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Quiet Quitting: Work Affect in the Post-Pandemic Workplace

[1]Susel Arzuaga, [2]Franco Gandolfi, [3]Taryn Johnston
[1]University of Lincoln
[2]Georgetown University & California Institute of Advanced Management (CIAM)
[3]University of Lincoln

Abstract
The COVID-19 pandemic precipitated the adoption of new work practices and a reassessment of our relationship with work. 'Quiet quitting' emerged as a pervasive phenomenon in the workplace post-COVID, generating concern amongst employers and contradictory conceptualisations amongst industry experts. This paper analyses the inherent tension within the construct 'quiet quitting' and its impact on the institution of work.

Keywords: Quiet quitting; Work affect; COVID-19 pandemic; Post-pandemic workplace; Psychological withdrawal

Introduction

The literature on attitudes and behaviour at work has long recognised a link between organisational commitment and both discretionary and non-discretionary behaviour (Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe, 2004). The belief that there are multiple benefits to a committed workforce has fuelled academic research as well as industry investment on commitment-related initiatives in the workplace (Doyle, 2022; Conway and Briner, 2012). Employees are assumed to be more likely to display desirable behaviours if they are committed to the task, the team, and/or the organisation they work for (Bentein, Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2002), commitment is considered as an energizing force for motivated behaviour (Meyer, Becker and Vandenberghe, 2004). A fundamental assumption of employers and scholars alike is that committed employees are more likely to work towards organisational goals and remain loyal (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Arzuaga *et al.*, 2021) than not committed employees.

It is thus not surprising that 'quiet quitting', an expression catapulted to fame by social media in 2022 (Kudhail, 2022), has generated considerable interest among employers, industry publications, and workplace scholars (Kordowicz, 2022; Hancock and Schaninger, 2022; Xueyun *et al.*, 2023). The most common view of quiet quitting is that it refers to psychological turnover or withdrawal at work, which is widely considered worse than actual turnover (Allen and Meyer, 1990; Marks and De Meuse, 2003). The rise to notoriety of quiet quitting coincided with the end of the strictest public health measures adopted worldwide to curb the spread of COVID-19. As the pandemic was easing and health systems and society moved to recovery, the institution of work was experiencing a paradigm shift caused by the tension between employer demands and employees' needs. Employers and employees are grappling to redefine the purpose of work, the meaning of success, and the link between labour and self-worth.

This article explores changes in attitudes and emotions towards work and the workplace following the recent global pandemic. We analysed the professional literature and identified that changes in work practices have led to different attitudes towards work. Finally, we examined the solutions offered to address current challenges and reflect on the implications for the future of the institution of work.

The post-pandemic workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic challenged society in a multitude of ways. Structures of government and models of healthcare provision were stretched to breaking point (Coccia, 2021) as was another central institution of modern living: work. One of the most enduring legacies of the pandemic has been the questioning of deep-seated assumptions about the economic and social order prevalent in modern societies, i.e., the exchange between individual labour and rewards. The consequences of such questioning are still unravelling as employees and employers struggle with issues of meaning, purpose, commitment (or lack thereof), and productivity.

The impact of COVID-19 on the institution of work may well outlast its effects on other parts of society. However, the seismic changes brought about by new ways of approaching work during national lockdowns were not entirely

due to the response to COVID-19. Many of the practices popularised by the pandemic were already emerging, for example, remote work, automation of some roles and processes, integration of technology, and the reassessment of work priorities based on non-work factors such as caring responsibilities (McKinsey, 2023; Venkataramakrishnan, 2023).

In reassessing work priorities, employee valuation of traditional inducements (e.g., compensation, benefits) has decreased while work-life balance has increased in importance (De Smet *et al.*, 2022). The central tension of the changes we see in today's workplace lies in the differing expectations of employees and employers. While the former have re-evaluated their relationship to work and what it means for them as individuals and their families, the latter have been slow to adapt their offering to the needs of today's employees.

This tension can be traced back to the Protestant work ethic that underpins the approach to work in many Western societies (Cohen, 1999). The Protestant work ethic postulates that honest accumulation of wealth is possible through disciplined work, constant enterprise, and observing moderation in consumption (Mirels and Garrett, 1971). Hedonistic pursuits are warned against, and self-worth is linked to contribution and labour. An extreme expression of this philosophy is the hustle culture in the corporate world where relentless work, striving, long hours, and workaholism are markers of status and desirable individual traits (Kelly, 2022; Venkataramakrishnan, 2023).

The anti-productivity movement is a response to the hustle culture. It promulgates a change in the way identity is construed and the role that individual labour plays in it. Proponents of this movement argue that individual value is innate and should be separated from perceived contributions made through work (Beddington, 2023). A by-product of this movement is the rejection of going above and beyond at work, despite employer expectations. Workaholism as a way of living is neither revered nor desired.

Anti-productivity as a way of living depends on whether employees can choose to not engage in traditional work expectations, which is risky under current social norms. However, according to the 2023 State of the Global Workforce Report (Gallup, 2023), many of us are currently not living up to the expected standards of work engagement. Gallup (2023) reports that only 23% of the workforce is engaged and thriving while the rest is either actively disengaged or not engaged. Most employees, given a choice, would not volunteer to take on a new project, work more hours, or put additional effort into work. In short, the majority of the world's employees are "quiet quitting" (p. 4), which by Gallup's estimate costs the global economy more than $8 trillion annually.

Questions about the need to carry on grinding became more widespread post-COVID. Quitting, quietly or otherwise, and the glorification of refusal to work (Beddington, 2023), evident in the admiration proffered to those who manage to 'rig the game', show a deeper questioning of work as an institution. Employees are increasingly wondering 'What if we didn't' (Gallup, 2023) which reveals their scepticism towards the value of work. From a financial point of view, the value of work has indeed decreased (Bérubé *et al.*, 2022; Beddington, 2023) due to heightened inflation, the rising cost of living, and reduced affordability of essentials like housing and food. Yet, the question of value is also philosophical. With a potential planetary collapse on the horizon (Gergis, 2020), a rise in anti-consumerism (Draper, 2011), increased rejection of the status-quo (Desai, Neitzel and Dubuisson, 2020), and the deterioration of social institutions (van Prooijen, Spadaro and Wang, 2022; Franks, 2023), what is the point of work?

Quiet quitting

Among the 2022 Collins Dictionary words of the year was quiet quitting (Franks, 2023), an expression coined by social media and quickly embraced by employees worldwide. Although there is disagreement on its conceptual definition, the professional literature almost unanimously considers quiet quitting as a reduction in work effort that shows employee disengagement and lowered commitment (Brownlee, 2022).

Within that school of thought, signs of quiet quitting include emotional and cognitive disengagement, reduced citizenship behaviour, lower productivity, lowered effort and contribution, absenteeism, and opting out of non-essential tasks (Cholteeva, 2022). The causes of quiet quitting are diverse and multifactorial. At an individual level, employees quiet quit because their needs are unmet, they feel undervalued or burnout, they have a problematic work-life balance, or are plainly unwilling to work (Callahan, 2022c; Duden, 2022; Case, 2022).

For some, chronic under-stimulation, also known as rust-out, may lead to quiet quitting (Beecham, 2023). While burnout occurs when demands exceed capacity, rust out happens when demands are below capacity. Both burnout

and rust-out can increase dissatisfaction and result in quiet quitting. Advocates of this standpoint claim that employees have developed an 'us vs. them' mentality whereby they spend more time trying to get out of tasks than actually working on them (Kelly, 2022).

At an institutional level, quiet quitting is seen as the result of a failure to adapt the work offering to current employee expectations (Aratani, 2023). The demands of the hustle mentality that rewards workaholism clash with employees' concerns of attaining a healthy work-life balance (Kilpatrick, 2022). Line managers are critical to employees' psychological withdrawal. Their failure to recognise the connections between 'rewarding' competent employees with additional work while under-performing employees are allowed to coast begins the cycle of withdrawal. The gradual addition of tasks to employees' core duties and trying to split too many activities among too few employees are all considered major factors in employee disengagement (Klotz and Bolino, 2022).

At a system level, some think that quiet quitting is the product of increased job security (Rosalsky and Selyukh, 2022). Low unemployment rates across developed economies may reassure employees that they could easily find another job, therefore reducing the incentive to work harder (Lev-Ram, 2023).

Proponents of this perspective posit that the consequences of quiet quitting are detrimental for employees and employers alike. On the one hand, a quiet quitter has a negative impact on team performance and climate (Callahan, 2022c). Employees who quiet quit miss out on being part of the change that their company needs and may get a bad reputation among co-workers who may see them as incompetent, disengaged, or lazy (Bersin, 2023). By doing the bare minimum, employees do not get to participate on other parts of the work experience which may provide enjoyment, skills, and social connections (Hancock and Schaninger, 2022). Employers, in the absence of clear feedback, are unable to provide what employees may need (Bersin, 2023). In sum, within this view quiet quitting is portrayed as a passive-aggressive act of employees who have given up (Rosalsky and Selyukh, 2022) or as retaliation against employers' decisions (Harper, 2022). Some consider quiet quitting unethical because employees continue to earn the same salary for lowered effort (Cholteeva, 2022).

A competing perspective on quiet quitting posits that working to contract is what employees are supposed to do (Henley, 2022). Quiet quitting is seen as a manifestation of employees taking back control over their work life and a positive step towards a healthy work-life separation (O'Connor, 2022). While some employees may choose to overdeliver, this should not be considered the norm, or even desirable (Kelemen and Matthews, 2023). Having firm boundaries at work is considered necessary so employees can focus on other interests and responsibilities; 'let it rot' has emerged as a conscious decision to not try to delivery unattainable expectations (Moss, 2022).

Quiet quitting, understood as working to contract, is a misnomer for what should be called simply: working (Kilpatrick, 2022). The perception that it constitutes mutiny is regarded as a reflection of the degree of exploitation that pervades today's workplace (Bero, 2022) and employees reclaiming agency is one of the ways to resist exploitation. This view of quiet quitting places responsibility squarely on employers and the social system that expects work from employees for which they are not willing to pay (Zenger and Folkman, 2022). The working culture in many organisations, for instance, Google and Facebook, and the 'perks' offered, promote workaholism and burnout (Venkataramakrishnan, 2023).

Furthermore, the normalisation of going above and beyond turned it from a voluntary contribution and differentiation strategy in the workplace to a regular expectation at work. But employees' ability to fulfil these additional expectations is greatly diminished by competing responsibilities in and out of work. The pandemic brought into sharp focus the awareness that there is different way of doing things (Aratani, 2023). The lack of correspondence between pay and productivity is a disincentivizing factor for employees and another reason to work to contract (Aratani, 2023; Kilpatrick, 2022).

Proponents of this view argue that while the focus is on quiet quitting, employers have resorted to quiet and loud firing in retaliation against employees. Quiet firing refers to deploying passive-aggressive behaviour to get employees to quit themselves, for example, forcing employees back in the office against their wishes; not inviting employees to important meetings; not offering rewarding projects; removing employees from networks; and giving them tasks that they do not want or dislike or deliberately causing burnout (Callahan, 2022b). It is considered a form of institutional bullying that remains within legal boundaries. Loud firing on the other hand, of which the events in X, formerly Twitter, after Elon Musk's takeover are an example, consists of public practices such as mass layoffs, anti-union practices, and anti-strike regulations (Mahdawi, 2023).

In essence, suggestions that through working to contract employees are stealing from the organisation are deemed offensive by those who adhere to this perspective. The label 'quiet quitting' is seen as a symptom of an unhealthy understanding of our relationship with work.

Quiet quitting and work affect

Despite the lack of conceptual clarity, quiet quitting as a work phenomenon can be placed in the field of work affect (Payne and Cooper, 2007; Isen, 1991). Historically, work affect was taken to mean job satisfaction (Payne and Cooper, 2003). However, there is now consensus that a full gamut of emotional experiences at work affect individuals and groups (Staw, 1994; Miner, Glomb and Hulin, 2005). The interaction among individuals and between them and the work environment facilitate the emergence of higher-level phenomena, such as organisational climate, culture, and organisational performance (Hancock, Allen and Soelberg, 2017; Luthans *et al.*, 2008).

The sustained interest in work affect among scholars and practitioners stems from the assumption that there is a direct link between positive work affect and enhanced performance (Conway and Briner, 2012). The literature on quiet quitting is underpinned by three further assumptions. Firstly, that employees are willing to make an emotional investment at work. Secondly, that quiet quitting is as bad, if not worse, than actual turnover. And thirdly, that quiet quitting is an option available to employees.

The first one is that employees are willing to enter a social contract that requires them to proffer their emotional investment, that is that they give not just their knowledge and skills with their physical and mental labour, but also their emotions, which they then withdraw through quiet quitting. In this transaction, employees derive meaning, social connections, and take energy from work (Zenger and Folkman, 2022). Work is a place where employees find a sense of belonging and purpose but in exchange, they are expected to offer loyalty, permanence, and citizenship behaviour (Tekleab and Chiaburu, 2011).

However, recent changes in the workplace challenge this assumption. The rise of the gig economy, temporary roles, and remote working have brought the notion of employee commitment into question (Gill, 2023; van Rossenberg *et al.*, 2018). Why would someone commit to an organisation when they are not likely to remain in it for long, or when the relationship is purely transactional and does not require emotional investment? How can employees' work affect develop if they are mostly working on their own with limited social interaction with co-workers?

Employees' willingness to engage affectively at work should not be taken for granted. Individual as well as situational differences will impact how much emotional investment employees wish to offer and most importantly, if the job is done proficiently, should emotions matter? What if employees perform well but also have firm boundaries? Those cutting back on emotional investment and discretionary effort might be modelling good behaviour at work. After all: "When doing everything that is required is considered quitting, it suggests that "working" must really require over-working" (Brownlee, 2022). This is particularly problematic when discretionary behaviour is used as the basis for promotions; employees who do their job well may miss out on accolades they deserve because they choose not to engage in behaviours that go outside the scope of their employment contract.

It is also important to consider that commitment and citizenship behaviours have potentially negative effects. For example, committed employees tend to engage in performance-assisting behaviour where they fill in gaps in the performance of the team at their personal expense. Highly committed employees are more receptive to stressors because their attachment increases sensitivity to the environment (Meyer *et al.*, 2002). Too much commitment can harm employees' health and well-being, especially when companies go through difficult times (Lavén and Bergström, 2014), it can detract from other areas of life (family, hobbies), or from attaining better things professionally. It can even reduce skills development and marketability (Meyer and Allen, 1997).

From an organisational perspective, too much commitment from employees can lead to blind acceptance of the status quo which can remain unchallenged and innovation-adverse, and it can hinder change as employees resist to adapt to a new state of things (Meyer and Allen, 1997). When citizenship behaviours become the norm within the organisation, the pressure is on employees to deliver them and expectations of what was perhaps once seen as exceptional behaviour become routine.

The second assumption is that actual turnover is preferable to psychological withdrawal or quiet quitting. This assumption speaks to how organisations have come to rely on employees' discretionary effort to attain competitive advantage so that an employee that has checked-out psychologically is alledged to be worse than having no employee at all (Klotz and Bolino, 2022; Henley, 2022). While this may be seen as an exaggeration for dramatic effect, it is telling that scholars (Arjyalopa, 2022; Liu and Wong, 2023) and industry alike (Bérubé *et al.*, 2022) equate the costs associated with actual turnover to the cost of quiet quitting.

Actual turnover depletes organisational knowledge, disrupts routines, challenges organisational culture, and has the potential to overload employees who remain in the organisation with additional tasks (Torre *et al.*, 2018). If employees who continue to deliver the responsibilities while reducing 'citizenship behaviours' (Klotz and Bolino, 2022) are indeed harmful for the organisation, employers may wish to look at finding the right balance between their demands, especially those not covered by the employment contract, and the needs of employees who do not seem to get as many benefits as employers from their sacrifices.

The dependence on discretionary behaviour carries ethical implications which should be considered by employers. For example, overtime remains a regular occurrence in the workplace across industries. It is well known that it affects recruitment and retention (Duden, 2022; O'Connor, 2022) and is heavily skewed towards junior and diverse employees who may need to prove themselves to a greater extent than other groups of employees (Bero, 2022). Overtime is largely detrimental in all areas of life, and it disadvantages employees with disabilities or those that have responsibilities outside work. Interestingly, managers cannot differentiate between 80hr/week employees and those that pretend to work as hard without doing so (O'Connor, 2022). Unwittingly, organisations may be encouraging availability and quantity of work rather than the quality of what is delivered (Kelemen and Matthews, 2023).

Organisations should consider whether promoting and rewarding such behaviour is ethical and whether ultimately it is in the interest of all parties to encourage extreme citizenship (e.g., answering emails while on leave, cancelling holidays due to work commitments, etc.) (Kelemen and Matthews, 2023). Once social norms are entrenched in organisations, they are hard to abandon. It is this overextension that gets imitated and perpetuated because it is the behaviour that gets rewarded although it leads to fatigue, potentially unethical behaviour, burnout, turnover, and conflict.

To counteract the negative impact of employer demands for citizenship behaviour, Klotz and Bolino (2022) suggest that organisations allow citizenship crafting through which employees can prioritise the discretionary behaviours they wish to engage in, based on an alignment with their own values, needs, interests, and motivations. Affording such freedom goes against the style of management in which those tasks are assigned "equally" by quota. Crucially, citizenship crafting should be encouraged only if/when employees have spare capacity (Klotz and Bolino, 2022).

The perceived equivalence between actual and psychological turnover supports the argument that organisations depend on discretionary contributions from employees to be competitive, and that formal employment contracts do not reflect accurately all the expectations that employees are supposed to meet.

Finally, the understanding of quiet quitting offered in the professional literature presumes that quiet quitting is indeed an option, a choice employees can make. But that is not always the case. For some employees, quiet quitting is a privilege they cannot afford. The risks associated with lowering effort or reducing discretionary input, even if they are still working to contract, are not acceptable for groups of employees for whom working harder than others is the norm.

In societies where structural inequality is high, double standards at work are not unusual (Harper, 2022). Women, people from ethnic minorities, migrants, and other diverse groups sometimes must work twice as much to attain the accolades and recognition that their counterparts receive (McCammon, 2023; Hancock and Schaninger, 2022). Their contributions are often overlooked, and their work is monitored and scrutinised to a greater extent while facing harsher consequences for their mistakes (Harper, 2022). A change in effort among these groups would not go unnoticed. Members of minority groups may also experience the burden of representation whereby they feel a responsibility to perform at a high level lest their performance hinders the chances of success of others in their group (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2015; Harper, 2022). For immigrants whose permanence in a country may depend upon employment, quiet quitting is not possible.

There are significant gender differences that influence quiet quitting. Unpaid work falls disproportionately upon women, who are less likely to do work that will get them noticed but who also experience more burnout and yet are unlikely to quiet quit because they cannot afford it (Bero, 2022). Men are more likely to engage in self-promotion and practice "strategic incompetence" (Mensik, 2023; McCammon, 2023). This means men can often take on the tasks that are easy to show off while the less flashy work that keeps the organisation going but is less promotable falls upon women.

Additionally, there are jobs that are not 'quiet-quittable'. Labourers or factory workers, for example, may consider the concept of quiet quitting laughable, something for those in offices and meetings who somehow have come to realise their overinvestment in work has taken over their lives and can afford to do less because no one will notice (Rosalsky and Selyukh, 2022). Overrepresentation of some groups with shared demographic characteristics in the kind of roles that do not allow for employee withdrawal means that quiet quitting, besides being an industry and a role-dependent phenomenon, is affected by demographic as well as individual characteristics.

Importantly, employees who are not displaying behaviours regarded as quiet quitting may well feel similarly to those who withdraw discretionary effort, they are just not able to enact it.

The future of work affect

For many, the disengagement observed during and after the pandemic among office workers was a reaction to the profound changes experienced throughout COVID-19. Individuals reassessed priorities, changed work routines, and developed a new relationship with the institution of work. External factors have weighed heavily on these changes: the war in the Ukraine, the high cost of living, and the impact of technology have brought new challenges to employees worldwide. Perhaps the biggest of these is that in the grand scheme of things, some jobs have lost meaning and it is that sense of purpose that employees may be looking for elsewhere.

However, it is possible that the current situation is part of a cycle in work-related emotions and attitudes. Not long ago, doing little to no work was seen as a symbol of status, something to aspire to. Those who could afford not to work were privileged. Later, cultural expectations and norms changed, and being busy, working long hours, and having a demanding job became a new status symbol. Presently, there is a shift towards having interests and an active life outside of work which precludes working long hours and being continuously busy (Venkataramakrishnan, 2023).

On the same vein, some authors posit that a cyclical change in the psychological contract may be behind the surge in quiet quitting (MacDonald, 2022). It may be the case that the modern workplace is now going full circle from a transactional psychological contract which is finite, specific, and with a strong financial component (Robinson, Kraatz and Rousseau, 1994), to a relational contract which is less specific and involves a longer-term relationship. It seems that quiet quitting is taken as evidence that the workplace is heading back to a transactional contract which entails narrower obligations (MacDonald, 2022).

In any case, work affect is not constant. It fluctuates and is linked to a multitude of factors. Therefore, employers must be careful not to obsess over dips in commitment and not to punish employees without a thorough understanding of what is going on because peaks and troughs are normal and to be expected (Cholteeva, 2022). That is not to say that both employers and employees should take a step back and wait for the situation to settle down. Change is required for the institution of work to evolve with the times.

Work as a modern institution is currently at an existential crossroad where two competing forces are pulling employees and employers apart. On the one hand, there is the hustle culture, enshrined in economies all over the world as the best way to get ahead and to be recognised and rewarded for one's efforts (Kelly, 2022). On the other hand, the pandemic forced a re-examination of every aspect of life, including how much of ourselves we are giving to work and whether that is the right decision (Beddington, 2023).

It is a concerning state of affairs when working to contract is not enough and is labelled quitting. This brings to question whether employment contracts as well as the prevalent psychological contract are fit for purpose. Should more obligations be formalised in employment contracts? Is the whole work experience being considered, including psychological and well-being factors, so both parties are aware of what is expected?

Interestingly, in the UK alone, working to contract is considered as an action short of strike which can, and is, penalised by employers through wage reduction (Farrer and Co, 2023; University of Sheffield, 2023). Yet, there is a paradox in that delivering what one has been hired to is punishable when the discretionary input is removed.

Should such vital input be discretionary? Can employers enforce behaviours that are by nature voluntary? Is it ethical for employers to police employees' feelings?

The professional literature offers a vast array of 'solutions' to deal with quiet quitting. Tellingly, many of them continue to place the burden for work affect on employees who ought to be more involved (Bersin, 2023); speak out to effect the change they want to see (MacDonald, 2022); do their homework before accepting employement in an organisation to suss out their true culture and perks (Scott, 2023); engage in job crafting so they can do more of what used to excite them at work (Rosseinsky, 2023); come back to the office so they can feel part of something bigger (Leonhardt, 2023); go for the job they actually want (Sinclair, 2023), or return to the hustle mentality to set themselves apart (Kelly, 2022).

The overwhelming reaction to quiet quitting, as seen above, is that it is a problem to solve, an undesirable state. However, it could also be a recalibration of work affect and a redistribution of responsibilities for it at work. It may be time for employers to take on a more active role in providing the workplace that both parties want. But for many employers, it may be time to stop trying to manage employees' feelings, if they are delivering on their roles and work duties, why focus on other considerations? By ensuring that workloads and demands remain realistic and deliverable without encroaching on employees' personal time, employers would lay the foundations of a mutually beneficial relationship. Doing away with exploitative practices is necessary for the evolution of work affect.

Employers should take time to understand what kind of workplace their employees are expecting. According to De Smet *et al.* (2022), there is huge variability in employee priorities at play today, from those that still value the traditional offering and who are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of the job, to those who are looking for a place that offers flexible arrangements or the 'idealists' who are looking for a place with purpose where they can make a difference to the world. A workplace that works for all types of employees may be an utopia but making changes that appeal to most should be at the core of employers' efforts.

The overarching themes in the professional literature with regards to employer-led initiatives are: enhancing the work experience through meaningful work (Cholteeva, 2022); building recovery time into everyday routines (Callahan, 2023); offering adequate compensation (Bérubé *et al.*, 2022); redesigning organisational culture (De Smet *et al.*, 2022) and procedures such as recruitment and retention (Callahan, 2022a); encouraging participation (MacDonald, 2022), and engaging in active listening (Henley, 2022).

While the recommendations above may go a long way towards ensuring better relationships and thus work affect, the issue of intentions remains. That is, would employers invest in any of the above without the expectation of employees doing more than their share? Would it be morally right for employers to implement said changes for the sake of getting employees to commit more of their time and effort? A true re-evaluation of work obligations and expectations must take place for the solutions offered to work.

Blaming the pandemic for today's woes is sometimes disingenuous. Many of the issues that became salient during COVID-19 were simmering long before the pandemic started. However, the extent and intensity of these phenomena today may be symptoms of a workplace pandemic of disengagement with the old ways of working. Although employee disengagement is not new, it used to be a much more concentrated issue, linked mostly to an industry or workplace and occurring at an individual or group level. What we are observing now is a worldwide spread of similar attitudes across cultures and socio-economic contexts. Has more visibility lent legitimacy to disengagement from work? Some would argue that social media has played a pivotal role in the popularisation of quiet quitting (Franks, 2023), but the fact that millions of employees identify with it shows that it is a phenomenon affecting employees everywhere.

With regards to work affect, future efforts should focus on re-engaging the workforce, not necessarily so they continue doing unpaid work that affects their health, relationships, and general well-being, but mostly so that together, employers and employees redefine the terms of their relationship in a way that satisfies both. The notion of regular re-onboarding or rebounding, through which employees are systematically and intentionally supported to succeed and thus enhance their sense of belonging, could be a starting point (Callahan, 2022a). If psychological commitment is truly critical for success, organisations should prioritise developing the right culture, policies, and procedures to generate the desired level of engagement among employees.

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