



Original Article (Qualitative)

Investigating the Formation Process of Quiet Quitting in Public Sector Organizations

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Abstract

The present study aims to explain the factors contributing to the formation of “quiet quitting” among employees in government organizations and to provide a conceptual model. This study is qualitative in nature, and was designed based on the Grounded Theory approach. Data were collected through 17 semi-structured interviews with employees and managers of public organizations by purposive sampling; the participant selection process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Data analysis was performed by a three-stage coding method (open, axial, and selective coding) within MaxQDA 10 software.

The findings revealed that quiet quitting results from a complex interaction of **causal factors**, including organizational injustice, inappropriate leadership styles, limited career growth opportunities, and workload; **contextual factors**, such as unfavorable organizational culture and bureaucratic structures; and **intervening factors**, including individual characteristics and the level of social support. In response to these conditions, employees adopt **strategies** such as reducing job effort, organizational silence, and focusing on personal interests, which lead to **consequences** such as decreased job satisfaction, burnout, and diminished organizational productivity. The results of this research not only contribute to theory development in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management but also serve as a foundation for designing management policies and strategies to mitigate quiet quitting and enhance employee commitment and motivation in the public sector.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

In recent years, public organizations have encountered emerging challenges in human resource management, most notably the gradual decline in employee motivation, commitment, and active participation in organizational tasks (Ghasemi Zargar et al., 2024). This phenomenon, known in management literature as “Quiet Quitting,” refers to a state where employees refrain from performing roles beyond their minimum job requirements without officially resigning. Consequently, their level of effort, creativity, and accountability drops to the bare minimum expected (Pourshahabi et al., 2023). Unlike overt turnover, quiet quitting develops subtly and gradually, making its identification and management significantly more difficult for public sector leaders (Zhang et al., 2025).

Quiet quitting describes a condition in which employees limit their involvement in organizational activities and settle for performing only their core job duties while remaining on the payroll. This phenomenon represents a form of psychological detachment from the organization, stemming from a decline in motivation, commitment, and psychological capital, which can have substantial implications for both individual and organizational performance. In organizational behavior literature, quiet quitting is closely related to concepts such as psychological withdrawal, organizational silence, and the reduction of organizational citizenship behaviors (Ozen et al., 2024).

The emergence of quiet quitting in government organizations can be attributed to a constellation of individual, organizational, and structural factors. These include perceived organizational injustice, weak incentive systems, limited opportunities for growth and promotion, inappropriate leadership styles, job stress, lack of involvement in decision-making, and the gap between employee expectations and workplace realities. The interaction of these factors fosters psychological and behavioral withdrawal, ultimately undermining organizational efficiency, the quality of public services, and employee trust in the management system (Rahman et al., 2025). Previous research has also demonstrated that quiet quitting is correlated with job burnout, high workload, authoritarian leadership styles, and restrictive organizational cultures (Hu et al., 2022). Thus, quiet quitting is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interplay of individual, organizational, and environmental factors, requiring a simultaneous analysis of causal, contextual, and intervening roles (Zarin Negar et al., 2024).

Given the vital role of human resources in achieving the missions of public organizations, a precise understanding of the factors shaping quiet quitting is of paramount importance. Explaining these factors not only enriches the theoretical literature of human resource management and organizational behavior but also provides a foundation for designing effective policies and managerial strategies to enhance employee motivation, commitment, and engagement. Therefore, the present research seeks to address the fundamental question: What are the factors influencing the formation of quiet quitting among employees in government organizations?

Theoretical Framework

Quiet Quitting

The concept of quiet quitting emerges when an employee “leaves” their employer mentally while remaining on the payroll. To clarify, quiet quitting can be defined as a state where an employee is physically present at the workplace but behaves as if they have resigned, performing only the bare minimum required to avoid termination (Zhang et al., 2025).

Quiet quitting can be summarized as employees mentally abandoning their jobs as a form of “rebellion” against routine work life (Dowlatabadi et al., 2025). The factors that trigger quiet



quitting and lead to employee discouragement and detachment include: lack of career development opportunities, perceived lack of organizational value for employees, decreased employee engagement, lack of autonomy, and the erosion of organizational trust (Mahand et al., 2023).

Yu et al. (2026), in a study titled “*Quiet Quitting of Employees Using Spatial Econometric Methods*,” confirmed the existence of intersections and spillover effects in quiet quitting behaviors within organizations. The generalizability of this methodological framework can further contribute to understanding a wide range of organizational behaviors by accounting for social interactions in the workplace.

Xu et al. (2026), in their research titled “*Mindfulness and Small Talk: Unlocking Engagement and Quiet Quitting in the Workplace*,” utilized Interaction Ritual Theory to examine the roles of mindfulness and workplace small talk in shaping job engagement and quiet quitting among hospitality employees in the United States. Using three waves of data collection, the results fully supported the hypotheses: mindfulness enhances job engagement, and workplace small talk boosts engagement specifically for employees with lower levels of mindfulness. Higher levels of job engagement, in turn, were associated with lower levels of quiet quitting and mediated the relationship between mindfulness and quiet quitting.

Research Methodology

Given the nature of the subject and the research objectives, this study employs a **qualitative research design** based on the **Grounded Theory** approach. The target population consisted of employees and managers of public organizations who possessed direct experience within government work environments.

Sampling was conducted through **purposive** and **theoretical sampling** techniques. The participant selection process continued until **theoretical saturation** was achieved, which was ultimately reached after 17 in-depth, semi-structured interviews.

Data analysis was conducted simultaneously with data collection by the **three-stage coding method**, including **open, axial, and selective coding**.

1. In the **open coding** stage, initial concepts were extracted from the interview transcripts; after refining and merging similar concepts, primary and secondary open codes were established.
2. During the **axial coding** stage, the relationships between codes and categories were identified and organized into sub-categories and axial categories.
3. In the **selective coding** stage, the axial categories were integrated into a coherent **paradigmatic model**, and the core phenomenon of the research was identified.

The software **MAXQDA 10** was utilized for the systematic organization and analysis of the data.

Research Findings

The findings indicate that **quiet quitting** is the result of a complex interaction between:

- **Causal Conditions:** including organizational injustice, inappropriate leadership styles, limited career growth opportunities, and excessive workload.
- **Contextual Factors:** such as an unfavorable organizational culture and rigid bureaucratic structures.
- **Intervening Conditions:** including individual employee characteristics and the level of social support.

In response to these conditions, employees adopt certain **strategies**, such as reducing job effort, organizational silence, and shifting focus toward personal interests. These strategies

lead to **consequences** such as decreased job satisfaction, burnout, and diminished organizational productivity.

The results of this study not only contribute to theory development in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management but also provide a strategic framework for designing managerial policies aimed at mitigating quiet quitting and enhancing employee commitment and motivation within government organizations.

Discussion and Conclusion

The research findings indicate that deficiencies in human resource management processes—such as payment discrimination and the absence of clear promotion criteria—are among the most fundamental factors shaping quiet quitting in government organizations. When employees perceive that their efforts go unrecognized and that rewards are based on personal connections (nepotism) rather than merit, they become psychologically detached from the organization. This finding is consistent with **Arar et al. (2023)**, who argue that flaws in managerial frameworks are the primary drivers of quiet quitting. Furthermore, **Mahand et al. (2023)** emphasize that a weak reward system transforms potential opportunities for commitment into opportunities for withdrawal.

In this study, authoritarian leadership and a lack of managerial support were identified as key causal factors. In public structures, managers who focus solely on top-down directives and fail to provide positive feedback foster an atmosphere of mistrust. This result aligns with the findings of **Yogurtcu et al. (2024)**, who demonstrated that in educational and administrative environments, non-supportive leadership styles lead directly to decreased motivation and the performance of only minimum duties.

Regarding workload and burnout, the results showed that high job demands, coupled with staffing shortages and time pressure, lead to job burnout. In such cases, quiet quitting serves as a “defense mechanism” to preserve mental health. These results corroborate the findings of **Zhang (2024)**, who specifically highlighted this relationship between burnout and quiet quitting. Additionally, **Sürmeli & Boy (2024)** maintain that in sensitive sectors, burnout resulting from excessive workload poses a significant risk to the overall performance of the system.

Data analysis further revealed that the discrepancy between the organization’s initial promises and the existing realities causes disillusionment among employees. This gap leads individuals to feel that their “psychological contract” with the organization has been violated. **Fomical et al. (2024)** view this situation as a “paradigm shift” in the post-pandemic world, where employees are no longer willing to go beyond their written obligations for an organization that fails to fulfill its promises.

The findings also indicated that the lack of effective interactions and poor information flow in government organizations result in role ambiguity and employee isolation. When feedback systems are absent, employees feel ignored. This finding is consistent with the results of **Yu et al. (2026)**.

Furthermore, the analysis suggests that successive management changes and the prevalence of temporary contracts within the public sector have created a sense of mental instability. In response to this uncertainty, employees reduce their effort to conserve energy for potential opportunities outside the organization. This situation aligns with the findings of **Nouri et al. (2025)**.

Finally, the research findings confirmed that rigid hierarchies, extreme centralization, and complex regulations in government organizations inhibit creativity and dynamism. In such structures, employees feel like mere “cogs in a large machine” with no power to effect change. This finding is consistent with the theory proposed by **Samnani et al. (2025)**.