



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL™
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

Quiet Quitting of Professional Services Staff in HEIs: Causes, Impacts, and Solutions

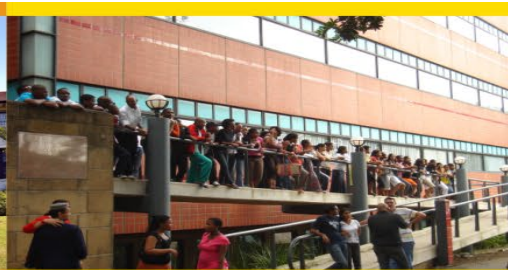
Ntokozo Mngadi
Khanyie Khuzwayo



EDGEWOOD CAMPUS



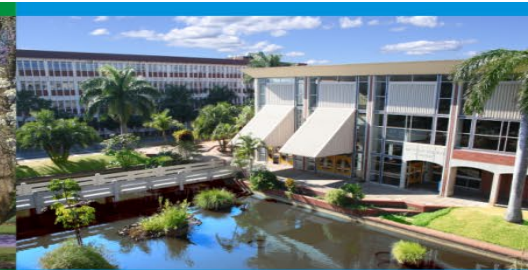
HOWARD COLLEGE CAMPUS



NELSON R MANDELA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



PIETERMARITZBURG CAMPUS



WESTVILLE CAMPUS

What is your understanding of the term "quiet quitting"?

What's Happening in Higher Education

- **Quiet quitting** refers **not** to resigning from a job, but to **mentally checking out**—doing the **bare minimum**, avoiding **extra effort**, and **disengaging emotionally**.
- Unlike visible resignation, this phenomenon is covert and cumulative, often overlooked **until productivity or morale suffers**.
- The root cause is usually not laziness but **long-term dissatisfaction, poor leadership**, or unfulfilled workplace needs
- Gained traction post-pandemic but is rooted in longstanding employee dissatisfaction (Formica & Sfodera, 2022).
- Particularly **overlooked among professional services staff** in Higher Education Institutions (Heffernan & McKay, 2019).

Understanding Quiet Quitting in HEIs cont...

Key Drivers

- **Burnout & stress:** Caused by work-life imbalance and leadership pressure (Zhong et al., 2024).
- **Unmet psychological needs:**
 - **Competence:** Employees feel disengaged when they lack opportunities for skill development, feedback, or recognition.
 - **Autonomy:** Excessive control or rigid processes reduce motivation by undermining employees' sense of independence.
 - **Relatedness:** Social isolation or weak connections with colleagues and leaders lead to emotional withdrawal from work. (Hong et al., 2023).
- **Lack of engagement and unfair rewards:** demotivates employees, leading to reduced effort and commitment.(Galanis et al., 2023).

Measurement

- **Quiet Quitting Scale (QQS)** identifies 3 traits:
 - Detachment
 - Lack of initiative
 - Lack of motivation

Background

- **The Critical Role of Professional Services Staff in HEIs**
 - Professional Services Staff form the **operational backbone** of universities—handling administration, student services, IT, finance, HR, and facilities.
 - These professionals ensure **seamless academic delivery**, yet often remain under-recognized in institutional narratives.
 - As universities modernize and diversify, the dependence on skilled, motivated professional services staff increases, making their engagement and well-being a strategic priority.
- **Why It Matters in HEIs**
 - HEIs face structural challenges: budget cuts, digital transitions, higher student demands—all placing more pressure on professional services staff.
- **Consequences of quiet quitting:**
 - Slower response times in student or other operational services
 - **Loss of institutional knowledge as experienced staff disengage**
 - Higher turnover or absenteeism, which disrupts continuity and increases costs

What's Going Wrong?



While academic excellence remains a focus, **institutional effectiveness** is increasingly undermined by disengaged professional services personnel.



COVID-19 acted as a catalyst, pushing already strained staff into **survival mode**, with minimal energy left for extra-role behaviour (e.g., innovation, collaboration).



The silent nature of quiet quitting makes it **hard to detect** and address until it causes visible dysfunction.

Theoretical Frameworks Explaining Quiet Quitting

1. Affective Events Theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996)

- Workplace events shape emotions → affects satisfaction & engagement.
- Positive: Recognition → engagement
- Negative: Overload/conflict → disengagement

2. Theory X & Y (McGregor, 1960)

- *Theory X*: Assumes laziness → strict control → burnout risk
- *Theory Y*: Assumes motivation → autonomy → higher engagement

3. Multidimensional Theory of Burnout (Maslach & Jackson, 1981)

- Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, low self-worth = key burnout traits
- Long-term burnout → disengagement → quiet quitting

4. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964)

- Fair treatment & support from the organization → employee loyalty & engagement
- Lack of reciprocity → disengagement → quiet quitting

Methodology Overview



Research Design

Qualitative desktop study using secondary data
Synthesizes academic literature, policy documents & institutional reports
Suitable for exploring *quiet quitting* in HEIs due to broad access to existing knowledge



Data Sources

Peer-reviewed journals, books, government & institutional reports
Accessed via **Google Scholar, Scopus**, and university repositories



Data Collection & Analysis

Systematic literature review
Thematic analysis to identify causes, impacts, and solutions to quiet quitting among professional staff



Validity & Reliability

Focus on **credible, peer-reviewed** sources (last 10 years)



Ethical Considerations

No direct ethical risks (secondary data)
All sources properly **cited and acknowledged**

Causes of Quiet Quitting

Key Causes

- **Job dissatisfaction** due to unmet needs for autonomy, competence, and recognition (Hong et al., 2023)
- Feeling **undervalued**: poor compensation, limited career growth, and lack of recognition (Figueron, 2015; Rakhra, 2018)
- **Workload & burnout**: tight deadlines, emotional exhaustion, and inadequate support (Maslach & Leiter, 2016)
- **Workplace politics & inequities**: especially affecting women and older staff (Snipes et al., 2023)

Impact on Institutions

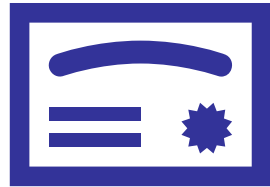
Reduced productivity: minimal effort from disengaged staff (Figueron, 2015)

Low morale: frustration among colleagues due to uneven workload

High turnover: increased recruitment and training costs (Rakhra, 2018)

Poor service delivery: delays in admin processes affecting student experiences (Jaiswal et al., 2022)

Findings: Strategies to Mitigate Quiet Quitting



Job Satisfaction & Recognition

Offer competitive compensation

Provide clear career paths

Acknowledge staff contributions (Hong et al., 2023)



Leadership & Culture

Promote transformational leadership

Foster fair rewards and psychological empowerment (Zhong et al., 2024)

Strategies to Mitigate Quiet Quitting cont...



Burnout Prevention

Ensure manageable workloads
Provide mental health support
Promote work-life balance (Maslach & Leiter, 2016)



Employee Engagement

Encourage participatory decision-making
Offer professional development opportunities
Build a positive organizational culture
(Schaufeli et al., 2002)



A holistic, multi-level approach is essential to address quiet quitting in HEIs.

Our Take on It



Mitigate Quiet Quitting Among Professional Staff in HEIs



Enhance Job Satisfaction

Career Progression: Clear promotion pathways and mentorship

Professional Growth: Continuous development (CPD) aligned to staff goals

Recognition: Incentives (monetary & non-monetary) to acknowledge contributions



Strengthen Leadership & Management

Empowerment: Promote transformational leadership

Training: Leadership development programs for managers

Participation: Involve staff in decision-making and policy formulation



Address Workload & Burnout

Workload Review: Fair responsibility distribution

Flexibility: Remote work, compressed workweeks where possible

Mental Health: Wellness programs, counselling, stress management

Our Take on It cont...



Improve Organizational Culture

Appreciation Culture: Recognize staff contributions regularly

Team Building: Encourage collaboration and social cohesion

Fairness: Transparent evaluations, reward, and promotion systems



Implement Retention Strategies

Engagement Monitoring: Regular surveys with actionable feedback

Competitive Pay: Align salaries with market benchmarks

Well-being Support: Promote work-life balance and resilience

Where to Go from Here?



Current Study:

Provides insights into quiet quitting through desktop research.

Focuses on synthesizing existing literature on professional staff disengagement.



Recommended Future Research:

Empirical Study: Conduct within an HEI to examine the lived experiences of professional staff.

Qualitative or Mixed-Methods: Use interviews, surveys, or focus groups to collect primary data.

Comparative Study: Explore the impact of institutional policies, leadership styles, and organizational culture across multiple HEIs.



Key Areas for Exploration:

Long-term effects of quiet quitting on institutional performance, student experiences, and workforce sustainability.

Investigate the relationship between engagement strategies and employee retention.

Interactive Session

Further strategies based on lived experiences

References

- Available on the article



INSPIRING GREATNESS



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL™
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

THE END

Thank You!!

INSPIRING GREATNESS