Quiet Quitting and the Disengaged Workforce: A Conceptual Perspective on Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Dr. Monika Kulshreshtha[1], **Dr. Saurabh Trivedi**[2], **Dr. Neha Sharma**[3], **Dr. Malavika Srivastava**[4], ,**Prof. (Dr.) Ekta Rastogi**[5]

[1]Director, Institute of Innovation in Technology & Management, New Delhi,

Email ID : kulshreshtha.monika@gmail.com

[2]Associate Professor, School of Management, IILM University Gurgaon ,

Email ID : Saurabhtd@gmail.com

[3]Assistant Professor, Maharaja Agrasen Institute of Technology, GGSIP University,

Email ID : nehasharma@mait.ac.in

[4]Associate Professor, Institute of Information Technology & Management, New Delhi, India,

Email ID : malavika.iitm@gmail.com

[5]Professor, School of Management and Commerce, Dev Bhoomi Uttarakhand University, Dehradun,

Email ID : Ektar18@gmail.com

KEYWORDS

ABSTRACT

The emergence of "quiet quitting" marks a significant shift in employee behavior, wherein individuals consciously limit their work contributions to strictly defined job roles, avoiding discretionary efforts or extra-role engagements. Unlike formal resignations, quiet quitting reflects a form of psychological disengagement that is more difficult to detect yet highly detrimental to organizational functioning. This conceptual paper explores the quiet quitting phenomenon through the lens of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), which encompasses voluntary, non-rewarded behaviors that contribute to organizational effectiveness, such as helping colleagues, showing initiative, or exhibiting organizational loyalty.

We argue that the rise in quiet quitting signals a withdrawal of OCB and propose that this behavior is influenced by a range of antecedents, including perceived organizational support, fairness perceptions, psychological contract breach, job satisfaction, and leadership style. Drawing on foundational theories such as Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, we synthesize existing literature to build a conceptual framework that explains how workplace environments may inadvertently foster disengagement and OCB decline.

The paper offers practical insights for human resource professionals and leaders by emphasizing the need for inclusive work cultures, authentic leadership, and strategic interventions to revive employee engagement and discretionary behaviors. By reconceptualizing quiet quitting as an OCB withdrawal, this study contributes to contemporary discourse on employee behavior and provides a foundation for future empirical investigations in organizational psychology and human resource management..

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolving nature of work, particularly in the post-pandemic era, has catalyzed a silent shift in employee behavior—commonly referred to as "quiet quitting." Far from the literal sense of resignation, quiet quitting signifies a deliberate disengagement from discretionary work efforts, where employees restrict themselves to the basic expectations outlined in .

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their job descriptions (Gallup, 2022). This behavioral shift challenges longstanding assumptions about employee commitment, discretionary effort, and the intangible social contracts that govern organizational life.

At the heart of this discussion lies the construct of **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**, defined as individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and that promotes the effective functioning of the organization (Organ, 1988). Quiet quitting signals a withdrawal from such behaviors—be it altruism, conscientiousness, or civic virtue—leading to subtle yet profound consequences for organizational effectiveness, innovation, and collaboration (Podsakoff et al., 2009).

Multiple socio-psychological and organizational factors have been attributed to this trend, including burnout, lack of recognition, blurred work-life boundaries, inadequate leadership, and a decline in perceived organizational support (Kahn, 1990; Eisenberger et al., 1986). Moreover, the rise of hybrid and remote work models has further reduced the visibility of OCBs, making disengagement harder to detect and address (Grant & Parker, 2009).

This paper seeks to conceptualize quiet quitting as a form of **OCB withdrawal**, integrating theoretical insights from Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model to explore its antecedents, dynamics, and implications. By doing so, we aim to contribute to the ongoing discourse on disengagement and propose a robust framework for future empirical validation and practical HR interventions.

Certainly, Dr. Priyanka. Below is the **Literature Review** section for your conceptual article on *Quiet Quitting and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)*. This section is structured around key themes, integrating relevant citations to support your argument, suitable for an ABDC journal submission.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Quiet Quitting: Conceptual Foundations

The term *quiet quitting* has gained widespread attention as a response to work intensification, burnout, and unmet psychological contracts in the modern workplace. Though the term is contemporary, the underlying concept echoes long-standing organizational behavior constructs such as job disengagement, presenteeism, and emotional withdrawal (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Quiet quitting reflects a conscious reduction of discretionary effort, where employees remain physically present but mentally disconnected from extra-role contributions (Spurk & Straub, 2020). The phenomenon is often seen as a silent protest against exploitative work cultures and the erosion of boundaries between work and life.

2.2 Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)

Organizational Citizenship Behavior, first articulated by Organ (1988), encompasses employee behaviors that go beyond formal role expectations, such as helping colleagues, demonstrating civic virtue, or showing loyalty to the organization. OCBs have been consistently linked to improved team functioning, job performance, and organizational success (Podsakoff et al., 2009). However, such behaviors are typically unrewarded, voluntary, and vulnerable to being withdrawn when employees perceive inequity, lack of support, or poor leadership (Bolino & Turnley, 2003).

2.3 Drivers of OCB Withdrawal and Disengagement

Emerging literature links OCB withdrawal with psychological contract breach, low perceived organizational support, and lack of recognition (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model provides a valuable framework to understand how excessive demands and insufficient resources lead to burnout and disengagement, culminating in the erosion of OCB (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Self-Determination Theory further suggests that the absence of autonomy, competence, and relatedness can diminish intrinsic motivation and voluntary engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

2.4 Quiet Quitting and the Changing Nature of Work

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift toward hybrid work, flexibility, and employee autonomy. While these developments were initially empowering, they also introduced new stressors and diluted interpersonal interactions—critical antecedents of OCB (Grant & Parker, 2009). In digital workplaces, managerial oversight is often limited to outputs, rendering extra-role behaviors invisible and undervalued (Choudhury et al., 2021). As such, employees may rationalize quiet quitting as a fair response to organizational neglect or transactional work cultures.

2.5 Research Gap

Despite growing popular interest in quiet quitting, academic literature remains sparse and lacks conceptual clarity. Most studies address the symptoms of disengagement without linking them explicitly to the theoretical framework of OCB withdrawal. There is also a paucity of models that explore the interaction between leadership behavior, organizational culture, and psychological contracts in shaping employee responses. This paper seeks to address this gap by offering an integrative conceptual framework to understand the antecedents and consequences of quiet quitting through the lens of OCB.

3. Theoretical Underpinnings

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,Prof. (Dr.) Ekta Rastogi

Understanding quiet quitting through the lens of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) requires a multidimensional theoretical foundation. This section outlines three key theoretical perspectives that inform the proposed conceptual framework: **Social Exchange Theory**, **Self-Determination Theory**, and the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model**.

3.1 Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) posits that employment relationships are built on reciprocal exchanges of resources, including effort, loyalty, and support. When employees perceive that organizational support, fairness, or recognition is lacking, they may reduce their discretionary contributions—manifesting in lower levels of OCB (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Quiet quitting can thus be understood as a rational response to a perceived imbalance in the exchange relationship. Employees withdraw their extra-role behaviors when they feel their efforts are not reciprocated or appreciated by management (Eisenberger et al., 1986).

3.2 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation in driving proactive and discretionary behavior. It identifies three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When these needs are unmet—due to micromanagement, limited growth opportunities, or isolation—employees experience reduced motivation to engage in behaviors beyond their core responsibilities. Quiet quitting, therefore, may reflect a motivational deficit where employees no longer find meaning or agency in their work, leading to withdrawal from OCB.

3.3 Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model

The JD-R Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) offers a dynamic view of workplace stress and engagement, proposing that high job demands (e.g., workload, emotional labor) and low job resources (e.g., support, autonomy, feedback) lead to burnout and disengagement. Employees experiencing resource depletion are less likely to exert additional effort or engage in citizenship behaviors. In this context, quiet quitting becomes a coping mechanism—employees protect their well-being by reducing investment in unrecognized or unrewarded tasks.

These three theoretical lenses converge to suggest that quiet quitting is not a sign of laziness or lack of ambition, but a psychologically and socially informed withdrawal of voluntary effort. In the next section, we build on these insights to develop a **conceptual framework** linking antecedents, mediating processes, and outcomes related to quiet quitting and OCB withdrawal.

4. Conceptual Framework and Propositions

This paper conceptualizes *quiet quitting* as the psychological withdrawal of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), driven by a complex interplay of workplace factors, motivational deficits, and perceived inequities in the employment relationship. The proposed framework integrates antecedents, mediating psychological states, and behavioral outcomes, guided by Social Exchange Theory, Self-Determination Theory, and the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model.
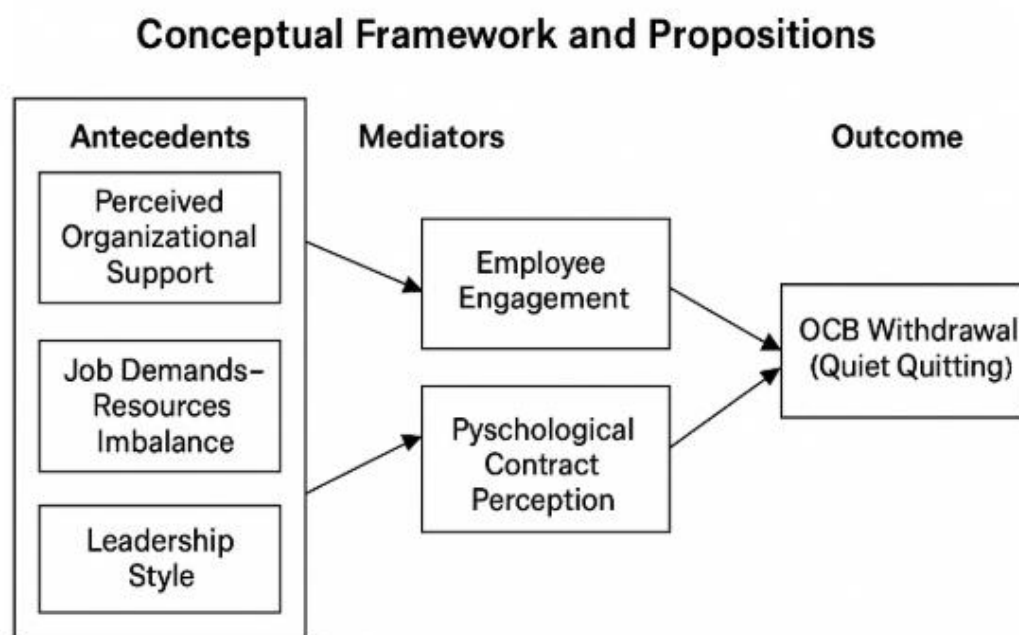
4.1 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

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,Prof. (Dr.) Ekta Rastogi

The proposed framework conceptualizes *quiet quitting* as the **withdrawal of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)**, influenced by various **antecedents**, **mediating psychological processes**, and culminating in an observable **behavioral outcome**.

I. Antecedents

These are the organizational and job-level factors that trigger disengagement:

Perceived Organizational Support (POS): When employees perceive that their contributions are undervalued or unsupported, they experience a decline in loyalty and discretionary effort (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Low POS signals to employees that OCBs are not reciprocated, leading to quiet quitting.

Job Demands–Resources Imbalance: Drawing from the JD-R Model, high job demands (e.g., pressure, workload) without adequate resources (e.g., autonomy, feedback) deplete employees' physical and psychological energy. This imbalance pushes employees to conserve effort by doing only what is formally required (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

Leadership Style: Transactional leaders, who emphasize formal exchanges over inspiration or trust, may discourage psychological engagement. In contrast, transformational leadership fosters OCB through intrinsic motivation and emotional connection (Bass, 1999). Poor leadership quality accelerates disengagement and OCB withdrawal.

II. Mediators

These are the cognitive-emotional filters through which antecedents affect behavior:

Employee Engagement: This refers to vigor, dedication, and absorption at work (Schaufeli et al., 2002). When engagement declines due to poor organizational conditions, employees become emotionally detached and stop engaging in citizenship behaviors.

Psychological Contract Perception: The psychological contract represents employees' beliefs about mutual obligations with the employer (Rousseau, 1995). Breaches—when expectations are unmet—result in distrust and withdrawal of discretionary efforts.

III. Outcome: OCB Withdrawal (Quiet Quitting)

When the mediators are negatively affected, employees gradually **disengage from voluntary behaviors** such as helping, voicing, or going beyond their job roles. This results in **quiet quitting**—employees remain on payroll but psychologically exit from meaningful organizational involvement. It is not simply a behavioral trend but a reflection of systemic breakdown in workplace relationships and support structures.

This framework emphasizes that quiet quitting is not merely individual laziness or generational behavior, but a **symptom of deeper organizational design and relational issues**. Addressing it requires strategic interventions at the leadership, culture, and job design levels.

4.2 Conceptual Propositions

Proposition 1: *Lower perceived organizational support is negatively associated with employee engagement and positively associated with OCB withdrawal.*

Proposition 2: *Imbalance between job demands and resources leads to reduced intrinsic motivation and higher likelihood of quiet quitting.*

Proposition 3: *Transactional leadership styles are more likely to foster disengagement and psychological contract breach, increasing OCB withdrawal.*

Proposition 4: *Employee engagement mediates the relationship between workplace antecedents (POS, job design, leadership) and quiet quitting.*

Proposition 5: *Breached psychological contracts moderate the impact of engagement on OCB withdrawal, amplifying quiet quitting behaviors.*

By presenting these relationships, the framework advances scholarly understanding of quiet quitting not as a standalone trend, but as a systematic consequence of organizational design, leadership, and employee experience.

5. Discussion and Implications

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This study offers a timely conceptualization of *quiet quitting* by positioning it within the framework of **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) withdrawal**, enriching the academic dialogue on employee disengagement. By synthesizing **Social Exchange Theory**, **Self-Determination Theory**, and the **Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) Model**, the proposed framework extends the discourse beyond individual attitudes to structural and relational dimensions that influence discretionary behavior.

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Moreover, the model bridges a critical gap in literature by identifying **engagement** and **psychological contract perception** as mediators—processes often overlooked in studies focusing solely on job satisfaction or performance metrics. This framing encourages future empirical research to test these interrelationships through longitudinal or mixed-method studies.

5.2 Managerial and HR Implications

From a practical standpoint, this framework equips **HR leaders and practitioners** with a diagnostic lens to detect and prevent quiet quitting. Key implications include:

Monitoring Perceived Organizational Support: Regular feedback mechanisms and transparent communication can mitigate perceived neglect and reinforce reciprocity.

Redesigning Jobs for Resource Balance: Applying JD-R principles, organizations must align job demands with adequate resources such as autonomy, training, and peer support to prevent burnout-induced disengagement.

Leadership Development: Encouraging transformational leadership can build trust, renew psychological contracts, and promote intrinsic motivation—key drivers of OCB.

Revitalizing Engagement Strategies: HR practices should go beyond engagement surveys and adopt real-time, adaptive approaches such as stay interviews, employee voice platforms, and recognition systems.

5.3 Societal and Cultural Sensitivities

Quiet quitting may manifest differently across **cultural contexts**, especially in collectivist versus individualist societies. For instance, in cultures with strong power distance or hierarchical norms, quiet quitting might remain hidden due to fear of retribution. Future cross-cultural studies could explore these variations to localize organizational interventions more effectively.

5.4 Policy-Level Implications

At a policy level, organizations and governments must recognize quiet quitting as an early signal of labor dissatisfaction. Labor laws promoting fair work conditions, psychological safety, and hybrid work support can play a proactive role in ensuring sustainable engagement and well-being.

In sum, this paper reframes quiet quitting not as a problem of poor work ethic but as a **symptom of broken engagement ecosystems**, deserving strategic and compassionate attention from leaders and organizations alike.

6. Conclusion

This paper presents a timely conceptual exploration of *quiet quitting* as a form of **Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) withdrawal**, grounded in robust theoretical underpinnings and informed by emerging workplace dynamics. Amidst changing work cultures, increased job demands, and shifting psychological contracts, employees are increasingly withdrawing not from their formal roles, but from the extra-role efforts that have traditionally driven organizational success.

The proposed conceptual framework integrates key antecedents—**Perceived Organizational Support**, **Job Demands–Resources imbalance**, and **Leadership Style**—and emphasizes their influence on **Employee Engagement** and **Psychological Contract Perception**, ultimately leading to the behavioral outcome of **OCB withdrawal**. This model not only offers a diagnostic tool for practitioners but also lays the foundation for empirical research to examine and validate these relationships across industries and cultural contexts.

In challenging the oversimplified narrative of employee disengagement as a generational attitude problem, this paper repositions quiet quitting as a complex organizational phenomenon rooted in unmet expectations, resource imbalances, and motivational decline. Addressing it requires systemic changes in leadership behavior, organizational culture, job design, and employee recognition.

By unpacking the multi-level drivers of quiet quitting, this paper calls for a more **human-centric**, evidence-based approach to work design and employee engagement—where employees are not only retained, but truly committed.

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