

Insight into QUIET QUITTING

Allowing staff to voice their perceptions, concerns and experiences can reduce quiet quitting.



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Today, the broader concept of work is being discussed and debated at length, with debates focusing on a range of future trends which are predicted to have significant impacts on how work is defined, organised and experienced by employees. The value of work is one of those trends, with phenomena such as quiet quitting gaining the attention of employers and employees. Individuals are increasingly being seen to question the meaning of work, as they take notice of a range of aspects of organisational life, such as flexibility and work/life balance.

The term 'quiet quitting' is used to refer to employees making the conscious decision to perform their duties according to the parameters of the job description and do the minimum required to avoid facing disciplinary action concerning their performance. Whilst employees might not be looking to leave the organisation, the term quiet quitting refers to individuals who chose not to engage beyond basic requirements of their role, therefore levels of disengagement are exercised.

The concept of 'quiet quitting' is a growing cause of concern for management teams across organisations as employees seem not to be going beyond the minimum requirements of their contracts to perform, and this is having an impact on organisations productivity, innovation and affecting their profit margins. Increasing numbers of top employees choose to quit or disengage from the organisation because they believe managers are not committed to their long-term development. In other research, increasing numbers of employees feel that their current roles provide limited opportunity for progression and that their current job is virtually a dead-end because employers do not provide workers with a path for professional growth and development.

On the one hand, it can be questioned whether this phenomenon is a new trend or whether the pursuit of maximising financial reward for minimal effort can be seen throughout history. On the other hand, the global pandemic has arguably illuminated this topic as many individuals took to social media to overtly question the role of work in an increasingly uncertain and fluctuating world of employment, and social and economic turbulence.

Some of the related shifts being reported by organisations and professional bodies, include

individuals seeking to work for organisations which align with their personal values and beliefs, the extent to which organisations can genuinely identify how they value employee wellbeing and happiness, and the availability of opportunities for professional development. In an era characterised by change, uncertainty and complexity, organisations, and their HR departments, are being called to respond to these changes. For some organisations, such responses include the introduction of new roles and activities tasked with gaining insight into the engagement and wellbeing of employees.

A qualitative study conducted within a manufacturing company, based within the North East of England, provided insight into the perceptions of quiet quitting of 5 employees (Distribution Manager, Warehouse Manager, Logistics Co-ordinator, Warehouse Operative, and Administrative Assistant). Thematic analysis of data from unstructured interviews resulted in the construction of 5 themes concerning the perception of quiet quitting which were; perceived low pay, lack of opportunities for promotion, perceived favouritism, a lack of respect from management, and poor communication.

Pay and perceptions of low pay was discussed, with participants feeling as though they 'do not get paid enough for the manual job they do ('especially when we have a lot of heavy lifting') or additional time they commit ('we never get paid overtime. I often work for free'). Whilst feelings of unhappiness with the situation were conveyed, it was also mentioned that looking for another job, with more pay, was challenging in the local area owing to a shortage of jobs of a similar nature.

Long-serving participants identified a lack of promotion within the organisation and the impact of this on their motivation to work above and beyond their role, and potentially stay at the organisation. It was also noted that new staff, recruited externally, were not staying in the role for very long. Where there were instances of promotions being recognised, these were discussed around perceptions that employees with connections to the managing director are being promoted.

Another theme identified in participants' discussions was the feeling that they are not being listened to about issues which concerned them, and the perception that there was a lack of care from management. More

specifically, participants also talked about a lack of communication from the executive team and not feeling as though they are a part of discussions and decisions being made. This loss of employee voice severely impacted employees' willingness to perform duties and significantly reduced motivation.

Overall, employees expressed thoughts and feelings about perceived low pay, a lack of opportunity for promotion for internal staff, feeling as though they do not have a voice and a lack of communication from those at the top of the organisation. Within the interviews, feelings of despondency were expressed highlighting feelings of isolated and disconnect from the organisation. Whilst some participants were job stayers, there was a sense that the participants were looking for other job opportunities because of pay and a culture of poor communication and top-down management.

CONCLUSIONS

As the broad concept of work faces increasing flux, debate and discussion concerning its organisation and meaning, the small-scale study conducted provides insight into workers' perceptions of the quiet quitting concept by gathering perceptions, feelings and responses to what happens on a daily basis within one organisation within the manufacturing sector.

Findings from the study suggest that organisations should carefully consider the opportunities they have available for staff to voice their perceptions, concerns and experiences, as a way of engaging employees and uncovering what might be done to improve engagement and connection to the organisation going forward. Whilst employee engagement surveys are one method organisations might gather experiences from their employees, this process is arguably on-going, and companies would do well to implement a range of mechanisms to enable employees to engage with initiatives to report on their experiences. However, rather than opportunities alone, the facilitation of open

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communication relates to other fundamental organisational issues around culture.

The cultivation of an open, inclusive and authentic culture requires time and effort, such as building trust, to enable employees to feel as though they can voice their true experiences, and a willingness of leaders, from across the organisation, to listen. These strategies will arguably enhance employee motivation, loyalty and commitment whilst reducing the possibility of "quiet quitting" from occurring. The evidence, coupled with increasing literature emerging about the concept of quiet quitting in contemporary society, suggests that organisations should carefully consider the opportunities they have available for staff to voice their perceptions, concerns and experiences. ■

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DEPRESSION - The silent killer

According to the World Health Organization, depression is the leading cause of ill health and disability worldwide. Its latest estimates show that more than 300 million people are living with depression, an increase of more than 18% between 2005 and 2015.

Depression is one of the prevalent mental disorders in South Africa:

