

The productivity paradox: SA companies grapple with the impact of quiet quitting, Remchannel data shows



Quiet quitting, a term which refers to employees who put no more effort into their jobs than is necessary and who do no more and no less than what is required of their employment, continues to affect South African companies, according to the latest data from Remchannel.

The biannual Remchannel Salary & Wage Survey for March 2023 found that South African employees are decidedly negative, indicating they are unwilling to go the extra mile at work. The results echo similar observations in various countries worldwide, as the phenomenon has become a universal issue affecting workplaces across different cultures and industries.

Remchannel Managing Director, Rene Richter, says it was most revealing and almost alarming to note that close to one-third (30.8%) of the participants responded with “Unsure or not applicable” for all statements.

The highest positive responses (66.2%) were for the selection “Employees are looking for increased mobility and choice in where they are able to work”. The survey included 19 statements that participants were required to respond to with “True (agree)”, “False (disagree)”, or “Unsure or not applicable”.

The results were as follows:

- 9% say quiet quitting is no longer a challenge
- 49% say there are no longer prepared to sacrifice mental health
- 36% say the number of employees feeling burned out is increasing
- 38% say quiet quitting is more prevalent among certain generations
- 43% of employees are tired of being asked to do more without compensation
- 34% say poor management is to be blamed for quiet quitting

“From the survey results, 52.38% of employers are either unsure whether quiet quitting’ impacts the organisation or indicated not applicable. This came as no surprise and was highlighted in research in May 2022 in the snap survey conducted on ‘Return to office’,” says Richter.

She noted that default passivity explains the quiet quitting phenomenon. “People have been stressed for years, but they don’t have the freedom to just up and quit. Feeling powerless to escape a stressful situation, they respond in a way we now know is typical and predictable: by becoming passive.

“They don’t contribute ideas in meetings. They don’t take the initiative to switch teams or proactively seek out more meaningful work. They do only what they need to do not to get fired,” she says.

According to the Remchannel data, shutting down and passively accepting the status quo is the normal human response to prolonged adverse events such as the Covid-19 tragedy. It can be attributed to factors such as job dissatisfaction, lack of recognition, inadequate work-life balance, ineffective leadership, or limited growth opportunities.

However, companies can take steps to reduce quiet quitting, and one of these is to give employees a sense of having control over their lives and choices. Managers can look for opportunities to give employees more autonomy.

“When possible, let them choose their schedules and deadlines and whether to work from home or the office. Let them make their own decisions about whom to collaborate with, how to allocate their time, and how to approach getting their work done. Ask for their input on goals and strategies and give them a voice in decisions,” she added.

Richter concludes by saying that if we add the new phenomenon of quiet quitting and the impact on productivity, the cost to corporate South Africa is escalating at an alarming rate.

“It’s imperative for companies to address this issue proactively to foster a culture of engagement, motivation, and resilience in the face of adversity. Companies must remain mindful of their Employee Value Proposition and steer a win-win course for employees and companies.”