

Study outlines one way employers can head off 'quiet quitting'

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A recent study from North Carolina State University finds that

companies can address "quiet quitting" among employees by ensuring employees spend time with other people who identify with the company. The findings can inform everything from office layouts to assigning mentors to new employees.

"We're not fans of the term 'quiet quitting,' since it seems dismissive of employees who are fulfilling their roles in a company," says Erin Powell, co-author of a paper on the work and an associate professor of entrepreneurship in NC State's Poole College of Management. "That said, it is clear that companies can benefit significantly when employees go above and beyond what's required of them. And our study offers insights into what gives employees that sense of purpose and drive that can benefit their employers."

"Fundamentally, we wanted to know how one's relationships with co-workers affect the extent to which one identifies with an employer and, by extension, the extent to which one is helpful at work," says Tom Zagenczyk, co-author of the paper and a professor of management in NC State's Poole College of Management. "Historically, attempts to explore 'organizational identification'—or the extent to which your organization is part of your identity—have focused on how employees perceive the organization's reputation and how they view the way they're treated at work. We really wanted to explore possible social influences."

To that end, the researchers conducted an in-depth social network study of 91 employees at a company that employs a total of 97 people. Study participants were given a survey designed to capture the role of each employee, how they related to the company, and how they interacted with other employees. For example, questions assessed the extent to which each employee identified with the company; how they viewed their treatment by the employer; how helpful co-workers were; and how they fit into the structure of the organization.

The researchers then used statistical tools to account for potentially confounding variables and to identify factors that affected organizational identification and helpfulness at work.

"One key finding was that a given employee's organizational identification was similar to the organizational identification of the people who give that employee advice in the workplace," Zagenczyk says. "In other words, it appears that the people an employee turns to for help at work have a significant influence on how the employee feels about the company."

"That's important because it is well-established that the more a person identifies with their company, the more likely they are to go beyond the call of duty at work," Powell says. "And that helps the employer's bottom line."

"This finding has practical applications, since employers have myriad ways of influencing how employees interact with each other. For example, employers decide where people's desks or offices are located, they can determine who is assigned to mentor new hires, and so on."

The researchers also found that, when people occupy similar places in their employer's social network, they exhibit similar levels of helpful behavior. That was true regardless of how closely the individuals identified with the [employer](#).

"We think this demonstrates that workplace behavior can also be influenced by observing the behavior of peers, regardless of whether they interact directly with those peers," Zagenczyk says. "This highlights the importance of establishing those positive social interactions we mentioned earlier—the effects can extend beyond the people directly involved in the interaction."

"One reason companies are freaking out about quiet quitting is that many workplaces have moved away from clearly defined job descriptions to adopt team-based, decentralized organizational structures," Zagenczyk says. "In that sort of environment—in which many tasks don't fall within any employee's defined job description—a lack of 'organizational citizenship' in [employees](#) can really hurt the [company](#). Employers can address this challenge by better understanding the informal social networks that influence the way people feel about their employers. Studies like this one will help managers do that."

The paper, "Social Networks and Citizenship Behavior: The Mediating Effect of Organizational Identification," is published [open access](#) in the journal *Human Resource Management*.

More information: Thomas J. Zagenczyk et al, Social networks and citizenship behavior: The mediating effect of organizational identification, *Human Resource Management* (2022). [DOI: 10.1002/hrm.22144](#)

Provided by North Carolina State University

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