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The Disquiet of Quiet Quitting: Definitional Clarity, Theoretical Pathways, and Future Research

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ABSTRACT

Quiet quitting (QQ) has emerged as a prominent topic in both popular press and academic research, reflecting shifts in employees' engagement, effort allocation, and responses to contemporary work pressures. This review synthesizes findings from 11 papers published in a recent Special Issue on *The Disquiet of Quiet Quitting*. We integrate conceptual, empirical, and methodological insights from these papers and other recent literature to clarify what QQ is and what it is not. We highlight the multidimensional nature of QQ, distinguishing deliberate and passive forms, reactive versus value-driven motivations, and variations in scope and behavioral expression. We then propose a 2 × 2 typology of quiet quitters (Protesters, Faders, Boundary Setters, and Indifferent Drifters) constructed along two key dimensions, intentionality and motivational basis, to capture the heterogeneity of behaviors and underlying motives. Finally, we discuss implications for theory, measurement, and practice, emphasizing how QQ signals broader dynamics in employment relationships, including fairness, well-being, and sustainable engagement, and we identify directions for future research, including longitudinal, multi-level, and cross-cultural investigations.

1 | Introduction

Few human resource management (HRM) concepts have entered the global lexicon as quickly, or as controversially, as “Quiet Quitting” (QQ). Initially dismissed by many as a passing fad (e.g., Christian 2022; Formica and Sfodera 2022), QQ has persisted, capturing the disillusionment of a workforce confronting the limits of hustle culture. First popularized on TikTok in 2022 (López-Fernández 2023), QQ has resonated far beyond social media, reflecting shifting expectations around work–life balance, a silent protest against poor working conditions, and post-pandemic burnout (Delery et al. 2023). Remarkably, for a term only a few years old, a Google search for “quiet quitting” returns more than 350 million results (Henry et al. 2025). In parallel with this popular attention, academic interest has grown

rapidly: within months of the term trending online, scholars have produced conceptual frameworks, validated scales, and empirical studies to map its relationship to longstanding HRM concepts such as disengagement, retaliation, fairness, and ethics. As of October 2025, a Google Scholar search for the term “quiet quitting” yielded over 6000 results, reflecting the rapid development of conceptual frameworks, measurement scales, and empirical studies examining its antecedents, outcomes, and connections to longstanding HRM constructs such as disengagement, fairness, and the ethical treatment of employees.

Yet as QQ has gained both popular and academic attention, fundamental questions remain. What does it really represent? How is QQ similar to or different from related phenomena? Scholars have drawn parallels between QQ and long-standing forms

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of calibrated effort such as “working-to-rule,” a form of labor resistance grounded in adherence to formal job descriptions (Johnson 2023; Lord 2022; see also Bendix 1956). Others situate QQ within broader burnout and emotional exhaustion phenomena (Richardson 2023; Wortelboer and van der Steen 2023), while still others frame it as the logical result of “hustle-oriented” organizational cultures that valorize constant employee availability and productivity (Formica and Sfodera 2022; Forrester 2023; Galanis et al. 2023). QQ intersects with debates in HRM about motivation, engagement, and equity: some view it as a boundary-setting behavior (“acting your wage”), others as a subtle form of resistance, and still others as a reflection of misaligned HRM practices or labor market pressures (Detert 2023; Ellis and Yang 2022; Tavanti 2011). These ambiguities reflect deeper tensions in HRM, such as how to balance employee well-being with organizational performance, calibrate expectations of effort, and interpret employee behavior in an increasingly flexible labor market.

Uncovering answers to these questions is important because QQ has real implications for organizations and HRM practice. The phenomenon of QQ highlights that there is a “silent” group of employees who show up for work but do not show enthusiasm for, commitment to, or trust in their employers. It is the manifestation of a broader shift in the unwritten psychological contract from employees’ unconditional devotion to their employers to employees emphasizing (and exercising) work-life boundaries, employee-employer reciprocity, and self-preservation. According to Gallup’s (2025) “State of the Global Workplace” report, 62% of employees worldwide were disengaged in 2024, which Gallup equates to QQ. Of these, only a third reported that they were “thriving in life overall” (10). Gallup further estimates that if the global workforce were fully engaged, US\$9.6 trillion in productivity could be added to the global economy, the equivalent of 9% of global GDP. These statistics underscore the stakes: QQ is more than a social media buzzword or a cultural meme; it reflects the untapped reservoirs of human potential in contemporary organizations. However, QQ should not be viewed simply as a threat; it also constitutes an opportunity for HR practitioners and scholars to reconsider how value is created and sustained in the employer-employee relationship.

Recognizing both the scholarly and practical significance of QQ, we issued a Call for Papers for this Special Issue (SI; Delery et al. 2023) to advance conceptual clarity, examine its drivers, and chart a path for future research to inform related HRM practice. The 11 papers in this SI address an array of issues relevant to understanding QQ, its origins and measurement, and its implications for HRM. Because this topic is still emerging, each paper approaches the topic of QQ from a slightly different perspective. As a collection, these articles utilize a variety of approaches and methods to offer a diverse and informative look at the QQ phenomenon and identify some important remaining questions. With this review and the conceptual framework we advance, we identify some of the key contributions of these works, highlighting connections between the papers that we hope will stimulate new research directions.

To provide clarity amid this growing discourse on QQ, we first draw from the SI papers to present a definition of what QQ is and is not, establishing conceptual boundaries and distinguishing it

from related constructs such as disengagement and burnout. Next, we examine how QQ can be measured, highlighting limitations of existing approaches, and introducing complementary research methods including self-reported intentions, enacted behaviors, and coworker-observed practices. With these tools in place, we then consider antecedents across macro, meso, and micro levels, showing how societal, organizational, and individual factors shape QQ. We then synthesize the insights of these 11 SI papers in a typology of quiet quitters, capturing diverse motivations, behaviors, and consequences, and chart directions for future research and practice. Finally, we conclude by highlighting research questions that emerged from this SI.

2 | Defining and Conceptualizing QQ

One of the most pressing issues facing QQ is its definition, particularly the question of whether it is distinct from related constructs such as (dis)engagement, burnout, commitment, and work-life balance. Indeed, much of the existing scholarship revolves around clarifying QQ’s conceptual boundaries: what constitutes QQ and what does not. For instance, Formica and Sfodera (2022, 900) define QQ as “the limited commitment of employees to carry out the assigned duties and to relinquish from any other task not specified in their job description,” while Scheyett (2023, 5) defines it as “being disengaged from one’s work, doing the minimum to get by.” Anand et al. (2024, 725) define it as “decreased psychological commitment to work with a lack of individual engagement, managerial support and quality of life at work, along with increased employee burnout, concern about well-being and work-life balance” (for specifics on the existing variation in extant definitions of QQ, see table 1 in Gray et al. 2025). These definitions often conflate QQ with related attitudinal constructs such as commitment and engagement and, in some cases, include related outcomes (e.g., burnout and work-life balance) rather than isolating the behavioral phenomenon itself (see Kanwal et al. 2025, Study 3). This conceptual blending and overlap have arguably created “noise” in the relevant literature and, consequently, complicated theory building about and measurement of the phenomenon of QQ.

In the absence of an existing universally accepted definition, every paper in this SI faced the task of clarifying the conceptual basis for QQ and its associated construct space. Thus, even within the papers of this SI, a diverse set of definitions has been adopted (see Table 1). We view this diversity in definitions not as a problem, but rather as a reflection of the multidimensional nature of QQ. Despite a variety of theoretical lenses, samples, and contexts, all papers in this SI (and most papers published elsewhere) converge on one key behavioral element: QQ involves fulfilling one’s formal job requirements while withholding optional, extra-role effort. This consensus across studies suggests that, at its core, QQ is about recalibrating effort and not about abandoning work and thus is closer to the withdrawal of *discretionary* rather than *required* effort. For instance, employees “adhere to contracted duties” (Harris 2025, 565) by deliberately choosing to “not exert effort beyond what is contractually required of them” (Hervé and Oh 2025, 1422).

Taken together, these patterns, summarized in Table 1, provide a foundation for articulating an integrated definition of

TABLE 1 | Definitions of quiet quitting from the SL.

		Scope	
		Selective (chosen domains) <i>Strategic allocation of effort across domains, investing in some and withdrawing from others</i>	Broad (widespread, generalized) <i>Reduced engagement and effort across most work tasks, performing only the minimum required</i>
Intentionality	Intentional/ Active	Narrow (limited domain) <i>Withdrawing effort from a small set of work behaviors while maintaining core responsibilities</i>	
		Georgiadou, Vezyrides and Glaveli (2025): “a distinct form of workplace behavior where employees consciously limit their efforts to explicitly stated job requirements while maintaining their positions” Henry et al. (2025): “an employee’s conscious decision to do the bare minimum in their job, which may be manifested in attitudinal, emotional, and/or behavioral changes... [such as covered here] withholding OCB” Kanwal et al. (2025) (<i>partial def’n</i>): “Active QQ is about employees willfully avoiding extra-role behaviors and engaging in intentional cognitive demotivation”	Decker et al. (2025): “intentionally... contributing the bare minimum to meet the requirements of one’s role, lacking active engagement, or withholding extra effort to advance the organization’s objectives” Dilchert et al. (2026) (<i>partial def’n</i>): “4) boundary setting that reflects an intentional rejection of “hustle culture” or prioritization of work over other life activities” Gray et al. (2025): “intentionally performing to the minimum requirements of the job” Hervé and Oh (2025): “...deliberate choice to limit work effort strictly to the responsibilities outlined in their contract, intentionally refraining from tasks that go beyond the minimum requirements”
	Unintentional/ Passive	Dilchert et al. (2026) (<i>partial def’n</i>): “(1) Lack of job-specific engagement, reflected in the absence of enthusiasm, energy, and voice in one’s role (e.g., not feeling energized by the job, not feeling that one’s opinions count)”	Agarwal et al. (2025): “...doing the bare minimum at a job to survive in an organization” Bennett et al. (2025): “doing the bare minimum at work and not going above and beyond.” Dilchert et al. (2026) (<i>partial def’n</i>): “(2) lack of generalized work engagement, encompassing the absence of purpose-driven or identity-relevant motivations to work (e.g., not feeling fulfilled by work, not striving to make meaningful contributions); (3) lack of social connections at work, reflecting relational disengagement (such as lacking trust, friendship, or connection with coworkers and supervisors)” Kanwal et al. (2025) (<i>partial def’n</i>): “Passive QQ refers to gradual, less- intentional drift away from full engagement reflecting a diminished concern for people, tasks, or events”

Our holistic definition:

Quiet quitting is a calibrated, cognitively guided stance, usually followed by withholding of optional, extra-role effort. It may be enacted deliberately or passively, reflecting either intentional restraint or gradual reduction in engagement

QQ that identifies the core phenomenon with greater precision and, in doing so, offers a conceptual anchor for future work. Accordingly, we propose the following synthesized definition:

Quiet quitting is a calibrated, cognitively guided stance, usually followed by withholding of optional, extra-role effort. It may be enacted deliberately or passively, reflecting either intentional restraint or gradual reduction in engagement.

Here, we caution that by “calibrated” we are referring to the behavioral pattern rather than implying conscious intent: it can be deliberate, as in active QQ, or the result of a gradual shift in energy, involvement, or commitment, as in passive QQ. This definition captures the core behavioral phenomenon of QQ while remaining agnostic about its cause or motivation.

Framing QQ as a calibrated behavioral pattern also helps locate it within the broader nomological network of work behaviors. QQ is distinct from related constructs such as *work role withdrawal* (avoiding work via absenteeism and lateness; Harrison 2002), *disengagement* (the withdrawal of physical, cognitive, and emotional involvement from work roles; Kahn 1990), and *retaliation* and *counterproductive work behaviors* (CWB, which include destructive acts intended to harm the organization; Carpenter et al. 2021). Instead, QQ occupies a middle ground: it reflects continued compliance with formal role expectations while reducing extra-role contributions (and is thus, as noted above, conceptually closer to a withdrawal of *discretionary* rather than *required* effort). Empirical evidence from articles in the SI exploring the nomological network of QQ supports this positioning. For example, Gray et al. (2025, Study 1d) report negative relationships between QQ and proactive personality, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work intensity, interpersonal OCB, organizational OCB, and engagement, and positive relationships with emotional exhaustion, withholding effort, turnover intentions, interpersonal CWB, and organizational CWB. Dilchert et al. (2026) conceptualize QQ as a multidimensional form of psychological withdrawal that involves lack of job-specific engagement (capturing refusal to go beyond one's core tasks and lack of proactivity), lack of generalized work engagement (referring to a broader disinclination of work as a meaningful part of one's identity), lack of social connections (minimized or complete absence of social engagement with coworkers and other constituents of the organization), and boundary setting (highlighting the efforts to set or defend the boundaries between one's work and non-work life domains). These patterns highlight that QQ is a distinct, calibrated behavioral response, involving intentional or passive modulation of effort without constituting outright withdrawal or deviant behavior.

At the same time, the definitions of QQ in the SI papers reveal key points of divergence around intentionality and scope. Regarding intentionality, most papers conceptualize QQ as intentional behavior, which Gray et al. (2025, 11) describe as “deliberate and calculated.” However, others recognize that QQ does not have to be conscious (e.g., Georgiadou et al. 2025). More specifically, Kanwal et al. (2025) differentiate between active QQ, where employees deliberately limit effort, from passive QQ, where there

is a more gradual, less intentional drift from full engagement. Harris (2025) similarly notes that QQ often emerges through a gradual slide, rather than deliberate protest, and asserts that employees rarely begin employment intending to QQ. This distinction between conscious restraint and unintentional depletion enriches the theoretical understanding of QQ as both a proactive and reactive form of effort regulation. This intentionality distinction reinforces our framing of QQ as calibrated rather than uniformly deliberate: the behavior may emerge through conscious restraint or through gradual, unplanned shifts in energy and engagement.

Regarding scope, QQ can manifest in different ways depending on which aspects of work an employee reduces effort in: QQ may involve only withdrawing from OCBs (narrow scope; Henry et al. 2025), a broader set of work actions performed with minimal engagement and dialed down effort (broad scope; Gray et al. 2025; Hervé and Oh 2025), or employees may invest in one identity or career-relevant domain of work and refrain from putting effort in less valued tasks (selective scope; Harris 2025). These variations highlight the diversity of QQ behaviors while remaining consistent with the core principle of adhering to formal job duties. The scope of QQ also shapes its visibility to managers and coworkers, its potential organizational consequences, and the ways it interacts with related constructs, such as disengagement or work role withdrawal.

While fundamentally an individual-level construct, QQ can be observed from the perspective of the self, supervisor, or coworker. Some studies in this SI rely on employees' self-reports (Gray et al. 2025; Hervé and Oh 2025; Kanwal et al. 2025), while others capture supervisors' attributions (Henry et al. 2025) or coworkers' perceptions (Bennett et al. 2025). These differences reflect measurement and observation choices rather than definitional divergence, though they also highlight distinctions around who perceives the behaviors. In addition, they highlight the importance of considering not only the intentions and actions of the focal actor but also the expectations and even the social norms of the observer, framing QQ as a socially constructed phenomenon.

Underscoring these differing manifestations of QQ, Harris (2025) reveals that the term “quiet quitter” carries varying connotations. For instance, some people perceive the term to be concerning, embarrassing, or even offensive, which may reflect popular discourse and early research that frames QQ pejoratively, as a form of laziness, disengagement, or shirking (e.g., Bell and Kennebrew 2023). In contrast, current empirical evidence and theorizing, such as in the SI articles, often present QQ as a strategic recalibration of effort, a form of boundary-setting, or self-protection. Consequently, QQ occupies a mixed reputation: it may be viewed negatively by supervisors (Henry et al. 2025) or peers (Bennett et al. 2025), positively by employees seeking work-life balance (Georgiadou et al. 2025) or a way of protesting perceived injustice (Harris 2025), or neutrally when seen as a rational response to excessive job demands (Harris 2025) or work climate (Samnani and Robertson 2025). This distinction between observed behavior and self-ascribed identity suggests caution in interpreting QQ purely through labeling or moral judgment. Collectively, these interpretations

underscore that QQ is not simply a behavior but also a socially constructed label whose meaning depends on the observer's values, expectations, and role within the workplace.

3 | Measuring QQ

Perhaps due to definitional ambiguities and divergent views on motives and antecedents, there is currently no universally adopted scale to measure QQ. As of the time of this review, multiple published scales (e.g., Anand et al. 2024; Bulut et al. 2024; Çelebi et al. 2025; Galanis et al. 2023; Karrani et al. 2024; Park et al. 2025; Patel et al. 2025; Talukder and Prieto 2025) exist apart from those developed for this SI. As detailed in Gray et al.'s (2025) Table 2, a central challenge with earlier measures of QQ is that many inadvertently expand the construct by incorporating antecedents, motives, or consequences directly into the items. For example, some include antecedents such as “there is a lack of meaningfulness at work” (Anand et al. 2024) or “I feel inspired when I work” (Galanis et al. 2023), motives such as “I am doing the bare minimum to avoid being fired” (Anand et al. 2024), or outcomes such as lateness (“I often arrive late and leave early;” Anand et al. 2024) or reduced feedback-seeking (“I don't actively seek feedback or seek to improve my skills;” Karrani et al. 2024). These inclusions blur construct boundaries and risk contaminating measurement by embedding content that is conceptually adjacent to, but not constitutive of QQ.

To address these concerns, four papers in this SI developed new measures grounded in their respective conceptualizations of QQ. Although all demonstrate strong psychometric properties, each emphasizes a different facet of the phenomenon. Our goal here is not to designate a single “best” scale, but to highlight the conceptual emphases and trade-offs so that researchers can select measures aligned with their theoretical goals.

Dilchert et al. (2026) developed a 20-item self-report scale, the Measure of Quiet Quitting (MQQ), organized into four five-item subscales reflecting their multidimensional conceptualization of the phenomenon: (1) lack of job-specific engagement, (2) lack of generalized work engagement, (3) lack of social connection at work, and (4) boundary setting. Items were developed deductively based on an integrative review of the literature on QQ, disengagement, and withdrawal, then refined through expert review. Across three validation studies, the authors found support for a four-factor structure (CFI ~ 0.91, RMSEA ~ 0.08) and internal consistencies ranging from 0.68 to 0.86. They also showed that the MQQ correlates with, but is not reducible to, measures of disengagement (e.g., reversed Utrecht Work Engagement Scale). Relative to the other measures in the SI, the MQQ is the least parsimonious. However, its conceptual breadth makes it a valuable option for researchers interested in the broader nomological network of QQ, particularly when multiple subprocesses or motivational pathways are theoretically relevant. In this sense, the MQQ trades brevity for multidimensionality, offering a more expansive profile of the attitudes and behaviors associated with QQ.

Gray et al. (2025) developed a global self-report scale capturing the intentional limitation of effort, a theoretical, state-like

operationalization designed to test conceptual boundaries. They define QQ as “intentionally performing to the bare minimum requirements of the job” (p. 7). The scale shows strong reliability and model fit ($\alpha = 0.96$, AVE = 0.81, CFI = 0.95, SRMR = 0.03, TLI = 0.90) and correlates with related constructs—engagement, work intensity, satisfaction, commitment, and withholding effort—in expected directions but below 0.70, suggesting it captures a unique construct. This scale emphasizes intentionality and calibrated effort but does not measure specific, everyday behaviors.

In contrast, Hervé and Oh (2025) developed a behaviorally anchored five-item scale assessing concrete, everyday manifestations of QQ, such as declining extra meetings or after-hours work. Their definition of QQ as “deliberately limiting their work effort to essential job responsibilities, intentionally avoiding any tasks beyond the minimum required” (1428) guided items that are contextually grounded and practice-relevant. The scale demonstrates good reliability ($\alpha = 0.80$ –0.88) and model fit (CFI = 0.96–0.97, SRMR = 0.04–0.05, TLI = 0.95–0.96, RMSEA = 0.05–0.06). This approach captures enacted behavior in everyday work, trading some generalizability for practical resonance.

Taking a different tactic, Bennett et al. (2025) develop a measure of *perceived coworker QQ*. They focus on *third-party perceptions* of coworker behavior rather than self-QQ, reflecting a focus on how QQ is observed and evaluated within the social environment of work. Using subject-matter expert evaluations and psychometric tests of definitional correspondence and distinctiveness, they identified three items as most representative of the coworker perceptions construct. Their analyses demonstrated strong definitional correspondence ($htc = 0.95$) and acceptable distinctiveness from related constructs such as social loafing, work withdrawal, and organizational citizenship behavior ($htd = 0.53$ –0.61). However, because the measure is based solely on observer perceptions, it remains unclear whether the coworkers being rated would self-identify as quiet quitters or endorse these behaviors themselves. This highlights a key gap between perceived and enacted QQ, an important distinction that future research should address through multi-source or mixed-method validation. Nonetheless, this measure complements the self-report and behaviorally anchored scales by highlighting the social observability and workplace implications of QQ behaviors.

Each of these measurement approaches offers a distinct vantage point on the same underlying behavioral pattern. The Dilchert et al. (2026) MQQ scale captures the *combined* conceptual space of QQ (spanning job-specific and generalized engagement, social embeddedness, and boundary setting), providing breadth that is useful for mapping the construct's nomological network. Gray et al.'s measure takes a more *psychological* approach, emphasizing intentional restraint and the cognitive stance of limiting effort rather than specific behaviors. Hervé and Oh (2025) advance a *behavioral* operationalization by focusing on concrete, observable work practices that reflect the withholding of extra-role contributions. Bennett et al. shift the lens yet again by capturing the *social* perception of QQ: how coworkers interpret and evaluate another's level of discretionary effort. Taken together, these four measures highlight that no single measure can fully represent

TABLE 2 | Comparing the Scales Developed for this SI.

Authors	Items	Comments
Dilchert et al. (2026)	<p>Lack of Job-Specific Engagement I feel energized by my job. In my work, I can pursue what I do best on a daily basis. The mission of my company provides importance to my job. My opinions count at my workplace. In my work, expectations of me are clear.</p> <p>Lack of Generalized Work Engagement I feel the most fulfilled when I am working. I wake up in the morning excited to work. I want to be known for the great work that I do. It is extremely important to me that my energy is focused on impactful work. One of my top priorities in life is to make meaningful contributions through my work.</p> <p>Lack of Social Connections at Work I am friends with my coworkers. I feel closely connected to my colleagues. I feel like I can confide in my direct team members about issues at work. One of my best friends is at work. My manager (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in my career aspirations.</p> <p>Boundary Setting Work-life balance is important to me. Work is important but breaks for leisure and relaxation are equally important. The point of life isn't to be working all the time. I don't want to be someone who's obsessed with working. All work and no play makes me feel dull.</p>	4-part scale can be particularly useful for examining different elements of the nomological network of quiet quitting but is not parsimonious when compared to the others.
Gray et al. (2025)	<p>"I intentionally do what is minimally necessary." "I intentionally fulfill my minimum job requirements but nothing more." "I intentionally do just the minimum requirements of my job." "I intentionally only perform my basic job duties/responsibilities." "I intentionally do the bare minimum."</p>	Global, abstract items capturing intentionality and psychological state. Highlights calibrated effort but doesn't measure specific everyday behaviors. Useful for theory testing.
Hervé and Oh (2025)	<p>"At work, I consciously choose not to work beyond my primary job responsibilities" "No matter how urgent a task is, it's only right for me to work on it during official work hours" "At work, I choose not to work extra hours to enhance the quality of my work beyond the minimum expected of me" "I choose not to check work-related emails after work hours if I am not required to do so" "At work, I choose not to attend non-mandatory meetings."</p>	Behavior-specific items capturing concrete, observable practices. Strong applicability to real work settings; may be less generalizable across roles or industries.
Bennett et al. (2025)	<p>"Does the bare minimum at work," "Does not go above and beyond," "Puts in the required amount of effort, but not more"</p>	Third-party/coworker perspective on QQ behaviors. Captures perceived effort reduction but does not verify actual engagement; complements self- and behavior-focused scales by showing social observability.

the multifaceted nature of QQ. Instead, they illustrate a constellation of related but distinct dimensions (i.e., conceptual breadth, psychological intentionality, enacted behavior, and

social observability), each of which may be relevant depending on a study's theoretical focus. As a result, researchers should select (or combine) measures based on the specific aspect of

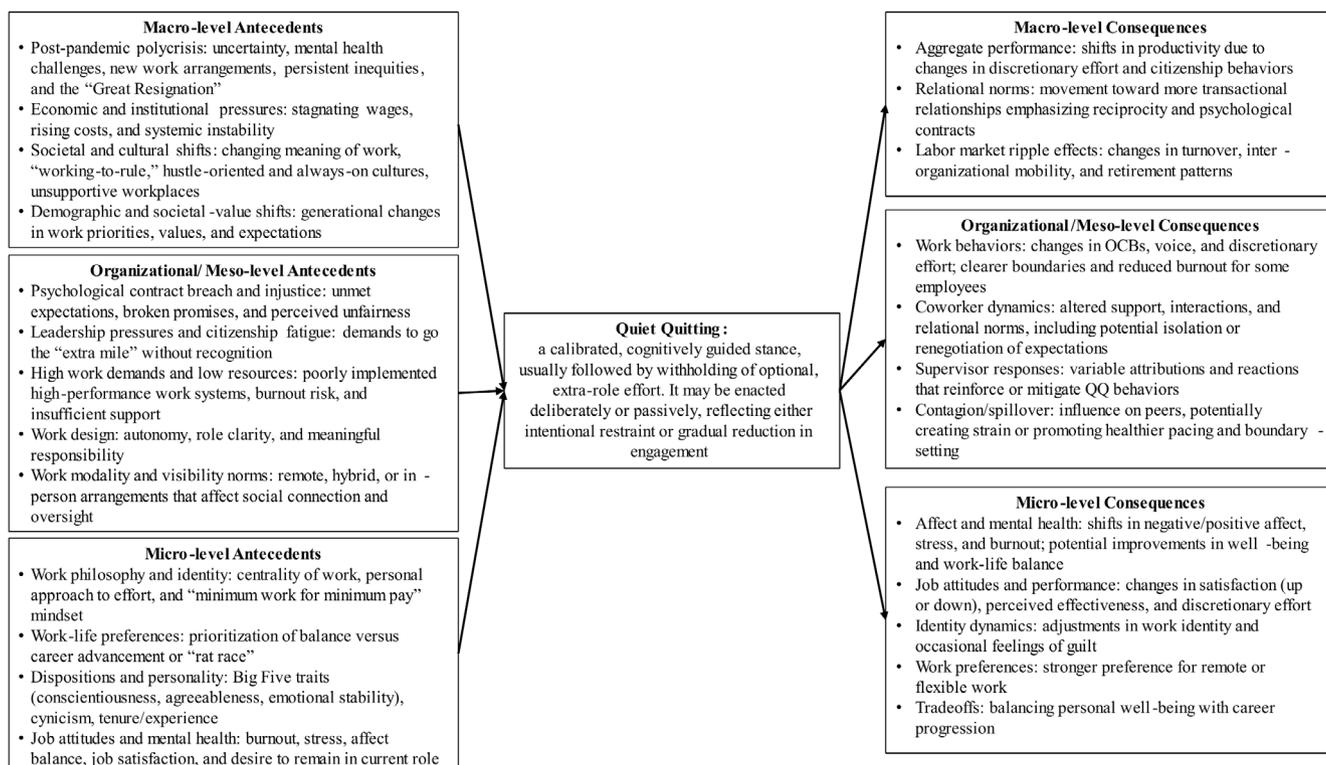


FIGURE 1 | The nomological net of quiet quitting.

QQ they are investigating. Table 2 summarizes these scales and outlines the conceptual and methodological trade-offs inherent in each.

4 | Antecedents of QQ

A key contribution of this review is to synthesize and theorize the factors that lead employees to engage in QQ behaviors. Popular discourse often frames QQ as purely an individual choice, yet empirical evidence and conceptual work reveal a more nuanced picture: QQ emerges from an interplay of individual, organizational, and societal influences.

Moreover, multiple papers (i.e., Kanwal et al. 2025; Harris 2025) suggested that QQ may take different forms across people, depending upon the underlying impetus for their QQ behavior, that is, whether QQ was internally motivated or a response to external factors. On the one hand, some forms of QQ were found to be a function of internally motivated decisions, such as a desire for greater work-life balance or a feeling of burnout (Kanwal et al. 2025). On the other hand, other papers describe QQ as a response to experiencing overwhelming work demands imposed by the employing organization with little support for addressing those demands from the employing organization (Agarwal et al. 2025; Georgiadou et al. 2025; Gray et al. 2025; Harris 2025; Kanwal et al. 2025; Samnani and Robertson 2025). Moreover, some papers describe QQ as a response to broader, societal demands, such as the disruption of traditional employee-employer relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic uncertainty, and shifts in the emphasis on work-life balance (Hervé and Oh 2025; Georgiadou et al. 2025).

Georgiadou et al. (2025) exemplify this multilevel perspective by examining QQ in the Greek context, showing how individual coping mechanisms, organizational practices, societal shifts, and cultural norms interact to produce and sustain QQ behaviors. Their work highlights how QQ is not only an individual response but also shaped by institutional realities and cultural expectations, manifesting as a dynamic process influenced by psychological contract breaches, emotional exhaustion, and identity rationalization.

Building on this approach, we categorize antecedents into three levels: micro (individual characteristics and personal philosophy), meso (organizational actions and practices), and macro (societal and cultural forces). Each level of antecedents offers unique insights into why employees limit discretionary effort, and considering all three provides a more comprehensive understanding than focusing on individual choice alone. In the subsections that follow, we summarize key drivers at each level, drawing on evidence from the papers in this SI as well as prior literature, and a visual depiction is provided in Figure 1.

4.1 | Antecedents of QQ at the Micro Level

At the individual level, QQ reflects a person's calibrated approach to effort: choosing to meet formal job requirements while withholding extra-role effort. Antecedents here center on personal work philosophy and identity-related factors as well as work-life balance issues. At this level, QQ can reflect a personal philosophy of “minimum work for minimum pay,” enacted regardless of organizational or societal context. The literature on work centrality provides a useful theoretical lens (Paullay

et al. 1994), demonstrating that individuals differ in how central work is to their identity. For those with high work centrality, work plays an important role in life; they are more likely to pursue intrinsic benefits and link performance to self-worth, and are therefore less prone to QQ. In contrast, individuals with low work centrality view work primarily as a source of financial security rather than meaning, making them more likely to adhere strictly to contractual obligations and withhold discretionary effort. This philosophy often reflects a conscious rejection of pressures to overwork and advance up the career ladder, prioritizing work-life balance, minimalist approaches to work, and opting out of the “rat race.”

Beyond work centrality, other personal traits and dispositions, including conscientiousness, cynicism, laziness, and age, can influence the likelihood of adopting QQ as a deliberate or habitual strategy. Dilchert et al. (2026) provide further evidence linking personality traits to QQ. Specifically, lower levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and agreeableness were associated with higher scores on their multidimensional quiet quitting scale, suggesting that sociability and self-regulation relate to QQ tendencies.

Dilchert et al. (2026) also examined job-related attitudes and mental health factors, finding statistically significant relationships between quiet quitting and job satisfaction, affect, balance, burnout, and stress. Importantly, their longitudinal study highlights that these variables may function both as proximal antecedents and outcomes of QQ. Demographic patterns emerged as well: younger and newer employees exhibited slightly higher QQ scores, whereas married employees and those with childcare responsibilities tended to show lower tendencies, potentially reflecting the influence of income security and stable routines. Gender, however, did not show a systematic relationship with QQ in their data.

Finally, micro-level antecedents intersect with the broader nomological network of work behaviors (Gray et al. 2025; Kanwal et al. 2025), including withdrawal, disengagement, and counterproductive work behaviors. Yet QQ remains conceptually distinct: it represents calibrated restraint, where employees selectively withhold extra-role effort rather than disengage completely, emphasizing intentionality and resource management as core drivers.

4.2 | Antecedents of QQ at the Meso (Organizational) Level

At the organizational level, QQ is most often portrayed as a response to perceived dysfunction in the work environment, particularly unfair, unrealistic, or unhealthy conditions. Building on classic work on psychological contract breach (e.g., Robinson and Wolfe Morrison 2000), the papers in this SI extend that logic to explain why employees may deliberately calibrate effort to the minimum required. When employees perceive that what was promised in exchange for their contributions has not been fulfilled, they may reciprocate by reducing their discretionary effort. In fact, this view of QQ as a breaking of a promise or contract was present or implied in many of the SI papers.

Specifically, Georgiadou et al. (2025) find through qualitative interviews that perceived injustice, unmet expectations, and broken promises frequently motivated QQ in Greece. Similarly, Gray et al. (2025) show that psychological contract breach increased intentions to QQ indirectly by reducing job satisfaction. In their Study 2, they test a model in which psychological contract fulfillment, operationalized as the extent to which promised and delivered justice dimensions and job characteristics align, impacts QQ via job satisfaction. Unmet expectations, or psychological contract breach, is found to be a contributing factor to QQ via work attitudes. This study provides a strong theoretical basis for why organizations may contribute to QQ and, in doing so, offers insights into how organizations can address QQ (i.e., via setting clear expectations and following through on promises), which we discuss further in Section 7.2. Like Gray et al. (2025), Georgiadou et al. (2025) and Decker et al. (2025) also identify psychological contract breach as an individual-level factor precipitating QQ; and Kanwal et al. (2025) highlight that people often experience frustration prior to QQ.

Leadership behaviors can further intensify this process. Henry et al. (2025) extend this discussion by examining the social dynamics that follow: drawing on attribution theory, they propose that managers' interpretations of QQ, such as whether it reflects willful underperformance or a reaction to mistreatment, shape how they respond to and potentially perpetuate such behaviors. They suggest that leaders who continually demand that employees “go the extra mile” without adequate recognition contribute to citizenship fatigue, which erodes trust and triggers QQ. QQ can thus emerge due to bad bosses, not bad employees. Zenger and Folkman (2022) found that the least effective managers oversaw work groups with roughly 14% quiet quitters, compared to top-performing managers' 3% quiet quitters.

These findings are consistent with Kanwal et al.'s (2025) framing of QQ as a form of disengagement rather than explicit contract violation, noting that employees who perceive persistent inequities or misaligned expectations often psychologically withdraw and scale back effort. This suggests that perceptions of fairness and reciprocity, whether framed as breach, fatigue, or disengagement, are central mechanisms linking organizational practices to QQ.

Another set of antecedents concerns workplace and job design. Agarwal et al. (2025) apply Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to suggest that poorly implemented High-Performance Work Systems can deplete employee resources, prompting QQ as a self-protective response to burnout and stress: employees “protect themselves from resource depletion because of high-performance expectations” (628). Similarly, Kanwal et al. (2025) show that burnout can trigger passive QQ, consistent with Job Demands–Resources theory (Bakker and Demerouti 2017), which posits that excessive workload, role ambiguity, and micro-management foster withdrawal behaviors. Dilchert et al. (2026) found that higher levels of job autonomy and greater responsibility within one's role were associated with lower levels of QQ. This pattern suggests that employees who have discretion over how they perform their tasks and perceive higher levels of responsibility are less likely to reduce their effort, affect, and social involvement. Enhancing these job characteristics may therefore reduce the phenomenon of QQ.

In addition, the mode of work itself (i.e., remote, hybrid, or in-person) has become a salient contextual antecedent of QQ. While some evidence suggests flexible and remote arrangements enhance satisfaction and reduce QQ (Mayne 2024), other work highlights that remote work can weaken supervisory visibility and interpersonal connection (Gajendran and Harrison 2007), conditions that may increase the likelihood of QQ for some employees. Supporting this perspective, Decker et al. (2025) in this SI empirically examine work modalities (in-person, fully remote, and hybrid) and their impact on QQ-related outcomes of OCB, voice, and neglect. Their analyses showed that hybrid employees reported the highest levels of OCB ($M=4.079$) and voice ($M=3.426$), while fully in-office employees had lower OCB ($M=3.804$) and voice ($M=3.166$) and higher neglect ($M=2.683$). Fully remote employees fell between hybrid and fully in-office employees for OCB ($M=3.834$) and voice ($M=3.210$) and were similar to hybrid employees for neglect ($M=2.039$). According to Decker et al., these differences may arise because hybrid work provides a balance between autonomy and flexibility (allowing employees some control over when and where they work) and social connection (maintaining in-person interactions and relatedness), whereas fully remote work may reduce social support and knowledge transfer, and fully in-office work limits flexibility. Overall, hybrid work generally supports the most favorable OCB, voice, and neglect outcomes, fully remote work produces intermediate outcomes, and fully in-office arrangements are associated with the least favorable profiles.

These findings are reinforced by papers outside of the SI, including Geng et al.'s (2025) meta-analysis, which identifies high-intensity workload, emotional labor, and tight deadlines as key predictors of QQ, especially in sectors such as construction, finance, and hospitality, where employees often reduce non-essential efforts to preserve well-being. Conversely, role clarity, transparent feedback, social support, and organizational involvement can reduce QQ intentions by providing structure, recognition, and meaning (Atiq et al. 2025; Geng et al. 2025).

4.3 | Antecedents of QQ at the Macro Level

The recent “surge” in QQ behaviors must be viewed against a backdrop of broad macro-level disruptions that have reshaped the modern employment relationship. The COVID-19 pandemic, while often cited as a catalyst, did not create QQ but rather accelerated and magnified existing tensions in the world of work (Hamouche et al. 2023; Harris 2025; Le et al. 2023). Pandemic-induced uncertainty, mental health challenges, and shifts in work arrangements, especially the normalization of remote and hybrid work, exposed longstanding inequities and imbalances (Kalargyrou et al. 2023; Kloutsiniotis et al. 2023). For many employees, these conditions contributed to the broader “Great Resignation,” and for those unable to exit, to the rise of QQ as an adaptive strategy of self-preservation (Aydin and Azizoğlu 2022). Georgiadou et al. (2025) highlight several societal trends that have prompted QQ within Greece, including shifts in employee emphasis on work-life balance due to COVID-19 and the associated polycrisis, as well as generational change.

Economic and institutional contexts have played an equally significant role. Stagnating wages and rising costs of living have fostered the “acting your wage” ethos, framing QQ as a rational calibration of effort to enhance perceived fairness. In Greece, for example, Georgiadou et al. (2025) illustrate how prolonged austerity and institutional fragility normalized effort withdrawal as a culturally sanctioned response to systemic instability. Their findings reveal how traditional collectivist norms intersect with emerging individualistic expectations, producing generationally distinct patterns of QQ. Younger cohorts prioritize autonomy, well-being, and work-life balance, while older cohorts socialized into collectivist work ethics tend to equate effort with moral worth. These generational differences help explain varying manifestations of QQ across national and cultural contexts.

Relatedly, Hervé and Oh (2025) theorize that uncertainty, spurred by societal crises of economic instability, political division, and health and climate crises, contributes to employees experiencing a lack of control, which in turn prompts QQ. In so doing, Hervé and Oh (2025) illustrate how macro-level factors may impact individual psychological decisions. Thus, beyond macroeconomic pressures, societal and cultural reorientations have altered the moral meaning of work itself. Scholars have drawn parallels between QQ and long-standing forms of calibrated effort such as “working-to-rule,” a form of labor resistance grounded in adherence to formal job descriptions (Johnson 2023; Lord 2022; see also Bendix 1956). Others situate QQ within broader burnout and emotional exhaustion phenomena (Richardson 2023; Wortelboer and van der Steen 2023), while still others frame it as the logical result of “hustle-oriented” organizational cultures that valorize constant availability and productivity (Formica and Sfodera 2022; Forrester 2023; Galanis et al. 2023).

Toxic or unsupportive workplace cultures, often shaped by managerial norms and institutional expectations, further amplify these macro-level pressures. As Harris (2025) notes, the pandemic's effects would likely have been less severe had organizational cultures been more compassionate and humane (see also Campton et al. 2023). Instead, “hustle” and “always-on” climates reinforced by digital surveillance and shrinking boundaries between work and life rendered burnout and withdrawal nearly inevitable. Such dynamics blur the line between macro and meso antecedents. Structural changes in the economy and labor market shape workplace norms, which in turn drive individual disengagement.

Finally (and similarly), demographic and psychographic shifts intersect with these macro trends. Extraverts and highly service-oriented individuals appear less likely to QQ (Liu-Lastres et al. 2024; Moon et al. 2023), whereas cynical or low-conscientiousness individuals may be more likely to calibrate their effort. Gender, education, and generation further moderate these tendencies (Hamilton et al. 2023). These findings underscore that QQ is not monolithic but reflects an evolving constellation of individual, cultural, and structural forces.

In sum, QQ represents a macro-level recalibration of the social contract at work. It signals a shift from the “work as identity” ethos of the late 20th century toward a “work as a transaction” mindset, shaped by economic inequality, pandemic fatigue,

generational value shifts, and evolving societal expectations around well-being and fairness.

5 | Consequences of QQ

The papers in this SI highlighted a range of consequences of QQ, both positive and negative across levels of analysis (individual to macrosocial) as visually depicted on the right side of Figure 1. Regarding individual consequences, Kanwal et al. (2025) reveal that quiet quitters tended to feel guilt over QQ, offering insight into why some quiet quitters engaged in identity work to rationalize their decisions to QQ (Georgiadou et al. 2025). Other work notes that some quiet quitters openly acknowledged that their decision to QQ brought them greater work-life balance, well-being, and work effectiveness (Harris 2025), but came with a risk of career stagnation (Kanwal et al. 2025), revealing that employing organizations largely hold ideal worker logics that value workers contributing an excess of time and effort.

Behaviorally, Decker et al. (2025) conceptualize QQ along a spectrum ranging from reduced voice and diminished OCBs to, in more severe forms, neglect. While reductions in OCB have been linked to QQ (e.g., Bolino et al. 2024), voice and neglect have received less attention. Decreased voice may emerge as disengaged employees become less inclined to raise concerns, whereas neglect represents a more extreme withdrawal that may extend to failing to meet job requirements (Decker et al. 2025).

Studies in this SI also reveal that quiet quitters tend to engage in fewer organizational citizenship behaviors and more counterproductive work behaviors (Gray et al. 2025; Kanwal et al. 2025). Harris (2025) identified different outcomes in short-term compared to longer-term quiet quitters, also noting that some long-term quiet quitters had stopped their QQ by the second phase of the study, in some cases due to leaving their job. This suggests that for some, QQ can be viewed as a transition state into another role or even into retirement.

Dilchert et al. (2026) offered one of the most systematic efforts to explore the consequences of QQ to date. Quiet quitters were found to report higher daily negative affect, lower positive affect (and poorer affect balance) over a 10-week period, as well as higher burnout and lower job satisfaction. Aside from the impact of QQ on employees' attitudes, mood, and mental health, the authors also explored work-related consequences. Interestingly, they found that quiet quitters did not report working dramatically fewer hours than more engaged employees. This finding indicates that QQ is not about time spent at work, but the effort invested while doing the work. Despite comparable hours at work, higher QQ was related to lower perceived work effectiveness and lower organizational performance evaluations. Finally, in line with the boundary-setting dimension of Dilchert et al.'s (2026) definition of QQ, quiet quitters expressed a stronger preference for remote work.

Multiple SI papers focused on the social consequences of engaging in QQ (Bennett et al. 2025; Henry et al. 2025; Samnani and Robertson 2025). Kanwal et al. (2025) found that engaging in QQ may limit opportunities for social activities at work, such as going out to lunch with colleagues, which may prompt feelings

of loneliness or isolation. In addition, based on interviews with 31 long-term quiet quitters, Harris (2025) found that coworkers had negative perceptions of QQ, and when coworkers found out that respondents were QQ, it tended to harm their relationship. Related to this, Bennett et al. (2025) conducted a vignette study where participants were informed about a coworker's performance (QQ, average performance, maximum performance) and asked about their intentions to act in a supportive or uncivil manner toward the coworker. They found that participants were more likely to be less supportive and more uncivil to coworkers who engaged in QQ, as compared to coworkers with average or maximum performance.

Samnani and Robertson (2025) deepen this initial understanding of the negative association between QQ and coworker reactions by offering a relational theory of QQ. They theorize that employees conceal versus reveal their QQ based upon the relational climate, which is associated with certain exchange norms (market pricing, equality matching, and communal sharing). The extent to which they conceal their QQ impacts coworker citizenship behaviors toward the focal employee, with more citizenship behaviors prompting greater reciprocation, thus diminishing QQ. Alternatively, less coworker citizenship behavior is associated with persisting QQ and subsequent worsening coworker relations as well as employee sanctions. Harris's (2025) work supports some of this theorizing, as he finds that employees engaging in QQ tend to experience worsening coworker relations as well as pressures to conform to the workplace culture (akin to Samnani and Robertson's (2025) sanctions). Samnani and Robertson's (2025) theoretical model provides interesting insights into a novel organizational factor, relational climate, that may reinforce or extinguish QQ, in conjunction with social interactions.

Finally, Henry et al. (2025) provide a theoretical account of how supervisors react to employee QQ and subsequent withholding of OCBs. They draw from attribution theory (Heider 1958) to propose that managers' interpretations of QQ, such as whether it reflects willful underperformance or a reaction to mistreatment, shape how they respond to and potentially perpetuate such behaviors. They suggest that leaders who continually demand that employees "go the extra mile" without adequate recognition contribute to citizenship fatigue, which erodes trust and triggers QQ.

6 | A Typology of Quiet Quitters

Building on the theoretical advances of the papers in this SI and integrating insights from the broader HRM and organizational behavior literatures, we introduce a 2×2 typology of quiet quitters that captures the heterogeneity of behaviors and motives subsumed under this label. Our framework is based on two key dimensions: intentionality and motivational basis. The intentionality dimension distinguishes between deliberate decisions to moderate effort and more passive, gradual declines in effort. The motivational basis captures whether QQ is primarily a response to external organizational or societal conditions or is rooted in internal personal values, beliefs, or identity. Taken together, these dimensions yield a 2×2 matrix (shown in Table 3) identifying four archetypal forms of quiet quitters: Protesters,

TABLE 3 | Typology of quiet quitters.

	Reactive/externally-driven	Philosophical/internally-driven
Deliberate	Protesters—engage in strategic withdrawal in response to perceived injustice; use calibrated voice through silence	Boundary Setters—consciously regulate effort based on personal values and needs
Passive	Faders—gradually reduce effort, often due to resource depletion	Indifferent Drifters—exhibit low intrinsic motivation and prefer to simply comply without deep engagement

Faders, Boundary Setters, and Indifferent Drifters. These archetypes are not intended as rigid categories but as heuristic anchors to capture meaningful variation in the behavioral expression, underlying motivation, and potential organizational consequences of calibrated effort withholding. In this section, we explain the rationale for adopting these dimensions and elaborate on each archetype in detail.

Although QQ is often treated as a single, uniform construct, emerging scholarship, including the papers in this SI, suggests it is more accurately understood as a family of related but distinct behavioral patterns. Kanwal et al. (2025) distinguish between active and passive forms of QQ, where the former involves conscious, deliberate restraint of discretionary effort and the latter reflects gradual disengagement due to exhaustion, disillusionment, or burnout. Similar distinctions, whether explicit or implicit, appear in other papers in this issue (e.g., Dilchert et al. 2026; Georgiadou et al. 2025; Harris 2025), underscoring that QQ varies not only in its behavioral expression but also in its underlying motivation.

Yet intentionality alone cannot fully account for the diversity of QQ. Much of the existing literature implicitly treats QQ as a reactive phenomenon where an employee responds to adverse organizational conditions or psychological contract breach. However, growing empirical evidence and cultural discourse point to a second, distinct logic: QQ as a philosophical stance toward work, grounded in personal values and the declining centrality of work in individuals' self-concept. To capture these dual origins, we introduce a second dimension: whether QQ is primarily reactive (externally driven) or philosophical (internally driven). Together, these two dimensions, intentionality and motivational basis, produce the 2 × 2 matrix presented in Table 3.

Contextual factors also shape the patterns observed across archetypes. For example, Decker et al. (2025) find that hybrid work arrangements may promote behaviors consistent with what we call Boundary Setters, while fully in-office roles are more likely to encourage drifting or fading, and fully remote arrangements often fall in between, suggesting that organizational context can influence both the expression and intensity of QQ behaviors. Over time, employees may move across quiet quitter archetypes or cease engaging in QQ altogether (Harris 2025). Some types, such as Boundary Setters, are less inherently “negative,” while others, like Protesters, are “louder” in their withdrawal, potentially generating stronger reactions from coworkers or supervisors. Although all archetypes maintain adequate task performance, their differential engagement in discretionary behaviors such as OCB and voice may have ripple effects on team

dynamics and organizational outcomes, reinforcing the value of distinguishing among these forms.

These variations in discretionary engagement, motivational drivers, and contextual responses highlight that QQ is not monolithic. By mapping these patterns onto the dimensions of intentionality and motivational basis, we can begin to identify distinct archetypes of quiet quitters, each representing a characteristic constellation of effort calibration, underlying motivation, and potential organizational impact. In the subsections that follow, we elaborate on each archetype, starting with the Protesters.

6.1 | Protesters

Protesters are the most visible and perhaps most widely discussed form of quiet quitters (this is certainly true for this SI). They actively and deliberately reduce effort as a form of resistance or self-protection. They consciously withhold discretionary effort as a strategic response to perceived organizational injustice, breach of the psychological contract, or moral misalignment with leadership. For instance, an engineer may stop mentoring junior colleagues after being passed over for promotion, or a nurse may refuse unpaid overtime after repeated unfulfilled promises about staffing levels. In this sense, Protesters engage in QQ as voice through withdrawal, that is, a subtle yet intentional signal of discontent when more direct voice feels risky or futile. Although these employees remain nominally compliant, they symbolically resist overextension, echoing work on exit–voice–loyalty–neglect (Hirschman 1972). This behavior is strategic and context-dependent, reflecting a conscious trade-off between maintaining job security and expressing discontent. This type of QQ is most likely to be a response to societal (macro) and organizational (meso) factors that prompt employees to reconsider their relationships with their employers, which might include even their approach to work-life balance.

The SI articles provide additional insight into the antecedents and psychological framing of deliberate QQ. Kanwal et al. (2025) report that individuals who deliberately reduce effort often do so in response to unfulfilled career goals, lack of recognition, compensation inequities, or organizational politics, highlighting triggers that can motivate this form of calibrated effort withholding. Georgiadou et al. (2025) further suggest that employees may engage in rationalization processes, framing their quiet quitting as a principled stance against negative work environments, which enables them to maintain a positive self-concept while withdrawing

discretionary effort. Together, these findings position Protesters as deliberate, context-sensitive actors whose quiet quitting reflects both behavioral and cognitive strategies to navigate perceived organizational failings.

For managers, responding effectively to Protesters requires addressing the underlying triggers of dissatisfaction rather than simply attempting to coerce higher effort. Potential interventions include repairing trust after perceived breaches, clarifying expectations around discretionary contributions, and implementing fair and transparent reward systems. Proactively soliciting feedback and engaging in structured dialogue can help identify grievances early, while ensuring that corrective actions are perceived as meaningful and just. In this sense, managerial responses should be both preventive and reparative, recognizing that Protesters are not disengaged out of apathy but are expressing a bounded form of resistance to perceived managerial or organizational failings.

6.2 | Faders

Faders slide into QQ gradually as their personal and job resources erode. Their effort calibration is unintentional rather than strategic, emerging as a coping response to persistent stressors rather than a deliberate stance or form of protest. Their progressive reduction of effort when personal/job resources are depleted might be driven by stress, fatigue, or chronic burnout. Over time, Faders may reduce participation in extra-role activities, slow their responsiveness to non-mandatory requests, or avoid discretionary tasks that were once part of their work repertoire. An example might be a teacher who begins to decline requests for extra tutoring support outside of class hours. This gradual scaling back carries meaningful consequences: Faders often experience decreased well-being, emotional exhaustion, and heightened burnout, which can, in turn, impact productivity, team cohesion, and engagement. If unaddressed, this state may persist or intensify, potentially culminating in formal resignation or long-term disengagement from discretionary organizational activities.

Like Protesters, Faders may exhibit QQ in response to psychological contract breaches and poor working conditions. Yet, Kanwal et al. (2025) suggest that there are some meso-organizational factors that are distinct to “passive” quiet quitters, specifically, poor leadership, limited opportunities for growth, low job meaningfulness, and inadequate organizational support. These findings point directly to HR practices that may address these concerns, such as implementing high-performance work systems. Indeed, based upon a sample of IT professionals in India, Agarwal et al. (2025) demonstrated that employees’ perceptions of the extent to which their employer promotes 10 high-performance work practices is negatively associated with QQ via increased psychological availability and meaningfulness of their work. As such, adopting HR best practices is likely to create a more positive work context, which in turn mitigates QQ. Thus, managers can intervene proactively via preventive and supportive interventions such as monitoring workload and clarifying roles, providing resources to mitigate burnout, and regularly assessing employee well-being through surveys or check-ins. Early identification of fatigue or disengagement allows for timely adjustments to

workload, flexible support mechanisms, and coaching or mentoring programs. Unlike Protesters, Faders generally respond positively to changes that restore personal and job resources, rather than to punitive or corrective measures. The goal is not to “fix” a protest behavior but to support employees in maintaining sustainable levels of engagement while protecting their health and well-being.

6.3 | Boundary Setters

Boundary Setters adopt QQ as a conscious personal philosophy, independent of employer actions or perceived breaches. They are guided by values such as work-life balance, autonomy, and the principle of “acting your wage,” often rejecting the societal or organizational expectation to go above and beyond. Boundary Setters are likely to have lower work centrality (Paullay et al. 1994), placing greater emphasis on non-work domains such as family, hobbies, and personal development, similar to the personal philosophy of *tang ping* (“laying flat” in Chinese; BBC 2021), which rejects pressures to overwork and overachieve.

From their perspective, Boundary Setters are not disengaged and may even reject the label of QQ. Rather, they see themselves as setting healthy boundaries and prioritizing work-life balance. They may also adopt a personal philosophy of “minimum work for minimum pay” (Georgiadou et al. 2025), enacted regardless of organizational or societal context. This philosophy reflects a conscious rejection of pressures to overwork and succeed in the career ladder, instead prioritizing work-life balance, minimalist approaches, and opting out of hustle culture (Kanwal et al. 2025). Like protesters, boundary setters may have decided to set firmer boundaries around work and life due to macro incidents (e.g., COVID-19). Indeed, Hervé and Oh (2025) argue that those with lower perceived control (theorized to be a function of societal uncertainty) are more likely to prioritize their life over work because it is a domain in which they can gain more control. Due to their lower work centrality (Paullay et al. 1994), they may work primarily as a source of financial security rather than meaning, making them more likely to adhere strictly to contractual obligations and withhold discretionary effort. Finally, boundary-setters may proactively set boundaries due to the family and/or life responsibilities that require their attention. For instance, Georgiadou et al. (2025) discovered that some quiet quitters had greater family demands that, when combined with overextending themselves at work, contributed to emotional exhaustion and burnout. Boundary setters might become short-term QQs to prioritize other things in their lives, increasing work discretionary behaviors again once life demands subside (e.g., around the holidays or when a family member is sick).

Behaviorally, all types of quiet quitters may refuse to check emails outside work hours, avoid non-mandatory meetings, or limit after-hours tasks, yet remain fully compliant with contractual obligations. What makes Boundary Setters unique is that, from their perspective, these actions are deliberate, rational, and aligned with personal values, rather than expressions of disengagement, protest, or disillusionment. Colleagues and supervisors, however, may perceive these employees as less committed or uncooperative, creating potential tensions around recognition, promotions, or team dynamics. Managerial

responses should focus on clarity, communication, and mutual understanding rather than attempting to “correct” the behavior. Effective strategies include setting transparent expectations regarding work scope, recognizing different modes of engagement, offering flexible career pathways, and respecting work-life boundaries. By acknowledging Boundary Setters' priorities and designing systems that accommodate different engagement styles, organizations can retain talent, reduce conflict, and leverage diverse approaches to work commitment without compromising productivity.

6.4 | Indifferent Drifters

Finally, *Indifferent Drifters* are the employees who never strongly identify with work. They approach work with a transactional, low-engagement mindset, performing only the minimum required by their job. Unlike Faders, their behavior is not a reaction to burnout or resource depletion, and unlike Boundary Setters, it is not a deliberate philosophy of work-life balance. Rather, these employees have historically placed little intrinsic value on work, focusing instead on external life priorities or seeking meaning outside the workplace. They perform the minimum work due to apathy, not overwork or a desire to protest. An example would be a retail worker or a barista who just “punches the clock” and sees work as a means to an end. Behaviorally, like most quiet quitters, Indifferent Drifters complete tasks to standard, avoid discretionary efforts, and rarely participate in initiatives beyond core responsibilities. However, Indifferent Drifters typically have limited career aspirations and are unlikely to pursue extra-role contributions such as mentoring, innovation, or process improvement. This form of QQ is best understood as an expression of the Indifferent Drifter's general orientation toward work, shaped by personal values and life priorities rather than workplace conditions. In other words, Indifferent Drifters have a low baseline of intrinsic motivation, and their QQ does not represent burnout or boundary management, but rather a naturally occurring, passive form of effort calibration.

From an organizational perspective, they represent a stable, predictable form of minimal engagement that rarely causes overt disruption but also offers limited upside in terms of discretionary effort. Managerial strategies for Indifferent Drifters should emphasize fit and role alignment during hiring and assignment decisions, rather than trying to elicit engagement. Efforts might include matching employees to positions where transactional performance is acceptable, providing clear role expectations, and designing tasks with structural supports that reduce reliance on intrinsic motivation. Interventions aimed at increasing discretionary effort are likely to have limited impact; organizations may be better served by accepting the boundaries of this archetype while ensuring operational standards are met. These types of workers are reliable for what is required and no more.

7 | Discussion and Future Research Directions

QQ has rapidly evolved from a social media trend to an important topic of organizational inquiry, highlighting the changing relationship between institutional expectations regarding employee engagement and the actual lived realities of work. The 11

papers in this SI collectively challenge the simplistic portrayals of QQ as mere laziness or disengagement. Instead, they reveal QQ as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon embedded in broader dynamics of fairness, reciprocity, meaning, and sustainability in employment relationships. In this discussion, we synthesize these insights, highlighting their implications for theory and practice, and we propose future directions for advancing scholarly understanding of QQ.

7.1 | Theoretical Contributions

This SI makes several theoretical contributions. First, the paper authors have made significant efforts to conceptually and empirically disentangle QQ from other relevant constructs, such as disengagement, withdrawal, and burnout. While such constructs imply diminishing motivation or capacity, QQ reflects employees' conscious or unconscious recalibration of effort. As such, QQ represents an adaptive adjustment to structural and psychological conditions that employees perceive as unsustainable. By reframing QQ as an attempt to regulate effort rather than mere absence of effort, this collection of papers opens space for theorizing QQ not necessarily as a deficit but rather as a form of strategic adaptation.

Second, we reframe QQ as a moral and sustainable response to the pressures of contemporary workplaces. Traditional HRM models equate engagement with virtue and disengagement with failure. However, our synthesis of the findings of this SI complicates this dichotomy. We argue that QQ can represent a deliberate effort by employees to restore fairness, authenticity, and work-life balance. In doing so, QQ illustrates how moral agency and ethical voice operate in everyday work. This perspective allows us to extend existing HRM theories, including self-determination and social exchange frameworks, by highlighting how employees strategically manage effort and commitment in ethically coherent ways.

Third, building on insights from across the SI papers, we offer an integrative typology of quiet-quitter archetypes: Protesters, Faders, Boundary Setters, and Indifferent Drifters. The goal of this typology is to emphasize that employees engage in QQ for different reasons and ascribe different meanings to it, ranging from protest to indifference. QQ, therefore, should not be viewed as a monolithic phenomenon, but rather as a behavior amalgamated by varying degrees of agency, ethical considerations, and resource constraints.

Finally, by organizing the definitions of the papers in this SI based on intentionality and breadth of effort reduction (scope), we highlight the variability in how QQ is perceived among scholars. This collection of papers shows that QQ ranges from narrow, targeted withdrawal to broad, diffuse disengagement, and from deliberate restraint to gradual drift. By integrating the various manifestations of QQ, we propose a more holistic definition that resolves existing terminological ambiguities.

7.2 | Practical Implications

From a practical standpoint, QQ invites a profound rethinking of what engagement means and how it is cultivated within

organizations. Typically, managers perceive QQ as a threat to productivity, but simply viewing it as a threat prevents scholars and practitioners from looking at its potential benefits to the worker (and even to the employer, if it is a just protest intended to evoke positive change) and from understanding the roots of any individual case of QQ. In many cases, QQ signals deeper systemic problems, such as overextension, perceived injustice, lack of voice, or lack of meaning. Recognizing QQ as a communicative act rather than a deviant or problematic behavior allows organizations to respond with empathy and propels a deeper discussion regarding the structure of work and HR practices.

The papers in this SI provide several concrete insights for managers. Gray et al. (2025) show that psychological contract breaches increase intentions to engage in QQ, while Kanwal et al. (2025) document that frustration and resource depletion precede both deliberate and passive forms of QQ. Together, these findings suggest proactive interventions such as setting clear expectations, monitoring workloads, ensuring access to resources, and providing mentoring or coaching to maintain sustainable engagement. Georgiadou et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of employee voice and perceived fairness, recommending structured dialogue, feedback mechanisms, and consistent application of policies to prevent QQ from escalating.

Decker et al. (2025) highlight how work design and contextual factors, such as flexible or hybrid arrangements, can reduce gradual disengagement, while rigid in-office requirements may exacerbate it. Agarwal et al. (2025) show that high-performance work systems enhance meaningfulness and psychological availability, and Hervé and Oh (2025) demonstrate that respecting autonomy and accommodating life priorities can reduce tension between organizational demands and individual well-being. Finally, Harris (2025) notes that QQ may be transient, suggesting managers treat it as a dynamic signal, adjusting roles, clarifying expectations, and aligning tasks with employees' intrinsic motivations.

Understanding QQ through the nomological network (Figure 1) helps managers anticipate which employees may be at risk based on antecedents such as contract breaches, burnout, or low work centrality, and to prioritize responses that protect well-being and sustain engagement. The 2×2 typology (Table 3) further enables tailored strategies.

For instance, Protesters might need voice or a re-negotiation of the psychological contract entailing a thorough dialogue that could lead to justice restoration. For Faders, managers might need to identify the resources needed to help these employees feel supported and reenergized. Boundary Setters may need work design adjustments that will help them satisfy their need for flexibility and autonomy. Finally, Indifferent Drifters may require deeper interventions to help them (re-)identify the meaning in their work.

By integrating insights from the nomological network and the 2×2 typology, managers can move beyond one-size-fits-all interventions, instead tailoring strategies to the type and motivation of the quiet quitter. This approach allows organizations to address root causes, mitigate negative consequences, and leverage the potential benefits of QQ when it reflects principled

boundary setting or constructive resistance, ultimately fostering a more sustainable and engaged workforce.

7.3 | Future Research Directions

The challenge for HRM research is not only to document this phenomenon but to understand what it reveals about the evolving nature of the employment relationships, and how organizations and societies might respond constructively. We believe that the 11 SI papers offer solid groundwork for future research. To advance this conversation further, we propose a research agenda that invites scholars to rethink some of the assumptions that have long guided HRM theory and practice (for a summary, see Table 4).

First, future research should take a closer look at the timing and process of QQ. QQ is often viewed as a fixed state, but in reality, it likely ebbs and flows over time. Indeed, Harris (2025) found that some quiet quitters remained quiet quitters a year later, whereas others re-engaged with their work, demonstrating that QQ is likely malleable, even within the same workplace. Employees may move in and out of QQ depending on their workload, energy levels, life demands, or perceptions of fairness. Longitudinal and diary studies could track these changes to see when QQ serves as a short-term coping strategy and when it turns into long-term disengagement. Viewing QQ as a process rather than a static condition can help organizations identify early warning signs and respond before motivation fully breaks down.

Second, quiet quitting has important social dimensions that warrant further research. First, QQ can be socially constructed. As noted by several papers in this SI, coworkers (Bennett et al. 2025) and supervisors (Henry et al. 2025) make attributions about who is “quiet quitting,” and these perceptions can shape subsequent behaviors toward the focal individual. Future research could leverage social comparison theory (Festinger 1954) to examine how these judgments influence cooperation, support, or sanctioning in the workplace. Second, QQ may also operate as a social process within groups and teams. Employees rarely disengage in isolation; reductions in effort can spread quietly through teams, creating a contagion effect (Porter and Rigby 2021) and shaping collective norms and expectations in a manner analogous to collective turnover (Nyberg and Ployhart 2013). Similarly, organizational structures, culture, and policies (Reilly et al. 2014) may collectively trigger or constrain QQ. Future studies should explore how leadership behavior, team climate, and peer influence amplify or attenuate the prevalence and diffusion of QQ across workgroups and organizations.

Third, future research should explore how personal values and fairness considerations shape quiet quitting. Employees often describe QQ not as laziness but as a matter of principle and boundary setting (i.e., Protesters and Boundary Setters), seeing it as a way to protect their well-being, defend fairness, or maintain alignment with their personal standards in workplaces that feel exploitative or unbalanced (Georgiadou et al. 2025). Evidence from the SI also points to the role of perceived fairness and justice in motivating QQ (Gray et al. 2025). QQ can thus function as a subtle form of protest or a strategy for maintaining integrity when formal voice channels or organizational processes fail.

TABLE 4 | Potential future research themes and questions.

Theme	Examples of research questions
Temporal and process dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does QQ happen instantly or evolve over time? • How does QQ unfold over time? How does it start and evolves into behavioral withdrawal? • What are the critical turning points that distinguish temporary effort recalibration from enduring disengagement? • Can employees re-engage after a period of QQ? What facilitates recovery?
Social dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do social comparisons shape judgments about acceptable levels of effort? • Does QQ spread among team members, and if so, through what mechanisms? • Do employees adopt QQ behaviors by observing peers or supervisors? • Under what conditions does QQ become a collective norm within a workgroup? • How do leadership behavior, team climate, and organizational context amplify or attenuate these effects?
Personal values and fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do employees ethically/morally justify QQ to themselves and others? • Is QQ a form of moral disengagement or an act of ethical resistance? • How does QQ ultimately impact and reshape work identities? • Does QQ serve as a mechanism for restoring fairness? Is it actually effective? • How do justice perceptions (procedural, distributive, informational, and relational) propel QQ? • What interventions and HR practices can curtail QQ stemming from perceived justice imbalance?
Cross-cultural and generational comparisons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does QQ vary depending on cultural values? • Are specific forms of QQ more relevant in various cultural environments? • How do cultural and generational values impact the shape, visibility, and justification of QQ?
Outcomes of QQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the consequences of QQ at different levels (for employees themselves, employers, and society?) • Can QQ be beneficial for individuals and organizations in the long-run? At what levels?
Sustainable/ethical HRM and work design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can HR be re-imagined in order to encompass core elements of QQ, such as self-protection, balance, and fairness? • How can HR systems preempt QQ?
Forms of QQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do different forms of QQ exist that vary by intention and motivation? • What are the antecedents and consequences of different forms of QQ?
QQ as a multilevel phenomenon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does QQ reflect a multilevel phenomenon? Is it the outcome of the interplay of individual, relational, organizational, and even cultural factors? • To what extent do supervisors' or co-workers' perceptions of an employee's QQing align with employees' own self-reported QQing, and what patterns of match or mismatch emerge?

Future research examining how employees make sense of and justify their QQ behaviors could shed light on how personal values and fairness considerations shape engagement, effort allocation, and responses to perceived organizational inequities, and inform strategies for preventing QQ and re-engaging employees who experience these concerns.

Fourth, papers in this SI examined QQ in the U.S., Greek (Georgiadou et al. 2025), and Indian (Agarwal et al. 2025) contexts, offering some cultural diversity. Future research may build on this foundation to more fully examine QQ in different cultural and generational contexts. What looks like disengagement in one country or industry may be viewed as professionalism or boundary-setting in another. For instance, in collectivist cultures, QQ may take quiet or indirect forms that preserve harmony, while in individualist settings it may appear as open defiance or self-advocacy. For younger generations, QQ may express a desire for respect, fairness, and purpose rather than disinterest. Comparative research can help scholars understand how cultural norms and generational shifts in how people value work affects the intricacies of QQ.

Fifth, although the papers in this SI shed light on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and individual consequences of QQ, much more research is needed to fully understand the consequences of QQ. Indeed, we suggest that future research should take a multi-level perspective to investigating QQ consequences. For example, some forms of QQ may harm team morale and performance, while simultaneously maintaining individual wellness, such as avoiding exhaustion or burnout. Moreover, short-term or situational reductions in discretionary effort may function as adaptive coping mechanisms that allow employees to maintain core role performance during periods of heightened nonwork or work-related strain. For instance, when an employee is temporarily caring for a sick family member, easing expectations for extra-role contributions, or even redistributing a portion of that employee's workload, might enable them to stay engaged with essential tasks while avoiding the need for deeper or longer-term withdrawal. Such episodic calibrations may look very different, in causes and consequences, from chronic disengagement or identity-level rejection of extra-role effort. Future studies should therefore examine both the negative and positive consequences of

QQ simultaneously, while explicitly considering its temporal dynamics. A clearer understanding of when QQ represents harmful withdrawal versus healthy self-regulation would allow HRM scholarship to better differentiate among its forms and their respective implications.

Sixth, QQ connects directly to the idea of sustainable HRM, which emphasizes the ethical and long-term management of human resources to support employee well-being, fairness, and organizational resilience (Aust et al. 2020; Cooke 2025). Sustainable HRM emphasizes employee care, fairness, and well-being as core objectives rather than by-products of productivity-driven practice (Järlström et al. 2018), reflecting the field's focus on long-term human development and ethical people management. The phenomenon of QQ challenges organizations to think about whether their current expectations of engagement are realistic or ethical. Future research could explore how HR systems can make balance, recovery, and fairness part of their design, rather than assuming and expecting constant enthusiasm and availability from their employees. This includes rethinking workloads, recognition systems, and strategic alignment of goals to values so that work remains meaningful and manageable. Employee-oriented HRM practices that support autonomy, psychological safety, and holistic well-being are central to sustainable HRM; such practices help protect engagement over time rather than assume it will persist without regard to employee needs (Järlström et al. 2018). Studying QQ through this lens, and considering the antecedents and consequences mapped in the nomological network (Figure 1) and the differential needs of quiet quitter archetypes (Table 3), can help HRM reframe commitment as something that must be constantly renewed and protected instead of assumed and expected. Tailored interventions that restore fairness, provide resources, and respect autonomy can prevent or mitigate QQ behaviors across archetypes, channeling potential withdrawal into sustainable engagement.

Seventh, the papers in this SI make headway in providing useful assessments of QQ (see "measurement" section), but they also suggest that there are different forms of QQ (Harris 2025; Kanwal et al. 2025). Thus, these papers highlight the inherent complexity in the measurement of this phenomenon. Accordingly, we suggest that future empirical research may help to advance the measurement of this phenomenon by exploring the types of QQ. For example, research may adopt latent profile analysis to investigate whether different types of QQ emerge when considering the degree of intention and underlying motivations for QQ behavior. Moreover, if forms of QQ do empirically emerge, then scholars may investigate whether these forms of QQ are associated with different individual differences, organizational practices/experiences, or cultural traditions.

Finally, QQ research should take an integrated, multi-level approach. It is not only a personal behavior but also a social and cultural signal. Researchers should combine individual-level insights with studies of team dynamics, organizational practices and culture, and societal trends to understand how these levels intersect. Georgiadou et al. (2025) take an important step in this direction by considering macro, meso, and individual factors simultaneously. Additional research like this is needed to more fully flesh out the interplay of the various precursors to QQ. In other words, research should explore the intersection of

what happens internally in quiet quitters (e.g., their emotions, value system, and internal calculus) with what happens among individuals (e.g., team dynamics), and in the employer-employee relationship (e.g., leadership and organizational practices).

8 | Conclusion

In sum, the body of work developed for this SI advances the field of HRM in several ways. First, it demonstrates that QQ is not simply a new label for familiar constructs, but a distinct phenomenon shaped by contemporary economic, cultural, and technological conditions. By clarifying what QQ is, and equally what it is not, the papers in this SI help resolve early conceptual ambiguities and establish a foundation for cumulative knowledge building. Second, the SI shows that QQ has meaningful implications for both individuals and organizations. Employees may QQ as a form of value-protecting self-regulation, as a protest against unfair conditions, or as a gradual response to resource depletion. These diverse pathways underscore why organizations cannot interpret QQ through a single lens or rely solely on traditional engagement models to understand it. Third, the SI highlights the importance of measurement. By offering validated scales alongside alternative data sources, including coworker ratings, scenario-based assessments, and multilevel contextual perspectives, the SI provides the field with methodological tools that will support more precise empirical work.

Perhaps most importantly, this SI illustrates that the emergence and persistence of QQ are not merely reflections of individual-level disengagement but signals of broader shifts in the employment relationship. As employees and organizations grapple with chronic overload, boundary erosion, and intensifying performance expectations, QQ challenges managers and HRM scholars alike to rethink what healthy and sustainable engagement looks like. The phenomenon compels employees, managers, and scholars to examine assumptions that employees *should* or *will* continuously perform extra-role behaviors and underscores the need for HRM to create conditions that sustain engagement while respecting boundaries, fairness, and employee well-being.

As QQ research continues to evolve, we hope this SI serves as both an anchor and a catalyst, offering conceptual clarity, methodological guidance, and theoretical provocation. By examining QQ as a multifaceted behavioral, social, and ethical phenomenon, the papers in this collection set the stage for a vigorous and interdisciplinary research agenda that can help scholars and practitioners better understand, anticipate, and respond to the changing nature of work.

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