



How quiet quitting could be killing your workplace – and what you can do about it.

Have you noticed a lack of enthusiasm or participation from your employees lately? Maybe communication is at an all-time low, or you’re getting a lot of pushback on changes that you’re trying to implement. These signs could indicate a high level of quiet quitting in your workforce.

The term ‘quiet quitting’ has been around for a few years now, and according to the latest [Gallup’s State of the Global Workplace 2023 report](#), it’s alarmingly high in Australia and New Zealand, especially at 67%, 8 points higher than the global average. The common symptoms we’ve listed above all result in one thing: low engagement.



What is quiet quitting?

“Quiet quitting, also known as silent resignation or ‘acting your wage,’” [Randstand](#).

Quiet quitters are those employees filling a seat in your organisation but only putting in the minimal effort required to do their job and not going beyond it. On the surface, some may think that this isn't a big deal, or perhaps these workers may appear lazy, but the reality is that it goes much deeper than that. Looking below the surface, many of these employees are psychologically disconnected from their employer, and as a result, they are most likely stressed and burnt out because of it.

Gallup's report noted that 47% of employees from Australia and New Zealand reported daily feelings of stress, 3 points higher than the global average. Looking through the Australian Public Service (APS) lens, this could be much higher, with results from the [2023 PMES scores for the NSW Public Sector](#) alone revealing that 66% of employees felt burnt out.

The flow-on effect for organisations that neglect to do anything about this is even more detrimental. Not only may they lose valuable employees in the long term by not re-engaging them and caring for their well-being, but an organisation's productivity will suffer, too. [Gallup reports](#) that "low engagement costs the global economy US\$8.8 trillion and accounts for 9% of global GDP."



Quiet quitting goes beyond work location.

"what people experience during their everyday work – their feelings of involvement and enthusiasm – matters more in reducing stress than where they are sitting." [Gallup's State of the Global Workplace 2023 report](#)

Since the pandemic, many workplace conversations about employees and their well-being have centred on where they physically work. Importantly, there is no black-and-white conclusion to what works best, as all organisations, people, and their workplaces are different. But workplace location isn't the ultimate decider on what's going to turn quiet quitting around to increase employee engagement. Leaders need to look at how engagement is directly related to stress, not the work location itself.

Gallup's report found that when employees are engaged at work, they report significantly lower stress in their lives, up to 26%. Further, engagement has a 3.8 times greater influence on employee stress than work location. But just a directive to managers saying 'increase your teams' engagement' isn't going to cut it. Especially when managers might be quietly quitting themselves. Sadly, only 23%

of respondents in Australia and New Zealand felt they were thriving at work, with less than a third being managers.



Getting back to citizenship behaviours

In an article published by [Harvard Business Review](#), the definition of quiet quitters also includes ‘not engaging in citizenship behaviours.’ Interestingly, [organisational citizenship behaviours \(OCB\) is a term that was first defined by Dennis Organ](#) in 1988 as “an individual behaviour which is not rewarded by a formal reward system... but that, when combined with the same behaviour in a group, results in effectiveness”. Organ identified five different types of organisational citizenship behaviour. These are Altruism, Courtesy, Sportsmanship, Conscientiousness, and Civic Value.

While these behaviours aren’t new, they are compelling in how they impact an organisation’s culture. [An Elsevier Survey](#) looked into the relationship between Organisational Citizenship Behaviours and Organisational Culture and found that Behavioural and Structural Factors in an organisation’s culture did have a positive relationship to organisational citizenship behaviours. This study also found that OCB “causes the staff to prefer organisational and group interests over individual interests”. Studies listed in this report also concluded a direct and meaningful relationship between OCB with internal and external satisfaction, self-stem work stress reduction, and achieving individual goals. They also noted that OCB had great importance in customer perception of service quality, satisfaction, behavioural intentions, and loyalty.



Turning quiet quitting around – the opportunity for managers

With the past few years of uncertainty and many employees feeling overwhelmed at work and in their personal lives, going above and beyond to engage in OCB may seem like 'too much.' That's where managers need to step in. In [Gallup's report](#), when employees were asked what they would change about their workplace to make it better, over 40% of quiet quitters' responses were related to engagement or culture. Their reasons included managers being more approachable, having more autonomy in their work to stimulate creativity, learning more things, clearer goals, and stronger guidance.

Redefining roles and responsibilities

A 2023 US report by [Slingshot into Digital Work Trends](#) revealed what employees do when priorities aren't given to them. 34% of respondents said they guessed what was important, while 31% said they chose what they wanted to do.

Add the need for additional skills to perform current roles, and you have the perfect storm for low employee morale and engagement. In our recent article, [“Skills-based transformation—Solving the Capability Gap,”](#) we discussed [LinkedIn data](#) revealing how skills for a given role have shifted around 25% since 2015 and that this percentage is expected to double by 2027.

Managers can motivate and engage their team by redefining tasks and role responsibilities to reflect what work is essential and what work is extra. Organisations need to look beyond just their team to redefine roles and accountabilities to succeed in this effectively. Leaders must take a holistic approach to how their organisation delivers value to their customers to ensure that changes to team roles and structures do not cause unnecessary knock-on effects to other parts of their service delivery.

Creating more time.

“Creating that culture of engagement is only possible when you slow down the other things as well,” says Pia Andrews, a public servant and global expert in open and digital government.

In our series on organisational health, Pia Andrews joined us on the topic of purpose and leadership. In this episode, Pia gave some great advice on time. She walked us through how she purposely builds

10% playtime into every agenda she has and how this gives her team innovation time, strategy time, and testing time throughout the whole lifecycle. [Listen to the full episode here.](#)

Creating a psychologically safe space for employees

In our conversation with Cherie Canning, Director at Luminate Leadership, as part of our podcast series on organisational health, we spoke about how leaders can create a great culture. In her response, she said it starts with creating a psychologically safe environment for employees. Cherie took us through the four elements of psychological safety: **Inclusion safety, Learner safety, Contribution safety, and Challenge safety.** [You can listen to an explanation of these in our FAQ library here.](#)

In addition to these four elements, Julie Etchells, Chief Human Resource Officer at the Department of Child Safety, Seniors and Disability Services for the Queensland Government, joined us in our [second podcast series on embracing change](#), added **Physical safety** and how employees must feel physically safe at work.

When leaders have created a safe space for employees, they also need emotional intelligence to be good listeners.

Tina McAllister, former Workforce Director of Workforce Strategy for the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries for the Queensland Government, took us through how her team conducted an Employee Value Proposition project in [episode four of our podcast series on Embracing Change.](#)

In our conversation, Tina mentioned how one-to-one discussions with employees and focus groups helped them to gather qualitative information about what employees wanted, which differed from just conducting quantitative surveys. One key point Tina raised was how Generation Z, in particular, wanted to feel connected to an organisation's purpose and how connecting to that purpose plays a significant role in building an attractive employee proposition.

"I think it's incumbent upon leaders to actually articulate that and support that understanding in their teams about how the work that they are doing contributes to broader purpose."

[Listen to the full episode here.](#)

Being a good listener

Effective leaders who demonstrate emotional intelligence through social skills such as active listening can help employees feel heard and supported by their organisation.

According to an article by the [Harvard Business Review](#), the term 'active listening' means that you are not only hearing what someone is saying but also attuning their thoughts and feelings. Further, the article explains that Robin Abrahams and Boris Groysberg from Harvard Business School describe active listening as having a **cognitive**; taking in and comprehending the information being received, an **emotional**; managing your own emotions to remain calm and compassionate, and a **behavioural** aspect; showing interest and understanding both verbally and non-verbally.

For a great example of active listening, tune into our [podcast episode on culture](#), where Cherie Canning from Luminate Leadership talks about how one of her clients took time out to have a one-on-one coffee with every member of their staff and used these sessions to make effective changes to turn their culture around and create more harmony in their workforce.

Connecting organisational purpose with personal purpose

"So now we've got two games, we've got the vision and the strategies of the organisation and we've got the vision and the strategies for the employee. If an organisation can do that, then you've basically motivated the person twice. They know the game they're playing at work, the contribution they're making and what all those around them are making and they also understand how what they're doing fits into their own life journey." David Powell, Founder of The Golden Thread, speaks on [episode seven of our podcast series on organisational health](#).

In the last point on being a good listener, we touched on the importance of employees feeling personally connected to their organisation's purpose. However, going further than just an organisation's purpose is the ability for leaders to understand what motivates their employees and how to align and activate that in their organisation through possibilities such as internal mobility, taskforces, and learning and development opportunities to learn and acquire new skills.



Re-engaging employees needs a holistic approach.

Reactivating quiet quitters presents an enormous opportunity for organisations. Embracing change, growing together, and increasing productivity are attributes of an engaged workforce with a strong and positive culture that delivers the best outcomes to the customers and citizens it serves.

Seizing this opportunity and re-engaging employees needs a holistic approach and involves:

- Defining and creating a shared organisational purpose and long-term vision.
- Looking at an organisational design and optimising the employee experience design.
- Managing change effectively and ensuring continuous improvements are made.

Organisational leaders must have the emotional intelligence needed to create a psychologically safe space for their employees to actively listen to their needs and make time for them to think and innovate.

CorbettPrice can help you at every phase of your transformation journey. We help organisations like yours define their strategy, design an optimal operating model that bridges the gap between strategy and implementation, implement changes, and ensure that changes are embedded in your

company's culture, processes, and daily operations. If you want to learn more, [please get in touch with us](#) for a no-obligation chat about how we can help.