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The Impact of Quiet Quitting on Turnover Intentions in the Era of Digital Transformation: The Mediating Roles of Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment, and the Moderating Role of Psychological Safety

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of "quiet quitting" during digital transformation on job satisfaction, affective commitment, and turnover intention. A time-lagged survey was conducted over six months with two waves of data collection from full-time employees in South Korea, resulting in 258 valid responses. Using the PROCESS macro for analysis, the findings reveal that quiet quitting significantly reduces job satisfaction and affective commitment, which, in turn, increases turnover intention. Furthermore, psychological safety serves as a critical moderator, buffering the negative effects of quiet quitting on these outcomes. The study confirms that the influence of quiet quitting on turnover intention operates through the mediating roles of job satisfaction and affective commitment, and organizations with higher psychological safety are better equipped to mitigate these adverse effects. Grounded in Withdrawal Progression Theory, this study empirically demonstrates the progression of quiet quitting into turnover intention and provides strategic insights for organizations to prevent employee turnover and maintain employee engagement during digital transformation.

Keywords: quiet quitting; turnover intention; job satisfaction; affective commitment; psychological safety; withdrawal progression theory; conservation of resources theory

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1. Introduction

Digital transformation is reshaping the operational landscape of modern organizations. As technological advancements accelerate, organizational leadership and decision-making processes have become increasingly complex, necessitating new strategies to effectively manage these changes [1]. The integration of advanced information technology has brought transformative shifts to organizational structures and workflows, where employee participation and engagement are now critical drivers of success [2]. However, the uncertainty and stress induced by digital transformation can place significant psychological burdens on employees, which, in the long term, may negatively impact organizational performance [3]. The rapid pace of change often leaves employees grappling with anxiety and pressure as they attempt to adapt to new technologies and processes, ultimately diminishing their engagement with their work. Insufficient organizational support or inadequate leadership during the digital transformation process can further exacerbate these psychological challenges [4]. When employees perceive that they are not adequately supported, job-related stress increases, leading to a psychological detachment from the organization. This disengagement manifests as "quiet quitting" [5,6].

The phenomenon of "quiet quitting" has recently gained significant attention in both academic and industry circles. It refers to a situation where employees continue to perform their job duties but only to the minimal extent required, reflecting a psychological withdrawal [7–9]. This behavior has been increasingly observed in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, as employees reassess work–life balance amid the accelerated pace

of digital transformation [10,11]. Quiet quitting can be driven by factors such as a lack of organizational support, negative leadership, and job-related stress, which eventually result in decreased job satisfaction and affective commitment, leading to increased turnover intention [5,12,13]. In the context of digital transformation, retaining key talent has emerged as a critical factor for organizational success [14]. Many organizations emphasize the importance of retaining employees with expertise in digital technologies, as their presence is crucial to the successful implementation of transformation initiatives [1]. Research indicates that organizations losing key talent during digital transformation may experience declines in productivity and innovation capacity, leading to long-term competitiveness issues [15]. Therefore, reducing turnover intention and enhancing affective commitment are regarded as essential strategies for ensuring organizational sustainability [16].

According to Withdrawal Progression Theory, initial withdrawal behaviors, such as quiet quitting, can progressively evolve into more severe forms of withdrawal, ultimately leading to turnover intention over time [17,18]. This theory suggests that as employees psychologically detach from their organizations, they engage in incremental withdrawal behaviors, eventually considering leaving the organization altogether. Specifically, if employees in a state of quiet quitting are not adequately motivated, their job satisfaction and affective commitment may continue to erode, thus intensifying their turnover intentions [18]. Understanding this progression is essential for managing employee attrition in the context of digital transformation. Although recent studies have linked quiet quitting to an increase in turnover intention [19], most of this research has relied on cross-sectional designs, limiting the ability to establish causality between quiet quitting and turnover intention. A gap remains in understanding whether quiet quitting directly drives turnover intention or whether other mediating factors amplify this effect [13]. Addressing this gap will provide not only significant theoretical contributions but also practical insights for organizations seeking to reduce turnover rates and develop leadership strategies tailored to the digital era. One potential mitigating factor in this relationship is psychological safety. In organizations where psychological safety is high, employees feel empowered to express their opinions and take on new challenges without fear of negative consequences, thereby increasing job engagement and affective commitment [20]. Research indicates that environments fostering psychological safety can reduce withdrawal behaviors such as quiet quitting, while simultaneously enhancing job satisfaction and affective commitment [21].

This study fills existing gaps by conducting a six-month, time-lagged survey examining the relationships between quiet quitting, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and turnover intention. It also investigates the moderating role of psychological safety in these dynamics. The findings provide strong empirical evidence for the progression of quiet quitting into turnover intention, highlighting the buffering effect of psychological safety. These results enhance the theoretical understanding of quiet quitting and offer practical strategies for preventing talent attrition and sustaining employee engagement during digital transformation. The study provides valuable insights into leadership and human resource management amid rapid technological change.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Quiet Quitting

In recent years, the concept of "quiet quitting" has emerged as an important framework for understanding employee disengagement and withdrawal behaviors within organizations [22]. Quiet quitting refers to a state in which employees remain physically present at their jobs but only perform the minimum required tasks, reflecting a psychological withdrawal [11]. This phenomenon often arises in response to job stress, a lack of organizational support, or inadequate leadership, and it can have adverse long-term effects on organizational performance and employee retention [5]. Quiet quitting is characterized by a sharp decline in job engagement, which can be seen as an early stage of psychological withdrawal [23]. According to Withdrawal Progression Theory, early withdrawal behaviors such as quiet quitting have the potential to escalate into more severe forms of

withdrawal, ultimately leading to turnover intention [17]. Employees in a state of quiet quitting experience diminished job satisfaction, which over time weakens their affective commitment to the organization and increases the likelihood that they will consider leaving the organization altogether.

To explain the impact of quiet quitting on turnover intention, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1. *Quiet quitting has a positive effect on turnover intention.*

2.2. Mediating Role of Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction refers to employees' overall emotional evaluation of their job, and it plays a significant role in influencing job engagement and organizational performance [24]. Job satisfaction serves as a key predictor of turnover intention. High levels of job satisfaction encourage employees to maintain a positive attitude toward their job and organization, thereby reducing turnover intention. On the other hand, job dissatisfaction leads to job stress and psychological withdrawal, which may increase the likelihood of employees considering leaving the organization [25]. Quiet quitting, in particular, leads to a sharp decline in job engagement, making it a significant factor that reduces job satisfaction. In a state of quiet quitting, employees exhibit psychological withdrawal from their work and perform only the minimum required tasks, which diminishes their emotional satisfaction with their job [11]. Since job satisfaction reflects employees' emotional responses to how they evaluate their work, quiet quitting often results in dissatisfaction, which consequently strengthens turnover intention [26]. Thus, the impact of quiet quitting on turnover intention can be explained through the mediating role of job satisfaction. As job satisfaction declines, employees tend to view their future in the organization pessimistically, prompting them to consider leaving. Job satisfaction acts as a variable that explains the psychological distance between employees and their work, playing a crucial mediating role in understanding how quiet quitting leads to turnover intention.

Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2. *Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention.*

2.3. The Mediating Role of Affective Commitment

Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment and sense of belonging that employees feel toward their organization [24,26,27]. It is a key factor, alongside job satisfaction, in influencing organizational performance and turnover intention [28]. Affective commitment reflects the emotional bond employees have with their organization, and the higher this commitment, the lower the turnover intention tends to be [29]. Quiet quitting represents a decline in organizational commitment, which weakens employees' emotional attachment to the organization. Employees in a state of quiet quitting experience lower motivation and engagement with their work, leading to a reduction in their affective bonds with the organization [11]. This diminished emotional attachment, in turn, becomes a factor that strengthens turnover intention [30].

In this context, job satisfaction refers to how employees evaluate their job, while affective commitment represents their emotional attachment to the organization as a whole. This distinction provides different explanations for the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. While job satisfaction primarily deals with evaluations related to the job itself, affective commitment more directly reflects the emotional connection with the organization. Therefore, in the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention, job satisfaction explains the psychological distance employees feel toward their job, whereas affective commitment explains the emotional distance toward the organization. These two distinct variables offer critical conceptual frameworks for understanding how quiet quitting can develop into turnover intention. This is consistent with the Withdrawal

Progression Theory, which suggests that initial withdrawal behaviors can gradually evolve into more severe forms of withdrawal, such as turnover, over time [17]. This process highlights the significant role that weakened emotional attachment to the organization plays in influencing turnover intention.

Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. *Affective commitment mediates the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention.*

2.4. The Moderating Role of Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to an employee's belief that they can freely express their thoughts and ideas at work without fear of being criticized, even when making mistakes [20]. In organizations with high psychological safety, employees are more likely to actively participate in their tasks, voice their opinions in challenging situations, and face new challenges without fear. This contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction and affective commitment and plays a crucial role in strengthening their dedication to the organization [21].

According to Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory [31], individuals strive to preserve and maximize their resources. When resources are at risk of depletion or are actually diminished, individuals experience stress, which, if unresolved, can lead to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and withdrawal behaviors. Psychological safety, in this context, serves as an important resource. In organizations with high psychological safety, employees are less likely to experience resource loss and are more likely to replenish or gain additional resources. This environment helps employees remain engaged in their work and maintain their commitment to the organization.

Psychological safety acts as a critical buffer that mitigates the negative organizational outcomes of behaviors like quiet quitting. Quiet quitting leads to psychological withdrawal from work and increases an employee's emotional distance from the organization. However, in environments with high psychological safety, the stress associated with resource depletion is less pronounced, reducing the negative impact of quiet quitting [32]. From the perspective of COR Theory, employees in psychologically safe environments are less likely to view job stress and dissatisfaction as resource losses, making greater efforts to resolve these issues through organizational interactions. Consequently, psychological safety can buffer the negative effects of quiet quitting on job satisfaction and affective commitment, thereby reducing turnover intention [33]. In organizations with high psychological safety, the negative impact of quiet quitting on job satisfaction may be weakened. Psychological safety acts as a resource that helps employees overcome the negative emotions associated with quiet quitting and maintain positive relationships with their organization.

Based on this theoretical background, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4. *Psychological safety moderates the negative relationship between quiet quitting and job satisfaction, such that this relationship becomes weaker as psychological safety increases.*

Within the framework of COR Theory, psychological safety is a key resource that helps employees preserve and acquire additional resources in the workplace. When an organization provides a safe environment, employees can more easily maintain their emotional attachment to the organization, preventing the decline in affective commitment caused by quiet quitting.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5. *Psychological safety moderates the negative relationship between quiet quitting and affective commitment, such that this relationship becomes weaker as psychological safety increases.*

Psychological safety plays a crucial role in mitigating the negative relationships between quiet quitting, job satisfaction, and affective commitment. Consequently, the negative

effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention will weaken as psychological safety increases. In environments with high psychological safety, the indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through job satisfaction may also diminish. According to COR Theory, when resources are depleted, job satisfaction declines, leading to turnover intention. However, psychological safety helps preserve employees' resources, buffering the negative impact of quiet quitting on job satisfaction.

Based on this, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6. *The indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through job satisfaction is weaker as psychological safety increases.*

Lastly, psychological safety may also mitigate the indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through affective commitment. Employees who feel psychologically safe in the organization are less likely to experience the negative emotions associated with quiet quitting, which helps maintain their level of affective commitment and, as a result, reduces turnover intention.

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7. *The indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through affective commitment is weaker as psychological safety increases.*

Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical model based on the proposed hypotheses.

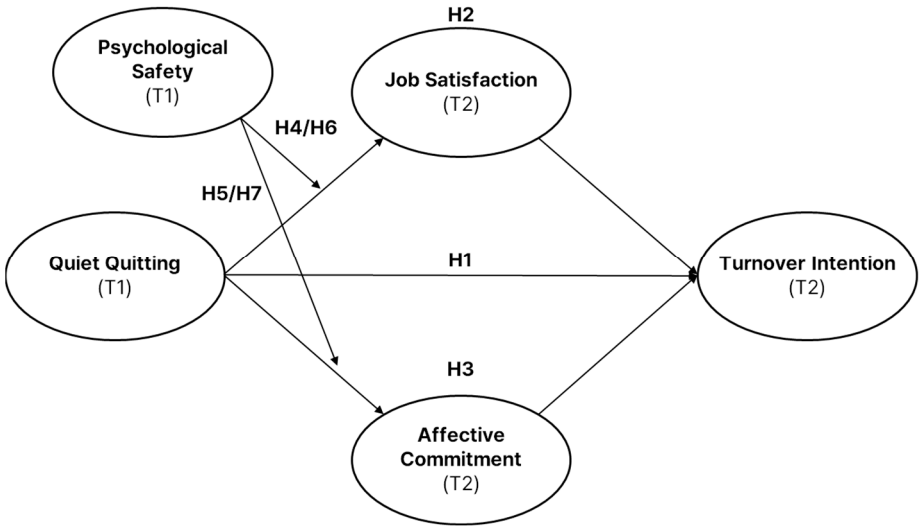


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and Procedures

This study was conducted with full-time employees residing in South Korea. Participants were recruited through Macromill Embrain, a professional research company. To ensure unbiased data collection from a diverse and representative sample, the recruitment process was outsourced to Macromill Embrain. The company applied demographic quotas—such as gender, job level, and age—to minimize sampling bias and achieve balanced participant recruitment. The inclusion criteria required participants to be adults (18 years or older) currently employed full-time in South Korea, with at least six months of tenure at their current organization. Participants provided information about their current job and total career experience, and to confirm their employment status, they were asked to explicitly verify their full-time employment in the survey. Employees who worked exclusively remotely were excluded from the study to control for the potential influence of remote work on the research findings. The study received approval from the appropriate

ethics review board, and all participants provided informed consent after being informed about the purpose and procedures of the research. Initially, a total of 300 participants completed the first survey, with a follow-up survey conducted six months later. T1 refers to the first wave of data collection, conducted at the initial point of the study, while T2 refers to the second wave of data collection, conducted six months later to capture longitudinal changes in key variables such as job satisfaction, affective commitment, and turnover intention. To identify dishonest responses, two attention-check questions were embedded in the survey. The attention-check questions asked the same content once in a positive form and once in a negative form to confirm whether participants responded consistently. For example, in the turnover intention scale, the question "I often think about quitting my current job" was also asked as "I want to continue working in this organization for as long as possible". If a participant responded with 1 or 2 on the first question but 1 or 2 on the second question on a 5-point Likert scale, the response was deemed insincere and excluded from the analysis. These attention-check items were included in both the first and second surveys, and participants who failed the checks were excluded, resulting in a final sample of 258 valid responses. The final sample comprised 51.6% male and 48.4% female participants, with an average age of 40.16 years (SD = 9.98). The average tenure at their current job was 7.1 years (SD = 3.9), and the overall career experience averaged 13.7 years (SD = 8.9). Participants represented a variety of industries, with the primary sectors including manufacturing (28.3%), service (19.7%), information technology (IT) (14.7%), construction (7.8%), retail (5.8%), wholesale and trade (5.8%), and finance and insurance (4.7%), among others (13.2%). The "others" category included sectors such as healthcare, education, and research.

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Quiet Quitting

Quiet quitting was measured using the Multidimensional Quiet Quitting Scale developed by Patel et al. [34]. This scale evaluates the degree to which employees disengage from their work and perform only the minimum required tasks, assessing both behavioral and emotional dimensions. For the purposes of this study, the scale was used as a unidimensional measure, focusing on overall quiet quitting. The scale consists of 13 items, including statements such as "I only do as much as I need to in order to avoid being fired" and "I feel emotionally satisfied when I don't do more than what's asked of me". Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The reliability of the scale was confirmed with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88.

3.2.2. Psychological Safety

Psychological safety was measured using the Psychological Safety Scale developed by Edmondson [20]. This scale assesses the extent to which employees perceive a safe environment in which they can express their opinions and make mistakes without fear of being blamed. The scale includes seven items, such as "In this organization, employees are not blamed for making mistakes" and "In our organization, employees can discuss difficult issues". Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), and the Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.76.

3.2.3. Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction was assessed using the Brief Index of Affective Job Satisfaction developed by Thompson and Phua [35]. This scale measures employees' overall emotional satisfaction with their job. The four items include statements such as "I am quite satisfied with my job" and "I am almost always enthusiastic about my job". Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("very dissatisfied") to 5 ("very satisfied"), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

3.2.4. Affective Commitment

Affective commitment was measured using the Affective Commitment Scale developed by Meyer et al. [36]. This scale evaluates employees' emotional attachment and commitment to their organization. The scale consists of five items, such as "I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own" and "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me". Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"), with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

3.2.5. Turnover Intention

Turnover intention was measured using items from the Organizational Assessment Questionnaire developed by Camman et al. [37]. This scale assesses employees' intention to leave the organization and includes three items, such as "I often think about quitting my job" and "I will likely look for a new job in the next year". Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.68 for the first survey and 0.71 for the second survey.

3.3. Ethical Considerations

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Yonsei University (Approval No. 7001988-202405-HR-1888-03, 24 May 2023). No personal data from the participants were collected. Before participating, all respondents were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's purpose and procedures and gave written informed consent. The study adhered to the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki of 1975.

3.4. Analytics Strategy

This study utilized Hayes' PROCESS macro (version 4.2 beta) to analyze the relationships between quiet quitting, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and turnover intention. The primary objective was to examine the direct effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention and to determine whether job satisfaction and affective commitment mediate this relationship. Additionally, the study investigated whether psychological safety moderates these mediating effects. Model 4 of the PROCESS macro was employed to assess the mediating effects, while Model 7 was used to test the moderated mediation effects [38,39].

In the first stage, the direct impact of quiet quitting on turnover intention was evaluated. Next, the mediating roles of job satisfaction and affective commitment in the quiet quitting–turnover intention relationship were analyzed, allowing for an evaluation of the indirect effects. A moderated mediation analysis was conducted to explore whether psychological safety moderates the relationships between quiet quitting and turnover intention. It was hypothesized that high levels of psychological safety would buffer the negative effects of quiet quitting on job satisfaction and affective commitment, leading to weaker indirect effects on turnover intention. Bootstrapping techniques with 5000 resampling iterations were applied to estimate confidence intervals for both indirect and moderated indirect effects. This method provides a more robust assessment of statistical significance, where the absence of zero within the confidence interval indicates a significant effect. All analyses controlled for potential confounding variables such as gender, age, and tenure to enhance accuracy. Gender was coded as "female" = 0 and "male" = 1, and age was recorded as the participants' actual age. To mitigate concerns regarding reverse causality and improve causal inference, turnover intention measured in the first survey was included as a control variable. All analyses were conducted using R (version 4.3.2), with the moonBook, psych, and ltm packages utilized for descriptive statistics.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the summary of the descriptive statistics and correlations for the variables analyzed in this study.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	40.16	9.98	-							
2. Gender [a]	0.52	0.50	0.01	-						
3. Quiet Quitting—T1	2.88	0.68	−0.30 ***	−0.05	-					
4. Affective Commitment—T2	3.08	0.73	0.19 *	0.06	−0.48 ***	-				
5. Job Satisfaction—T2	3.00	0.80	0.19 *	0.14	−0.31 ***	0.58 ***	-			
6. Psychological Safety—T1	3.24	0.52	0.09	0.08	−0.19 *	0.48 ***	0.41 ***	-		
7. Turnover Intention—T1	3.06	0.84	−0.14	−0.13	0.29 ***	−0.47 ***	−0.34 ***	−0.39 ***	-	
8. Turnover Intention—T2	3.06	0.85	−0.15	−0.03	0.29 ***	−0.55 ***	−0.47 ***	−0.35 ***	0.66 ***	-

Notes. $N = 258$, * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$ [a] female = 0, male = 1.

4.2. Hypothesis Tests

4.2.1. Direct Effect of Quiet Quitting on Turnover Intention (Hypothesis 1)

To test the hypotheses, we first replicated the cross-sectional study by Galanis et al. (2023) to examine the effect of quiet quitting (T1) on turnover intention (T1). The results indicated a statistically significant relationship, even after controlling for gender and age ($B = 0.32$, $SE = 0.077$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that as quiet quitting increases, turnover intention also significantly rises. However, when analyzing the effect of quiet quitting (T1) on turnover intention (T2) six months later, the relationship was not statistically significant ($B = 0.12$, $SE = 0.063$, $p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that the initially significant relationship may have been influenced by common method bias, which is a common issue in cross-sectional studies, and that the strength of this relationship diminishes over time. In other words, the initial significant relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention appears to weaken as time progresses, suggesting that the short-term relationship may have been exaggerated. These results imply that the direct effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention decreases over time, pointing to the potential involvement of mediating or moderating variables. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was rejected.

4.2.2. Mediating Effect of Job Satisfaction (Hypothesis 2)

Hypothesis 2 predicted that job satisfaction would mediate the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. As shown in Table 2, quiet quitting (T1) had a significant negative effect on job satisfaction (T2) ($B = -0.23$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.01$), and job satisfaction (T2) had a significant negative effect on turnover intention (T2) ($B = -0.20$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through job satisfaction was also significant (indirect effect = 0.047, 95% CI = [0.010, 0.097]). These results support Hypothesis 2, indicating that job satisfaction is a key mediator in the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention.

Table 2. The mediating effect of job satisfaction and affective commitment.

IV	DV	*B*	*SE*	*t*	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Control variables						
Age	Job Satisfaction—T2	0.01	0.00	1.54	−0.002	0.017
Gender	Job Satisfaction—T2	0.14	0.10	1.56	−0.038	0.325
Turnover Intention—T1	Job Satisfaction—T2	−0.25 ***	0.06	−4.32	−0.360	−0.135
Age	Affective Commitment—T2	0.00	0.00	0.50	−0.006	0.010
Gender	Affective Commitment—T2	0.01	0.08	−0.10	−0.156	0.141
Turnover Intention—T1	Affective Commitment—T2	−0.31 ***	0.05	−6.70	−0.405	−0.221
Age	Turnover Intention—T2	−0.00	0.00	−0.28	−0.009	0.006
Gender	Turnover Intention—T2	0.12	0.07	1.61	−0.027	0.265
Turnover Intention—T1	Turnover Intention—T2	0.52 ***	0.05	10.41	0.420	0.616

Table 2. *Cont.*

IV	DV	*B*	*SE*	*t*	95% CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Main Effects						
Quiet Quitting—T1	Job Satisfaction—T2	−0.23 **	0.07	−3.23	−0.378	−0.092
Quiet Quitting—T1	Affective Commitment—T2	−0.40 ***	0.06	−6.65	−0.511	−0.278
Quiet Quitting—T1	Turnover Intention—T2	−0.22	0.06	−0.34	−0.145	0.102
Job Satisfaction—T2	Turnover Intention—T2	−0.20 ***	0.06	−3.53	−0.312	−0.088
Affective Commitment—T2	Turnover Intention—T2	−0.24 ***	0.07	−3.44	−0.376	−0.102

	Paths	Effect	SE	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
Mediating (Indirect) Effect	Quiet Quitting—T1 → Job Satisfaction—T2 → Turnover Intention—T2	0.047	0.022	0.010	0.097
	Quiet Quitting—T1 → Affective Commitment—T2 → Turnover Intention—T2	0.094	0.035	0.030	0.166

Notes. LLCI: lower limit of 95% confidence interval; ULCI: upper limit of 95% confidence interval; ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

4.2.3. Mediating Effect of Affective Commitment (Hypothesis 3)

Hypothesis 3 proposed that affective commitment would mediate the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. The analysis results revealed that quiet quitting (T1) significantly negatively affected affective commitment (T2) ($B = -0.40$, $SE = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$), and affective commitment (T2) had a significant negative effect on turnover intention (T2) ($B = -0.24$, $SE = 0.07$, $p < 0.001$). The indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through affective commitment was also significant (indirect effect = 0.094, 95% CI = [0.030, 0.166]). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported, confirming that affective commitment plays an important mediating role in the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention.

4.2.4. Moderating Effect of Psychological Safety (Hypotheses 4 and 5)

The moderating effect analysis tested Hypothesis 4, which predicted that psychological safety would moderate the relationship between quiet quitting and job satisfaction, and Hypothesis 5, which predicted that psychological safety would moderate the relationship between quiet quitting and affective commitment. As shown in Table 3, psychological safety significantly moderated the relationship between quiet quitting and job satisfaction ($B = 0.27$, $SE = 0.10$, $p < 0.01$), as well as the relationship between quiet quitting and affective commitment ($B = 0.16$, $SE = 0.08$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3. The moderation effect of psychological safety.

Variables	DV = Job Satisfaction—T2					
	B	*SE*	*t*	95% CI		R^2
				LLCI	ULCI	
(Constant)	4.77 ***	1.12	4.27	2.566	6.969	
Age	0.01	0.00	1.48	−0.002	0.015	
Gender	0.12	0.09	1.44	−0.046	0.296	
Turnover Intention—T1	−0.14 *	0.06	−2.48	−0.256	−0.029	0.279 ***
Quiet Quitting—T1	−1.12 **	0.35	−3.17	−1.815	−0.423	
Psychological Safety—T1	−0.30	0.31	−0.97	−0.905	0.308	
Quiet Quitting—T1 × Psychological Safety—T1	0.27 **	0.10	2.63	0.069	0.476	

Table 3. *Cont.*

Variables	DV = Affective Commitment—T2					
	B	*SE*	*t*	95% CI		R^2
				LLCI	ULCI	
(Constant)	4.86 ***	0.90	5.41	3.094	6.634	
Age	0.00	0.00	0.38	−0.006	0.009	
Gender	−0.02	0.07	−0.34	−0.161	0.114	
Turnover Intention—T1	−0.21 ***	0.05	−4.60	−0.303	−0.121	0.443 ***
Quiet Quitting—T1	−0.92 **	0.28	−3.25	−1.482	−0.363	
Psychological Safety—T1	−0.02	0.25	−0.07	−0.504	0.471	
Quiet Quitting—T1 × Psychological Safety—T1	0.16 *	0.08	1.99	0.002	0.329	

Notes. LLCI: lower limit of 95% confidence interval; ULCI: upper limit of 95% confidence interval; * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Specifically, the interaction effect of psychological safety on the relationship between quiet quitting and job satisfaction is illustrated in Figure 2. The interaction effect was significant. The effect was statistically significant at the average level of psychological safety (B = 0.06, SE = 0.02, 95% CI = [0.015, 0.103], excluding 0) and at low levels of psychological safety (1 SD below the mean, B = 0.07, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.017, 0.120], excluding 0), but not significant at high levels of psychological safety (1 SD above the mean, B = 0.02, SE = 0.02, 95% CI = [−0.013, 0.063], including 0). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

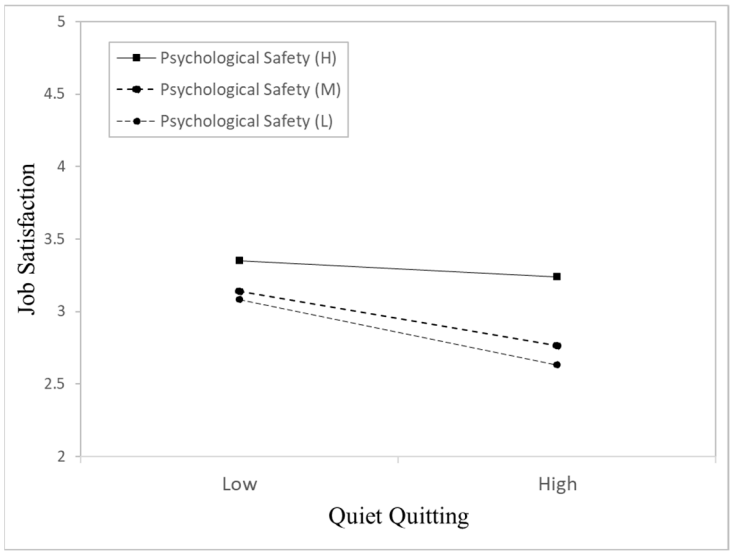


Figure 2. Interaction of quiet quitting and psychological safety on job satisfaction.

Next, the interaction effect of psychological safety on the relationship between quiet quitting and affective commitment is shown in Figure 3. The interaction effect was significant at the average level of psychological safety (B = 0.10, SE = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.029, 0.179], excluding 0), at low levels of psychological safety (1 SD below the mean, B = 0.11, SE = 0.04, 95% CI = [0.032, 0.190], excluding 0), and at high levels of psychological safety (1 SD above the mean, B = 0.07, SE = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.022, 0.133], excluding 0). Thus, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

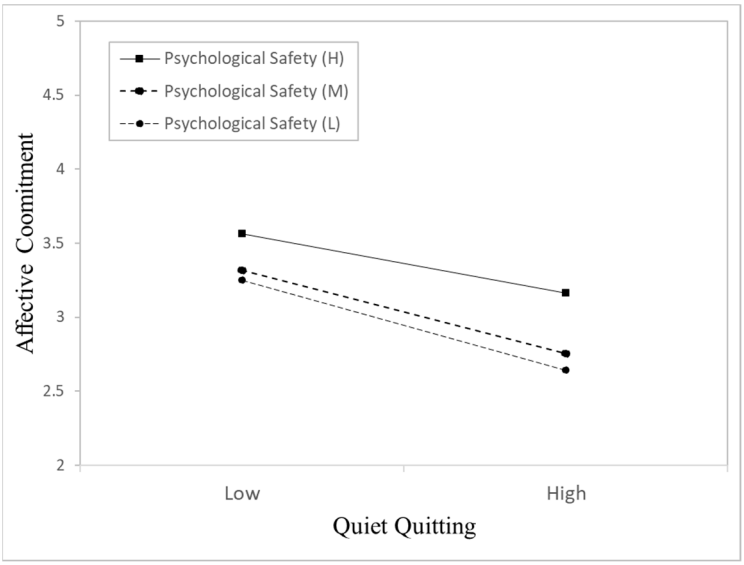


Figure 3. Interaction of quiet quitting and psychological safety on affective commitment.

Overall, these findings indicate that as psychological safety increases, the negative effects of quiet quitting on both job satisfaction and affective commitment are weakened, supporting both Hypothesis 4 and Hypothesis 5.

4.2.5. Moderated Mediation (Hypotheses 6 and 7)

Finally, we examined the moderated mediation effects of psychological safety on the indirect effects of quiet quitting through job satisfaction and affective commitment. As shown in Table 4, the results indicated that the indirect effect of quiet quitting on turnover intention through job satisfaction was weaker when psychological safety was high (moderated indirect effect = −0.054, SE = 0.024, 95% CI = [−0.098, −0.004]). Similarly, the indirect effect through affective commitment was also weaker when psychological safety was high (moderated indirect effect = −0.040, SE = 0.023, 95% CI = [−0.087, −0.002]). These results support both Hypothesis 6 and Hypothesis 7.

The results of the analyses are illustrated in Figure 4, which provides an overview of the theoretical model. Overall, the findings suggest that quiet quitting has a negative impact on both job satisfaction and affective commitment, ultimately leading to an increase in turnover intention. Additionally, psychological safety functions as a critical buffer, mitigating the adverse effects of quiet quitting on these variables.

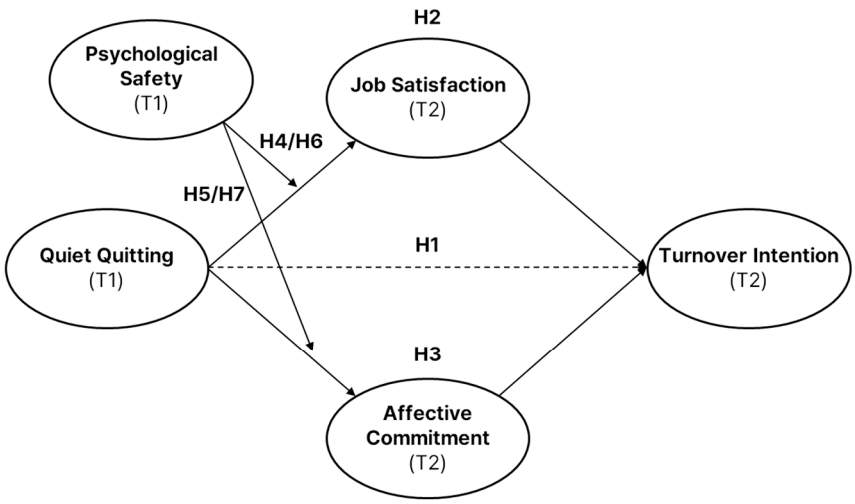
The non-significant effect of quiet quitting (T1) on turnover intention (T2) can be understood through the framework of Withdrawal Progression Theory, which posits that withdrawal behaviors are not isolated, short-term phenomena but part of a gradual process that intensifies over time. According to this theory, initial withdrawal behaviors—such as quiet quitting—may escalate into more serious forms of withdrawal, including turnover intention, as time progresses. Previous research supports this trajectory, showing that minor withdrawal behaviors can manifest as visible dissatisfaction and eventually lead to more severe forms of withdrawal, such as turnover intention [17].

In line with this theory, turnover intention measured at T1 significantly predicted turnover intention at T2 (B = 0.64, SE = 0.049, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that turnover intention is likely to persist or even intensify over time. These findings are consistent with Withdrawal Progression Theory, which emphasizes the progressive nature of withdrawal behaviors. As such, understanding the impact of quiet quitting on turnover intention necessitates consideration of mediating and moderating factors. This study confirms that quiet quitting influences turnover intention via the mediating effects of reduced job satisfaction and weakened affective commitment, supporting the notion that initial withdrawal behaviors may eventually culminate in more severe withdrawal intentions over time.

Table 4. Conditional indirect effects at levels of psychological safety.

Psychological Safety		Quiet Quitting—T1 → Job Satisfaction—T2 → Turnover Intention—T2			
		Effect	SE	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
$M - 1SD$	2.900	0.066	0.026	0.017	0.120
M	3.100	0.055	0.023	0.015	0.103
$M + 1SD$	3.812	0.016	0.019	−0.013	0.063
Moderated Mediation (indirect) Index		Index (ω)	*SE*	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
		−0.054	0.024	−0.098	−0.004
Psychological Safety		Quiet Quitting—T1 → Affective Commitment—T2 → Turnover Intention—T2			
		Effect	SE	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
$M - 1SD$	2.900	0.106	0.040	0.032	0.190
M	3.100	0.098	0.037	0.029	0.179
$M + 1SD$	3.812	0.070	0.029	0.022	0.133
Moderated Mediation (indirect) Index		Index (ω)	*SE*	95% CI	
				LLCI	ULCI
		−0.040	0.023	−0.087	−0.002

Notes. Effect: mediation (indirect) effect size; ω: moderated mediation (indirect) index [40].



Job Satisfaction, indirect effect: 0.05, *SE* = 0.022, 95% CI [0.010, 0.097]
Affective Commitment, indirect effect: 0.09, *SE* = 0.035, 95% CI [0.030, 0.166]
Job Satisfaction, Indirect effect at −1SD of Psychological Safety: 0.07, *SE* = 0.03, 95% CI [0.017, 0.120]
Job Satisfaction, Indirect effect at +1SD of Psychological Safety: 0.02, *SE* = 0.02, 95% CI [−0.013, 0.063]
Affective Commitment, Indirect effect at −1SD of Psychological Safety: 0.11, *SE* = 0.04, 95% CI [0.032, 0.190]
Affective Commitment, Indirect effect at +1SD of Psychological Safety: 0.07, *SE* = 0.023 95% CI [0.022, 0.133]

Figure 4. Theoretical model results.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical Contribution

This study provides significant theoretical contributions by empirically analyzing the impact of quiet quitting on turnover intention through the lens of Withdrawal Progression Theory and COR Theory. These two frameworks provide a robust foundation for understanding the progression and dynamics of employee disengagement, highlighting how both behavioral withdrawal and resource management affect turnover intention.

First, according to Withdrawal Progression Theory, early withdrawal behaviors such as quiet quitting can escalate into more severe withdrawal behaviors, such as turnover intention, over time [17]. This study confirms this progression by showing that quiet quitting diminishes both job satisfaction and affective commitment, which in turn leads to increased turnover intention. This demonstrates that quiet quitting is not a transient or isolated behavior, but a significant variable that can drive long-term disengagement within organizations. By employing a time-lagged design over six months, this study makes a meaningful contribution to the literature by tracking the development of withdrawal behaviors over time, unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on short-term relationships.

Second, this study applies COR Theory to demonstrate that psychological safety serves as a key moderating factor in the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. COR Theory posits that individuals strive to conserve their psychological resources, and resource depletion leads to stress and negative outcomes [31]. This study empirically confirms that psychological safety helps employees preserve their resources, mitigating the negative impact of quiet quitting on job satisfaction and affective commitment. These findings emphasize the theoretical importance of psychological safety as a buffer against withdrawal behaviors, suggesting that organizations promoting psychological safety can reduce turnover intentions by maintaining job satisfaction and commitment levels.

Third, the study makes a further contribution by analyzing both the mediating and moderated mediation effects within the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. It confirms that job satisfaction and affective commitment act as key mediators, providing a pathway through which quiet quitting leads to turnover intention. This study also demonstrates that higher levels of psychological safety weaken these mediating pathways, underscoring how organizations can use psychological safety to buffer against the negative effects of quiet quitting. These insights contribute to refining the withdrawal mechanism and highlight the importance of multi-level strategies for managing disengagement.

In conclusion, this study advances the understanding of quiet quitting by bridging two complementary theoretical frameworks—Withdrawal Progression Theory and COR Theory. It offers a temporal perspective on the progression from quiet quitting to turnover intention, contributing to the development of withdrawal behavior theory. These insights enhance our understanding of employee withdrawal mechanisms over time, advancing research on disengagement within the context of digital transformation.

5.2. Practical Contribution

This study offers practical strategies for effectively understanding and preventing quiet quitting within organizations undergoing digital transformation. First, the findings alert managers and leaders that if quiet quitting occurs, it can manifest as a decline in job satisfaction and affective commitment in the short term and evolve into turnover intention in the long term. Managers should not treat quiet quitting as mere job neglect but recognize it as an early warning signal of potential organizational withdrawal. In response, managers should conduct regular pulse surveys or one-on-one conversations to detect early disengagement signs. Early intervention strategies to re-engage employees, such as offering career development opportunities, flexible work arrangements, or meaningful task assignments, are essential to restore employee engagement [19].

Second, the study highlights the importance of continually assessing and improving job satisfaction and affective commitment, which mediate the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. Setting clear career paths and recognizing employee efforts through performance-based rewards and regular feedback sessions can foster affective commitment. Organizations need to implement structured programs that regularly monitor employees' satisfaction levels and strengthen affective commitment through feedback systems and support structures. These initiatives will play a crucial role in human resource management by enhancing job satisfaction and preventing turnover [28].

Third, this study emphasizes the need to create psychologically safe work environments, as psychological safety mitigates the negative effects of quiet quitting. When

employees feel safe to express their ideas without fear of punishment, they are less likely to experience stress or engage in withdrawal behaviors. To foster such an environment, managers should encourage open dialog and implement anonymous feedback channels, which provide employees with a safe space to raise concerns. Moreover, the recent advancements in generative AI present powerful tools to support leadership development and employee coaching aimed at enhancing psychological safety. AI-driven personalized coaching can help managers better understand employees' psychological needs and respond more effectively, facilitating a systemized approach to improving psychological safety [41]. Managers must also proactively address stress and anxiety that employees may encounter amid the rapid changes of digital transformation. If left unaddressed, these stressors could lead to disengagement and quiet quitting. To prevent this, it is essential for managers to adopt empathetic leadership styles and foster trust-based communication systems, creating an environment where employees feel valued and engaged. Ultimately, these strategies will enhance job satisfaction, affective commitment, and retention [20].

In summary, this study provides concrete, actionable strategies for managing quiet quitting and preventing the subsequent increase in turnover intention within the context of digital transformation. By proactively monitoring satisfaction and engagement, investing in psychological safety, and leveraging AI for leadership development, organizations can strengthen employee retention strategies and ensure long-term organizational success and sustainability.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study provides significant insights into the roles of job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological safety in the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. However, several limitations exist, highlighting the need for future research to address these shortcomings.

First, there are limitations related to the research design. Although the study employed a time-lagged design with a six-month interval, it falls short of capturing the long-term trends in the relationship between quiet quitting and turnover intention. To better understand how quiet quitting evolves and progresses over time, future studies should incorporate longitudinal research with data collection over a period longer than one year. This would enable a more detailed analysis of how quiet quitting may eventually lead to turnover intention over time.

Second, the study is constrained by sample limitations. Since the sample consisted solely of full-time employees in South Korea, generalizing the findings across different countries and industries is limited. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported survey data introduces potential biases, such as social desirability bias and common method variance, which may affect the accuracy of responses. Future studies could benefit from using multi-source data (e.g., supervisor evaluations or organizational records) to mitigate these issues and enhance the validity of findings.

Moreover, job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological safety may vary considerably due to cultural differences, which limits the broader applicability of the results. Although South Korea's work culture is gradually evolving, it is still heavily influenced by hierarchical, seniority-based practices, and a rigid employment environment where layoffs are difficult to execute [42]. These cultural and structural characteristics may shape how employees experience quiet quitting and related outcomes, such as turnover intention, in unique ways. To broaden the generalizability of the findings, future research should conduct cross-cultural comparative studies to assess how the quiet quitting phenomenon manifests across diverse national and cultural settings with different employment systems and workplace norms.

Third, while this study focused primarily on individual-level factors, such as job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological safety, it did not account for organizational-level variables that may influence quiet quitting. Future research should investigate how organizational culture, leadership styles, and structural factors, such as workload and

resource availability, impact quiet quitting. In addition, exploring both the behavioral and emotional dimensions of quiet quitting provides key insights. A crucial consideration is that emotional disengagement may spread within teams through emotional contagion, influencing the broader organizational climate. This aligns with prior research, which highlights the contagious nature of emotions in organizational settings [43]. Although emotional withdrawal might not manifest as immediate behavioral disengagement, it can still subtly impact team dynamics and lead to collective withdrawal over time. Future studies should adopt a multi-level perspective that considers how emotional contagion amplifies withdrawal behaviors such as quiet quitting at both the individual and team levels. Such an approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of how disengagement behaviors propagate across the organization, providing insights for more targeted interventions.

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the mechanisms through which quiet quitting leads to withdrawal behaviors within organizations, while emphasizing the moderating role of psychological safety. However, additional research is necessary to address the limitations outlined above. Future studies could make important contributions by expanding the sample size and scope, employing longer time-lagged research designs, exploring both behavioral and emotional dimensions of quiet quitting, and examining how emotional contagion operates across teams and organizations. Furthermore, incorporating multi-level analyses that account for individual, team, and organizational factors—such as leadership styles, organizational culture, and structural constraints—would provide a more holistic and nuanced understanding of quiet quitting and its long-term effects on employee outcomes and organizational performance.

6. Conclusions

This study analyzed the impact of quiet quitting on turnover intention in the context of digital transformation, while also examining the roles of job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological safety. The findings demonstrate that quiet quitting increases turnover intention by reducing job satisfaction and affective commitment, with psychological safety acting as a key moderating variable that mitigates these negative effects. The study provides theoretical support for Withdrawal Progression Theory, showing how quiet quitting evolves into turnover intention over time. Its time-lagged design over six months confirms the temporal nature of this progression and extends prior research focused primarily on short-term relationships. In addition, this study highlights the importance of considering both the behavioral and emotional dimensions of quiet quitting, as emotional withdrawal may spread through teams, leading to broader disengagement.

Practically, this research emphasizes the importance of preventing quiet quitting by enhancing job satisfaction and affective commitment to reduce turnover intention. Furthermore, it underscores the role of psychological safety as a key strategy to buffer against the negative effects of quiet quitting. The findings suggest that leveraging generative AI to develop leadership strategies and strengthen psychological safety can enhance employee engagement and retention.

However, this study's design and sample limitations suggest the need for further research. Future studies should explore broader cultural contexts and employ longitudinal data to capture the long-term evolution of quiet quitting. Additionally, research should investigate organizational-level factors, such as leadership styles, workload, and organizational culture, to provide a more holistic understanding of how both individual and organizational factors contribute to quiet quitting. Ultimately, this study offers valuable insights for organizations navigating the evolving digital landscape, providing actionable strategies to effectively manage quiet quitting and prevent turnover.

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