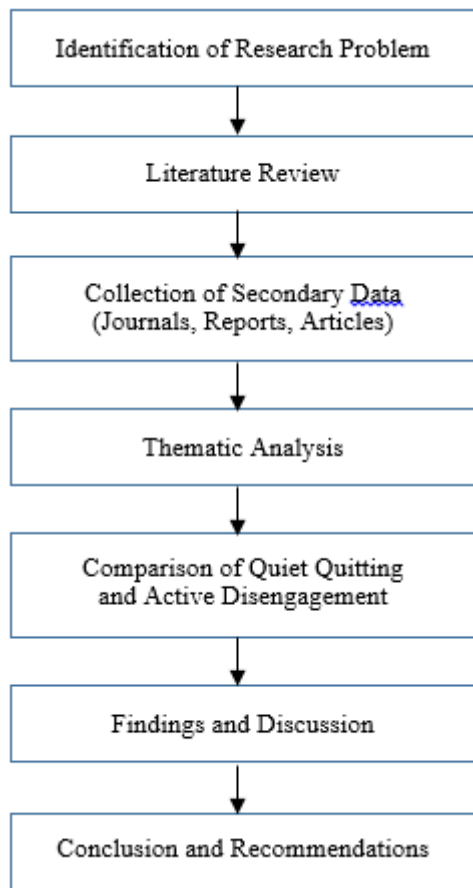


Figure 2: Research Methodology Framework

Comparative analysis is also used in the research to differentiate the features and organizational implications of both workplace phenomena.

In the study, different organizational factors including leadership style, recognition system, workload management, and career development opportunities were critically examined for their impact on employee engagement levels. As it is conceptual in nature, no primary survey or experimental investigation has been carried out. Nevertheless, the study offers important theoretical implications and practical recommendations for organizations seeking to improve employee engagement, workplace satisfaction, and the long-term sustainability of the organization.

V. QUIET QUITTING VS. ACTIVE DISENGAGEMENT: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The main differences between quiet quitting and active disengagement in the areas of employee behaviour, emotional involvement, workplace attitude and organisational impact are highlighted in Table 1 below. Quiet quitting is frequently conceptualized as a passive, intentional response to job stress, whereby employees do their work but set their own boundaries around what they will and won't do. Active disengagement however, is a more serious type of dissatisfaction and emotional withdrawal that can affect organizational culture, employee morale, and productivity negatively. The comparison indicates that quiet quitting is less damaging for organisations than active disengagement.

Table 1: Comparison between Quiet Quitting and Active Disengagement

Basis of Comparison	Quiet Quitting	Active Disengagement
Meaning	Employees perform only assigned duties without extra effort	Employees become emotionally disconnected from work
Employee Attitude	Boundary-setting and work-life balance focused	Negative and dissatisfied attitude toward work
Work Performance	Completes minimum required tasks	Reduced productivity and poor performance
Emotional Involvement	Low emotional attachment but still functional	Complete emotional withdrawal
Workplace Behavior	Neutral behavior	Negative workplace behavior
Team Impact	Limited effect on coworkers	May negatively influence team morale
Organizational Impact	Reduced innovation and initiative	Toxic work environment and communication issues
Motivation Level	Moderate	Very low
Intention to Leave	Possible but not immediate	Highly likely
Main Causes	Burnout, work-life imbalance, stress	Toxic culture, poor leadership, dissatisfaction
Effect on Productivity	Moderate decline	Severe decline
Employee Participation	Avoids extra responsibilities	Avoids collaboration and involvement

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that quiet quitting, active disengagement and changes in employee expectations, workplace stress and organizational culture are closely related to each other. Today's workers care more about mental health, work/life balance, flexibility and job satisfaction than they do about

traditional workplace standards like long hours and being available 24/7. This has prompted many workers to re-examine just how much emotional and professional investment they want to put into organizations. One of the key findings from the research is that the main reasons for employee disengagement are burnout and stress at work. Those employees who are under constant pressure, face unrealistic deadlines, excessive workloads and lack of organizational support are more likely to reduce their engagement levels. Quiet quitting is often a coping mechanism, as employees try to protect their mental health and set boundaries at work. They still do the thing they are supposed to do but don't go the extra mile that may affect their personal life and mental health. The study also found that active disengagement is more damaging to organizations than quiet quitting. Actively disengaged employees are likely to feel emotionally disconnected from the goals of the organisation and may demonstrate negative work environment behaviour, decreased collaboration, absenteeism and low motivation. Such employees can have a negative effect on their co-workers, drag the team morale down and create a toxic environment at work. This can have a huge effect on productivity, communication and the organizational culture. Another key finding is the importance of leadership and recognition on employee engagement. When employees feel valued, supported and recognised by management they're less likely to become disengaged. The main reasons for employees' dissatisfaction and emotional withdrawal are lack of appreciation, poor leadership, limited career development opportunities and bad communication.

The findings also show how the emergence of remote and hybrid working models has altered employee perceptions of flexibility and autonomy at the workplace. Employees are increasingly requesting organisations to support work-life balance, mental health and flexible working conditions. "Companies that fail to keep up with these evolving expectations will see an increase in turnover, a decrease in productivity and a decline in employee engagement." In short, the research shows that quiet quitting and active disengagement are not just employee issues, they are signs of bigger organizational and managerial problems. Organizations need to implement employee-centric policies, supportive leadership, recognition systems and wellness initiatives to improve engagement, organizational culture and long-term sustainability.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Conclusion

This research has identified quiet quitting and active disengagement as two major workplace phenomena reflecting the change in employee mindsets today. Behaviour is strongly influenced by factors such as burnout, workplace stress, poor leadership, lack of recognition, work-life imbalance and limited career growth opportunities. But the nature and organizational impact of these behaviors are very different. Quiet quitting is usually a passive action where employees do just enough to get the job done within their scope of work but still maintain their personal boundaries and mental well-being. Active disengagement on the other hand is a deeper emotional disengagement that is characterized by low motivation,

negative workplace behaviour and low organisational commitment.

The results suggest that disengagement is not only an individual problem, but also a symptom of organizational culture, quality of leadership and workplace practices. Organizations that fail to invest in employee well-being and professional development risk lower productivity, low morale, poor organizational culture and high employee attrition. More flexible work arrangements plus greater awareness of mental health has also changed what employees expect of work and relationships in organisations.

B. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Encourage work-life balance by having flexible work policies and fair work distribution.
- Managers and leaders should have a helpful and sympathetic leadership style to gain the trust and motivation of their staff.
- Improving employee recognition and reward programs to boost work satisfaction and organizational commitment.
- Organizations should have mental health support programs and offer counselling services and have stress management measures to reduce burnout.
- Offer career development opportunities (training, mentorships and promotion opportunities) to support long-term employee involvement.
- Build employee feedback and communications systems that may be used to identify issues in the workplace and build bonds within the firm.
- Organizations will foster a positive and inclusive work environment that values employee health and wellness, teamwork and professional development.

Implementing these recommendations can help organizations reduce employee disengagement, improve workplace satisfaction, and achieve sustainable organizational performance.

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