
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN QUIET QUITTING AND LEADERSHIP ORIENTATION: THE CASE OF CROATIAN EMPLOYEES

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Abstract

Quiet quitting describes the situation when an employee mentally and emotionally checks out from the job, and does the bare minimum in her/his everyday work activities. This topic becomes very popular since the coronavirus pandemic, when people reconsidered their approaches towards work and decided to accomplish work-life balance. Quiet quitting is mostly evident among generation Z and Millennials, but other generations are also involved in this phenomenon. In general, quiet quitting originates from an organization's failure to create a meaningful bond with its employees. Consequently, leadership orientation could influence on appearance and presence of quiet quitting behaviour. The aim of this paper was to examine the phenomenon of quiet quitting among Croatian employees. An additional aim was to analyse the connection between quiet quitting and leadership orientation. The empirical research was conducted in 2023 on convenience sample. The questionnaire was created and distributed online. Research results showed a moderate level of quiet quitting behaviour among Croatian employees. Furthermore, research results suggested that task oriented leadership is more often represented than people oriented leadership. A negative statistically significant correlation between task oriented leadership and quiet quitting has been discovered, but no statistically significant correlation between quiet quitting and people oriented leadership.

Keywords: *quiet quitting, task oriented leadership, people oriented leadership*

1. INTRODUCTION

Quiet quitting is defined as doing the basic minimum at the job and not going above or beyond. In 2022, quiet quitting got a lot of attention in mainstream media. Many articles were published and labelled this concept as a new and real phenomenon. On the contrary, some authors considered it as an old idea that has been conceptualized under different concepts in the field of organizational behaviour for decades (Kahn, 1990; Joo & Lee, 2017). Quiet quitting has become viral mostly among generation Z and Millennials due to their characteristics of valuing work-life balance (Schroth, 2019; Boy & Surmeli, 2023; Ng, Schweitzer & Lyons, 2010; Andert, 2011), although other generations are also engaged in this phenomenon (Damron, 2018). Namely, it is also a perspective of many older employees who are somehow dissatisfied at their jobs. Generally, quiet quitting results from an organization's inability to create a meaningful relationship with its employees

(Zenger & Folkman, 2020). In that context, leadership orientation could have significant impact on appearance and existence of quiet quitting behaviour. Namely, leadership orientation is a personality trait that is determined by analysing leaders' behaviours, or the type of leadership style that a leader exhibits. Lowitz (2022) emphasised leaders' impact on quiet quitting behaviour. DePrisco (2022) analysed the role of leadership in quiet quitting behaviour, and suggested five leadership actions to prevent quiet quitting, while Brownlee (2022) dealt with four leadership strategies to address quiet quitting. This paper is focused on two types of leadership orientation: task oriented and people oriented leadership. Task oriented leadership is an approach, where the leader focuses on the tasks that need to be performed in order to meet certain goals, or to achieve a certain performance standard, while people oriented leadership is an approach where the leader focuses on job satisfaction, motivation and work-life balance of the employees (Nilufer, 2018). Since there is no academic research on quiet quitting among Croatian employees, this paper tried to fill this gap. Additionally, it connected quiet quitting with leadership orientation in order to find out whether there is any connection between these variables, as well as its direction and strength.

Therefore, the research questions of this paper are:

- (1) What is the level of quiet quitting among Croatian employees?
- (2) What is the relationship between quiet quitting and leadership orientation?

The results of this paper would create additional knowledge about the concept of quiet quitting, which could be especially valuable in the Croatian context given the lack of this kind of research. Moreover, research results on the relationship between quiet quitting and leadership orientation could additionally clarify the importance and value of leadership in the context of employee behaviour and employee performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Quiet quitting

Recently many authors have dealt with the phenomenon of quiet quitting and proposed different definitions of this concept (Christian, 2022; Hart, 2022; Zenger & Folkman, 2022; Mahand & Caldwell, 2023). However, generally all of them stated that quiet quitting is not literally leaving the job and the company, but reducing work efforts to the minimum possible extent.

Quiet quitting has increased in popularity since the coronavirus pandemic, when people reassessed their attitudes towards work and decided to achieve a more fulfilling work-life balance, and focus on avoiding job burnout. Namely, during the pandemic, some employees realized that their jobs allow them a certain flexibility in terms of hours of work; some employees witnessed burnout due to failure to balance work and family obligations, while some employees were in a certain danger due to the demands of their work with constant social contact. Additionally, many employees have experienced the loss of loved ones, loneliness and fear that create the awareness that the work should not be the centre of life (Ayдын & Azizoğlu, 2022). Therefore, quiet quitting has become one of the trends that employees engage in, when they want to eliminate the negative consequences of work, re-establish the work-life balance, and maintain well-being. Quiet quitters limit their effort at work to achieve all of these. They do the bare minimum for work, they do not accept the expectations of putting extra hours into work, and they do not take additional work or duties unless they are paid extra.

2.2. Leadership orientation

Leadership is a process in which the leader influences her/his subordinates to attain defined tasks and aims (Yukl, 2010). Many authors in their research discovered or furthered researched two

different leadership behaviour orientations: task oriented leadership and people oriented leadership (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1975; Bons & Fiedler, 1976; Northouse, 2015; Nilufer, 2018).

Task oriented leadership is an approach where the leader is focused on the tasks that have to be done in order to achieve standards of performance, or defined goals necessary for organizational success (Northouse, 2015; Nilufer, 2018). A task oriented leader assigns roles to the employees, assigns them the tasks or sets of tasks, as well as the procedures necessary to achieve those tasks. S/he coordinates the work plan, provides employees with a technical support and monitors whether the completion of tasks is done correctly. A task oriented leader is very rational and systematic. S/he strongly understands how tasks should be performed and is focused on that. In task oriented leadership the main leader's activities are: planning, scheduling, coordinating, monitoring and providing a technical assistance (Yukl, 2010).

People oriented leadership is an approach where the leader is focused on motivation, job satisfaction and work-life balance of the employees. A people oriented leader promotes teamwork and cooperation, supports communication and positive relationships among employees. This leader focuses on each employee in order to meet her/his individual needs and aspirations. Larman (2015) points out that this leader understands the importance of tasks, but s/he emphasises work culture and meeting the employee's needs. The people oriented leader provides a support and help to her/his employees, acts friendly, shows trust, and tries to understand the problems of the employees (Yukl, 2010). In people oriented leadership the main leader's activities are: employee recognition, teamwork enhancement and creating an inspiring environment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper was to analyse the phenomenon of quiet quitting among Croatian employees. An additional aim was to explore the relationship between quiet quitting and leadership orientation. The empirical research was conducted in 2023. A convenience sample was used. The questionnaire was created and distributed via e-mail.

In the first part of the questionnaire, the participants were informed about the aim of the research, that participation is anonymous and voluntary, and that the collected data would be used for scientific purposes only. The second part of the questionnaire contained the questions about participants' demographic characteristics (gender, age, tenure, education and marital status). The third part was devoted to the evaluation of quiet quitting. Quiet quitting was assessed by the questionnaire developed by BuzzFeed, Inc. This questionnaire includes 8 questions related to the occurrence of quiet quitting behaviour. The respondents could choose three possible answers to those questions (1= no, 2= sometimes, and 3= yes). The level of overall quiet quitting was calculated as the average value of respondents' answers to those 8 questions. The fourth part of the questionnaire explored leadership orientation. For that purpose, the questionnaire developed by Northouse (2015) was used. This questionnaire includes 20 statements (10 about task oriented leadership, and 10 related to people oriented leadership). The respondents could choose how often they have experienced the described behaviour from their leader on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1= never, 2= seldom, 3= occasionally, 4= often, 5= always. The level of overall leadership orientation is calculated as the average value of respondents' answers to 10 related statements.

In total, 273 participants have filled out the questionnaire. Research sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample Characteristics

Characteristic		Respondents	
		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	130	47.6
	Female	143	52.4
Total		273	100.00
Age	18 - 27	44	16.1
	28 - 37	76	27.9
	38 - 47	59	21.6
	48 - 57	62	22.7
	58 and older	32	11.7
	Total		273
Tenure in organization	Less than 9 years	93	34.1
	10 - 19	80	29.3
	20 - 29	52	19.0
	30 - 39	32	11.7
	40 and more years	16	5.9
Total		273	100.00
Education	Primary education	41	15.0
	Secondary education	91	33.3
	College education	61	22.3
	University education	65	23.8
	Master education or Doctorate	15	5.6
Total		273	100.00
Marital status	Single	81	29.7
	Married	155	56.8
	Divorced	20	7.3
	Widowed	17	6.2
Total		273	100.00

Women made up the majority of respondents (52.4 percent). The majority of respondents were aged 28 - 37 (27.9 percent), those having less than 9 year of tenure (34.1 percent), those with secondary education (33.3 percent), and those who were married (56.8 percent).

Collected data was analysed by SPSS 23 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

4. RESEARCH RESULTS

The research results will be presented according to the research questions. The first research question was related to the level of quiet quitting occurrence among Croatian employees. Table 2 presents the results of descriptive statistical analysis on quiet quitting.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics - Quiet quitting

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std.Dev.	Min	Max	N
1. Do you only work the time you have to and refuse to work overtime?	1.692	2.000	1.0	.7721	1.0	3.0	273
2. Do you deliberately avoid attending meetings you need to attend?	1.278	1.000	1.0	.5585	1.0	3.0	273
3. Do you only do what is necessary and rarely put much effort into the assigned task?	1.451	1.000	1.0	.6955	1.0	3.0	273
4. Do you skip company-organized events because they are held outside of business hours?	1.516	1.000	1.0	.6702	1.0	3.0	273
5. Do you leave the office early, or within a few minutes, as soon as you get the chance?	1.733	2.000	1.0	.7986	1.0	3.0	273
6. Do you avoid taking on extra projects even if you have free time?	1.670	1.000	1.0	.7725	1.0	3.0	273
7. Do you skip meetings just because you can?	2.484	3.000	3.0	.7529	1.0	3.0	273
8. Do you avoid answering business e-mails or calls after business hours?	1.762	2.000	1.0	.8303	1.0	3.0	273
OVERALL QUIET QUITTING	1.6983	1.6250	1.50	.34201	1.13	2.75	273

Table 2 suggests a low or moderate level of quiet quitting behaviour among research participants, since the mean values of participants' answers to the majority of questions was significantly less than 2. Only in the case of the question regarding skipping business meetings if it is possible, the average value of participants answers was above 2 ($M= 2.484$). Observing the level of overall quiet quitting, the previous state could be confirmed. Namely, the mean value of overall quiet quitting implies the moderate level of quiet quitting among surveyed employees. Regarding respondents' demographic characteristics (gender, age, tenure, education and marital status), Nonparametric Tests (Kruskal- Wallis Test) revealed that there were statistical significant differences in overall quiet quitting only in the case of education [$H(4)= 13.837$, $p= .008$]. Namely, the respondents who had a college degree expressed the highest level of quiet quitting ($Md= 164.76$).

The second research question of this paper is related to the correlation between quiet quitting and leadership orientation. Two types of leadership orientation have been observed: task oriented leadership and people oriented leadership. Table 3 presents the results of descriptive statistical analysis on task oriented leadership.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics – Task oriented leadership

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	N
1. Tells group members what they are supposed to do.	3.842	4.000	4.0	1.0645	1.0	5.0	273
2. Sets standards of performance for group members.	3.681	4.000	4.0	1.0800	1.0	5.0	273
3. Makes suggestions about how to solve problems.	3.700	4.000	4.0	1.1104	1.0	5.0	273
4. Makes his or her perspective clear to others.	3.634	4.000	4.0	1.1333	1.0	5.0	273
5. Develops a plan of action for the group.	3.579	4.000	4.0	1.0991	1.0	5.0	273
6. Defines role responsibilities for each group member.	3.590	4.000	4.0	1.1344	1.0	5.0	273
7. Clarifies his or her own role within the group.	3.641	4.000	4.0	1.1324	1.0	5.0	273
8. Provides a plan for how the work is to be done.	3.700	4.000	4.0	1.1004	1.0	5.0	273
9. Provides criteria for what is expected of the group.	3.542	4.000	4.0	1.1176	1.0	5.0	273
10. Encourages group members to do high-quality work.	3.564	4.000	4.0	1.1491	1.0	5.0	273
OVERALL TASK ORIENTED LEADERSHIP	3.6473	3.900	4.00	.90870	1.0	5.0	273

The results presented in Table 3 implies that leaders occasionally or often have applied task oriented leadership. Namely, the mean value of respondents' answers on all statements was above 3.5, and close to 4. This is even more visible from the median and mode values. The mean value of overall task oriented leadership was 3.6473.

Table 4 presents the results of descriptive statistical analysis on people oriented leadership.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics – People oriented leadership

	Mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	N
1. Acts friendly with members of the group.	3.630	4.000	4.0	1.1207	1.0	5.0	273
2. Helps others in the group feel comfortable.	3.560	4.000	4.0	1.1234	1.0	5.0	273
3. Responds favourably to suggestions made by others.	3.549	4.000	4.0	1.1401	1.0	5.0	273
4. Treats others fairly.	3.667	4.000	4.0	1.0790	1.0	5.0	273
5. Behaves in a predictable manner toward group members.	3.473	4.000	4.0	1.0711	1.0	5.0	273
6. Communicates actively with group members.	3.718	4.000	4.0	1.1201	1.0	5.0	273
7. Shows concern for the well-being of others.	3.377	4.000	4.0	1.2007	1.0	5.0	273
8. Shows flexibility in making decisions.	3.516	4.000	4.0	1.1791	1.0	5.0	273
9. Discloses thoughts and feelings to group members.	3.011	3.000	3.0	1.2050	1.0	5.0	273
10. Helps group members get along with each other.	3.469	4.000	4.0	1.1504	1.0	5.0	273
OVERALL PEOPLE ORIENTED LEADERSHIP	3.4971	3.700	3.80	.93187	1.0	5.0	273

Table 4 implies that people oriented leadership was less often represented than task oriented leadership, according to the employees' observation. Namely, the mean values of respondents' answers on statements regarding people oriented leadership were lower compared to the mean values of the statements regarding task oriented leadership. As a result of that, the

mean value of overall people oriented leadership was lower ($M= 3.4971$), compared to the mean value of overall task oriented leadership ($M= 3.6473$).

Since the second research question of this paper examined the existence of the correlation between quiet quitting and leadership orientation, correlation analysis was conducted, and presented in Table 5.

Table 5 Correlation Analysis: Quiet quitting and Leadership orientation

		Quiet Quitting	Task Oriented leadership	People Oriented Leadership
Overall Quiet Quitting	Pearson Correlation	1	-.156*	-.082
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.010	.176
	N	273	273	273
Task Oriented leadership	Pearson Correlation	-.156*	1	.866**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010		.000
	N	273	273	273
People Oriented Leadership	Pearson Correlation	-.082	.866**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.176	.000	
	N	273	273	273

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

There exists a low intensity negative statistically significant correlation between quiet quitting and task oriented leadership ($r= -.156$, $p\leq .05$), and no statistically significant correlation between quiet quitting and people oriented leadership.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has dealt with the phenomenon of quiet quitting, and the relationship between quiet quitting and leadership orientation. The empirical research was conducted online 2023 in Croatia. The research sample included 273 respondents.

Research results suggested a moderate level of quiet quitting among Croatian employees, that is in line with another research on quiet quitting that has been also conducted in Croatia, which showed that 28 percent of Croatian employees express quiet quitting behaviour (Brnić, 2023). All of that is significantly lower, compared to the number of quiet quitters in U.S., which represents 50 percent of U.S. workforce (Smith, 2022). Regarding respondents' demographic characteristics (gender, age, tenure, education and marital status), research results discovered statistically significant differences in overall quiet quitting only regarding education. Namely, the respondents who had a college degree expressed the highest level of quiet quitting compared to the employees with all other levels of education.

Additionally, the research results showed that task oriented leadership is more often represented than people oriented leadership according to the employees' observation. Regarding the relationship between quiet quitting and leadership orientation, the research results uncovered a negative statistically significant correlation of low intensity between task oriented leadership and quiet quitting, and no statistically significant correlation between quiet quitting and people oriented leadership. That means when leaders more often apply task oriented leadership, quiet quitting is reduced. Authors that have dealt with the relationship between leadership and quiet quitting behaviour emphasised the importance of leadership, which has to be people oriented, in order to prevent quiet quitting (Brownlee, 2022; DePrisco, 2022; Kitchens, 2023; Slezak, 2023). Therefore, one could expect that the research results would identify the existence of strong negative statistically significant correlation between quiet quitting and people oriented leadership, but these results showed the opposite. The reasons for that could be in the domination of task oriented leadership according to the employees' observation, and the way in which this leadership

orientation also could affect employees' behaviour since it is structured and rigid and by that could limit quiet quitting employees behaviour.

The presented research results should be taken with some caution due to research limitations that are: small research sample, self-reported measures and cross-sectional analysis. The recommendations for future research could be related to the diminution of these research limitations as well as to extensively investigate quiet quitting and connects it with different HRM practices. Since, the results of this paper are not in accordance with general observations about the importance of leadership orientation in prevention and diminution of quiet quitting behaviour, the further research on this topic is necessary. Nevertheless, the results of this paper created a valuable knowledge about the concept of quiet quitting, especially in the Croatian context, given the lack of this kind of research. Moreover, the research results on the relationship between quiet quitting and leadership orientation presents an interesting standpoint for future research on the importance and value of leadership in the context of employee behaviour and employee performance.

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