



# Quiet Quitting: Silently Redefining Work

by Sofia Milani

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**‘Quiet quitting’ does not have a formal definition: the term covers different approaches to work, e.g. avoiding overtime and tasks not detailed in one’s contract, performing essential activities to avoid dismissal, starting to dislike one’s job.** Although examining this terminology would be of great interest, it might be sufficient to analyze this phenomenon as a movement opposing the US hustle culture. In other words, the feverish activity underlying the myth of American success is opposed through quiet resistance.

**Quiet quitting has not gone unnoticed at the company level, due to the impact on both individual productivity and the workplace climate.** Thus, it is companies that have a keen interest in investigating this issue, providing interpretations and possible solutions. This analysis regards quiet quitting as a ‘loss of meaning’, going beyond the professional sphere. If work is seen as a tool for personal fulfillment and identity construction, disregard in this sphere is tantamount to a professional and existential crisis. Individuals who are not involved in their job would experience a crisis that affects the person as a whole, where work should provide both identity definition and life purpose. It is necessary to start from these two elements to reassert two aspects making part of someone’s work ethics: the sense of belonging and purpose. The actions to be taken with respect to the ‘identity’ issue have as their starting point a broader definition of corporate values. On the one hand, this would provide a shared ideological basis that would strengthen the sense of community among colleagues.

**On the other hand – and hoping that the individual aligns with the foregoing principles – it would provide people with those certainties which are necessary to have a well-defined view of the world.** It is therefore important to lay down goals for the worker and grant them the autonomy and decision-making power to fulfill them. By taking more responsibility and becoming more independent, the individual would then move closer to their achievement as understood in the ‘success’ culture, according to which it is the leader that has to be admired, not the follower. Consequently, in order to ensure enough satisfaction to maintain a certain degree of productivity, everyone should be a leader.

**This is a management model described as horizontal, organic, and ‘humanistic’.** One example was Zappos, an online shoe and clothing sales company, in which the charismatic CEO (Tony Hsieh) introduced the ‘Holacracy’ strategy in 2013. This system would encourage the spontaneous establishment of teams operating without centralized supervision, so workers could define their own goals and projects. Another example is the ‘Spaghetti Organization’ laid down by Oticon, a Danish hearing aid company. Again, through a "bottom-up" structure, the system would be project-based rather than role-based.

**However, both Zappos and Oticon had to take a step backwards to the traditional hierarchical model.** The horizontal organizational structure seems to survive successfully in few companies (i.e. Gore, Morning Star, Valve, and Haier). In order to understand the critical issues of this approach, it is necessary to return to the starting point of our argument.

**Our interpretation of quiet quitting is based on the assumption that quitters want to escape.** While it may be true that some workers are not satisfied and do not identify entirely with their professional role, it is not obvious that this might lead to an existential crisis. Regarding quiet quitting as a sort of individual crisis presupposes a perception of work as the main element for a fulfilled life, i.e. increasing autonomy and responsibility so as to re-establish the centrality of work. Nevertheless, if one tries to understand this phenomenon as a counterculture movement, then its purpose will deconstruct the dominant culture, specifically hustle culture and the myth of success. And if the fundamental principle of this ideology is precisely work – i.e. work understood as a totalizing vocation and life purpose – then deconstruction is likely to begin with that. In other words, quiet quitting may be nothing more than protesting against a certain definition of work. The causes for this may be diverse, e.g. the falling boundaries between the public and private sector, with digitization and the introduction of remote work, the difficulty to identify with roles that are becoming increasingly fluid, or the search for new forms of ‘fulfillment’.

**Therefore, rather than an existential crisis, working beyond the limits imposed by the employment contract has become a way to redefine work according to given times and spaces, e.g. in an area of life rather than in life as a whole.** The lack of passion and initiative in the professional sphere does not necessarily hint at generalized discomfort when considering personal fulfillment as a distinct aspect from work.

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