

# When Gen Zs ‘quiet quit’: Role of Leader-Member Social Exchange and Resilience

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**Abstract:** The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped workplace dynamics, amplifying disengagement behaviors like quiet quitting (QQ), where employees perform only the bare minimum at work. Building on the Social Exchange Theory, this study investigated the roles of leader-member social exchange (LMSX) and employee resilience (ER) in shaping QQ behavior among Gen Z corporate employees. Using a quantitative research design, the study examined: (1) the relationship between LMSX and QQ, (2) the effect of LMSX on QQ, and (3) the moderating role of resilience in the relationship between LMSX and QQ. A survey using validated scales to measure LMSX (Bernerth et al., 2007), QQ (Galanis et al., 2023), and resilience (Näswall et al., 2015) was administered to 104 Gen Z employees. Correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between LMSX and QQ ( $r = -0.461$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Simple linear regression showed that LMSX explained 21.2% of the variance in QQ, indicating a statistically significant but modest association. Moderation analysis showed that resilience directly reduced QQ ( $B = -0.3570$ ,  $SE = 0.0965$ ,  $Z = -3.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, it only marginally moderated the LMSX-QQ link ( $B = -0.0973$ ,  $p = 0.046$ ), suggesting that resilience alone cannot compensate for weak LMSX. These findings suggest that QQ is influenced by a broader range of factors and cannot be attributed to a single cause. Moreover, it underscores the importance of cultivating fair and supportive leader-member relationships. Concrete solutions should therefore focus on leadership development programs that train managers in building trust, reciprocity, and emotional support, which are essential for addressing quiet quitting. Future research should adopt a multifactorial perspective integrating LMSX, burnout, organizational culture, and generational priorities to address QQ holistically, especially noting the evolving workplace needs of Gen Z.

**Key Words:** Quiet Quitting; Social Exchange Theory; Leader-Member Social Exchange (LMSX); Resilience; Gen Z

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the study

The COVID-19 pandemic reshaped workplace dynamics, accelerating a shift in how employees, particularly Gen Z, value work by prioritizing well-being and relational fulfillment (Richmond, 2024; Formica & Sfodera, 2022). As organizations navigate this new landscape, it is critical to understand quiet quitting—not as a simple behavior, but as a multifaceted response where employees perform only the bare minimum within their defined roles (Bhatt et al., 2024). While fulfilling core duties may seem acceptable, research

links this phenomenon to reduced organizational performance and career stagnation (Kang et al., 2023; Klotz & Bolino, 2022).

Unlike overt withdrawal behaviors, quiet quitting is often subtle yet equally harmful (Xueyun et al., 2024). While current research primarily attributes it to factors like burnout and adverse work conditions (e.g., Trang & Trang, 2024), this paper argues these are often symptoms of a more foundational dynamic that is frequently overlooked: the critical role of manager-employee relationships. Serenko (2024) identifies perceived imbalance in employer-employee exchanges as a major trigger for quiet quitting behavior.

When employers expect extraordinary effort without corresponding investment in employee development or well-being, workers view this as inequitable and reduce their discretionary efforts (Talukder & Prieto, 2024). Leader-Member Social Exchange (LMSX), based on the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Cropanzano et al., 2017), offers a valuable framework for understanding this dynamic. Employees who experience high-quality exchanges with managers typically exceed role expectations, while those in low-quality exchanges are more likely to quiet quit. Personal resilience appears to moderate this relationship, acting as a buffer against negative outcomes and quiet quitting tendencies even in strained work environments (Khan et al., 2024).

### *1.2 Statement of the Problem*

This study aims to answer the following questions: (1) what is the relationship between employees' perceived LMSX quality and quiet quitting behavior? (2) to what extent does employees' perceived LMSX quality affect quiet quitting behavior?; and (3) to what extent does resilience moderate the relationship between employees' perceived LMSX quality and quiet quitting behavior?

### *1.3 Objectives*

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to determine the relationship between employees' perceived LMSX quality and quiet quitting behavior; (2) to determine if employees' perceived LMSX quality affects quiet quitting behavior; and (3) to examine the moderating effect of resilience on the relationship between employees' perceived LMSX quality and quiet quitting behavior.

### *1.4 Significance of the Study*

Recent calls emphasize the need for managers to adapt their team management strategies, recognizing that employees no longer idealize over-contributing without adequate recognition (Almazrouei, 2023). By examining the impact of LMSX quality and resilience on quiet quitting, this study contributes to the evolving research on post-pandemic workplace behaviors, particularly among younger employees (Xueyun et al., 2023). The findings aim to assist managers and organizations in developing strategies to address quiet quitting and cultivate fair, productive cultures in the Philippine corporate sector, fostering a more resilient

and engaged workforce.

### *1.5 Literature Review*

#### *Leader-Member Social Exchange (LMSX)*

Leader-Member Social Exchange (LMSX) is grounded in Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that workplace relationships develop through ongoing reciprocal exchanges between parties (Cropanzano et al., 2017). These exchanges—whether supportive or detrimental—shape trust and obligation over time, influencing employees' behavioral responses (Colquitt et al., 2014). LMSX specifically focuses on the exchange relationships between managers and employees, characterized by three key elements: reciprocity, expectancy, and socioemotional investment (Colquitt et al., 2014). Reciprocity ensures mutual contributions and balanced exchanges, fostering cooperative behaviors and commitment (Serenko, 2024). Expectancy refers to the anticipation of a return (e.g., recognition) even when the exact nature and timing of that return are uncertain (Arar et al., 2023). Socioemotional aspects include mutual trust, support, commitment, and affect, generating feelings of loyalty and gratitude rather than guilt-driven indebtedness (Atalay & Dağistan, 2023). High-quality LMSX relationships motivate employees to engage in extra-role behaviors beyond formal duties (Andersen et al., 2020). Conversely, perceived unfairness in low-quality LMSX relationships undermines trust and reciprocity, prompting employees to reduce discretionary efforts as a defense mechanism, which can manifest in behaviors like quiet quitting (Talukder & Prieto, 2024).

#### *Quiet Quitting*

Quiet quitting is generally defined as the practice of doing only the bare minimum at work (Bhatt et al., 2024), reflecting an unwillingness to invest discretionary effort or take on additional responsibilities (Atalay & Dağistan, 2023). Common behaviors include detachment, lack of initiative, and reduced motivation (Galanis et al., 2023). Employees found to be 'quiet quitters' are emotionally, psychologically, and cognitively detached or withdrawn from their job obligations (Atalay & Dağistan, 2023), with reduced extra-role efforts being the most evident sign (Stein et al., 2020). This means not showing proactiveness (e.g., volunteering to do additional tasks), communicating opinions or ideas, getting involved in problem-solving

activities, recommending process changes, and fully engaging in collaborative discussions (Karrani et al., 2023).

### *Resilience in the Workplace*

Resilience, defined as the ability to bounce back following adversity, is a process that can be developed by external interventions for employees to navigate workplace challenges (Hartmann et al., 2019) and enable flourishing during times of difficulty (Kuntz et al., 2016). It consists of two core elements: the presence of adversity, which can range from high-intensity crises to frequent low-intensity stressors (Fisher et al., 2018), and adaptation, where individuals return to or exceed a steady psychological state after challenges (Hartmann et al., 2019). Low-quality social exchange relationships, a frequent form of workplace adversity, often result in low engagement and heightened job stress (Aggarwal et al., 2020).

Resilience acts as a moderator in such situations by buffering adverse effects and enabling emotional control despite poor leader-member dynamics (Hassaan, 2024; Khan et al., 2024). The mechanism behind this moderation involves disrupting the negative cycle of social exchange. Instead of perceiving a poor leader relationship as a significant imbalance that requires withdrawing effort to restore fairness (Arar et al., 2023; Ye et al., 2022), resilient employees are better equipped to cognitively reframe the situation as a manageable challenge (Hartmann et al., 2019; Kuntz et al., 2016). Highly resilient employees adapt by seeking coworker support or developing strategies to restore balance, preventing declines in extra-role behaviors typically linked to quiet quitting (Lestari et al., 2024). Rather than merely “getting by,” resilient employees maintain strong performance and demonstrate proactive behaviors even amidst ongoing difficulties (Agarwal, 2019).

### *Research Gaps*

The literature review reveals several research gaps in understanding quiet quitting. While Social Exchange Theory (SET) has been applied broadly, limited studies have examined quiet quitting specifically through this lens (Lu et al., 2023), leaving the status of this direct relationship as largely conceptual. Resilience, though identified as a buffer against negative workplace behaviors, requires further exploration to determine its role in mitigating quiet quitting, as it may explain why

some employees are more affected by poor leadership than others. Given its context-dependent nature (Harms et al., 2016), it is important to test if its buffering power applies to this specific phenomenon. Additionally, quiet quitting remains underexplored in corporate settings, with most research focusing on industries heavily impacted by the pandemic, such as healthcare, education, and hospitality (Galanis et al., 2024).

Existing studies predominantly address job-related factors like burnout, role stressors, and workplace policies, but overlook human relations dimensions such as mentorship and leader-member exchanges (Wu & Wei, 2024). Addressing these gaps can provide valuable insights for organizations to strategize against quiet quitting and strengthen their post-pandemic workforce.

### *1.6 Framework*

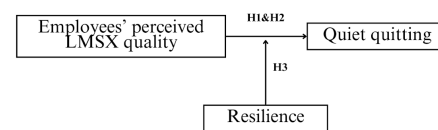


Fig. 2. Conceptual framework

The researchers propose the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Employees' perceived LMSX quality is related to quiet quitting behavior.

**H2:** Employees' perceived LMSX quality affects quiet quitting behavior; that is, quiet quitting behavior varies with LMSX quality.

**H3:** The level of resilience in employees moderates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, such that a high level of resilience weakens the relationship. In contrast, a low level of resilience strengthens it.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### *2.1 Quantitative Research*

The survey respondents were Gen Z corporate employees with at least one year of work experience. A pre-test with 23 participants yielded acceptable Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.8 to 0.9, which confirmed reliability. The survey employed existing validated scales that measured social exchange

relationships (Colquitt et al., 2014; Bernerth et al., 2007), quiet quitting (Galanis et al., 2023), and resilience (Näswall et al., 2015; 2019). Items used a seven-point Likert scale. Statistical analyses included correlation analysis, which tested hypothesized relationships between variables (H1); linear regression (GAMLj3 module), which assessed the impact of Leader-Member Social Exchange quality (LMSX) on quiet quitting (QQ) (H2); and moderation analysis (medmod), which examined resilience as a moderator between LMSX and QQ (H3).

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Correlation Analysis

Table 1. Correlations Between Leader-Member Social Exchange and Quiet Quitting, n=104

Relationship to Dependent Mean_QQ	Pearson R	p-value
Independent Mean_LM	-0.461	< 0.001

*Reject Ho if p<0.05; significant*

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between leader-member social exchange (LMSX; Independent Mean\_LM) and quiet quitting behavior (QQ; Dependent Mean\_QQ) (Table 1). The results revealed a statistically significant moderate negative correlation ( $r = -0.461$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that higher levels of LMSX were associated with lower levels of QQ behavior. These results provided support for hypothesis 1.

#### 3.2 Simple Linear Regression

Key assumption tests were performed to confirm the validity of the regression analysis. The Durbin-Watson statistic ( $DW = 1.76$ ,  $p = .224$ ) showed no autocorrelation, meaning the residuals were independent. VIFs (1.42 to 1.92) and tolerance values (0.520 to 0.705) suggested no multicollinearity issues. The Breusch-Pagan test ( $p = .856$ ) indicated no signs of heteroscedasticity. Lastly, the Shapiro-Wilk test ( $p = .771$ ) confirmed that the residuals were normally distributed.

Table 2. Linear Regression, n = 104

Model	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>	F	P	T	P
Dependent Mean_QQ	-0.36	0.21	27.5	<.001		
Independent Mean_LM					-5.2	<.001

*Reject Ho if p<0.05; significant*

Table 3. Fixed Effects Parameter Estimates (GAMLj3 module)

Names	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval
			Lower
(Intercept)	3.459	0.0942	3.272
Independent Mean_LM	-0.368	0.0701	-0.507

Upper	$\beta$	df	t	p
3.646	0.000	102	36.71	<.001
-0.229	-0.461	102	-5.24	<.001

To further explore this relationship, a simple linear regression was conducted with QQ behavior as the dependent variable and LMSX as the predictor (Table 2). The model explained 21.2% of the variance in QQ behavior, as indicated by the R<sup>2</sup> value. Despite the moderate explanatory power, the regression model was statistically significant ( $F = 27.50$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that the inclusion of LMSX as a predictor meaningfully contributed to explaining variations in QQ behavior. The regression coefficient for LMSX ( $\beta = -0.368$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) further confirmed this relationship, indicating that a one-unit increase in LMSX was associated with a 0.368-unit decrease in quiet quitting behavior.

The findings support hypothesis 2, showing that employees who perceived high-quality LMSX—marked by trust, open communication, and



mutual respect—were less likely to engage in quiet quitting. This aligns with prior research indicating that fair, supportive leadership encourages discretionary effort (Garba et al., 2018), while poor leadership leads to psychological withdrawal and reduced extra-role behaviors (Arar et al., 2023).

However, LMSX’s explanatory power was modest ( $R^2 = 0.212$ ), indicating that quiet quitting is shaped by a broader array of influences. Consistent with recent frameworks (e.g., Bell & Kennebrew, 2023; Liu-Lastres et al., 2023), the behavior stems from both individual factors (e.g., burnout) and work-related ones (e.g., leadership, role stressors). While much of the literature focuses on individual causes, organizational factors like culture and management practices play an equally significant role. Studies have shown that toxic environments elevate quiet quitting risk (Rugiubei & Cruceanu, 2024), while equitable rewards and recognition reduce it (Toska et al., 2025).

Attributing quiet quitting to a single cause oversimplifies its complexity. Effective interventions must reflect multifactorial models that integrate both personal and structural dimensions. Still, LMSX remains a meaningful predictor, especially given the limited empirical work connecting leadership and quiet quitting (Harter, 2025). Its influence is particularly relevant among Gen Z and millennial employees, who prioritize psychological safety and authentic communication—areas deeply shaped by leadership dynamics (Richmond, 2024).

Improving LMSX alone is unlikely to eliminate quiet quitting, but it should be part of a broader strategy. Relational quality not only affects engagement directly but also moderates how employees perceive and respond to workplace stressors. Addressing quiet quitting will require integrative, context-sensitive models that account for the interplay between individual experiences and organizational systems.

### 3.2 Moderation Regression

Table 4. Moderation Estimates

	Estimate	SE
Independent Mean_LM	-0.2727	0.0728
Moderating MEAN_ER	-0.3570	0.0965
Independent Mean_LM * Moderating MEAN_ER	-0.0973	0.0487

Z	p
-3.75	< .001
-3.70	< .001
-2.00	0.046

The moderated regression analysis (Table 3) examined the relationship between LMSX, QQ, and resilience. The results showed that LMSX had a significant negative effect on QQ behavior ( $B = -0.2727$ ,  $SE = 0.0728$ ,  $p < .001$ ), indicating that stronger leader-member relationships are associated with lower disengagement. Resilience (ER; Moderating MEAN\_ER) also showed a significant negative main effect on QQ behavior ( $B = -0.3570$ ,  $SE = 0.0965$ ,  $p < .001$ ), suggesting that employees with higher levels of resilience tend to report lower QQ. However, the interaction between LMSX and ER ( $B = -0.0973$ ,  $SE = 0.0487$ ,  $p = .046$ ) was only marginally significant. Despite the p-value falling below the conventional .05 threshold, the small effect size raises questions about the practical relevance of this moderation.

The study hypothesized that ER would moderate the relationship between LMSX and QQ (hypothesis 3), based on prior research suggesting that resilience buffers against workplace stress (e.g., Hassaan, 2024). Theoretically, this buffering mechanism was expected to function by enabling employees to cognitively reframe the negative social exchange, thus interrupting the path to quiet quitting. While earlier findings (Caniëls & Hatak, 2019) indicated that resilience could sustain extra-role behaviors under poor leadership conditions, this study found no significant moderating effect. One possible explanation is the context-specific nature of resilience. As noted previously by Harns et al. (2016) and Shatté et al. (2017), resilience is more effective when paired with strong workplace support, suggesting that its protective influence may be limited without a supportive environment.

Additionally, generational expectations may have shaped the findings. Gen Z employees, who emphasize authentic leadership and relational fulfillment (Schroth, 2019), may be less tolerant of poor LMSX regardless of ER levels. This suggests that for this cohort, the negative impact of a low-quality leader relationship may be too strong for the individual

buffering mechanism of resilience to overcome. This underscores the idea that ER alone may not prevent QQ when deeper relational needs are unmet. As such, organizations should avoid over-relying on individual traits like resilience and instead focus on improving leadership quality and cultivating positive work environments. Future research should explore alternative moderators in the LMSX-QQ dynamic, such as organizational culture, job demands, or intrinsic motivation. These structural factors may play a more substantial role in shaping employee engagement and offer more sustainable solutions to reduce quiet quitting (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This study underscores the importance of LMSX in mitigating QQ, as evidenced by a moderate negative correlation ( $r = -0.461$ ) and a significant predictive effect ( $\beta = -0.37$ ), which explains 21.2% of the variance in QQ. These findings suggest that fostering high-quality leader-employee relationships characterized by equity, support, and mutual respect can reduce QQ behavior. However, ER does not moderate this relationship ( $B = -0.050$ ,  $p = 0.445$ ), implying that even resilient employees may disengage when LMSX is poor. This emphasizes that relational dynamics, rather than individual resilience, primarily drive workplace disengagement. While LMSX is influential, its limited predictive power indicates the need to consider additional factors, such as organizational culture, job demands, and intrinsic motivation, in fully addressing QQ. Future research should adopt a multifactorial approach that explores how these elements interact over time, particularly in hybrid work settings where trust dynamics are more complex. "Improving LMSX remains essential, but organizations should also invest in concrete solutions. This includes leadership development that fosters psychological safety and meaningful communication, and cultivating an organizational culture where the principles of social exchange—fairness, support, and mutual respect—are systemically embedded, especially in meeting the evolving expectations of Gen Z employees.

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