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QUIET QUITTING: RE-ESTABLISHING THE BOUNDARIES OF WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE

Abstract

Quiet quitting has become widely known and researched since the Covid-19 pandemic. The phenomenon implies that employees only do the “required minimum” at work, not more than the contractual agreement (Lee et al., 2023). This trend goes seemingly against the tendencies of neoliberal societies, where the traditional boundaries of work and life have been increasingly blurred since the widespread accessibility of the internet (Voswinkel & Kocyba, 2005). Working from home changed the dynamics of work-life balance and brought new challenges to white-collar workers.

This research investigates quiet quitting from the perspective of the employees in low-level corporate jobs and attempts to explore its complexity. Opposed to earlier studies (such as Lee et al., 2023; Johnson, 2023), we argue that quiet quitting is not a negative outcome of “bad management”, rather it is the re-establishment of the once clear boundaries of work and private life.

Quiet quitting can be seen as a trend, that contrasts the reality of the neoliberal “achievement society” (Han, 2015), pointing out the instrumental nature of work and the strive for keeping it within strict boundaries.

The novelty of our research is the qualitative investigation of quiet quitting, that gives place to the subjective interpretation of employees, providing an in-depth insight into the topic. The standpoint of quiet quitters is highlighted through semi-structured interviews, connecting their feelings to the critical literature on neoliberalism, and the notion of alienation (Han, 2015; Honneth & Ash, 1982). The results

suggest that employees at a workplace where the overall satisfaction with management is high, still quiet quit as a result of their instrumental perception of work and their aim to keep a healthy work-life balance.

Keywords: quiet quitting, work from home, work-life balance, neoliberalism, alienation

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