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"You Pretend to Pay Me; I Pretend to Work": A Multi-Level Exploration of Quiet Quitting in the Greek Context

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ABSTRACT

This study explores quiet quitting—a distinct form of workplace withdrawal—in the Greek context, adopting a multilevel approach to understand how cultural, institutional and individual factors shape this emerging phenomenon. Drawing upon relevant literature, we investigate the macro, meso-organizational, and micro-individual level factors that shape the emergence and persistence of quiet quitting. Through a qualitative, interview-based methodology, we engage with a diverse sample of Greek Human Resource (HR) managers to capture their perceptions and lived experiences of the factors that contribute to quiet quitting. Our findings highlight the complex interplay between societal shifts, cultural norms, organizational practices, and individual coping mechanisms that give rise to and sustain quiet quitting behaviors. We propose a conceptual framework that situates quiet quitting within the unique socio-cultural, economic, and institutional realities of the Greek context. This framework reveals how quiet quitting manifests as a dynamic process, initiated by psychological contract breaches and perpetuated through cycles of emotional exhaustion and identity rationalization. By providing a holistic understanding of the quiet quitting phenomenon, this study contributes to the advancement of contextualized Human Resource Management (HRM) research and offers valuable insights for practitioners navigating the challenges of the modern workplace.

1 | Introduction

The phenomenon of "quiet quitting" has emerged as a significant concern in contemporary workplace dynamics. While often conflated with employee disengagement, quiet quitting represents a distinct form of workplace behavior where employees consciously limit their efforts to explicitly stated job requirements while maintaining their positions. Rather than completely withdrawing or intending to leave, these employees make a deliberate choice to redefine their relationship with work by establishing firm boundaries around their contributions (Pevec 2023). Understanding this nuanced phenomenon requires examining how it manifests within specific cultural and institutional contexts.

The Greek context provides a particularly revealing setting for studying quiet quitting due to several distinctive characteristics. First, Greece occupies a unique position at the intersection of traditional collectivist values emphasizing loyalty and self-sacrifice, and emerging global trends prioritizing work-life balance (Stephan and Pathak 2016). Second, the country's experience with prolonged economic crisis and austerity measures has fundamentally altered psychological contracts between employees and organizations (Vassilopoulou et al. 2019). Third, Greece's institutional environment, characterized by relatively underdeveloped Human Resource Management (HRM) systems and strong hierarchical traditions, creates specific conditions that may shape how quiet quitting manifests. Recent legislative changes further highlight the unique tensions in the

Greek workplace (Psychogios and Wood 2010). While many Western nations experiment with reduced working hours and 4-dayweeks, Greece has moved in the opposite direction. New legislation enacted in July 2024 permits businesses operating on a 24-h basis to implement 6-day working weeks, with employees able to work up to 48h weekly (Race 2024). This policy divergence from global trends towards work-life balance creates additional complexity in understanding quiet quitting within the Greek context.

For Human Resource (HR) managers in Greek organizations, these institutional changes create unique challenges in maintaining employee engagement while implementing extended working hours. The contrast between local policies and global workplace trends towards reduced hours requires HR practitioners to develop context-sensitive approaches that balance organizational needs with evolving employee expectations. Our study offers practical insights for HR managers navigating these tensions, particularly in addressing generational differences in work values and managing the implementation of new working time arrangements.

▌ You pretend to pay me; I pretend to work

This sentiment, expressed by one of our study participants, encapsulates the essence of quiet quitting and serves as a poignant reminder of the reciprocal nature of the employee-employer relationship. It highlights how perceived inequities or breaches in the psychological contract can lead to a tacit withdrawal of effort and engagement. While quiet quitting has gained prominence globally following the COVID-19 pandemic (Lu et al. 2023), its manifestation in Greece reflects deeper historical and cultural dynamics. The country's experience with austerity measures, economic uncertainty, and institutional transformation has created a workforce simultaneously bound by traditional values and pushed towards new ways of relating to work.

Despite growing recognition of quiet quitting's significance, research examining how this phenomenon unfolds within specific national contexts remains limited. Most existing studies have focused on Western, industrialized settings, raising questions about how quiet quitting manifests in different cultural and institutional environments (Campton et al. 2023). Additionally, the role of national context in shaping both the triggers and sustaining mechanisms of quiet quitting remains underexplored.

Drawing on the contextual strategic HRM framework (Farndale and Paauwe 2018; Roumpi et al. 2020), this study examines how macro, meso-organizational, and micro-individual factors interact to shape quiet quitting behaviors in Greece. Our analysis reveals how historical legacies, cultural values, and institutional arrangements create distinct patterns of quiet quitting that differ from those observed in other national contexts. This multi-level perspective allows us to understand both the universal aspects of quiet quitting and its culturally specific manifestations.

Through this study, we aim to address three key research questions:

1. How do macro-level factors, including both global trends and Greek-specific cultural and economic conditions, shape quiet quitting behaviors?

2. What meso-level organizational practices and dynamics in Greek organizations contribute to the emergence and persistence of quiet quitting?

3. How do individual employees in Greece experience and rationalize quiet quitting as a response to their work environment?

To address our research questions, we propose a multilevel process model of quiet quitting evolution as a coping mechanism (Figure 1). This model illustrates how factors at different levels interact to create conditions conducive to quiet quitting behaviors.

Our model highlights the interplay between macro-level factors (both global and national), meso-organizational factors, and micro-individual factors in shaping quiet quitting behaviors. It emphasizes how the generational gap and shifts in societal discourses at the macro level create misalignments with traditional psychological contracts at the organizational level. These

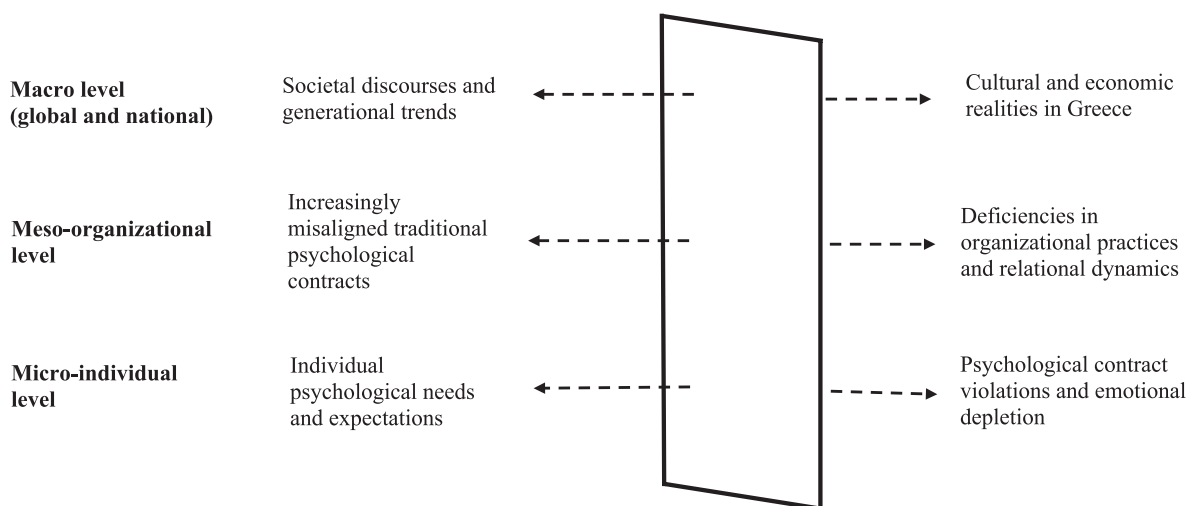| Macro level (global and national) | Societal discourses and generational trends | Cultural and economic realities in Greece |
| Meso-organizational level | Increasingly misaligned traditional psychological contracts | Deficiencies in organizational practices and relational dynamics |
| Micro-individual level | Individual psychological needs and expectations | Psychological contract violations and emotional depletion |

FIGURE 1 | A process multilevel model of quiet quitting evolvement as a copying mechanism.

misalignments, coupled with deficiencies in organizational practices and relational dynamics, lead to psychological contract violations and emotional depletion at the individual level, ultimately resulting in quiet quitting as a coping mechanism.

Our study makes several contributions to the literature on employee disengagement and the emerging discourse on quiet quitting. First, we advance understanding of quiet quitting by showing how it emerges through the interaction of societal, organizational, and individual factors. Unlike previous research that has treated quiet quitting primarily as an individual choice or organizational failure, our multi-level analysis reveals it as a complex phenomenon shaped by broader cultural and institutional forces.

Second, we contribute to organizational justice theory by demonstrating how perceptions of fairness at both institutional and organizational levels influence quiet quitting behaviors. The Greek context, with its recent institutional changes and economic challenges, provides unique insights into how justice perceptions shape employee responses during periods of significant workplace transformation.

Third, we extend generation gap theory by revealing how generational differences in work values influence quiet quitting decisions. Our findings show how younger and older generations interpret and respond differently to workplace changes, particularly regarding work-life boundaries and organizational commitment. This generational lens helps explain varying manifestations of quiet quitting across different age cohorts in the Greek workforce.

Fourth, our findings contribute to psychological contract theory by showing how cultural values and institutional arrangements influence employees' expectations and responses to perceived contract breaches. The Greek context, with its strong emphasis on reciprocal obligations and collective values, reveals how cultural factors shape both the formation and violation of psychological contracts.

Our findings also offer important practical implications for Greek organizations addressing quiet quitting. The multilevel nature of our analysis reveals how institutional changes intersect with organizational practices and individual responses, providing insights for developing targeted interventions. As Greek organizations navigate between traditional workplace values and evolving expectations, especially around working hours, HR practitioners face increasing pressure to develop flexible approaches that acknowledge both operational needs and changing workforce values. The success of new working time arrangements depends heavily on organizations' ability to bridge generational perspectives, particularly as younger employees question traditional definitions of workplace commitment. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations seeking to maintain employee engagement while adapting to transforming workplace expectations.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first review existing literature on quiet quitting and develop our theoretical framework. We then describe our research methodology and present our findings organized around the three levels of analysis. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our findings and suggest directions for future research.

2 | Theoretical Background

2.1 | Quiet Quitting: A Contemporary Label for an Enduring Workplace Issue

While sharing some features with related workplace phenomena, quiet quitting represents a distinct form of employee response that requires careful theoretical differentiation. Quiet quitting, while a relatively new term, is not a novel concept. It is a phenomenon that has existed for decades under various guises, such as disengagement, presenteeism, and job dissatisfaction. However, unlike these related constructs, quiet quitting is characterized by its intentionality and scope—employees consciously calibrate their effort to meet but not exceed job requirements, maintaining adequate performance while withdrawing discretionary contributions. At its core, quiet quitting is a manifestation of the psychological disengagement that occurs when employees feel unfulfilled, undervalued, or disconnected from their work (Heikkeri 2010; Atalay and Dağıstan 2024). Recent scholarly work has helped distinguish quiet quitting from related but distinct workplace phenomena, demonstrating how it differs from simple disengagement or burnout through its intentional, active management of work boundaries and effort (Harris 2025). While burnout represents an involuntary state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion, and general disengagement reflects a broader withdrawal from work, quiet quitting involves conscious choices about effort allocation. Similarly, unlike social loafing or working-to-rule, quiet quitting represents a conscious recalibration of the psychological contract between employee and employer rather than mere withdrawal or protest (Agarwal et al. 2024).

When employees feel their efforts are not recognized, growth opportunities are limited, or values are misaligned with the organization, they may employ quiet quitting as a coping mechanism to protect their well-being and maintain control in the face of job-related stressors (Koelhi and Lidströmer 2024). In the Greek context, this manifestation takes on unique characteristics shaped by cultural expectations around work dedication and loyalty, creating tension with emerging values around work-life balance.

From a micro-individual perspective, quiet quitting can be understood through the lens of several key psychological theories and constructs, particularly psychological contract theory (Rousseau 1995), which frames quiet quitting as a reciprocal response to perceived organizational breaches. When such breaches occur, as when promised rewards or opportunities fail to materialize, employees may experience feelings of betrayal, anger, and mistrust (Robinson and Wolfe Morrison 2000), leading them to withdraw discretionary effort to restore equity in the relationship.

Another relevant micro-individual factor is the concept of employee engagement, which reflects the degree to which individuals invest their cognitive, emotional, and physical energies into their work roles (Anitha 2014). Engaged employees are

characterized by high levels of vigor, dedication, and absorption in their work (Schaufeli and Bakker 2010). However, when employees experience chronic job demands, lack of resources, or misalignment between their values and those of the organization, they may become disengaged and withdraw their discretionary effort (Bakker and Demerouti 2017). Quiet quitting can be seen as a form of disengagement, where employees remain physically present but mentally and emotionally detached from their work.

The decision to engage in quiet quitting is also influenced by individual differences in personality, values, and coping styles. For example, individuals with a strong sense of entitlement or a low tolerance for frustration may be more prone to withdrawing effort when their expectations are not met (Fisk 2010). Similarly, individuals with a high need for achievement or a strong work ethic may be less likely to resort to quiet quitting, even in the face of job-related stressors (Wong et al. 2017). The interplay between these individual differences and the organizational context can shape the likelihood and severity of quiet quitting behaviors.

It is important to note that quiet quitting is not always a deliberate or conscious choice. In some cases, it may be a gradual process of disengagement that occurs over time due to accumulated job-related strain and unmet needs. The job demands-resources model (Bakker and Demerouti 2017) posits that when job demands (e.g., workload, emotional demands) chronically exceed job resources (e.g., autonomy, social support), employees may experience burnout and disengage from their work as a self-protection mechanism. Quiet quitting, in this sense, can be seen as a coping strategy that employees resort to when they feel overwhelmed and unsupported in their work environment.

The negative consequences of quiet quitting extend beyond the individual employee to the wider organization. When employees withdraw their discretionary effort, it can lead to reduced productivity, lower quality of work, and a negative impact on team morale (Serenko 2024). Moreover, as quiet quitting often goes unnoticed by managers, it can create a culture of disengagement that spreads throughout the organization, leading to a vicious cycle of reduced performance and further disengagement (Mahand and Caldwell 2023).

With the rise of remote work and the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, employees are increasingly seeking a sense of purpose, flexibility, and work-life balance in their careers (Magrizos et al. 2023). Organizations that fail to adapt to these changing expectations risk alienating their employees and fueling a culture of disengagement. By embracing a more human-centered approach to work, one that prioritizes employee well-being and meaningfulness, organizations can create a more resilient and engaged workforce.

2.2 | Quiet Quitting or Loud Micromanaging?

The relationship between quiet quitting and management practices in Greece reflects a complex interplay between traditional authority structures and evolving workplace expectations. Is quiet quitting solely a result of disengaged employees, or is it a symptom of a deeper organizational malaise? The answer may lie in the interplay between employee disengagement and managerial practices, particularly micromanagement within Greece's hierarchical organizational culture.

Micromanagement, characterized by excessive control, close monitoring, and a lack of trust in employees' abilities, has long been recognized as a destructive force in the workplace (White 2010). When managers engage in micromanagement, they send a clear message to their employees: "I don't trust you to do your job." This lack of trust can diminish employee morale, suppress creativity, and ultimately lead to disengagement and quiet quitting. Greek management styles have historically emphasized close supervision and control, reflecting broader cultural values around authority and hierarchy (Vassilopoulou et al. 2019). This creates particular tension as younger employees increasingly expect autonomy and trust-based leadership approaches.

The institutional landscape of Greek organizations reflects a complex heritage of family ownership, state influence, and emerging corporate structures (Boufounou et al. 2024). Traditional Greek businesses often operate within deeply embedded networks of personal relationships and informal governance mechanisms. These institutional characteristics create distinctive organizational dynamics where formal policies, such as the recent extension of working hours, interact with informal practices shaped by family ties and personal loyalties. Understanding quiet quitting in this context requires appreciation of how these institutional structures mediate between formal workplace policies and employee responses.

At the meso-organizational level, the relationship between quiet quitting and micromanagement in Greece can be understood through the lens of various organizational theories and constructs. One such construct is organizational justice, which refers to employees' perceptions of fairness in the workplace (Greenberg 2011). When employees feel that their managers are treating them unfairly, such as by excessively monitoring their work or not providing adequate autonomy, they may experience a sense of injustice. This perceived injustice can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including reduced job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job performance (Colquitt et al. 2001).

Another relevant organizational factor is the concept of job control, which reflects the degree to which employees have autonomy and decision-making power in their work (Thompson and Prottas 2006). When managers engage in micromanagement, they effectively strip employees of their sense of control, leaving them feeling powerless and demotivated. This lack of job control has been linked to a range of negative outcomes, including increased stress, burnout, and turnover intentions (Jensen et al. 2013). In the context of quiet quitting, a lack of job control may be a key driver of employee disengagement, as individuals feel unable to shape their work environment in a meaningful way.

The relationship between quiet quitting and micromanagement can also be understood through the lens of leadership

theories. Inclusive leadership, for instance, is characterized by fostering employee's uniqueness, strengthening belongingness within a team, and showing appreciation (Korkmaz et al. 2022). Inclusive leaders empower their employees, provide them with a sense of purpose, and foster a climate of trust and collaboration. In contrast, micromanagers often exhibit behaviors more aligned with transactional leadership, which focuses on rewards and punishments to shape employee behavior (Podsakoff et al. 2010). This transactional approach may lead to short-term compliance but is unlikely to foster the kind of intrinsic motivation and engagement that is necessary for long-term success.

However, it is important to recognize that micromanagement is not always a deliberate choice on the part of managers. In many cases, micromanagement may be a result of organizational culture, leadership styles, or systemic pressures. For instance, in organizations with a high degree of centralization and formalization, managers may feel pressure to closely monitor and control their employees' work. Similarly, in organizations with a culture of fear or blame, managers may resort to micromanagement to protect themselves from potential criticism or failure (Alvesson and Sveningsson 2003).

2.3 | Quitting the Old Workplace?

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a new era of work, marked by unprecedented challenges and a fundamental shift in employees' priorities and expectations (Restubog et al. 2020). The Greek workplace finds itself at a critical juncture, where traditional management approaches rooted in close supervision confront emerging demands for autonomy and work-life balance. This global polycrisis has not only disrupted the traditional Greek workplace but also exposed the deep-seated inequalities and exclusionary practices that have long troubled organizations (Georgiadou, Magrizos, et al. 2021; Georgiadou, Metcalfe, et al. 2021; Vassilopoulou et al. 2019). As employees navigate this new landscape, the phenomenon of quiet quitting has emerged as a silent but powerful force, reflecting a growing disconnect between individuals and their work.

At the macro level, the pandemic has served as a catalyst for a profound re-evaluation of the role of work in people's lives (Hamouche 2023). Faced with the stark realities of illness, isolation, and economic uncertainty, many employees have begun to question the value and meaning of their work (Magrizos et al. 2023). The sudden shift to remote work arrangements has further blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, leading to increased stress, burnout, and a sense of disconnection from the workplace (Branicki 2020).

In this context, quiet quitting can be seen as an indicator of a broader societal shift towards greater work-life balance and personal well-being. As individuals grapple with the existential challenges posed by the pandemic, they are increasingly prioritizing their mental health, family obligations, and personal growth over the demands of their jobs. The pressure to be "always on" and available, once a hallmark of the modern workplace, is now being met with resistance and a growing desire for boundaries and autonomy (Georgiadou et al. 2024). The failure

of organizations to adapt to the changing needs and expectations of their employees has led to a growing sense of alienation and disengagement, particularly among marginalized groups (Georgiadou, Magrizos, et al. 2021; Georgiadou, Metcalfe, et al. 2021). This has created a vicious cycle, where the very individuals who are most in need of support and accommodation are also the most likely to experience quiet quitting and other forms of disengagement.

2.4 | Research Questions

Drawing upon the unique characteristics of the Greek context and the theoretical foundations discussed above, the present study seeks to address three key research questions that aim to provide a holistic understanding of the quiet quitting phenomenon in the Greek context:

Research Question 1. What are the macro level key factors contributing to the quiet quitting phenomenon in the Greek context?

This question aims to explore the interplay of broader societal trends and Greece-specific factors that shape quiet quitting tendencies. By examining global discourses on work-life balance, evolving career aspirations, and shifting employer–employee power dynamics alongside Greek cultural values, economic realities, and institutional practices, we seek to situate quiet quitting within a complex socio-cultural landscape. This approach allows us to uncover how both global and national forces influence employees' expectations, values, and psychological contracts, ultimately shaping the manifestation of quiet quitting in the unique Greek context. Through this lens, we can better understand how individual attitudes and behaviors in the workplace are molded by the intersection of global trends and local realities.

Research Question 2. What are the meso-organizational level key factors contributing to the quiet quitting phenomenon in the Greek context?

This question looks into the organizational practices, policies, and relational dynamics that directly influence employees' experiences and propensity to engage in quiet quitting behaviors. By examining factors such as job design, performance management systems, leadership styles, and organizational culture, this study seeks to identify the meso-level levers that organizations can use to prevent or mitigate quiet quitting among their workforce.

Research Question 3. What are the micro-individual level key factors contributing to the quiet quitting phenomenon in the Greek context?

This question explores the experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms of individual employees that give rise to and sustain quiet quitting behaviors. By investigating factors such as psychological contract breach, emotional exhaustion, identity work, and motivation, this study aims to uncover the micro-level psychological processes that underlie employees' decisions to disengage from their work roles.

3 | Methods

Our methodological approach was designed to capture the nuanced manifestations of quiet quitting within Greece's unique cultural and institutional context. We report findings from an empirical study conducted between October 2023 and March 2024.

Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interviews with 15 HR managers in Greece (Table 1). Our sampling strategy had a theoretical orientation, aiming to purposefully recruit participants knowledgeable of the phenomenon under investigation (Murphy et al. 2017). Participants were invited for an interview via the Greek People Management Association (GPMA)—Greece's professional association of more than 750 HR professionals.

The sample included participants from large (7), medium (5), and small (3) companies operating in diverse economic sectors, such as manufacturing (7), consultancy (2), shipping (2), private education (1), utilities (1), finance services (1), and advertising (1). Of the 15 participants interviewed, 13 belonged to small HR teams with 1–5 employees. Five participants identified as male and 10 as female, with the majority (8) being between 46 and 55 years old. Twelve participants held a postgraduate qualification in HRM. Two participants, who provided their expert opinion, held executive positions in GPMA or one of its local branches. All participants confirmed experiencing quiet quitting among their employees. All but three participants confirmed having personally engaged in quiet quitting at some point in their professional lives.

Initially, we stopped collecting data after 10 interviews as no new dimensions of the phenomenon were emerging from the analysis. However, to ensure that we have reached theoretical saturation, we collected and analyzed data from five additional interviews (Murphy et al. 2017; Saunders and Townsend 2016). This approach led to a rich and in-depth dataset from a more balanced sample of participants, particularly in terms of gender, professional experience, size of company and HR team. All interviews were conducted in Greek by the three authors via videoconferencing software (MS Teams). They lasted between 27 and 60 min (average: 41 min, SD: 10 min), which amounted to approximately 10 h in total.

We followed a semi-structured interview protocol that, apart from certain socio-demographic and organizational questions (i.e., age, gender, years of experience in HRM, economic sector of activity, and size of HR team), focused on three main themes around quiet quitting: (1) perceptions and understandings, (2) personal experiences, and (3) enablers (including macro-environmental factors such as economic crises and the pandemic). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview excerpts presented below were translated in English by the three experienced bilingual authors. A word-for-word approach was initially employed to ensure that translations remained faithful to the original Greek transcript. We subsequently reviewed them for readability and contextual accuracy, resolving any discrepancies through discussion.

An inductive and interpretive qualitative data analysis was followed (Klein and Myers 1999). Data was analyzed iteratively (Strauss and Corbin 1997) on NVivo 14 to develop descriptive and contextualized understandings of quiet quitting and its antecedents in the work settings investigated. Our analytical approach was specifically attuned to identifying among our participants' narratives any contradictions of having personally experienced this phenomenon while also

TABLE 1 | Participants' demographic characteristics (*expert).

ID	Age group	Gender	Years of experience	Economic sector	Company size	HR team size
1	46–55	F	1–5	Manufacturing (food)	Large	1–5
2	46–55	M	16–20	Private education	Medium	1–5
3	26–35	F	1–5	Consultancy	Small	1–5
4	46–55	F	11–15	Consultancy	Small	1–5
5*	36–45	F	16–20	Manufacturing (food)	Large	1–5
6	26–35	F	1–5	Financial services	Large	1–5
7	36–45	F	11–15	Shipping	Large	1–5
8	46–55	F	11–15	Utilities	Large	1–5
9	46–55	F	1–5	Advertising	Small	1–5
10	36–45	M	11–15	Manufacturing (food)	Medium	1–5
11	36–45	M	16–20	Manufacturing (energy)	Large	16–20
12	46–55	M	21+	Manufacturing (food)	Medium	1–5
13	46–55	F	6–10	Manufacturing (food)	Medium	1–5
14*	36–45	M	21+	Shipping	Large	11–15
15	46–55	F	6–10	Manufacturing (packaging)	Medium	1–5

working on addressing its impact in their respective organizations. Coding involved close reading and open coding of the transcripts, until all data was clustered and represented into respective categories. As coding progressed, the generated themes that resulted from the combination of multiple categories of codes were constantly compared and refined (Braun and Clarke 2006). All coding was conducted independently by one of the co-authors. To enhance the findings' dependability, all authors reviewed, discussed, and clarified codes, categories and themes until consensus was reached (Murphy et al. 2017).

All participants provided informed consent. To preserve their anonymity, the excerpts below use "Participant" and a number as signifiers.

4 | Results

Our findings reveal how quiet quitting in Greece emerges at the intersection of global workplace trends and deeply embedded cultural practices.

4.1 | Macro-Level Factors Contributing to Quiet Quitting in Greece

The Greek context presents a unique case where traditional collectivist values encounter growing individualistic workplace expectations, creating distinct manifestations of quiet quitting.

4.2 | Global Factors

4.2.1 | Shifting Societal Emphasis on Work-Life Balance and Well-Being

The global shift in societal discourse towards achieving work-life balance and prioritizing employee well-being over excessive work hours is increasingly evident in Greece (Kinman and McDowall 2016). This emerging cultural narrative is gaining traction in the country, challenging long-standing local workplace norms that have traditionally equated self-worth and dedication with putting in long hours and making personal sacrifices for the job. As this global phenomenon takes hold in Greece, it highlights the tension between the desire for a more balanced approach to work and the deeply ingrained expectations of the Greek work culture.

Greek organizational structures have historically developed through a combination of family entrepreneurship and state-influenced industrial policy. This institutional heritage continues to shape how organizations implement and manage workplace policies. The recent introduction of extended working hours exemplifies how Greek institutions often navigate between traditional approaches to labor management and pressure for modernization. Unlike Northern European countries where works councils and formal labor representation shape working time policies, Greek organizations operate within a relationship-oriented management culture where informal networks and personal connections often take precedence over formal procedures

(Bourantas and Papadakis 1996). This institutional context creates particular challenges for implementing and managing new workplace policies while maintaining employee engagement.

The interviews highlighted this societal shift, especially among younger generations of Greek employees who are increasingly rejecting the notion that their value should be defined by endless hustling and a lack of boundaries around work. These employees have been socialized in an environment where these values of self-care are celebrated over outdated "hustle culture" mentalities and practices that could have a detrimental effect on their health, well-being, and work-life balance (Kelliher et al. 2019). An experienced HR manager in a large manufacturing company stated:

> The new generation, the young people don't want to hear about, they don't want to work shifts, they don't want to work on weekends. (Participant 12)

> These young people, fundamentally, and I think they're doing the right thing, put themselves and their own wellbeing first. And work is the means to make this happen. (Participant 13)

> This has brought to light issues we were previously hesitant to prioritize or demand. In Australia, I had even read that in contracts they say that there's no way they won't have telework. I want to live, some people enjoyed the lockdown, I went for walks, we spent time with my family, look at what I was missing while I was sitting for so many hours in the office with so-and-so barking over my head and treating me badly? All these things came and were weighed inside each person, so the scale now tilts towards 'being well', because if I'm well, I'll be good at work too. There was a reassessment of many aspects of life, with work being a major factor. (Participant 3)

When organizational norms and expectations fail to adapt to this evolving societal reality, it can trigger feelings of dissatisfaction, unmet needs, and misalignment among employees who have internalized these newer work-life balance values. This perceived violation of the psychological contract they have constructed can initiate quiet quitting behavior to emotionally disengage and restore equilibrium in the face of organizational practices that are out of step with societal emphases. The clash between individual expectations shaped by societal discourse and the reality of outdated organizational cultures causes disengagement and withdrawal facilitated by quiet quitting.

4.2.2 | Generational Shifts in Work Values and Expectations

Closely tied to the changing societal discourse around work-life balance is a broader generational shift in work values and expectations that is also contributing to quiet quitting in organizations. The interviews revealed a divide between how older

generations socialized in past eras tend to approach work versus the mindsets and attitudes of younger cohorts.

For an early career, but middle-aged, HR manager working in manufacturing, older generations seemed to possess more enduring mentalities oriented around persevering in unfavorable work conditions without rocking the boat:

> I think the older generations handled it more stoically. Meaning okay this is my employer, this is my manager, I won't speak up, this is how it is, this is what I'll do now. (Participant 1)

In contrast, the perspectives of younger workers reflected in the interviews highlighted very different priorities and red lines around factors like work-life balance, opportunities for continuous growth and development, and finding personal meaning in their jobs. Another middle-aged but more experienced HR consult explained:

> Today's youth have almost all studied, have at least a master's degree and know at least one or two foreign languages…It is a generation that is yes, hungry, wants to contribute if they find that background, and wherever they find it, they evolve very well. (Participant 4)

They went on to suggest that this generation is much less likely to quietly tolerate situations where their growth needs, desires for work-life integration, or personal fulfillment go unmet:

> However, I would not call this phenomenon quiet quitting for this generation. Because it does not apply to this generation…there is no quiet quitting at all in this case. (Participant 4)

> But on the other hand, we must consider that there are different types of employees, so now the new generations, Generation Z, Millennials, and all these people who are emerging etc., have, I would say, different limits in their tolerance for these processes. So, the young employees who are 20–30 years old won't even enter this process to ever experience this, because they change jobs so quickly for nothing, so there you have to struggle to keep them, let alone… rather than having time to experience such situations. I mean, these people are asking for quick success, quick career, quick development, and at 40, you know, to be retired—jokingly speaking. So this type of target range, this age range, you can never face it. There you should focus on people who are over 30, for sure, and as they get older, this behavior becomes more common. (Participant 11)

These contrasting perspectives reflect broader generational shifts in work values identified in scholarly research

(Twenge 2010). Younger generations tend to prioritize intrinsic values like work-life balance, personal growth, and deriving meaning from their jobs. When their psychological contracts built around these values are violated by organizational cultures and leadership styles ill-equipped to adapt, it breeds misalignment and disengagement more likely to result in turnover than in quiet quitting behaviors.

4.2.3 | Societal Shifts Disrupting Traditional Employer–Employee Dynamics

Adding to these generational and work-life balance tensions is a broader power shift occurring in employer–employee relations within the broader society. Historically, economic forces and high unemployment rates tended to suppress overt turnover, as employees felt compelled to remain in unfulfilling roles that violated their psychological contracts due to a lack of alternatives. However, this dynamic is shifting nowadays:

> I think the transitional stage we're in now and the change from the type of employees our generation was used to plays a role too. (Participant 1)

This suggests that younger generations of employees feel more empowered to disengage and withhold full effort and engagement when their needs go unmet. They do not feel compelled to persist in unsatisfying situations due to perceived difficulty in finding alternatives. The shifting power dynamics have emboldened employees to act, whether through quiet quitting or actual turnover, when faced with misaligned expectations.

This disruption to the historical power dynamics also reduces deterrents to quiet quitting for those who do feel trapped in unfulfilling roles. A very experienced HR consult currently working for a private education institution described his experience:

> That's exactly why I left the company because during Covid I realized that the little things I had put in place meant I had nothing more to give to the company. (Participant 2)

4.3 | National Factors

4.3.1 | Cultural Norms as Triggers and Sustaining Mechanisms

Deeply embedded within the Greek national culture are norms and belief systems that tie an individual's sense of self-worth, social standing, and family obligations to persevering through challenging work conditions without complaint (Miliopoulou and Kapareliotis 2021). Employees are socialized with the notion that committed organizational membership requires aligning oneself with the company's needs, even when personal or professional fulfillment lags.

As a younger HR consultant explained, Greece's emphasis on cultural alignment with organizational values can trump individual growth needs:

Culture comes into play there. When we are aligned with what we want to do and our culture highlights and illuminates all these aspects, then yes, I will be able to provide them with appropriate training [for growth]. (Participant 3)

This quote highlights the powerful role of cultural perceptions around alignment, perseverance, and prioritizing organizational values over individual growth and fulfillment. When those beliefs remain rigid and inflexible to evolving psychological contracts, it allows for quiet quitting to emerge. An expert manager, who has extensive HRM experience both in hospitality and shipping, touched on these ingrained Greek societal norms of perseverance at all costs, noting:

I've noticed that here where I work and live, younger people do this naturally, without feeling guilty. When I started working and left earlier, I felt guilty, I had this feeling, because that's how they had instilled it in me. Now I see the young people, and I'm happy to tell the truth, and without any intention to judge them, they do it effortlessly, and they do it well. I came to work and give you this…We agreed that I would do this, and I do this and leave. (Participant 7)

Younger generations are less beholden to these traditional cultural expectations, increasing the likelihood of incongruence with organizational realities and triggering quiet quitting as a coping mechanism.

Once psychological contract violations have been triggered by misalignment with evolving individual values, Greece's cultural emphases become a sustaining force for quiet quitting tendencies. As employees cannot overtly exit due to cultural constraints around loyalty, commitment, and avoiding shame, quiet quitting becomes a face-saving form of passive coping.

Yes, if you ask me, I'd like to reduce the extent of quiet quitting. I mean, I wouldn't want constant high turnover because with high turnover, you can't create a culture within the organization. I would prefer quiet quitting, as you put it, but with the idea of reducing it, finding ways to not have this thing. I mean, you'll definitely have cases of quiet quitting, but you can't have 50% of the organization doing quiet quitting. Something's not right there. (Participant 14)

The above quote lays bare the implicit cultural acceptance and normalization of quiet quitting as an unfortunate inevitability that must be managed and minimized, rather than aggressively rooted out through repairing breached psychological contracts. There is a level of resigned contentment around quiet quitting in Greece stemming from cultural norms that deter employees from overtly exiting.

These findings add richer cultural context to research on quiet quitting's antecedents, which has highlighted misalignment between individual and organizational values as a key trigger (Nimmi et al. 2024). The current analysis reveals how quiet quitting can become entrenched and normalized when catalyzed by cultural standards that constrain employees from openly quitting, as found in Greece's nationally ingrained norms around perseverance and loyalty. The cultural forces at play not only contribute to the emergence of quiet quitting but also sustain it as an accepted, if undesirable, reality.

4.3.2 | Economic and Institutional Realities as Enabling Factors

Greece's economic landscape and institutional capabilities in HRM have further contributed to the proliferation of quiet quitting tendencies by reducing deterrents and limiting organizations' ability to detect and address breached psychological contracts. The country's periods of economic crisis, austerity measures, and high unemployment have historically made Greek employees more risk-averse towards overtly quitting their roles, even when faced with high levels of dissatisfaction and incongruence with their needs. These restraining economic forces have deterred outright exits during turbulent times, leaving quiet quitting as one of the few available coping mechanisms for employees dealing with misaligned expectations and unmet psychological contracts.

However, as Greece's labor market has rebounded, these economic forces suppressing turnover have started to ease:

Now purpose is quite a buzzword, but… [quiet quitting] has always existed, it's not something completely new. (Participant 2)

The availability of more employment alternatives may cause quiet quitting to escalate from a reactionary coping mechanism in response to unsatisfying jobs into a strategic, prolonged approach as employees feel more empowered to disengage while selectively exploring external opportunities. This aligns with research findings on how perceived employability and the availability of job alternatives influence employee motivation and retention (Veth et al. 2019). However, it is important to note that this trend may not be uniform across all age groups. Older generations, who may have higher redundancy pay in a high-turnover environment and may be less educated in new digital skills, could face fewer employment alternatives. As a result, they may be more likely to resort to quiet quitting as a means of coping with job dissatisfaction. In some cases, employers may even tacitly accept this "loyalty," as it costs them less than actively addressing the underlying issues or investing in employee development.

These economic forces are compounded by Greece's relative lack of robust, institutionalized HRM systems and practices in areas such as compensation, roles, responsibilities, and decision rights. Such ambiguities mean that psychological contract issues, misalignments between employee needs and expectations, and declining engagement and motivation often go undetected until quiet quitting has become entrenched.

> We have an issue with salaries because they're not under my control…I don't have visibility into what salaries my people make. (Participant 3)

> There are no processes, systems…so in many companies the role, responsibilities and scope of decisions that can or cannot be made; [the role of HR] is not even clear. (Participant 4)

These institutional deficiencies reflect previous research on Greece's slow adoption of modern HRM practices compared to other European nations (Katou and Budhwar 2010). When asked whether it was more preferable to manage employees with quiet quitting than having to recruit new personnel in a labor market characterized by high turnover, an experienced HR manager in a food processing factory exclaimed that:

> I am forced to manage quiet quitting… I have no choice but to manage quiet quitting…First, replacing them is too costly, so I have to handle it carefully to get whatever contribution I can, ensuring they aren't working against me but alongside me. Second, I can't replace them…I can't pay to lure…the Gen Z or the millennial, how do I to maintain their engagement? And this requires investments, so the company says 'we don't invest'. We are managing [quiet quitting] at the expense of the ambitious players. The talented ones. (Participant 12)

4.3.3 | Polycrisis Strains Further Fueling Quiet Quitting

Beyond Greece's economic and institutional realities, the polycrisis context of overlapping global threats including public health emergencies, social upheaval, geopolitical conflicts, rapid technological disruption, and climate change impacts is taking a significant cumulative psychological toll on the Greek workforce:

> The employer is not the only factor. It's overwhelming for people right now, with everything that's happening. You start to reduce your effort in different areas. (Participant 8)

In this depleted state, workers are increasingly prioritizing self-preservation and personal needs over going above and beyond in their jobs. Quiet quitting represents a form of passive disengagement and boundary-setting as people's capacity gets maxed out by the polycrisis overload. For some, it has even become an act of resistance against unsustainable "hustle culture" and norms of toxic productivity at any personal cost. Quiet quitting becomes not the desirable first choice, but rather "a solution at that moment" (Participant 8), especially when readily available better alternatives that allow employees to fully thrive are lacking.

The cascading societal impact of this polycrisis has been particularly acute in Greece due to the country's recent trauma of austerity and economic turmoil during the debt crisis of 2010. As one interviewee highlighted regarding Greece's brain drain:

> We see… Talented people who no longer accept working just to survive. (Participant 12)

The above quote poignantly captures how this polycrisis is rapidly eroding workers' psychological resilience and tolerance for any form of exploitation or mere subsistence-level existence. In this context of compounded risk and uncertainty, quiet quitting emerges as a coping mechanism and form of self-protection when psychological contracts are perceived as breached.

4.4 | Meso-Organizational Factors Contributing to Quiet Quitting in Greece

4.4.1 | Industry and Occupational Job Characteristics

Certain industry and occupational characteristics emerged as risk factors making work environments more susceptible to quiet quitting taking hold. In line with job demands-resources theory (Bakker and Demerouti 2017), roles characterized by excessive hindering demands like repetitive tasks, tight controls, and minimal autonomy deplete employee motivation over time:

> Positions which may not give them the leeway to make decisions and have responsibilities. So I would say yes, basic administration positions are certainly ones where the phenomenon is more pronounced. (Participant 4)

> In blue-collar technical positions, I wouldn't say this phenomenon is encountered anymore because things are more fluid there. That is, someone who doesn't like it simply leaves. Whereas another employee who is an office worker, years have passed and they know that if they enter the job market, things won't be so encouraging, so they compromise, I would say, with their earnings and with their style of career development, so they settle in and get comfortable, doing the bare minimum. So, I would say I haven't encountered it in my own company. (Participant 11)

> When we are in a phase of company growth, this [quiet quitting] is not encountered, because there are increased work rates and often we exceed the typical, the typical working hours. So all this, because we are in a very fluid environment, everything changes in our daily routine, new colleagues come in, new systems and programs change, so all this maintains a challenge, a motivation. (Participant 11)

The combination of role constraints with lack of motivating job resources like autonomy, variety, and opportunities to utilize

one's full skills results in emotional detachment. This finding aligns with research linking monotonous, over-controlled work to burnout and turnover intentions (Karthikeyan and Thomas 2017). When employees feel stifled and unable to fully apply their capabilities, disengagement becomes a coping mechanism to deal with the frustration and lack of fulfillment.

4.4.2 | Nepotistic, Inequitable Cultures

Nepotistic, non-meritocratic organizational cultures breeding systemic injustice also surfaced as a strong driver of quiet quitting in Greece. Injustice perceptions arise when employees feel their contributions are not recognized or rewarded equitably compared to colleagues advancing based on politics or family ties:

> Nepotism affects negatively...it reinforces quiet quitting...When I have a company and I put [a relative] and I have [other employees] who have potential and want to give something more, they are disappointed. They say 'why should I give something extra when I know beforehand that this position will be taken over by [a relative]'. (Participant 12)

This aligns with research on the negative effects of nepotism on job attitudes and motivation (Wated and Sanchez 2015). When rewards and growth opportunities are distributed based on cronyism rather than merit, disengagement results. Employees who feel undervalued and unfairly passed over for recognition tend to withdraw their discretionary efforts as a form of protest and self-protection against further injustice.

Organizational injustice caused by unclear, subjective decision-making processes lacking transparency and opportunities for voicing concerns similarly breed quiet quitting.

A younger HR manager working in consultancy highlighted:

> Because there's lack of transparency! [...] Something we have an issue with here is the salaries, because it is not under my management. [...] I do not have a picture of what salaries my people have [...] I do receive questions about them, and they tell me, '[HR manager's name], I asked for this, you told me it would happen, and I haven't seen it'. This is a very delicate issue that can cause a lot of damage. [...] It's easy to write five [organizational] values and frame them on the wall. Do we practice them or will we laugh among ourselves and deceive ourselves that there is transparency when there isn't? (Participant 3)

Feeling powerless to influence decisions and processes that impact one's work causes employees to withdraw effort and cooperation as a coping mechanism (Colquitt et al. 2001). Instead of speaking up when psychological contracts are violated, they quietly reduce discretionary effort as distrust sets in. The lack of fair, consistent

procedures for making key decisions signals to employees that their perspectives and well-being are not valued, eroding motivation to go above and beyond.

Most fundamentally, disengaging leadership styles and toxic cultural attributes emerged as root causes fueling quiet quitting across Greek organizations. Command-and-control, micromanaging leadership lacking in inspirational vision, transparency, and psychological safety bred employee cynicism and detachment. Moreover, creating inclusive, psychologically safe organizational climates where employees feel able to voice dissent without retaliation emerged as another preventative HR imperative. Participant 14's call for inclusive leadership resonates with the importance of fostering organizational trust, respect for individual authenticity, and involvement in shaping work processes (e.g., Shore et al. 2018). When leaders micromanage, control, and treat employees as mere implementers rather than valued partners in setting strategic visions, psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, participation and competence go unmet. Reflecting on this erosion of intrinsic drivers, this experienced HR manager observed that:

> I consider this to be the challenge, and it's also the part of the organization. Does the organization have the power to move forward, or is it a mess, to put it differently? That is, does the organization follow international trends, or is it just putting out fires daily? If there is a vision and mission from management about where we're heading and how we'll drive this change and to participate in all this, I think that quiet quitting is a bit marginal. (Participant 14)

Organizational cultures built on mistrust, power hoarding, and lacking authentic employee involvement are ripe for becoming demoralizing, dehumanizing experiences (Agarwal 2014).

As psychological safety and basic self-determination needs go unmet, defensive disengagement and quiet quitting take over by default among employees. The lack of trust, respectful treatment, and opportunities for meaningful influence signal to employees that their well-being and perspectives are not valued, leading them to mentally check out.

4.4.3 | Ineffective Performance Management

Lack of formal performance management systems linking employee contributions to valued outcomes emerged as another key driver of quiet quitting in Greece. Without continuous accountability systems providing clear expectations, developmental feedback, recognition, and consequences, breaches in the psychological contract go unaddressed. An HR manager, who works in a large utilities company, noted about their own internal attempts to identify antecedents:

> Weak performance management, recognition, and career development systems were identified as antecedents signaling procedural injustice and contributing to quiet quitting. (Participant 8)

This reflects research emphasizing the reciprocal contingencies between perceived organizational support, organizational commitment, and employee motivation (Kurtessis et al. 2017). When efforts are unrecognized or not clearly aligned with valued incentives, disengagement takes over. Employees become less willing to invest discretionary effort when they do not see a clear link between their contributions and meaningful rewards or growth opportunities.

While organizational context factors like nepotistic cultures, poor leadership, and processes enabling injustice perceptions enable quiet quitting to take hold, certain HR systems and practices emerged as potential preventative countermeasures. Participant 3 highlighted realistic job previews, continuous investment in training and development, and providing clear career pathing as measures HR should focus on. This recommendation reflects strategic HR literature emphasizing the powerful role of robust talent management architectures in shaping sustained employee commitment and motivation (Collings et al. 2015).

4.4.4 | Lack of Voice and Involvement Mechanisms

Closely related to organizational injustice perceptions fueling quiet quitting was the lack of systems and cultural norms providing employees a meaningful voice in decisions impacting their work. Open communication channels and avenues for upward feedback have been established as key drivers of employee engagement and proactive behaviors (Weiss and Zacher 2022). Without such outlets to constructively voice concerns, employees in Greece appear more prone to quietly reducing discretionary efforts:

> When employees don't have a voice in decisions that affect their work, they become apathetic and reactive rather than proactive. (Participant 11)

Research on employee silence has similarly found that organizational situations where voicing concerns feels unsafe, impractical, or unsuccessful cultivate withdrawal behaviors like quiet quitting as a default (Cullinane and Donaghey 2020). This lack of voice mechanisms prevents problem-solving and proactive adjustments to resolve misalignments before quiet quitting fully sets in. When employees cannot openly discuss frustrations, unmet needs, or areas for improvement without fear of retaliation, the issues fester unaddressed and fuel disengagement.

By transparently investing in employee growth through training, providing avenues for skill mastery, and visibly linking efforts to meaningful career progression, the conditions that breed detachment can be disrupted. This finding aligns with research positioning developmental HR practices as key drivers of engagement and retention through meeting intrinsic needs and aligning actions to desired outcomes (Aguinis and Kraiger 2009). When organizations demonstrate a sincere commitment to employee development and create clear pathways for advancement based on merit, employees are more likely to remain motivated and invested.

Organizational contexts where uniqueness is valued, nurtured, and harnessed rather than suppressed through exclusionary favoritism make quiet quitting less likely to set in. Inclusive environments equip HR to manage diverse talent pipelines without cultivating lateral inequities that initiate disengagement (McKay et al. 2009). When employees feel their authentic selves are welcome and their diverse perspectives are appreciated, they are more likely to stay actively engaged.

4.5 | Micro-Individual Factors Contributing to Quiet Quitting in Greece

4.5.1 | Perceived Psychological Contract Breach

One of the primary individual-level triggers setting quiet quitting in motion was the experience of psychological contract breach. When employees perceive their organization has failed to fulfill its implied obligations around factors like equitable compensation, developmental support, work-life balance, or other salient expectations, violation emotions like anger, resentment, and mistrust arise.

As Participant 1 personally recounted:

> Yes, I had this feeling of injustice...It's not only the financial rewarding, in many cases it's the behavior and also the fact that you never hear a 'thank you' or... You do a hundred things right without recognition, but make one mistake and they criticize you. (Participant 1)

This type of psychological contract rupture, where an employee feels their efforts and integrity went unrecognized or were actively undermined, sparks a revision of effort norms and motivation to uphold their end of the relational deal (Coyle-Shapiro et al. 2019). Quiet quitting emerges as a self-protective coping response. When trust is broken and employees feel betrayed, they withdraw their discretionary contributions to rebalance the psychological ledger and protect themselves from further disappointment.

The interview insights align with psychological contract theory's propositions around how unmet expectations and perceived organizational discrepancies from understood deal terms impact employee attitudes and behaviors like organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, neglect, and even retaliation (Robinson and Wolfe Morrison 2000). When employees feel their psychological contracts have been violated, they are more likely to mentally check out and withhold effort as a form of passive protest against organizational injustice.

4.5.2 | Emotional Exhaustion and Burnout Mechanisms

In addition to perceived psychological contract breach serving as a trigger, the interviews also highlighted how individual experiences of emotional exhaustion, depletion of personal resources, and feelings of helplessness can become self-reinforcing

psychological mechanisms that enable quiet quitting to persist once it takes hold.

For instance, a female HR manager, who works in a medium-sized factory, described how personal stressors like caretaking responsibilities and feeling overextended can exacerbate disengagement:

> They may have to take care of someone at home...and they say, 'Now, I don't want to start everything from scratch again'. (Participant 13)

As supported by research on work–family conflict, exhaustion of psychological and emotional resources for coping with excessive demands across life domains decreases motivation and enhances burnout (Allen et al. 2020). When individuals feel drained, even discretionary contributions that were previously sustainable begin to feel unmanageable. The cumulative strain of juggling too many responsibilities without adequate support leaves employees feeling overwhelmed and unable to invest their full selves in their work.

This experience of depletion perpetuates a self-reinforcing cycle of quiet quitting as a defense mechanism to preserve remaining psychological resources. Individuals experiencing burnout limit their resource expenditure to only the bare minimum required, rationalizing any previous discretionary efforts as foolish overextension. They become increasingly protective of their time and energy, leading to further disengagement to prevent total depletion.

4.5.3 | Identity Work and Rationalization Mechanisms

At the micro-individual level, participants explained how they have engaged in identity work and rationalization processes to protect their self-worth and self-concept when persisting in quiet quitting situations that violated their expectations:

> Well, look, honestly, I'm experiencing it now, and it's not easy, it's not a desirable position, I mean it creates ambivalence. You go back home and you're questioning yourself. And you wonder, OK, quiet quitting is not my strategy, it's a tactic, and now it's a necessary tactic, but for how long can one live with tactics? At the end of the day, you have to decide on a strategy. I don't see my life like this, let's say, to be long-term like this in the professional part, right?... [Quiet quitting] pushes me to always find other creative alternatives outside of work, but...you would like... your work to fulfil you too, and not have to be... it's a defense mechanism, I mean, and you say, OK, how long will I do defense? Let's say, for how long? (Participant 8)

This quote suggests the employee engaged in this "tactic" to avoid having their self-concept defined solely by quiet quitting and disengagement after years of effort. By re-framing

the situation as a conscious values-based "refusal" rather than passive quiet quitting, a degree of agency and positive distinctiveness is reasserted. The employee is able to maintain a sense of integrity and self-respect by casting their disengagement as a principled stance rather than a helpless reaction.

This dynamic aligns with self-affirmation theory's propositions about how individuals strive to maintain self-integrity by rationalizing and finding face-saving ways to view their responses to situations as consistent with core personal values (Steele 1988). Versus simply admitting to being burned out or becoming a passive reactor, employees engage in identity work recasting quiet quitting as a principled form of resistance against workplace mistreatment or cultures failing to align with their authenticity. They construct self-protective narratives that allow them to withdraw effort without completely sacrificing their sense of self-worth. An experienced HR consultant, reflecting on Greece's state of the economy and labor market during the financial crisis, noted that:

> All these people not seeing any prospect or progression stayed trying financially to make ends meet, not even covering their daily expenses, which was not necessarily businesses' fault as this was the state of the Greek economy...A business would have looked to have the cheapest possible employees, so even those who were already there experienced wage cuts...this of course led to the mentality of 'You pretend to pay me and I'll pretend to work'. (Participant 4)

In this example, employees engage in quiet quitting as an adaptive form of self-preservation and justice restoration against exploitative compensation practices. By "pretending" to uphold their side of the deal when the organization openly disregards the other, they restore a sense of equity and protect self-worth against undignified mistreatment. Quiet quitting becomes a way to maintain a modicum of autonomy and dignity in the face of dehumanizing organizational practices.

This resonates with identity work research suggesting individuals engage in strategies like defining new bases of self-worth and introducing counter-narratives to maintain a positive sense of self amid identity threats like micromanagement or underpayment (Brown 2015). Quiet quitting represents an emancipatory reassertion of personal dignity when institutional identity workspaces threaten self-definitions. By redefining what it means to be a good employee on their own terms, workers can psychologically insulate themselves from the identity-eroding effects of toxic work environments.

5 | Discussion

Our findings illuminate how quiet quitting in Greece represents more than simple employee withdrawal—it reflects a fundamental tension between traditional cultural values and evolving workplace expectations (Figure 1). The institutional

complexity of Greek organizations helps explain the unique manifestations of quiet quitting we observed. Traditional organizational structures, characterized by strong family influence and personal relationships, create distinctive pathways through which employees express dissatisfaction. While Western corporate environments might see quiet quitting emerge through formal channels of reduced engagement, Greek organizations often experience it through subtle shifts in personal loyalties and informal work arrangements (Psychogios and Wood 2010). The implementation of extended working hours policy provides a clear example of how institutional structures shape employee responses—rather than outright rejection or acceptance, employees navigate these changes through complex networks of personal relationships and informal accommodations.

To further elaborate on the factors contributing to quiet quitting, we present a comprehensive table of shapers that influence the emergence and persistence of quiet quitting tendencies in the Greek context (Table 2).

This table provides a detailed breakdown of the factors shaping quiet quitting across macro, meso-organizational, and micro-individual levels. It also outlines the theoretical foundations underpinning our analysis at each level and the mechanisms through which quiet quitting manifests. Through the lens of this proposed process model and the identified shapers of quiet quitting (Table 2), we analyze the interplay between macro-level, meso-organizational, and micro-individual factors. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of how quiet quitting emerges and persists within Greece's unique socio-cultural and economic landscape.

5.1 | Reconceptualizing Quiet Quitting in the Greek Context

Our findings extend understanding of quiet quitting by revealing its distinct nature from related workplace phenomena. While previous research has often conflated quiet quitting with general disengagement or burnout (Heikkeri 2010; Atalay and Dağıstan 2024), our study demonstrates how it represents a more nuanced and intentional response to perceived organizational conditions. The data reveals that quiet quitting manifests not as simple withdrawal or protest, but as a conscious recalibration of effort and engagement in response to specific organizational and cultural conditions. This intentional calibration distinguishes quiet quitting from involuntary states like burnout or broader withdrawal behaviors like disengagement (Harris 2025). Particularly noteworthy is how quiet quitting operates as a coping mechanism that allows employees to maintain professional standing while protecting personal well-being—a finding that helps explain why it often goes unnoticed by management and can persist long-term (Koelhi and Lidströmer 2024). This understanding helps position quiet quitting as a distinct phenomenon requiring specific management approaches rather than general engagement strategies.

This conceptualization is particularly evident in the Greek setting, where quiet quitting reflects a fundamental clash between traditional work values and new global expectations. Our data reveals a significant generational divide in approaches to work, with younger employees demonstrating a more relaxed attitude towards traditional work norms. They appear to prioritize work-life balance and personal fulfillment over the long-standing cultural emphasis on sacrifice and loyalty to the organization.

5.2 | The Unique Greek Context: A Crucible for Quiet Quitting

Greece provides a particularly fertile ground for studying quiet quitting due to its distinctive blend of economic challenges, cultural traditions, and rapid societal changes. The country's experience with austerity measures and high unemployment rates has created a workforce that is simultaneously risk-averse and deeply frustrated. Our findings indicate that HR managers in Greece are grappling with the challenge of managing quiet quitting in a context where replacing employees is costly and difficult, and where investments in employee engagement are often limited due to financial constraints.

Moreover, Greece's traditional work culture, characterized by strong hierarchies and expectations of long-term loyalty, is increasingly at odds with global trends towards work-life balance and personal fulfillment. This creates a unique tension that manifests in quiet quitting behaviors, particularly among younger workers who resist traditional expectations around working hours and schedules.

The contrast between Greek working time policies and global trends towards reduced hours creates unique challenges for organizations. While some sectors implement 6-day working weeks to boost productivity, they must simultaneously address employee expectations shaped by global movements towards 4-day weeks and enhanced work-life balance. This paradox requires Greek organizations to develop nuanced approaches to employee engagement that acknowledge both local economic realities and evolving workforce expectations. Organizations might consider implementing flexible scheduling options within the extended working hour framework, allowing employees greater autonomy in managing their time while meeting operational requirements.

5.3 | Theoretical Implications

Our study makes several key theoretical contributions to the understanding of quiet quitting, particularly in how it unfolds over time and across different levels of analysis.

5.3.1 | Temporal Dynamics of Quiet Quitting

The process model we propose (Figure 1) offers a dynamic view of how quiet quitting evolves over time, addressing a significant gap in the literature which has often treated it as a static phenomenon (Heikkeri 2010). Our findings suggest that quiet quitting in Greece typically follows a pattern of initial enthusiasm, followed by disillusionment, gradual withdrawal, and eventually, a state of detached persistence.

TABLE 2 | Multi-level shapers, theoretical foundation and mechanisms of quiet quitting emergence and persistence tendencies in the Greek context and interventions to address it.

Criterion	Level		
	Macro (global and national)	**Meso-organizational**	**Micro-individual**
Shapers	Global level i. Shifts in societal emphasis on work-life balance and well-being (COVID-19 and poly-crisis) ii. Generational gap in work values, life values, and expectations iii. Disruption of traditional employer–employee dynamics and power shifts partly due to globalization and war for talent National level i. Challenge of cultural related work norms around the symbolic value of work and the prioritization of organizational demands over personal life and needs (i.e., individual growth, fulfillment, and work-life balance) particularly by younger generations—leading to stoicism for the older versus action for the young ii. Economic reality, for example, crisis, austerity, availability of job alternatives iii. Institutional capabilities in HRM iv. Poly-crisis strain	i. Industry characteristics: – Growth rate – Maturity level ii. Occupational characteristics: – Monotony – Control-lack of autonomy iii. Organizational characteristics: – Nepotism and inequitable, toxic, cultures – Performance mismanagement and lack of formal HRM systems – Lack of voice and involvement mechanisms – Exclusionary, command-and-control, micromanaging (leadership style)	i. Perceived psychological contract breach ii. Emotional exhaustion and burnout iii. Work identity and rationalization mechanisms
Theoretical foundation	Generation gap theory Crisis, working conditions and employer–employee power shifts literature	Demands-resources theory Organizational justice theory Contextual strategic HRM framework Employee engagement literature	Psychological contract theory Identity work and negotiation literature Employee burnout and voice and silence literature
Mechanism	Balance—transition	Reciprocal reaction to toxic, unfair, non-meritocratic, disengaging workplace environments	Psychological copying mechanism for self-protection, justice restoration, and self-preservation
Interventions	Address generation gap i. Design intergenerational mentoring programs ii. Adapt work-life balance practices	Re-invent HRM to build trust and boost fairness in the organization i. Adopt transparent, fair systems for promotion and recognition ii. Implement clear performance management systems iii. Ensure career advancement opportunities based on merit Foster psychological safety i. Introduce formal mechanisms for employee feedback	Redefine success and contribution i. Recognize and reward diverse forms of contribution ii. Introduce more flexible work arrangements to accommodate changing employee expectations and needs Foster voice i. Ensure that employees feel safe expressing concerns without fear of retaliation

This temporal perspective enriches psychological contract theory by demonstrating how repeated small breaches, rather than a single major violation, can cumulatively lead to quiet quitting. It also extends job demands-resources theory by showing how the balance between demands and resources shifts over time, gradually tipping towards disengagement.

5.3.2 | Multi-Level Interplay in Quiet Quitting

Our study contributes to the literature by illustrating the complex interplay between macro, meso, and micro factors in shaping quiet quitting behaviors. At the macro level, we extend generation gap theory (Twenge 2010) by showing how generational differences in work values interact with national economic conditions to create a context ripe for quiet quitting.

At the meso level, we contribute to organizational justice theory (Greenberg 2011) by demonstrating how perceived injustices in Greek organizations, particularly related to nepotism and lack of meritocracy, fuel quiet quitting behaviors. Our findings reveal that employees are less likely to invest discretionary effort when they perceive that career advancement is based on personal connections rather than merit.

At the micro level, we enrich understanding of identity work (Brown 2015) in the context of quiet quitting. Our findings show how Greek employees engage in complex processes of identity negotiation as they navigate between traditional cultural expectations of hard work and loyalty, and their own needs for self-preservation and fulfillment.

While our findings emerge from the Greek context, the multilevel process model we propose offers broad theoretical applicability across different cultural and institutional settings. The fundamental dynamics of how macro-level factors interact with organizational practices and individual responses to shape quiet quitting behaviors are likely generalizable, even as the specific manifestations may vary by context. For instance, while the particular cultural values and institutional arrangements that influence quiet quitting in Greece may differ from those in other countries, the underlying mechanism of how these macro factors create conditions for quiet quitting through their impact on psychological contract violations and emotional exhaustion likely holds true across contexts. What varies is not the basic framework but rather the specific cultural, institutional, and organizational factors that activate these processes. This suggests our model's utility for understanding quiet quitting across different national and cultural contexts, while acknowledging that the specific drivers and manifestations will be shaped by local conditions.

5.4 | Practical Implications

The implementation of extended working hours in Greek organizations exists within a complex institutional environment where traditional workplace values encounter evolving expectations. Our findings reveal how quiet quitting emerges through the interplay of institutional pressures, organizational practices, and individual responses to workplace changes.

Performance management systems in Greek organizations often lack the robustness needed to detect and address quiet quitting behaviors early. The absence of formal HR systems and clear decision-making processes creates conditions where psychological contract breaches can go unaddressed until quiet quitting becomes entrenched.

The traditional hierarchical structures and relationship-oriented management culture in Greek organizations shape how policies like extended working hours are implemented and received. When organizations lack formal voice mechanisms and transparent decision-making processes, employees may turn to quiet quitting as a form of passive resistance.

These institutional characteristics require HR managers to develop context-sensitive approaches that acknowledge both local organizational realities and changing workforce expectations. Understanding how quiet quitting manifests within Greece's unique cultural and institutional environment is crucial for developing effective interventions.

5.4.1 | Addressing Generational Divides

HR practitioners in Greek organizations must navigate significant generational differences in workplace expectations and responses to psychological contract breaches. While older employees often adopt stoic acceptance of workplace conditions, including extended working hours, younger employees demonstrate different thresholds for disengagement. HR managers need to recognize how these generational patterns influence quiet quitting behaviors and develop appropriate interventions that acknowledge these distinct perspectives on work relationships.

5.4.2 | Rebuilding Trust in Organizational Systems

HR managers face the challenge of strengthening formal systems within Greece's relationship-oriented management culture. Our findings show how the lack of clear HR processes around compensation, performance evaluation, and career development contributes to quiet quitting. The recent introduction of extended working hours further highlights the need for HR practitioners to develop transparent frameworks while working within organizational structures that have traditionally relied on informal relationships and personal networks.

5.4.3 | Fostering Psychological Safety and Voice

Greek HR managers need to create effective channels for employee voice within traditionally hierarchical organizations. The absence of such mechanisms emerged as a key factor in quiet quitting behaviors. HR practitioners must develop ways for employees to express workplace concerns constructively, particularly in organizations where command-and-control management styles persist. This becomes especially important when implementing significant changes to working conditions and time arrangements.

5.4.4 | Redefining Success and Contribution

HR practitioners must help their organizations adapt to changing definitions of employee contribution and engagement. Our findings reveal how traditional Greek workplace values focusing on presence and unlimited availability clash with evolving expectations about work-life boundaries. Changes in working time policies add another layer of complexity to this challenge. HR managers need to guide their organizations in developing new approaches to recognizing and rewarding employee contributions that reflect these changing workplace dynamics.

5.5 | Limitations and Future Research Directions

To our knowledge, this article represents one of the first empirical studies that attempted to explore this new and underdeveloped phenomenon from the perspective of HR managers, particularly in a country with underdeveloped HRM (Evangelia and Barbara 2023). Despite our novel findings, our research has certain limitations indicative of an inductive qualitative research approach. First, the number of interviews comprising our data is rather small, although in line with similar studies in this area (see also Batiste 2024; Esen 2023). We also acknowledge that our convenience sampling approach via an HR professional association might have led to a less typical and variable sample, limiting the wider representation of opinions and experiences in the collected data. Despite our recruitment efforts, our sample did not include participants from certain sectors, such as hospitality that constitutes a major economic industry in Greece with its own intrinsic complexities of HRM.

However, given the narrow aim of the study and the particular participants interviewed, we consider the quality and size of the data to be of adequate "information power" (Malterud et al. 2016). We focused specifically on exploring this phenomenon as experienced by a diverse sample of HR managers, the majority of whom have engaged in quiet quitting themselves. We also interviewed both senior and junior professionals from small, medium, and large enterprises. Importantly, we focused also on macro-environmental factors and circumstances (e.g., Greek financial crisis, pandemic) that impacted the way this phenomenon was understood and experienced by our participants. The authors' extensive experience in qualitative research as well as their diverse backgrounds in HRM and social sciences contributed to a targeted, balanced and in-depth data collection and analysis (Saunders and Townsend 2016). Lastly, data collection was theoretically informed by the contextual strategic HRM framework, integrating insights from psychological contract theory, job demands-resources model, and employee engagement literature.

Our findings point to several promising avenues for future research that could deepen understanding of quiet quitting across cultural contexts. Cross-cultural comparative studies would be particularly valuable for examining how quiet quitting manifests differently between collectivist cultures like Greece and individualistic Western contexts. Such research could illuminate how varying cultural values around authority, loyalty, and work ethic shape both the expression and management of quiet quitting behaviors. The influence of different institutional contexts on quiet quitting responses represents another critical area for investigation.

Longitudinal research could provide valuable insights into how quiet quitting evolves as organizations navigate between traditional and modern management approaches. Such studies could track changes in workplace values across generations and examine their impact on quiet quitting patterns. This temporal perspective would be especially relevant in contexts like Greece where traditional and modern workplace values often conflict.

Multi-level investigations could further explore how national cultural values translate into organizational practices and individual behaviors. Understanding these cross-level influences is crucial for developing effective interventions that account for both institutional pressures and individual responses. Such research could particularly examine how organizations in traditional cultural contexts can effectively adapt to changing employee expectations while maintaining cultural coherence.

The relationship between quiet quitting and cultural transformation in workplace values deserves particular attention in future studies. Researchers might examine how organizations navigate the tension between preserving valuable cultural traditions and adapting to global workplace trends. This understanding could help organizations develop more nuanced approaches to employee engagement that respect both cultural heritage and evolving workplace expectations.

6 | Conclusion

This study offers a comprehensive, multi-level understanding of quiet quitting in the Greek context, highlighting its unique manifestations and underlying dynamics. By proposing a process model and identifying key shapers of quiet quitting, we provide both theoretical insights and practical guidance for addressing this complex phenomenon. Our findings underscore the importance of considering the interplay between macro-level societal trends, meso-organizational practices, and micro-individual experiences in understanding and mitigating quiet quitting behaviors.

Our study reveals how quiet quitting in Greece emerges within a distinct institutional context where traditional workplace expectations, exemplified by recent moves towards extended working hours, encounter growing global emphasis on work-life balance and reduced working time. This tension creates unique manifestations of quiet quitting that reflect both local economic pressures and evolving employee values. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for organizations seeking to maintain employee engagement while navigating between local institutional requirements and global workplace trends.

As the global workplace continues to evolve, particularly in the face of ongoing economic and social challenges, understanding phenomena like quiet quitting becomes increasingly crucial. By shedding light on the unique manifestation of quiet quitting in the Greek context, our study not only contributes to the broader literature on employee engagement and disengagement but also offers valuable insights for practitioners

navigating the complexities of the modern workplace in culturally specific settings.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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