Exploring How Job Satisfaction Mediates the Relationships between Work-Life Balance, Job Burnout and Quiet Quitting among Gen Z Administrative Workers

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Abstract. This study aimed to analyze the conceptual model of the mediating between work-life balance, job burnout, and quiet quitting in administrative workers of the Gen Z generation in Yogyakarta. The conservation of resources (COR) theory was used in this study. The methodology has been done by following in the following: A structured conceptual framework wherein literature from previous studies in various areas studied and used in the development of conceptual model and then analyzed. The analysis results show that work-life balance and job burnout can indeed directly affect quiet quitting; however, the empirical inconsistencies indicate that there are a number of unaccounted variables that mediate the relationship between the variables. The object is to complement the previous studies in the absence of job satisfaction factor. This research is original because it has not been studied in this context before and focuses on the role of job satisfaction as a mediator in quiet quitting in the present. The results of this study have implications for in the workplace job practices and the development of a more effective HRM strategy that could help increase job satisfaction, control resources, and, consequently, minimize quiet quitting among young administrative workers.

Keywords: Conceptual Analysis, Generation Z, Job Burnout, Job Satisfaction, Work-Life Balance, Quiet Quitting,

1 Introduction

Quiet quitting is a phrase used when an employee establishes clear limits for his/her work, by which he/she continues to work on the essential tasks of his/her profession, but refuses to work beyond his/her scope of work [1]. The Wall Street Journal recently reported that 50% of today's workforce have decided to reduce their job dedication. The latest phrase to describe "Quitting the Job" is “Quiet Quitting,” which implies that an individual stops putting in the full effort required for a job and only performs enough to get by [2]. Quiet quitting is troublesome for companies with growing numbers of young recruits checking out emotionally from work. The term “quiet quitting” has been the topic of much literature around grievances related to company cultures and the

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generation known as Generation Z [3]. Most studies define quiet quitting as deliberately reducing effort to strictly assigned work and reducing extra role, rather than planning to quit, contributions from the moment, and so on. It is often interpreted as boundary setting and coping with stress and burnout [4]

They also respond to an employee desire for a healthy work-life balance, and attempt to actively control stress and prevent burnout. The balance between work and life depends on the employees' commitment and happiness in their work and families. If an employee can be able to harmonise with his priorities then he will be able to reach the WLB. [5]. There is a greater emphasis on work-life balance as the generation gets younger. Generation Y and Z nurses perceived that younger nurses do not get due respect and recognition from their colleagues [6]. This is a generational trait that can have profound impact on organization's work arrangements and policies. Millennials and gen Z put a value on flexibility of work hours, annual leave and work from home for work-life balance [7] These preferences reflect a fundamental shift in how younger workers conceptualize the relationship between professional and personal life domains. Despite growing Gen Z awareness, definitions and metrics remain inconsistent [8] Some studies have created scales to assess quiet quitting, but the prevalence of quiet quitting has been found to be different across the various studies, ranging from 67.4% of nurses being quiet quitters to 53.8% of physicians and 40.3% of other healthcare workers [9] This discrepancy raises questions of the validity and reliability of the measurement across occupational groups.

Job satisfaction is a positive feeling toward one’s job that is influenced by factors such as the work environment, self-confidence, wages, and corporate social responsibility [10] Several studies confirm job satisfaction's protective role against quiet quitting. Research findings highlight the negative effect of job satisfaction towards quiet quitting behavior in millennial and Z workers, with job satisfaction influenced by empowering leadership, organizational culture, and work overload [11] Job satisfaction has been found to have a significant negative impact on quiet quitting, and it partially mediates the relationship of work-life balance and job burnout on quiet quitting [12]. Furthermore, research in higher education found that there is no direct influence of burnout on quiet quitting behavior of lecturers, while employee dissatisfaction and disengagement significantly influence quiet quitting behavior [13]. This contradicts studies in other sectors where three dimensions of job burnout—personal burnout, work-related burnout, and client-related burnout—all positively impact quiet quitting[14].

This study not only addresses the knowledge gap but also the empirical gap by elucidating the combined effect of WLB and Job Burnout on Quiet Quitting, with Job Satisfaction as the mediator, in an yet uncharted territory of Sri Lankan Battery Manufacturing industry. [5]. [15], [16], [17] This method adds to the existing knowledge on the “quiet quitting” trend, in which workers make the active decision to do less than their assigned tasks. Previous research has found that this disconnection can result from not having basic human needs met, lack of connection to the organization's vision and poor culture. The level of workload employees experience in tough jobs leads to psychological distress and triggers quiet quitting to keep them in their mental frame or to establish limits.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Conservation of Resources Theory

This study uses the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Stevan E. Hobfoll developed this theory in 1989. COR theory offers a useful framework for understanding how people manage and protect resources they consider valuable, especially under workplace pressure. The theory suggests that individuals naturally want to acquire, keep, and safeguard these resources. Stress arises when these resources are threatened or lost, or when people do not get the resources they expected after making a significant investment. [18]. Over the past thirty years, COR theory has become one of the most commonly used theories in organizational behavior (OB). Stevan E. Hobfoll introduced COR in 1989 as a new model for understanding stress. He is a clinical psychologist who studies stress disorders. After several revisions, COR evolved from a stressor-strain model into a motivational theory. It created a framework with various extensions. This framework sees an individual's resources and the changes in those resources as key factors driving stress reactions and coping behaviors.19]

2.2 Quiet Quitting

Quite quitting was first proposed by Mark Boldger in 2009 who used the term as an explanation for the decline in motivation to perform in the workplace decrease in motivation has an impact on company productivity [20]. Quiet quitting (QQ) is defined as a behavioral phenomenon wherein employees establish clear professional boundaries, continuing to fulfill their primary responsibilities in accordance with their job descriptions, while declining to engage in work that exceeds those prescribed duties [20], [21], [22], [23]. In essence, quiet quitting is a psychological coping strategy that can be a subtle form of withdrawal from a job because of the lingering physical or emotional fatigue caused by burnout. This is exacerbated by the lack of balance between work and home responsibilities and by an underlying sense of dissatisfaction with an organizational structure that does not acknowledge and take care of its staff's needs. [11], [13], [16], [24]. In today's work environment, especially for Gen Z workers, this has grown more and more significant as they are often driven to “quiet quit” their job due to the stress of administrative work and unrealistic expectations..[25], [26], [27], [28], [29]

2. 3. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance (WLB) is a multi-dimensional concept that involves maintaining a balance between work-related obligations and activities and personal life areas such as family, leisure and personal development [30]. In modern working life contexts, work-life balance is especially difficult in the context of blurring of work boundaries, long hours and performance pressure. Work-life harmony is a new way of framing work-life dynamics, a concept that captures a dynamics that takes into account cultural values, organizational culture, and people's boundary preferences. [31]. Recent literature emphasizes that optimal work-life balance is a critical determinant for the modern

workforce, particularly Generation Z, as it significantly enhances job satisfaction and employee performance while mitigating detrimental outcomes such as job burnout and quiet quitting [5], [32], [33]

Generation Z highly prioritizes flexible working conditions and supportive environments. Rigid conditions, such as long working hours and inadequate compensation, significantly diminish their work-life balance, leading to increased stress and higher turnover intention. Conversely, fostering a healthy work-life balance effectively mitigates job burnout, ultimately sustaining professional commitment and optimizing overall project performance [7], [32], [34], [35].

2.4 Job Burnout

Job burnout is a state of physical and mental exhaustion that occurs as a result of long-term negative feelings that are developed at work and affect individuals of various professions. The results of the research show that burnout is a multi-faceted phenomenon and that a number of factors are involved at personal, job, organisational and social level. [36]. This complex psychosocial condition emerges when workplace pressures exceed an employee's adaptive and coping capacities, manifesting in high levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment [14], [37], [38], [39] Furthermore, in current workforce dynamicsparticularly among Generation Z job burnout drives the emergence of mental protection strategies in the form of "quiet quitting" behavior [39], [40], [41], [42]. In this context, employees adaptively limit their emotional involvement and refuse additional initiatives beyond the minimum boundaries of their formal duties as a defensive mechanism to prevent worsening exhaustion [37], [40], [41], [43]

2.5 Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is a positive feeling toward one’s job that is influenced by factors such as the work environment, self-confidence, wages, and corporate social responsibility [10]. On the other hand, it affects employees' motivation and commitment to the organization [44]. According to [45], [46], [47] In the contemporary workforce, job satisfaction has emerged as a paramount concern, particularly among Generation Z, who exhibit a heightened level of awareness regarding the alignment between their professional roles and personal well-being. Unlike previous generations, Generation Z increasingly equates high job satisfaction with sustainable work-life integration, viewing it as a critical safeguard against burnout and a prerequisite for long-term organizational retention [48], [49]. Drawing upon the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, job satisfaction functions as a vital psychological resource. When employees experience a supportive work environment that facilitates adequate work-life balance, their intrinsic resource pool is replenished. This accumulated psychological resource acts as a critical buffer against the emotional and physical depletion characteristic of job burnout.[5], [43], [50], [51]

3 Methodology

The methodology that is applied in this research is conceptual which aims to further

develop the theoretical constructs development and to produce new concepts by synthesizing existing concepts [5]. As stated by, such an analytical review plays an important role in pinpointing the gaps in the scholarly literature and provides a solid base for further empirical research. This work draws on relevant studies to develop a comprehensive knowledge of the interactions among significant variables. This study therefore proposes a conceptual framework for future research to validate and test, which is designed to answer a set of basic research questions. (1) Does Work-Life Balance influence Quiet Quitting among Generation Z administrative workers in Yogyakarta? (2) Does Job Burnout influence Quiet Quitting among Generation Z administrative workers in Yogyakarta? (3) Does Work-Life Balance influence Job Satisfaction among Generation Z administrative workers in Yogyakarta? (4) Does Job Burnout influence Job Satisfaction among Generation Z administrative workers in Yogyakarta? (5) Does Job Satisfaction influence Quiet Quitting among Generation Z administrative workers in Yogyakarta? (6) Does Job Satisfaction mediate the relationship between Work-Life Balance and Quiet Quitting? (7) Does Job Satisfaction mediate the relationship between Job Burnout and Quiet Quitting?

4 Results & Discussion

4.1 The Influence of Work-Life Balance on Quiet Quitting

A work-life balance (WLB) is a complex and intertwined system, that one's ability of balancing work and life needs directly affects one's psychological stability and performance. The ability to effectively balance this at work has been shown to reduce the likelihood of employees experiencing emotional exhaustion, increase their job satisfaction, and maintain their mental health in the long term. In the workplace, the well-being of the employee is no longer judged by productivity or output but also by his or her capacity to keep his or her autonomy, mental integrity, and quality of relations with others outside working hours. This optimal balance is an important protective factor that can lead to a well balanced use of psychological resources in the workplace when dealing with challenging situations.. [7], [35], [37], [52]. Within the framework of Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals have an inherent drive to protect and replenish their psychological resources. Work-Life Balance (WLB) serves as a critical mechanism in this process, acting as a strategic shield against resource depletion. By harmonizing professional demands and personal life, individuals can sustainably preserve their mental energy and capacity, aligning perfectly with COR's core principle of protecting valuable resources to maintain stability [53], [54] . Research on Generation Z employees highlights a clear chain reaction: a lack of work-life balance significantly drives up burnout levels, which ultimately triggers quiet quitting. In this context, burnout serves as the critical link that turns personal life imbalance into workplace withdrawa [55]

4.2 The Influence of Job Burnout on Quiet Quitting

Job burnout (JB) constitutes a condition of mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion resulting from prolonged stress that requires intense emotional engagement [56]. Research has looked into certain aspects of burnout in connection with quiet quitting.

The results show that three kinds of job burnout personal burnout, work-related burnout, and client-related burnout have a positive effect on quiet quitting. [14]. According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory), job burnout occurs when individuals chronically deplete their internal resources—such as energy and emotional capacity without sufficient recovery. As employees continuously invest their energy to meet work demands without gaining new resources in return, they fall into a 'loss spiral.' This relentless drain directly triggers extreme mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion [13], [24], [38], [57]. Generation Z values mental health and clear boundaries between work and play, and are extremely sensitive to work-related stress. Usually, these young professionals do not continue to exert themselves to the point of job burnout when their job requirements are relentless. Rather, they often rely on "quiet quitting" as a psychological defense mechanism, which is the conscious attempt to reduce their discretionary effort for some reason or another in order to avoid using up the rest of their mental and emotional energies.. [43], [55], [58], [59]

4.3 The Influence of Work-Life Balance on Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is one of the important factors affecting the sustainability of a business. The links between the personal and professional life balance (or work-life balance) and job satisfaction have been a major focus of interest given that work-life balance can affect an employee's job satisfaction [60]. The findings from this study indicate that the work-life balance has a positive effect on job satisfaction and job performance, with job satisfaction serving as a mediator between the work-life balance and job performance. [61]. Work-life balance is critical in maintaining and safeguarding the valuable resources of an employee, including physical resources, time, and emotional capacity, according to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Having a healthy separation between work and play life helps avoid the risk of a loss of resources due to role conflict, and provides sufficient time for recovery. These psychological benefits are effectively maintained and replenished leading to improved levels of wellbeing, and consequently job satisfaction. [13], [47], [62], [63], [64]. In addition, work–life balance indirectly influences job performance through job satisfaction for the gen Z sample, indicating that a positive work–life balance has a positive effect on job satisfaction which, in turn, positively affects job performance. [65]. Flexible working hours, mental health leave and wellness programs are proven to lower burnout, increase satisfaction, improve retention and enhance productivity for Millennials and Gen Z. This flexibility is best implemented with clearly-defined work boundaries and sufficient financial compensation, however. [63], [66], [67]

4.4 The Influence of Job Burnout on Job Satisfaction

Job burnout is defined as a syndrome of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion resulting from chronic stress and intensive emotional demands [43], [56]. Research shows the three burnout dimensions impact job satisfaction differently: emotional exhaustion and depersonalization have strong and moderate negative correlations, respectively, while personal accomplishment shows a strong positive correlation [68]. Conservation of resources (COR) theory postulates the link between job demands-

resources, personal resources, organizational commitment, work engagement, turnover intentions, and job performance [69]. Generation Z's job satisfaction heavily relies on organizational justice, transformational leadership, and adequate compensation. A decline in job satisfaction due to a lack of fairness makes them highly vulnerable to quiet quitting, which is a psychological withdrawal from their work. Additionally, exposure to chronic job stress can trigger job burnout, characterized by physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion. For employees managing dual roles, unaddressed job burnout significantly drives a high turnover intention [45], [70], [71], [72].

4.5 The Influence of Job Satisfaction on Quiet Quitting

A major post-pandemic concern, quiet quitting occurs when employees strictly limit their engagement to essential tasks, demonstrating minimal effort, low emotional investment, and reduced communication at work [74]. The phenomenon of quiet quitting is increasingly explained using Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. The core premise of this model is that an employee's stress responses and coping behaviors—such as withdrawing from work—are primarily driven by the availability and fluctuation of their personal resources. [75]. A fundamental principle of COR theory is that understanding the impact of resource reservoirs, resource passageways and crossover provides a framework for research and intervention promoting resilience to employees as well as to organizations. [76]. Generation Z is fundamentally reshaping workplace dynamics, particularly in how they respond to low job satisfaction. When these young professionals feel undervalued or dissatisfied with their roles, they are highly likely to engage in "quiet quitting." Rather than formally resigning, Gen Z workers experiencing low job satisfaction tend to establish strict boundaries, performing only their required duties to protect their work-life balance and prevent burnout [10], [13], [23], [45].

4.6 The Influence of Work-Life Balance on Quiet Quitting through Job Satisfaction as a Mediating Variable

Quiet quitting has become a significant organisational phenomenon in the modern-day workplace, drawing worldwide attention across multiple sectors. Quiet quitting is a form of employee disengagement . Employees do the minimum required to meet expectations and refuse to take on any additional tasks or responsibilities outside of what is required . Such behaviour has implications for organisational performance, workplace relations and employee wellbeing [44], [77]. The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory offers a powerful theoretical lens to understand the work–life balance–job satisfaction–quiet quitting nexus, connecting job demands and personal resources to larger organisational outcomes like engagement and performance. In the end the theory shows how people try to get hold of and defend their resources in an effort to reduce psychological distress and avoid burnout [78], [79]. Direct empirical evidence indicates the complex relationship between work–life balance, job burnout and quiet quitting, with job satisfaction as a significant partial mediator. A proper work-life balance reduces quiet quitting, burnout worsens it through the lens of job satisfaction, and the emergence of quiet quitting leads to more negative consequences. In particular, quiet quitting significantly hurts ongoing job satisfaction and affective commitment. It

serves as a trigger to finally boost employee turnover intentio [5], [80].

4.7 The Influence of Job Burnout on Quiet Quitting through Job Satisfaction as a Mediating Variable

Driven by an increasingly exhausted workforce, quiet quitting has become a critical organizational challenge that requires understanding the psychology behind employee withdrawal." [26]. The goal of this literature review is to synthesise the current research on the topic and explore how job burnout drives quiet quitting, drawing on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. Specifically, it investigates the mediating role of job satisfaction in this relational pathway.. [38], [78], [79]. Research has consistently established a decline in job satisfaction as an important mediating mechanism that links job burnout to quiet quitting. These findings add to the Conservation of Resources theory by demonstrating that resource depletion resulting from burnout results in quiet quitting among vocational college lecturers, primarily mediated by a decline in job satisfaction . The results underscore the importance of boosting job satisfaction and controlling emotional exhaustion for sustaining lecturer engagement . [81], [82]. owever, Quiet quitting (QQ) has become a global phenomenon, particularly among Generation Z employees who are more vulnerable to workplace stress. There is critical empirical evidence that job satisfaction is a key mediating mechanism between job burnout and this withdrawal behaviour. However, this mediation model is largely untested in the battery manufacturing industry, highlighting a substantial research gap. This needs to be addressed on an urgent basis, especially in light of the recent reports of an alarming 80% of the workforce in a Sri Lankan battery manufacturing company showing tendencies of quiet quitting in their factories. [5], [57], [66],[77]

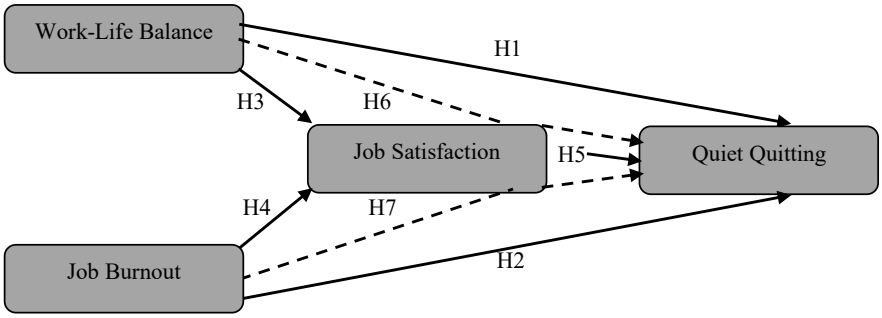


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework

Figure 1. Developed through a synthesis of prior literature and scholarly discussions, this conceptual framework proposes a new structural model. Specifically, this theoretical study posits that Work-Life Balance (WLB) and Job Burnout (JB) significantly influence Quiet Quitting (QQ), both directly and indirectly through the mediating effect of Job Satisfaction (JS). This premise is firmly grounded Conservation

of Resources (COR) Theory, emphasizing the fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs alongside the preservation of personal resources. Job Satisfaction serves as a critical bridge in this dynamic; achieving a solid WLB fosters a more fulfilling work experience and boosts overall contentment, which in turn mitigates the tendency for QQ. A parallel mechanism applies to JB—when job-related burnout is effectively managed or reduced, employees are able to maintain higher levels of JS and prevent emotional depletion, ultimately leading to a significant decrease in Quiet Quitting behaviors.

5 Conclusion

From a conceptual perspective, this research gives a detailed understanding of the relationship between work-life balance, Job burnout, Job Satisfaction and Quiet Quitting. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory, we suggest a conceptual framework focusing on the underlying importance of job satisfaction as a mediator. Based on the results of the concepts, it can be concluded that support in respect of work-life balance, as well as actively opposing job burnout has a significant impact on quiet quitting and also on overall job satisfaction. This boost in job satisfaction, in turn, is an important link in the chain that helps restore psychological resources and aids in the development of a sense of fulfillment in the workplace, indirectly reducing the likelihood of engaging in quiet quitting behaviors. This model provides a holistic understanding of the complex aspects affecting employee engagement and treats job satisfaction as a key element that links personal resources to job requirements. This research provides a theoretical contribution to the understanding of 'quiet quitting' in terms of the mediating role of job satisfaction between work-life balance and job burnout. Applied from a practical perspective, these findings can be incorporated into human resource management and organisational leadership practices to develop strategies to support work-life balance, limit occupational burnout and to create positive working environments to prevent quiet quitting and to keep the productivity of the organisation intact. To prove this conceptualization, then the next step is to conduct an empirical test using the quantitative approach and the tool PLS-SEM for administrative employees in Yogyakarta.

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