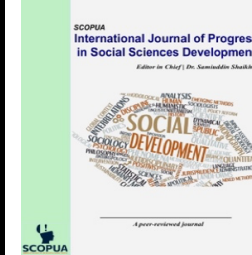


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Exploring Employees' Perceptions and Lived Experiences of Quiet Quitting

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ABSTRACT

The idea of quiet quitting, in which staff members reduce their overall effort while keeping their “discretionary” effort to the standard of the official job description, has become an important issue in the modern workplace. The research examines the employees' perception and lived experience of quiet quitting in the corporate context, the causes behind it, the emotions that trigger it and the response of the organization. The design was qualitative, phenomenologically oriented and semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 employees of the banking, telecommunication, information technology and fast-moving consumer goods industry in Pakistan using purposive and snowball sampling method. Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis was used for the analysis of the data. The five themes that arose were redefining work boundaries, organizational causes, emotional triggers, organizational responses, and coping and future intentions. Participants did not view quiet quitting as laziness, but rather as a self-protective boundary setting strategy. The study is based on the concepts of Psychological Contract Theory, Conservation of Resources theory, and Social Exchange Theory, and provides empirical evidence from employees in a developing economy context, revealing that quiet quitting is a reversible reaction to violations in the employment relationship.

Keywords: Quiet quitting; Employee disengagement; Psychological contract breach; Emotional triggers

1. Introduction

There has been a significant shift in the engagement of employees in corporate environments over the past few years. One of the most talked-about is the recent social media trend dubbed ‘quiet quitting’ which entered the academic and managerial world after 2022. Quiet quitting does not refer to an actual resignation. Rather, a pattern of having employees stay in their jobs but intentionally restrict their effort to the formal aspects of their job, and avoid discretionary behaviors like going to work past their scheduled hours or volunteering to do extra work or putting their emotional energy into organizational goals (Atiq et al., 2025). What started out as an online phenomenon is starting to be seen as a real sign of the current employment relationship issues.

Scholarly interest in quiet quitting has surged rapidly, but the idea is still up for debate. Some people see it as a disengagement that will impact organizational performance and productivity, and others as a rational exercise of setting boundaries to ensure wellbeing is not negatively impacted by too many demands (Hamidi, n.d.). Based on evidence from online communities, the justification cited for withdrawal is often based on unfairness, low pay, and a lack of fairness in the ratio of what is given and what is received from their employer (Khansary, 2026). This dynamic can be vividly illustrated in the Greek context, where employees reported that their lowered input stemmed from organizations that didn't fulfill their side of the bargain (Georgiadou et al., 2025), and was influenced by individual, organizational, and societal factors.

The psychological and emotional aspects of “quiet quitting” have also started to be discussed. Recent research ties the phenomenon to issues of mental health in the workplace, suggesting that stigma related to psychological distress could be a reason why employees might not openly share their mental health struggles, but instead opt for silent withdrawal (Konwar et al., 2026). On the organisational level, managers may struggle to identify and manage quiet quitters because their employees may appear to be doing their jobs as required, but are actually disengaging in a subtle way (Rahmadara &



Rachmawati, 2025). Combined, these viewpoints suggest that quiet quitting is a perception, feeling and organizational experience, and not just a behavior.

Despite the above growing body of literature, there are still some gaps. The majority of the previous studies are conceptual, secondary data (online narratives), or managerial perspectives rather than employee perspectives (Khansary, 2026; Rahmadara & Rachmawati, 2025). Furthermore, most of the studies were carried out in Western or regional settings, which results in a lack of knowledge about how the concept of quiet quitting is experienced in corporate workplaces in developing economies, where hierarchical cultures and job insecurity can influence the expression of dissatisfaction. It is also important to consider the reasons behind employees' passive resignations, as well as the emotional motivations and feelings that spark a resignation and the employee's perception of how the organization reacts.

To fill these gaps, the present study takes a qualitative approach to examine employees' perceptions and lived experiences of quiet quitting in corporate settings. In particular, the study aims to address the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the meaning of quiet quitting for employees in their work context?

RQ2: What factors might make employees more prone to quiet quitting and what motivates them to do so?

RQ3: What is the employee perspective on how the organization is responding to quiet quitting and how they are assessing it?

This study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of quiet quitting and offer practical implications for organizations looking to regain engagement and trust through their employees' voices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Quiet Quitting

Esen (2023) defined quiet quitting in public institutions as a pattern in which employees perform the functions obligated to them as stipulated by their jobs but refrain from additional effort, enthusiasm and discretionary contributions. Papadopoulou and Vouzas (2024) placed the concept within existing theories in organizational behavior, such as turnover intention, absenteeism, and overall organizational disengagement, and suggested a framework that connects it to its antecedents and consequences. Magrizos et al. (2026) suggested that the concept remains vague in its definition and urged for more theoretical clarity, as "quiet quitting" can take different forms, from the protective boundary setting to the conscious decision to quit. In the field of nursing, a concept analysis by Jalali et al. (2026) found quiet quitting to be a multifaceted experience characterized by a lack of commitment, emotional disconnection, and low performance. Bulut et al. (2024) also created and tested a scale to measure the phenomenon of quiet quitting, which suggests that the concept is gaining traction as a unique and quantifiable employee behavior.

Jana et al. (2026) explored quiet quitting as well as moonlighting, noting that both are indicators of a shift of employee energy from the main job to another one. An important counterpoint was raised by Oquendo et al. (2024) who wondered whether quiet quitting came before or after "quiet firing," which is when organizations quietly remove employees by neglecting to provide opportunities or by terminating them via constructive discharge. This discussion is continued by Oquendo et al. (2024) and Magrizos et al. (2026), who both suggest that quiet quitting is not a personal decision but should be considered in a relational and organizational lens.

2.2 Antecedents of Quiet Quitting

Islam et al. (2026) compiled the available research and categorized the causes of quiet quitting under the following categories: too much job demands, lack of organizational support, inadequate leadership, and limited career development, along with the consequences of quiet quitting on performance and wellbeing. Drawing on the Stimulus-Organism-Response model, Bordoloi et al. (2025) theorized that stimuli in the workplace (e.g., workload, unfair treatment) influence the level of psychological and emotional responses of the employees, which ultimately result in the behavioral response of quiet quitting. In a case study on a private tertiary institution, Bangura and Lourens (2023) found low compensation, lack of recognition and managerial neglect as the major factors that drove employees to leave their jobs.

A high workload and low level of recognition was linked to burnout and job satisfaction in radiographers by Kennedy et al. (2025). Lee et al. (2025) also demonstrated that a work design that emphasizes the right balance of job demands, rewards, recognition and autonomy is a key determinant of workforce wellbeing. Another significant antecedent is perceived inequity, as individuals who believe that their efforts are not sufficiently rewarded may seek to balance this by lowering their own efforts, Shinde (2025) noted. Bhattacharya and Sharma (2026) stated that the employees who were exposed to toxic leadership perceived themselves to be undervalued and wanted to protect themselves psychologically from it. In a similar finding, Al Shaikh Abubakar et al. (2025) found that workplace bullying leads to silent struggles that are often not reported formally by employees.

2.3 Emotional Dimensions

Burnout symptoms (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization) were correlated with withdrawal behaviors by Lyubarova et al. (2023) and it was demonstrated that the factors that contribute to burnout may vary according to gender and role expectations. Karim et al. (2026) discovered that stress, administrative burden and gendered leadership experiences in the



workplace create frustration and fatigue, which affect people's relationship with their work. Al Shaikh Abubakar et al. (2025) and Bhattacharya and Sharma (2026) both found that employees feel humiliated, powerless, and resentful when they are bullied or overworked by toxic supervisors, which can cause them to disengage without speaking up. Based on the findings, Bordoloi et al. (2025) propose that emotions are the mediating factor between working conditions and quiet quitting, sometimes even the deciding factor influencing employees' choice to reduce their work investment.

2.4 Organizational Responses

Esen (2023) noted that institutional reactions to quiet quitting tend to be reactive and aimed at performance control rather than at tackling the root causes. Some organizations react to employees' disengagement by withdrawing in their own way, thus engendering a cycle of disinvestment (Oquendo et al., 2024). More positive solutions were suggested, such as fair reward systems, good leadership, workload management and good communication (Islam et al. 2026, Papadopoulou and Vouzas 2024). Magrizos et al. (2026) pointed out that research into organizational responses is still in its infancy, and very little has been done to investigate employees' perceptions and assessments of these responses, leaving a gap in the literature.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

According to Topa et al. (2022), psychological contracts are employees' expectations regarding relationships with their employers, and a violation of these informal agreements is often correlated with decreased commitment, performance, and withdrawal. Samson and Swink (2023) have found that the manner in which organisations manage these expectations has a significant impact on employee outcomes, especially when facing change. Based on Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, Hu et al. (2023) pointed out that people try to maintain resources that are important for them, like time, energy, wellbeing, or other resources, and they begin to take measures to conserve them when they feel their resources are threatened or depleted. According to Ahmad et al. (2023), Social Exchange Theory is based on reciprocity, which means that employees give back based on the level of support and fairness they receive. This study builds upon the work of Topa et al. (2022), Hu et al. (2023), and Ahmad et al. (2023) and uses the lens of Psychological Contract Theory as the main lens, with the assistance of COR theory and Social Exchange Theory, to understand why quiet quitting happens when expectations are broken, when resources are depleted, and when there is perceived imbalance in the employment relationship.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest a qualitative design when trying to find out how people make sense of their experiences. Based on this guidance, the present study used qualitative research design based on an interpretivist paradigm that believes reality is socially constructed and is best understood through the lived experiences of people. As this study was informed by the lived experience of the employees, it was phenomenological in nature, aiming to uncover their perceptions of quiet quitting, the factors that trigger it, and the reactions of the organisations to it. This method was deemed suitable as it is a phenomenon that is subjective and difficult to measure using standardised methods.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

According to Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling is a method for identifying and recruiting individuals who are relevant to information and have direct contact with the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, the participants were selected using purposive sampling and snowball sampling was used to gain access to employees who may not be inclined to talk about disengagement openly. Understanding that participants could be: (a) employed full-time in a corporate organization, (b) had at least one year of working in their current employer, and (c) had personally experienced quiet quitting or scaling back their efforts to the bare minimum required by their job. The study included 18 employees from four categories of industries in Pakistan, such as banking, telecom, IT, and fast moving consumer goods. The participants were of different genders, age and hierarchy which gave a range of perspectives.

3.3 Data Collection

Kallio et al. (2016) state that semi-structured interviews have a framework and are flexible to allow for more in-depth exploration of participants' answers. The data were thus obtained from semi-structured interviews based on an interview protocol that was developed based on the three research questions. The protocol encompassed free-response items regarding participants' definition of quiet quitting, the factors and feelings associated with their decision to quit quietly, and their managers' and organizations' reactions to their quitting. Elaboration and clarification were encouraged using probing questions. Interviews in English or Urdu as preferred by the participants were either conducted in person or online and lasted between 40 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded and verbatim transcribed with the consent of the participants and then Urdu responses were translated into English and verified. Guest et al. (2006) reported that data saturation in homogeneous samples is likely to be achieved with the first 12 interviews, and in this study, the data was saturated by the eighteenth interview when no new codes or themes emerged.

3.4 Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2021) describe six steps for reflexive thematic analysis: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, constructing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. The analysis



proceeded in the following phases: Transcripts were read several times to become familiar with them and initial codes were generated inductively from participants' accounts, using NVivo software. These codes were then clustered into subthemes and broader themes, followed by a checking of the coded extracts and the entire data set for coherence. Lastly, themes were elaborated, named and interpreted with reference to the research questions and the theoretical framework.

3.5 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest four criteria to determine trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Member checking was used to enhance credibility, by asking participants to check summaries of their interviews for accuracy. The transferability of the results was facilitated by describing the participants and research context in detail. An audit trail was kept to ensure the data were collected and analysed in line with decisions made, ensuring dependability. Reflexive notes were used to improve the confirmability of the researcher in keeping track of his personal assumptions and to reduce the influence of his own interpretation.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Orb et al. (2001) stress the need for special attention to autonomy, confidentiality and avoidance of harm in qualitative research. Ethical approval was granted before data collection and informed consent was given after participants were informed of the purpose and procedure of the study. The participation was voluntary and participants were told they could withdraw from the study at any time, without consequence. To ensure anonymity, the names of individuals and organizations were removed from the transcripts and findings, and codes were assigned (P1 to P18) to ensure the anonymity of the participants in the discussion of disengagement, which may have implications for their profession.

4. Results

The results of reflexive thematic analysis of 18 semi-structured interviews with employees in corporate organizations in Pakistan are presented in this section. The analysis resulted in 5 main themes and 14 subthemes that relate to the three research questions: what is employees' perception of quiet quitting, what are the factors and emotions that push employees toward quiet quitting, and how do employees feel when they experience organizational reaction to quiet quitting? The participant profile is presented first, then an overview of the themes and a detailed account of each theme with participant quotations.

4.1 Participant Profile

The sample comprised 10 male (55.6%) and 8 female (44.4%) employees aged between 26 and 41 years ($M = 31.7$ years). The participants came from the banking sector ($n = 5$), information technology ($n = 5$), telecommunications ($n = 4$), and fast-moving consumer goods ($n = 4$). They had between 2 and 15 years of work experience and held a variety of positions, from entry level officers to senior managers. Table 1 shows the demographics of the participants, while Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participants by sector and gender.

Table 1: *Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 18)*

Code	Gender	Age	Sector	Position	Experience (Years)
P1	Male	29	Banking	Officer	4
P2	Female	27	IT	Software Engineer	3
P3	Male	34	Telecom	Assistant Manager	8
P4	Female	31	FMCG	Brand Executive	5
P5	Male	38	Banking	Branch Operations Manager	12
P6	Female	26	Banking	Relationship Officer	2
P7	Male	30	IT	QA Engineer	6
P8	Female	33	Telecom	HR Executive	7
P9	Male	28	FMCG	Sales Executive	3
P10	Female	35	IT	Project Manager	10
P11	Male	41	Telecom	Senior Manager	15
P12	Female	29	FMCG	Supply Chain Officer	4
P13	Male	32	IT	Senior Developer	7
P14	Female	30	Banking	Credit Analyst	5
P15	Male	36	FMCG	Area Sales Manager	9
P16	Female	28	Telecom	Customer Experience Executive	3



P17	Male	27	IT	Data Analyst	2
P18	Male	37	Banking	Compliance Officer	11

Note. Codes P1 to P18 were assigned to protect participant anonymity.

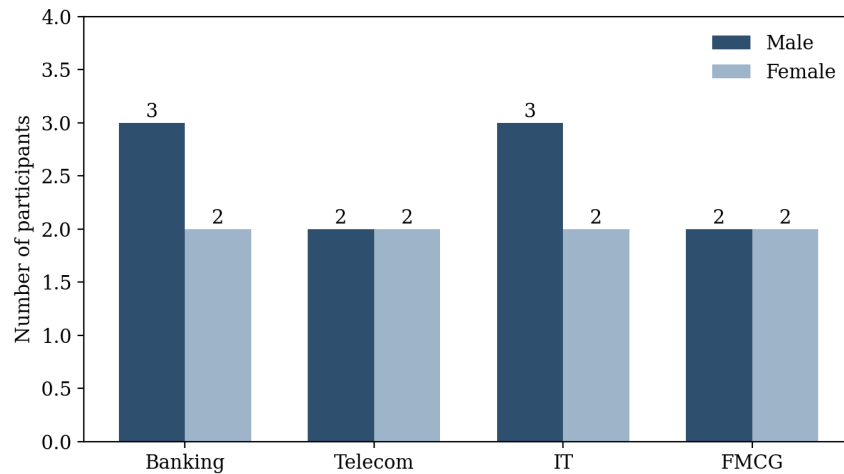


Figure 1: Distribution of Participants by Sector and Gender

4.2 Overview of Themes

Five themes emerged from the data: (1) redefining work boundaries, (2) organizational causes of quiet quitting, (3) emotional triggers, (4) organizational responses, and (5) coping strategies and future intentions. Table 2 displays the themes, subthemes and codes and Figure 2 displays the number of participants where their accounts added to each of the themes.

Table 2: Themes, Subthemes, and Codes

Theme	Subthemes	Codes
1. Redefining work boundaries	1.1 Quiet quitting as self-protection; 1.2 Doing the job, not the life	Protecting health; refusing unpaid overtime; rejecting the laziness label
2. Organizational causes	2.1 Unrecognized effort; 2.2 Broken promotion promises; 2.3 Unfair workload distribution; 2.4 Toxic or absent leadership	No appreciation; favoritism in appraisals; extra work for top performers; micromanagement
3. Emotional triggers	3.1 Feeling invisible; 3.2 Betrayal after a critical incident; 3.3 Burnout and exhaustion	Being overlooked; denied promotion; public criticism; constant fatigue
4. Organizational responses	4.1 Managerial blindness; 4.2 Punitive responses and quiet firing; 4.3 Superficial engagement initiatives	Manager unaware; excluded from projects; token surveys; pizza parties
5. Coping and future intentions	5.1 Emotional detachment; 5.2 Side work and job search; 5.3 Conditional re-engagement	Mental switch-off; freelancing; updating CV; would return if valued

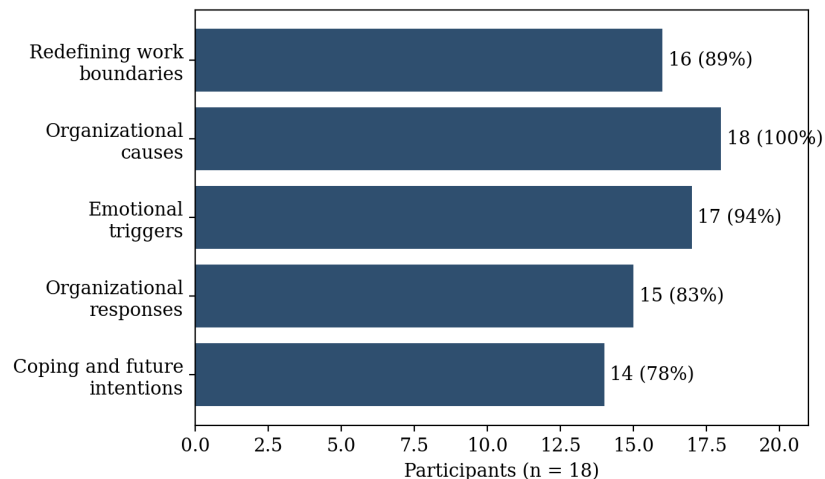


Figure 2: Prevalence of Themes Across Participants (n = 18)



4.3 Theme 1: Redefining Work Boundaries

The majority of the participants (n = 16) did not consider quiet quitting as a lack of commitment or lack of professionalism. Rather, they described it as a conscious choice to not work more than what they were contracted to do as they were striving to protect their health, family time and sense of self. Many responded with a deflection from the negative connotations of the word and equated their actions as an appropriate corrective measure for an unhealthy working relationship.

"I still do everything in my job description, and I do it well. I just stopped answering emails at eleven at night. If that is quitting, then the definition of work is broken." (P2, Female, IT)

"For years I thought staying late would get me noticed. It only got me more work. Now I leave at five and I feel like I have my life back." (P9, Male, FMCG)

Participants also distinguished between their role and their identity, explaining that they no longer allowed their job to define their worth. This shift from emotional investment to contractual compliance was often described as a form of maturity rather than rebellion.

"My job is what I do from nine to five. It is not who I am anymore." (P14, Female, Banking)

4.4 Theme 2: Organizational Causes of Quiet Quitting

All participants (n = 18) attributed their withdrawal to organizational conditions rather than personal traits. Four subthemes emerged. The most frequently reported cause was unrecognized effort, where participants felt that extra work went unnoticed or was credited to others.

"I worked three weekends to close a project. In the meeting, my manager thanked the whole team and presented it as his idea. That was the day something changed for me." (P13, Male, IT)

Broken promotion promises formed the second cause. Several participants described being assured of advancement that never materialized, often because of favoritism or opaque appraisal processes.

"They told me for two years that I was next in line. Then someone with better connections got the position. After that, I stopped believing anything they said." (P5, Male, Banking)

Unfair workload distribution was the third cause. High performers reported being rewarded with more work rather than recognition, while less productive colleagues faced few consequences. The fourth cause, toxic or absent leadership, included micromanagement, public criticism, and managers who were unavailable when support was needed.

"The more capable you are, the more they dump on you. Meanwhile, people who do the minimum get the same increment." (P10, Female, IT)

"My manager only talks to me when something goes wrong, and usually in front of everyone." (P16, Female, Telecom)

4.5 Theme 3: Emotional Triggers

While organizational causes accumulated over time, most participants (n = 17) identified a specific emotional turning point that transformed dissatisfaction into quiet quitting. As shown in Figure 3, the most common trigger was feeling unrecognized or invisible (n = 14), followed by burnout and exhaustion (n = 13), a broken promotion promise (n = 11), public humiliation (n = 8), and a loss of meaning in work (n = 7).

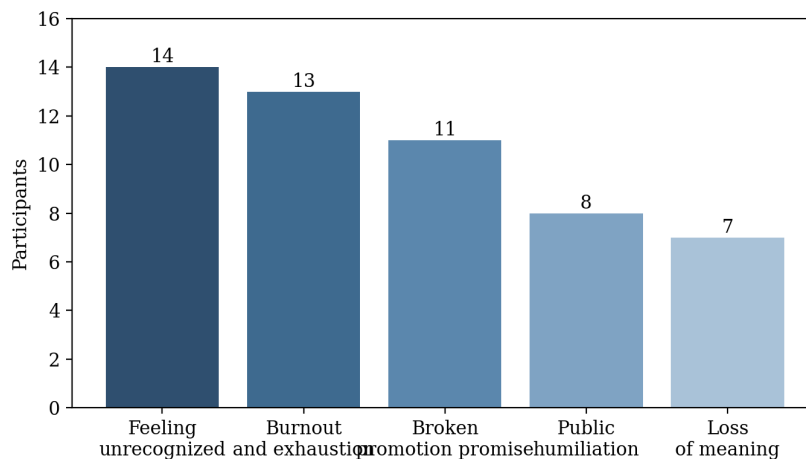


Figure 3: Frequency of Emotional Triggers Reported by Participants

Participants described feelings of invisibility as deeply hurtful, particularly when their contributions were ignored during appraisals. Betrayal following a critical incident was often expressed with strong emotion and marked a clear before-and-after moment in their work lives.

"It was not one big thing. It was being ignored again and again until I felt invisible. One day I just decided I would stop trying to be seen." (P4, Female, FMCG)



"When they announced the promotion list and my name was missing, I felt betrayed. I sat in the washroom for ten minutes. When I came out, I was a different employee." (P8, Female, Telecom)

Burnout was described as both a cause and a consequence. Participants reported chronic fatigue, sleep problems, and irritability, which pushed them to conserve their remaining energy.

"I was exhausted all the time. I realized that if I kept going like this, I would break. Doing less was the only way to survive." (P3, Male, Telecom)

4.6 Theme 4: Organizational Responses

Fifteen participants discussed how their organizations responded, or failed to respond, to their reduced engagement. Figure 4 presents the distribution of perceived responses. The most common experience was managerial blindness (n = 12), in which managers did not notice the change as long as targets were met.

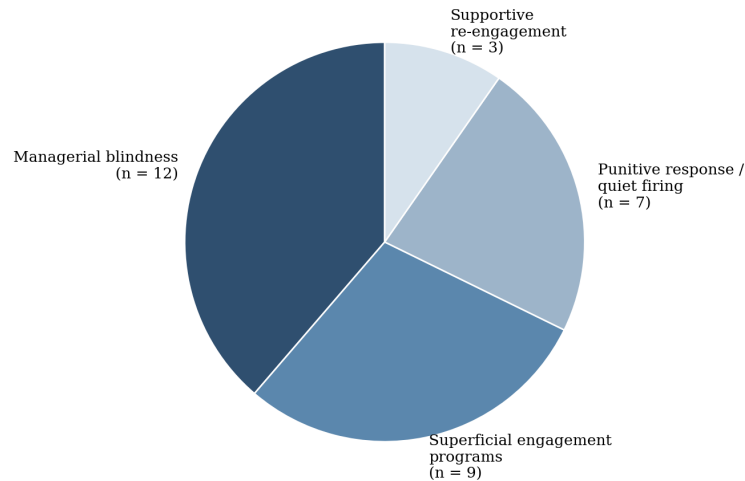


Figure 4: Participants' Perceptions of Organizational Responses to Quiet Quitting

"Nobody noticed. As long as my numbers were fine, nobody asked why I stopped volunteering or staying late." (P18, Male, Banking)

Nine participants described engagement initiatives as superficial, such as annual surveys with no follow-up or social events that ignored underlying problems. Seven reported punitive responses resembling quiet firing, including exclusion from important projects, reduced responsibilities, and cold treatment from supervisors.

"They organized a fun day with games and lunch. Nobody fixed the workload. It felt like they were laughing at us." (P12, Female, FMCG)

"After I started leaving on time, I was removed from the client account I had built. It was clear they wanted me to resign." (P15, Male, FMCG)

Only three participants reported supportive responses, where a manager initiated an honest conversation, adjusted workload, or recognized their contributions. These participants described partial recovery of their engagement.

"My new manager asked me directly what had happened. Just being asked made a difference. I started taking initiative again, slowly." (P7, Male, IT)

4.7 Theme 5: Coping Strategies and Future Intentions

Fourteen participants described how they coped with quiet quitting and what they planned for the future. Emotional detachment was the most common strategy, allowing participants to continue working without personal distress. Others redirected their energy toward freelancing, further education, or searching for new jobs.

"I switched off emotionally. I come, I do my work, and I go. My energy now goes into my freelance clients." (P17, Male, IT)

Importantly, many participants expressed conditional willingness to re-engage if their organizations demonstrated genuine change, suggesting that quiet quitting was reversible rather than permanent.

"I have not given up on work. I have given up on being taken for granted. If they value me, I will give my best again." (P6, Female, Banking)

4.8 Summary of Findings

Themes are organized in relation to the research questions and the theoretical framework in Table 3. Overall, results suggest that a quiet quitting was the result of a set of organizational causes, triggered by specific emotional factors and maintained by the absence of organizational responses, but potentially reversible by the presence of supportive organizational responses.

Table 3: Mapping of Themes to Research Questions and Theoretical Framework

Research Question	Related Theme(s)	Key Finding	Theoretical Link
RQ1: Perceptions of quiet quitting	Theme 1	Viewed as self-protective boundary setting, not laziness	Conservation of Resources
RQ2: Causes and emotional triggers	Themes 2 and 3	Unrecognized effort and broken promises, activated by critical emotional incidents	Psychological Contract breach; Social Exchange
RQ3: Organizational responses	Themes 4 and 5	Mostly unnoticed or superficial responses; re-engagement possible with genuine support	Social Exchange reciprocity

5. Discussion

The study examined employee perceptions and lived experience of quiet quitting in the workplace and explored the reasons for quiet quitting, emotional triggers, and responses from organisations. The findings offer three main contributions, each addressing one of the research questions.

5.1 Quiet Quitting as Boundary Setting

To address RQ1, participants were mostly against the idea of quiet quitting as laziness, and instead explained it as a conscious attempt to preserve their health, time and identity. This discovery corroborates the argument by Hamidi (n.d.) that quiet quitting can be recognized as a rational act of setting boundaries, and by Magrizos et al. (2026) that it may be a protective process, rather than a withdrawal process. Conservation of Resources theory was used by Hu et al. (2023) to describe the behaviour of people who use 'conserving' strategies when they feel their valued resources are under threat. This resource-protection logic is echoed by the accounts of the participants about their limiting efforts to avoid exhaustion. Meanwhile, the participants were meeting the formal expectations, which aligns with the definition given by Esen (2023) and Atiq et al. (2025) which states that the employees are performing their duty but they are not performing their discretionary effort.

5.2 Accumulated Causes and Critical Emotional Triggers

To address RQ2, the findings indicated a two-stage process in quiet quitting. The reasons were usually organizational, including unrecognized effort, broken promotion promises, workload imbalance, and poor leadership, but a particular emotional incident generally was the trigger. Similarly, Islam et al. (2026) and Bangura and Lourens (2023) also found low recognition, poor leadership and limited career development as antecedents. Similarly, Kennedy et al. (2025) and Lee et al. (2025) found that low levels of recognition and high workload are linked to a decrease in wellbeing and job satisfaction, which corresponds with the participants experiencing that they were being rewarded with more work than with recognition. When employees feel that there is inequity, they will try to balance this out by putting in less effort, as was evident in the comparisons of less productive employees with the participants (Shinde, 2025).

Topa et al. (2022) found that psychological contract breach typically causes a decrease in commitment and withdrawal. Participants' reports of the broken promises of promotion are clear evidence of such unwritten promises, and the intensity of the feelings of betrayal reported by participants indicate that these unfulfilled promises carry an emotional weight. Bordoloi et al. (2025) suggested that workplace triggers influence internal emotions, which ultimately result in quiet quitting. The present findings build on this view and reveal that the emotional stage tends to be tied to one salient event that usually occurs at a distinct before/after juncture, for example, a missed promotion or public humiliation. The silence of employees in response to their feelings of distress at work is related to toxic leadership and bullying, reported by Bhattacharya and Sharma (2026) as well as Al Shaikh Abubakar et al. (2025). The study by Konwar et al. (2026) indicated that stigma associated with mental health may lead employees to withdraw silently, and the hierarchical environment of Pakistani corporate workplaces might limit the ability to openly express dissatisfaction.

5.3 Organizational Responses and the Possibility of Re-engagement

Most of the participants answered RQ3 by stating that their withdrawal was not noticed or received with superficial initiatives. Participants mentioned that managers have a problem in recognizing quiet quitting because the employees only meet the minimum requirements, which was observed by Rahmadara and Rachmawati (2025) in their research. Esen (2023) pointed out that institutional responses are mostly based on performance control rather than on the root causes, and this is echoed by the participants' criticism of token engagement activities. Oquendo et al. (2024) wondered if quiet quitting came



before or after quiet firing, and the stories of the participants who were not part of projects indicate how quiet quitting can follow quiet firing, or how it can reinforce it in a cycle of disinvestment. Georgiadou et al. (2025) termed this reciprocal dynamic as the decrease in effort by employees when organizations do not uphold their side of the exchange.

The few participants who had received supportive responses, reported partial re-engagement. Ahmad et al. (2023) stated that Social Exchange Theory is based on reciprocity, which means that they will return effort according to the effort that they receive from the employer. This discovery indicates that quiet quitting is more of a malleable phenomenon rather than a permanent behavior and is linked to the quality of the employment relationship. In the present study, the employees who reported their quiet quitting were also open to re-engaging with their efforts when they experienced fairness and recognition, while in Khansary (2026) they explained their rationale for quiet quitting in terms of the lack of fair exchange.

5.4 Contextual Contribution

Papadopoulou and Vouzas (2024) and Magrizzos et al. (2026) argued for a deeper understanding and more context-specific empirical evidence of quiet quitting. This study answers that call by articulating the first-hand accounts of Pakistani employees in corporate environments using a combination of Psychological Contract Theory, Conservation of Resources theory, and Social Exchange Theory.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to understand the perceptions and lived experiences of the employees in the corporate workplaces of Pakistan regarding the phenomenon of 'quiet quitting', its causes, emotional triggers and responses of the organizations. The results indicate that employees see quiet quitting as a conscious effort to safeguard their well-being and to rebalance an employment relationship they feel is unfair rather than a sign of laziness or disinterest. According to the researchers, quiet quitting started to creep in over several factors of the organization, such as not being recognized for effort, broken promises on promotion, unequal workloads, and poor leadership, and was often triggered by a particular emotional incident that served as a turning point. Many organizations either did not see this change or reacted in a superficial or punitive way, often exacerbating the sense of disengagement. From a Psychological Contract Theory perspective, quiet quitting may be driven by the failure of expectations or what is referred to as an unfulfilled psychological contract.

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