



# QUIET QUITTING IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR: ENUMERATION OF THREE CASES

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## ABSTRACT

*This is a case study on quiet quitting which has become a talking point these days. The three cases in this presentation explain the practice of Quiet Quitting by three teachers at different age levels. Purposely selected three subjects from education institutions in India who practices quiet quitting represent three categories of teachers, beginner, midlevel and senior. The subjects indulge in Quiet Quitting for various reasons in their career. The results show that the phenomenon is not new in the education sector. It is an age-old practice for many reasons, though not named as quiet quitting. The study also evaluates the positive and negative effects of quiet quitting.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Quiet quitting, HR, higher education institution, teachers, issues of teachers*

## INTRODUCTION

Quiet Quitting is a popular discussion point in newspapers, magazines, and websites after a TikTok video by Clayton Farris became viral (Krueger, 2022). Though the government blocked TikTok in India on June 29, 2020, the internet is filled with articles from employers, employees, and HR personnel talking about quiet quitting, explaining the positive and negative things. Quiet Quitting sounds like an employee resigning silently or disappearing without the proper information. It refers to a work culture of maintaining a minimum to retain the job with less psychological involvement; it's an effective alternative to resigning and sitting unemployed (Klotz & Bolino, 2022).

Work from home (WFH), which became popular after the pandemic, changed the nature of the job and work culture. During the COVID-19 pandemic, WFH was a legitimate practice with little supervision from the employer. To salvage the situation, many employers initiated unannounced salary cuts, non-payment of salary, and termination of employees. This massive misuse of labour laws and ignored employee well-being caused havoc in many families (Sharma, 2020). To overcome this sad situation, many employees embraced moonlighting. Moonlighting is working at many places, for an extra income, without telling the primary employer.

As WFH ended, many employers and organisations felt that moonlighting hinders employee commitment and productivity. Vikram Shroff of Global Law Firm explains, "in full-time employment, the employee is expected and required to spend his entire working time, efforts and energy for the employer interests" (Yadav, 2022). Infosys, a software company in India, banned 'moonlighting' among its employees (Oberoi, 2022). Wipro Chairman Rishad Premji called it cheating, whereas Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) labelled it as 'unethical' (Ghosh, 2022). However, Swiggy, an

online food delivery chain, allowed its employees (Singh, 2022).

After the pandemic, many competent employees looked for healthier, flexible working conditions, better pay benefits, and career advancement opportunities, which led to 'the great resignation'. A recent survey by MIT Sloan identified the following as predictors of the great resignation: a) toxic work culture, b) deprived job security, c) innovation that requires more effort, d) failure to recognise employee performance, e) employer's poor response during COVID situation (Sull, Sull, and Zweig, 2022). The survey further identified the toxic culture of an organisation as the main factor pushing for resignation. Less respect for employees, unethical practices, and treating high-performing employees on par with laggards added fuel to employee resignation. Menon (2021) suggests that it is time for management to self-reflection to evaluate the style of functioning and create a tailored retention strategy.

On the other spectrum, the practice of quiet quitting has become a mental health saver for many employees from this toxicity. Quiet Quitting is not quitting the job per se, rather an employee follows work-to-rule, and does the bare minimum to fetch a monthly salary. To avoid these burning current issues, many global organisations make jobs more appealing (Darrell, 2022; Wann, 2022). However, as many HR personnel identify, these promises of employers remain in papers, not in practice. Kashyap (2021) quotes Priyadarshini (former CHRO, Jindal Stainless) that many companies promise big bonuses and variables and fail to deliver those promises and the employees feel cheated; employees do not trust the employer. Quiet quitting is a kind of revenge an employee exhibits for various inhuman organisational actions (Mearian, 2022). Quiet Quitting could be a mental health saver from workloads, pathetic low pay, lack of incentives



and toxic workplace culture (England, 2022). However, some psychologists and HR specialists' opinion that if an employee is not performing due to overwork or stress, quiet quitting seems to be a solution, but it is an obstacle to career progression for a long time (Kaplan, 2022).

Quiet quitting is not something new, not invented or practised after the pandemic; it is not the problem of Gen Z, as it is projected; every organisation had it before and practised by many employees for various reasons. It has been called 'work to rule', 'acting your wage', 'clock-watching' etc. Sometimes organisations that plan to grow or change into professional organisations with new work cultures practise voluntary retirement to weed out these deadwood employees.

In the name of the pandemic, just like the corporate companies, the educational sector also face problems. Many teachers became victims of unanticipated salary cuts and termination of employment, all in the name of COVID-19. On the contrary, teachers who enrolled for part-time PhDs converted to full-time without informing or getting consent from the management. Online teaching assignments at many places become common practice among many teachers. Though media often projects issues in the IT sector, the equally affected educational sector is seldom mentioned. This case study explains Quiet Quitting in the educational sector, studying three employees and evaluating the positive and negatives of each case.

## OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This Case Study purposively selected three private college teachers from different parts of India, who are practicing quiet quitting in different ways, for various reasons, at different stages of their jobs. The authors consulted an educational psychologist and validated the case reports. Further, quiet quitting of the three subjects were analysed critically and evaluated.

## CASE PRESENTATION

**Case One:** The subject (Mr. X) is a 25-year-old NET qualified Assistant Professor. The subject is an unmarried male. His father was a retired schoolteacher and his mother a homemaker. He is the last child in the family; his two female elder siblings were married. His mother runs a small-scale business by raising poultry and pasture few goats. His father, while he was working as a schoolteacher, was a dedicated and committed man that earned him special respect in the village. This inspired Mr. X to choose this career.

After the NET qualification, Mr. X got a job in a private college, some 25 KMs away from his hometown. He stayed in a private apartment close to the college. During weekends and holidays, he visits his family in his newly bought motorcycle. Mr. X enjoyed the job, and it was uneventful in the first year. In his own words, "I was hard working. I am eligible to avail one casual leave every month, but I never utilised. As per the contract, if no casual leaves are taken, incentives will be given at the end of each academic year. This motivated me not to avail any casual leave. I attended one international conference and published one paper. The management gave me permission to attend the conference,

but politely told that only two days are allowed in an academic year. On few occasions, I took extra classes to encourage the slow learners. I was actively involved in activities, though it was not mandated. The management congratulated me privately few times for the dedication I showed at this young age. Though some senior teachers who work in the institution for many years advised me not to involve too much, I did not like their comments on my commitment and most of the times avoid them. When the second year started, there was a tremor waiting for me in the form of pay-increase".

"The pay rise for all, irrespective of their performance, was 175 rupees. While announcing the pay raise, the management insisted that there is no partiality, and the institution maintains the policy that all employees are equal. This so-called pay-increase and the so-called non-partial attitude of the employer made a dramatic impact in my personality that I adopted the style of doing 'minimum at work' from the second year and started searching for a better organisation".

"My father who noticed the changes in my behaviour enquired many times with apprehension. I hid everything about my career, hard work, expectations, and the reward. I overheard my mother telling my father that I may be in love with some girls. When I heard that, I cried alone thinking about my fate. Pay-increase was only an annual ritual. Though contract says that the performance of the employee will be rewarded in the annual increment, nothing was seen in reality. The incentives that I am eligible for not availing any casual leave was not there. No incentives for publication or any hard work. I approached the management regarding the casual leave incentives, the management gleefully told the annual increment given to me includes that also. When I talked to my colleagues about this issue seriously, they laughed casually. They further commented that this is the secret of many employees holding-on to the job for many years without any productivity or performance. Many seniors are aware of this, and it is a haven for lazy people. If the coffer is filled, the management is happy. I learned many new things about organisational culture after this eye-opening incident. As per the seniors, they know very well that they cannot compete with other performing employees or will not be eligible for any competitive jobs. So, the performing employees either leave the institution or soon adopt the lazy work culture of the institution".

"My decision to leave the institution came to a halt because of the pandemic. During the pandemic, salary reduction and non-payment of salary were common norms in the workplace. When normalcy arrived this academic year, I started to apply for new jobs. Since I am a beginner, I find it hard to compete with some senior employees who attend interviews".

"My decision for non-performance has nothing to do with my workload. My workload has never affected my life or family involvement. I have no complains that I do not get time to relax or exercise. All my behaviour started after seeing the greedy, inhuman, money-mongering attitude of the management and, the unethical practices. The institution has no desire to come out of these shackles. In short, education today is a money-making business".



“I know, I must accomplish a lot, a long way to go before I grow professionally. This non-performing lifestyle is not permanent. This is not my real personality and not my real choice. I am aware, if this lazy work culture continued for a longer period, it would affect my personal, professional development. I am even afraid that it might become my lifestyle, if I adopt this culture for a longer period. I realised now that I am a fool and try to do many things in a wrong place. I regret that I joined this institution at the beginning of my career”.

**Case Two:** The subject (Mrs. Y) is a 49-year-old female who works in a college for nearly two decades. Mrs. Y is married and have school going children. Her husband is a government employee and economically well off. Though she worked two years in a government college on a temporary basis, she took this fulltime job after the completion of her Doctorate. Since she is the senior most employees in the institution, the management is very fond of her. Since she does not have the equalling API score under UGC norms for the Principal, she is not appointed. However, couple of times the management promised at least a vice-principal post, it did not materialise due to reasons the subject is not very clear. A good number of employees admire her thinking that her closeness to the management would fetch them some favour. Her admiration for the management made her the most admired employee in the campus and, many teachers cling around her, some even ready to slave her.

Mrs. Y looks at her job as a mere decoration. She does her minimal works by going to class and giving marks to the students generously. She is not bothered anything about her personal and professional growth. According to her, personal growth means living happily with the co-workers and getting the monthly salary; and professional growth means the management make more money. There is no difference, according to her, between a school and college teaching. Since she has a PhD, she thinks that it is sufficient to be college teachers.

Mrs Y is happy that the management is not bothered about quality education. She has habituated to this life of minimal work culture and remains happy, content, and above all in the good book of the management. She has created her own comfort zone in the teaching as well as organisation. She does not want to apply for other jobs. During one annual Faculty Development Program, some experts from outside talked about the need for organising conferences, insisted on the participation of faculty members in international conferences, seminars, and the need for personal research and other growth in the Higher Education. After listening to the talk, Mrs. Y wondered whether the talk is relevant or such things are needed for a teaching profession in the college. She knows well that the school like culture in the college is the secret of many teachers cling on to this institution for many years. She admires the management for being magnanimous to understand the problems of the employees, especially the regular needs for leave and absences or late to manage many other family related concerns. They encourage the employee to take leave whenever it is needed so that they can attend their family concerns.

When few new employees talked about the poor infrastructure in the college and the non- progressiveness of the college that becomes a hindrance for quality education, she could only laugh. As far as infrastructure is concerned, she justifies the poor lab facilities and explains that it serves the employer, employee, and the students in many ways. 1) The management need not invest too much money to buy expensive equipment; 2) since less equipment are available in the lab, a teacher can teach limited number of experiments that reduces the workload; 3) since few experiments are taught, students can easily learn them and score high marks. Mrs. Y never realised that this concept spoils the life of future generation as well as the society. In her own words, “As an employee, I fulfil the requirement of my job so that I get my salary; I don’t bother about annual pay hike or incentives. If the management earn more money, sure they will share it with the employee in the form of increment. How can an employee expect salary hike every year when the management does not earn enough profit. If I am paid my salary and my job is guaranteed in the college, I am happy. I try my best to be in the good books of everyone”.

Things changed in the last few years. A new Principal took charge insisted on the performance of the employees, both personal and professional. It was a strong jolt for Mrs. Y, as she spends years of non-performance, which was favoured by the management too. She was even sceptical about the success of the new Principal in implementing many quality items in the college. She is confident that the management will not change as far the reforms the new principal is concerned; maximum, the Principal can ask the employees to perform and work hard. She had few conversations with the management and ventilated her displeasure about the changes the new principal introduced that spoils the smooth sailing of the college. Some senior teachers who were well versed in non-performance and laziness left the institution. She pointed out this to the management few times casually. Though the management did not say anything openly, she understood that they too are not happy with the principal. Few times, she had the dilemma of leaving the institution because she was often targeted by the new Principal. After a brief conversation with one of the management members, she put aside the concept of leaving the institution. Instead, she adopted a new job culture to adjust to the situation.

She befriended one of her department mates to add her name in her publication as the co-author. She also asked another friend from another institution to add her name in another paper. Thus, for the first time in her teaching career she has imprinted her name in the list of publications. This shortcut method proved to be very effective. Wherever she is a committee member, she sees that there is a dynamic assistant who does the job so that her presence is felt as an active employee. She volunteered activities where without much efforts and time she can organise few activities. Now she is very comfortable to survive the storm of changing work culture introduced by the new principal without much stress and efforts. However, her concept of minimal performance remains unaltered, and she knows well that the changes introduced by the new Principal will not continue for a long



time. Recently she heard the happy news that the contact period of the new Principal will be over soon and he is going to retire.

**Case Three:** Mr Z is a 65-year-old male. He worked as a HR and project officer in an electronics company and took voluntary retirement at the age of 56. After his retirement, he was looking for a few jobs. Since he came taking VRS, it was hard for him to get corporate jobs. Since he started his career as a teacher in a college before joining the electronics company, some of his friends suggested having a teaching job that is less laborious. Fortunately, a college in a small town was looking for industrial exposed people in their MBA program to give hands on experience to the students. Since his basic qualifications are from another stream, the management was very reluctant to hire him for MBA department. The management asked him whether he is interested to join another department. Since Mr. Z was unemployed, looking for a job, he opted to accept the offer. He joined the teaching career again. Thus, he was working for the last 7 years in the same college. He has no desire of career progression at this age and no intention of job-hopping. He is happy and content with his current job.

Mr. Z is a well-seasoned employee and therefore knows how to adjust to the new environment. His concept of teaching is different, and he is well aware of his age-related limitations. In a short period, he adopted a new work culture. Teaching job for him is an easiest one as compared to the corporate job.

Mr. Z has a well-chiselled daily routine. He comes college in time and leaves in time. He does not take unnecessary leaves. He goes to the classes in time and finishes the classes in time. If Dean or Directors expect works from his department, he see that his department teachers finish the works in time. Few lady-teachers in his department look at any extra work as an opportunity for career progression and do it politely. However, they consider his requests more like commands than accomplishments tasks. Many a times, they even complained that he is not performing anything in the department except going to the class. He proudly proclaimed that a retired person could perform only so much. Thus, according to him, he is a perfect fit in the institution.

Mr Z comes to the college in the morning with a newspaper and, finishes reading the newspaper in his free hours. Once he completes his newspaper reading ritual in the first few hours of work, he slowly moves to other departments, mainly to the rooms of Deans or Directors for a chat. If they entertain him, he spends few hours there until he has next class, or they ask him to leave. He carries his own coffee and lunch from home and very frugal in his expenditure. He associates with teachers who are ready to spend money for his extra tea or coffee and snacks. Though he heard many saying that he is a dead wood in the organisation who does clock watching to punch his card in the evening, he does not bother, if his salary is paid.

After the pandemic, the secretary of the college called him to inform that there will not be any increment. This decision of the management is not only for him, for other retired employees who are working in the college. They will be a

paid every month a lump sum money as honorary salary and no benefits will be given to them. When Mr. Z heard this from the college secretary, though perplexed in the beginning, he did not take it as an evaluation of his job. He knows well there are youngsters in the department to do all works to keep the educational standards, his mere presence in the department as a senior faculty, an industry-exposed expert is sufficient to raise standards. He was worried a bit that his pocket money will be reduced, and he has to manage his expenditure in a different way. The high raising inflation and the constant price hike of common commodities worried him personally.

Few times, he had a hard time with the research department and other skills development departments in the college. In his own words, "the research department asked me few times to focus on research and look for few projects. I have less interest in that area. The do my teaching perfectly well and get salary. I don't miss it or violates this. I do what I can as a teacher; if someone things it is not sufficient, I can't even help. Since I am not eligible for any extra incentives, I think they are not job requirements; even more, I am a retired person with limited capacities. If someone thinks it is minimalistic engagement from my part, I will call the person inhuman".

**Evaluation of cases:** Change in an educational organisation do not happen in a vacuum; there are three players: the students, the primary stakeholders, the teachers and finally the management. The students are students; they are customers in the triode. The teachers can be motivated, and non-performing teachers could be replaced or, young teachers can be trained to be performers. What about the management? If they are not willing to change, no quality improvement is possible. If one analyses the three cases, can understand the teaching career more meaningfully.

Self-knowledge and self-awareness are primary signs of a person's growth and development. These give self-esteem and confidence to a teacher. Self-satisfaction is also another important sign that leads to goal-centric life (higher aspirations and achievement motivation). Therefore, teachers in institute of Higher Educations expected to be developed personalities, both personally and professionally. In the personal development, the maturity expected of a person should be proportionate to the age and developmental period. Emotional stability, the ability to manage time, balancing work and life commitments are signs to show that a person is growing and mature. Economic stability together with a better financial portfolio, preparation for retirement helps the person to become more independent. Development of hobbies and other skills to manage the free time is also important. These various aspects in the life makes a person to achieve self-actualization or individuation to become one's own person. Together with personal development, establish one's own style of imparting knowledge, with a clear teaching philosophy, constant updating of knowledge, attending conferences, regular refresher courses, continuous constant research, showcasing one's ability and skills in the field, contribution in the field so that people who are in need will be attracted.



One can apparently see three stages in the professional growth of college teachers. The first stage or phase is a young professional – a person learns many things and try to settle in the profession as a teacher. This lasts for 5 to 8 years. This follows mid-level professional stage (roughly age 32 to 55) in which a teacher is comfortable and confident, well quipped for the job. In the final stage, a person becomes a seasoned professional in the field. Having a broader understanding and outlook on knowledge, become a competent and expert in the field at the same time desire to learn new things to be UpToDate in the field

Mr. X, the first subject's expectations did not match with reality. When the reward is not proportionate to his expectations, he is shattered, depressed. The expectations are not extraordinary or unrealistic related to the profession, and the expectations are the backbone of success of any educational institution. However, the subject was not aware, not understood clearly the organisational culture that is being practised, or encouraged in the institution. The subject is positive and aware of his situation; the non-performing phase is not permanent and confident to overcome. Mr. X is a real performer, engaged employee whereas the organization he works is not conducive to any of his aspirations; though he realized it a bit late, but his defence mechanism of non-performance is not fully justifiable. He wants to overcome this situation at the earliest. Whether the subject's action could be justified or not, the organisation gave a painful experience and his quiet quitting give him some solace.

In the second case of Mrs. Y, the quiet quitting is a rather senior employee in the institution, working nearly two decades. She has well understood the organisational culture and there are chances that new employees who join the institution learn quickly this vicious cycle of mutual cheating of employer and employee. Her situation is similar to 'never complain – never explain' policy taken by some shrewd politicians. To be a good teacher, someone has to break this vicious cycle; also, an institution need to overcome this unethical stance to grow as a professional organization. Otherwise, the stakeholders are the ones who suffer. The employee should have professional goals of grow. The management has to overcome the greedy goal of moneymaking and update their policies time to time. That is why UGC and other higher bodies issue regulations time to time, expect every institution to have well organized IQAC, active Alumni gatherings and systematic teacher-parents interaction. Otherwise, at the end, not only the employees but also the stakeholders feel cheated. To chance this situation, this never complain attitude of employee and the never explain attitude of management need a paradigm shift. In the quite quitting case of Mrs Y, she lost her prime phase of productive life in the vicious cycle and developed a work culture of laziness, which is encouraged by the management.

In the case of Mr. Z, it is a different kind of quite quitting. The subject is a voluntary retiree from an industry. Even though he does not reveal why he took voluntary retirement and left the industry, he does not seem to an achievement-motivated person. He repeatedly says that he is a retiree and therefore limits his activity to teaching alone. Probably, he was not

oriented properly about the nature of job and responsibilities associated with that or, he has defined his role by himself. He has developed a retiree attitude. The management is aware of this and that could be one of the reason not to give incentives to all the retired appointees in the college. This quiet quitting of the retired subject sends a message to all employers to be cautious in appointing retirees in the organisation.

## CONCLUSION

This case study brings out the nature of quiet quitting in the educational institutions. The subjects were selected purposively from different age groups. All the three employees practice quiet quitting for different reasons, in a different way. The study identify quiet quitting as a defence mechanism and a mental health saver of a depressed employee in one subject. In two cases, the organisation plays a vital role in inducing the employees for quiet quitting. It is encouraged by some institutions for their selfish motive of moneymaking, as a business. The study identifies the phenomenon not as a new trend evolving after the COVID 19 pandemic as often reported. It is an age-old practice done by many employees, who are neither fit for a specific job nor who do not fully involve in the job. This practice affects the employee, the stakeholders and ultimately the institution itself.

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