

The Great Resignation and Its Cure

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Abstract

This paper explores the reasons behind the Great Resignation phenomenon, which has seen millions of employees leaving their jobs due to burnout, lack of growth opportunities, and pandemic-related concerns. This sudden shift in mindset will be explained by looking at the trends causing this worker exodus. The paper examines the importance of the employee experience and how it impacts worker retention. It provides insights into the need for a positive start to an employee's journey, highlighting the importance of improving the onboarding process. Additionally, the paper underscores the significance of an employee-centric model for fostering passion, loyalty, and emotional connections. Furthermore, it highlights the critical role of employee engagement in addressing emotional needs in promoting a healthy work environment and preventing burnout, ultimately improving worker satisfaction and retention. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes the need for employers to invest in their employees' well-being to maintain a healthy and happy workforce.

Keywords

The Great Resignation Phenomenon, Burnout, Growth Opportunities, Employee Well-Being, Pandemic-Related Concerns, Onboarding Process, Employee Engagement, Worker Satisfaction, Human-Based Relationship

1. Introduction

In 1977, "Take This Job and Shove It" hit the country charts as the lyrics told of a man tired of working a job that offered him no benefit or reward. Because of his long hours at work, his woman left, and he hated the line boss whom he considered "a fool", and the foreman was just "a dog." He was a bitter, angry man who felt that he'd "blow his top." There should be a small amount of irony or humor in the fact that the song's artist was named Johnny Paycheck. Paycheck

could have written this song for the millions of people who work jobs every day and see no reward. To them, it just works, and there is no passion or meaning behind what they do. However, researchers found that individuals seek more meaning in their daily work than in their personal lives (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2017). This discovery is astounding because it means many people value finding meaning and purpose in their job more than in the personal relationships they establish. With so many people leaving their jobs in “The Great Resignation,” why do some people choose to stay, and why is their experience different from people who identify with the country song? If one examines the language used in some articles. In this case, when one becomes an employee, one enters into a relationship with their employer just as in any other human-based relationship (186). If this is the case, then breaking up with one employer would involve much more than just leaving. Several components must be in place to maintain the relationship one has with their employer.

2. “The Big Quit”: Root Causes

In April of 2021, 4 million people quit their jobs in the US. This staggering statistic is probably confusing to most, considering the rising cost of housing, a precarious food supply chain causing food shortages, and the pandemic still sweeping across the globe. Through these unprecedented, strange times, the expectation is that people would try and hold on to what job they had out of fear and insecurity. Instead, millions of workers are weighing their options and deciding to walk away from their jobs in what many called the “Big Quit” (Salvucci, 2023). Many depart for various reasons—burnout, stress, being stalled in the workplace, or out of pandemic fear (Cooban, 2021). In June this year, the popular job site Monster.com surveyed 649 US employees, where 95% of workers said they considered quitting their jobs. Burnout appears to be the number one reason employees leave, with one-third of those surveyed citing this as an impetus for their departure. In the same survey, 29% said that lack of growth at their job was their reason for wanting to part ways (2021), making this the second reason for opting to depart.

In Fortune, contributing writer Yasmin Tayag explains that the pandemic’s shock drove people to resign. She says that COVID caused an idiosyncratic shock, and workers decided to quit their jobs en masse. This is natural because people tend to quit their jobs after a significant “turnover shock” or a major life event that results in self-reflection about one’s satisfaction on the job (Tayag, 2021). Sydney Ember of The New York Times feels that many people quit because of what economists call a “backlog” of people who may have wanted to quit their job (Ember, 2021). The pandemic was the nudge that most people needed to make them reevaluate their position. If that is true, this begs the question: why did workers want to leave their jobs before the shock of the pandemic? The author believes that many people need fulfillment in their careers. Whether they were minimum wage-earning hotel workers or highly paid tech employees, they were ready to walk. They sought jobs that paid more money, had more

flexibility, and offered more happiness (Hsu, 2021). Not surprisingly, people often reported leaving jobs more for the latter. A diminished view of self and work negatively impacts individuals' feelings about their jobs. It creates alienation and fear, causing them to seek a deeper meaning in life (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010). In essence, people depart from their jobs because they want more from their jobs—more meaning and more purpose. In her article, Tayag advises: “Employers looking to stop the exodus should pay attention: Much of the onus is on them to give workers better reasons to stay.” (Tayag, 2021)

3. Optimizing Employee Lifecycle Experience

When a person leaves their job, it is not because they are tired of the daily grind and want a change; they want a new experience. For employees to gain a new experience, employers must fully discover the worker's needs (Bertolotti et al., 2018). Employee experience is defined as the “...sum of the perceptions of employees' interactions with their organization. Employee experience depends largely on perceptions and expectations, where perceptions determine the outcome of the experience” (Maylett & Wride, 2017). Moreover, employee experience is seen as a way to “...describe how organizations create a positive work environment that empowers individuals to reach their potential, encouraging productivity and innovation. It also includes understanding the role of trust in the employment relationship established between employee and employer and promoting a happier, healthier workforce” (Lang, 2021). When considering employee experience, talent retention, or the activities and methodologies an organization utilizes to prevent talent from leaving must be looked at to study it properly. It is said that to give employees the best experience, at the onset of hiring, organizations must offer a compelling reason to stay with culture, physical space, and technology.

The life cycle of the employee is a 7-stage cycle that includes: recruitment, onboarding, performance engagement, training, retention, offboarding, and alums. The entire employee life cycle must be a joyous journey from day one. “Employees who interact positively in employee experiences throughout the employee lifecycle come to work because they want [to] and [are] excited, not because they have to come to work” (Lang, 2021). Although the first step in the employee phase is recruitment, most experts agree that employee experience starts with onboarding. The employee experience does not start with the first day setting up your cubicle; it begins during onboarding. Here, the emphasis should be on the word “process,” which implies a systematic series of actions and may take several weeks in the case of onboarding. HiBob (n.d.), an onboarding platform launched in 2015, had one goal: to revolutionize the onboarding and hiring experience by streamlining HR processes and engaging top talent. The company feels the onboarding experience can hugely impact turnover; a bad experience could result in worker dissatisfaction and departure. “A bad onboarding experience not only leaves a negative impression on your new employee, but it also hinders their

time-to-productivity and can result in a shorter stay at the company” (Jobvite, 2016). HiBob (n.d.), conducted a study of 1000 US workers and found that 64% of employees were likely to leave a job if there needed to be better onboarding. They also found that more than 25% of hires felt they needed more information about their position before accepting it (Hodkin, 2020). Employees on the Tiny Pulse blog discuss their nightmare onboarding experience. From being handed an intimidating file with no instructions on how to tackle it or embarrassingly being thrust into a new workplace without even being shown how to find the restroom, these employees felt that their employer could have done better (Son, 2015). Luckily, many organizations recognize the issues with poor onboarding and are remedying the situation with improved methods. Nowadays, companies have no excuse for poorly orientating and engaging new hires due to all the newly developed tools and resources available. For example, The Society for Human Resource Management Foundation (SHRM Foundation) has developed guidelines for properly onboarding employees in their 2010 guidebook “Onboarding New Employees: Maximizing Success.” The guidebook was created to show companies how to help newly hired employees succeed in the workplace at the onset of hiring (Bauer, 2010).

4. Employee-Centric Workplace Drivers

Once they have gotten through the initial onboarding stage, employees should learn the ropes to engage thoroughly in their work. For this to occur, though, they must have a connection to the work they do and for whom they are doing it. A degree of passion and an established emotional connection must be considered a fundamental concept of employee engagement (Parida, 2020).

The employee-centric model is a principle that places the needs of personnel as the focus of a company’s operations. This means that instead of concentrating on the company’s outputs, such as revenue and customer satisfaction, the corporate culture draws attention to the professionals who make those outputs possible. The model reinforces the idea of “Our people are our best asset”. In an employee-centric culture, employees are supported, encouraged, and their ideas are requested and heard when making decisions about business practices, products, or services. This approach can help companies build and retain an engaged workforce and customer base (Parida, 2020).

Employees are shaped through their experiences in the workplace. In the book, *The Employee Advantage*, the author feels organizations must get to know their employees. “One crucial thing to keep in mind is that employee experiences can’t be created unless the organization knows its employees (Morgan, 2017). To achieve this, a more intimate and personal relationship must be established between the worker and employer. This takes into account understanding the needs and wants of the worker, which for some organizations is a challenge, especially when distance is put between higher-ups and workers. In their study of the positive effects of employee-centeredness in the workplace, assistant profes-

sor at Delhi University Sahil Ramchandani and Vice Chancellor of Sri University Ajay Kumar Singh suggested that certain drivers affect the organization overall. In their 2020 research on the employee-centered workplace, they conducted a qualitative study involving an in-depth literature review of journals, magazines, books, research bulletins, and online sources. These varied sources made it possible to research and identify the drivers that foster an employee-centered working environment. The drivers I have chosen to focus on here are ones I feel that deal more with supporting the employee's emotional needs.

5. Workplace Spirituality and Engagement

Employee burnout is a serious problem and can cause depression, stress, and hypertension. People may leave their jobs, citing burnout as their reason but is being "burned out" the real reason they leave? Researchers feel this is a deeper problem. Employees need to feel connected to their work. Many experts say that to feel connected to one work; there must be employee engagement because engaged employees feel empowered, loyal, and enthusiastic (Al Mehrzi & Singh, 2017). Although employee engagement is difficult to define by researchers due to the various factors that affect how a person engages, for the most part, real engagement consists of exhibiting vigor, absorption, and dedication (833). For employees to be engaged and establish an emotional connection, there must also be trust, transparency, and internal communication between managers and employees (Mishra et al., 2019). These are the major cornerstones of any relationship. Relationships must be nurtured to grow; positive emotional input is necessary to keep that relationship healthy and long-term. When employees do not have these components, the emotional input is no longer there, and the overall experience could be better. This may be when it is time to leave.

The fully engaged worker feels their needs are being met through workplace spirituality. Workplace spirituality is the concept of finding wholeness or completeness within the organization and facilitates employee engagement. This encompasses having enhanced employee well-being and quality of life. It also supplies employees with a sense of purpose and meaning, and lastly, the employee must have a sense of interconnectedness and community (VadBaunsgaard, 2019). Scholars have argued that spirituality in the workplace opens the door for a worker to experience a higher sense of service and personal growth to increase conceptions of self-worth and inherent uniqueness (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003). Workplace spirituality is not easy to define, and because the word "spirituality" carries such a heavy connotation to religion, it is often misunderstood. In a nutshell, it recognizes that employees have an inner life, assumes employees have a desire to perform meaningful work and realizes the significance of an organization's commitment to serving as a conduit for spiritual growth.

6. Empowerment and Employee Engagement

Giving power to the people may seem a bit oxymoronic in the workplace, given

that bureaucracies don't usually allow many employees to exercise much influence or control over the tasks they perform. Still, according to researchers, this change needs to be implemented to keep employees satisfied and on the job. Empowerment can be manifested in several ways. One of them is through self-managed teams that offer colleagues the opportunity to self-select what they want to do and how they want to be evaluated. This is called holacracy. The characteristics of the jobs being done are also key (Bernstein et al., 2016). Employees should also be able to do unstructured jobs involving complex tasks and enriching job characteristics that allow employees to utilize self-determination and creativity. Lastly, in terms of empowerment, organizational trust is another element. Employees must have confidence that every action of the company is beneficial. Trust is the secret sauce that makes an organization's effectiveness sizzle and gives it a competitive edge in the race for top talent, job satisfaction, and long-term stability and well-being of its members. Information sharing facilitates decentralization of decision-making, creates broader work participation, and more empowerment in controlling employee work processes.

7. Enablement of Workers

Workers need to be in a supportive environment that caters to their needs and feelings. This is key to fostering a positive space that results in productivity and worker success. It should also encourage them to voice their concerns, allowing them to enhance new skills and solve work-related problems. The environment workers are in is defined as the building where one works, along with the surrounding accoutrements like the art of walls and workspace layout. People want to work in a space that will inspire and energize them (Morgan, 2017). The cultural environment also plays a part in employee experience. This determines how an employee is treated throughout their tenure. Other factors that may affect the company's performance include the products or services offered, the partnerships established, and the methods used by employees to complete their tasks. "Organizational culture affects the way employees feel, think and act in a workplace and is the collective mindset and way of working the employees bring to work on a daily basis" (Ngwane, 2019). Enablement of employees also takes into consideration how talent and skills are fostered. Training and development are also critical because it allows employees to unleash hidden potential or develop new skills so that organizations can get more of their workers. This will lead to growth so that they can acquire future higher-level positions (Ramchandani & Singh, 2020). For workers to feel enabled, they must be provided the right resources, the tools, equipment, and supplies that will allow them to perform their job optimally.

8. Change and Innovation: Who Is Getting It Right

The pandemic has changed the face of the workplace. It has not only changed

the way people work but also how they think about work. With companies now fighting hard to retain their employees, they must restructure and rework old paradigms that no longer apply. With so many workers leaving the workplace in droves, this leaves a massive void in many industries. Companies are faced with a crisis causing them to develop new strategies that are effective, realistic, and that give workers a sense of purpose. Businesses now must answer the question: how do I keep my workers and make them happy? They must give workers a reason to come and stay at work. Companies must provide their employees a why, and once they do, it will lead to purposeful work that has meaning and significance for both employers and employees. A few leading companies are getting it right by making some changes.

Pharmaceutical Giant AstraZeneca had to think quickly on its toes during the pandemic. They needed all hands on deck, so they decided to take advantage of worker potential to develop an effective vaccine to fight against COVID-19. They not only used the knowledge of the company's experts but also brought in high performers who were very passionate about what they do and wanted to get involved. They tapped into various talent pools within the company to utilize everyone's unique skills. This helped to make the road to developing a vaccine to fight against COVID-19 smoother. AstraZeneca explains that they "identify and prioritize critical capabilities across our organization that is needed to drive our company strategy and meet the challenges of the future. They also "believe every employee has potential. We focus on identifying succession candidates for critical roles and capabilities and accelerating readiness and career development for all employees." The company also offers professional and technical training, enhanced through leadership, mentorship, and job rotation programs (*Sustainability Report 2020: 55*). This is a way for them to invest in their employees and make them feel proud of their work. The company uses an online recognition platform called CatAlyZe. The company created this platform and was implemented to "...spark things and to create innovation that will allow individuals to be who they are and remain the same" (*Astra Zeneca, 2020*). Its main goal was to create a "culture of connection," With the platform being used globally, CatAlyZe enables all employees, regardless of their role, location, or level, to highlight exceptional work based on how we demonstrate behaviors and values. The company feels this is a way to celebrate individuals' and teams' contributions and efforts while showing appreciation in real-time. "Failure to attract, develop, engage, and retain a diverse, talented, and capable workforce is a principal risk. This risk can potentially have a material impact on our business or results of operations..." (*Astra Zeneca, 2020*)

Johnson & Johnson, like many companies during the pandemic, offered mental-emotional support to their employees during a crisis. With so many of their employees fearing the situation they had to face working in-office and on the front lines, while the rest felt socially deprived working from home, this was a much-needed change in the company. They had to think fast and innovate! They

realized that providing meaningful work to their employees changed how they thought about their work. At the beginning of the pandemic, Johnson and Johnson introduced their Medical Personnel Leave Policy. This allowed employees to leave the office and get medical training to volunteer in their communities. With this new skill set, they could now help diagnose, treat, and provide health support to patients who had contracted COVID-19 (Gador, 2020). The company addressed the stress and emotional strain workers had to endure during the pandemic and created the Johnson & Johnson Center for Health Worker Innovation to help support and sustain the mental wellness of the company's frontline workers. The Johnson & Johnson Global Public Health Program provided meals to frontline healthcare workers and supported hospital staff fighting to prevent COVID-related hunger (Johnson & Johnson, n.d). Johnson & Johnson provided meaningful work to their employees, allowing them to utilize their talents to help their communities. They were now stuck behind a desk or getting burned out with working from home. Employees were given a purpose and, through this purposeful work, were able to make a significant contribution.

9. Unilever Educating with “Degrees”

Top household, beauty, and food product manufacturer Unilever, known for such products as Axe, Dove, Lipton, and Breyers, has a history of leading with purpose. “Purpose became important because [a] business driver, embedded into every level of the organization, as Unilever positioned itself as a global leader in sustainability” (Forbes, n.d.). However, the purpose is more than just reserved for their brands. The company's learning platform Degreed helps educate its employees and fosters the idea that purpose helps build resilience during sudden change and uncertainty during the pandemic. As employees learn through the online program, they can discover what critical skills they have that might fit future roles. The credentials learned are transferrable and may be used within or without the company. Most office workers and contractors at the company could access the learning platform by 2020. Unilever estimated that employees are 35% less likely to quit if they had access to lifelong learning and upskilling, representing a potential saving of €6.6 million per year in hiring costs for over 700 employees trained” (Kerr et al., 2019). In 2018, they developed “Discover Your Purpose” workshops, which were needed more than ever during the pandemic. The workshops aimed to allow people to discover the meaning behind their work every day. The company saw that people who could bring their purpose to the workplace also felt engaged and optimistic about their well-being and development. Unilever feels everyone has the right to a fulfilling work life. To achieve this, you must start with a purpose. “Unilever needed to help each worker identify their purpose, preferences, current and future skills, and upskilling options. Different pathways were available learning something new, starting a new business, finding a job inside Unilever or outside Unilever”.

10. Conclusion

The employee experience is a crucial factor in organizational success. Unilever's adoption of degreed to encourage employee learning and development is a remarkable example of how companies can prioritize employee growth and well-being. By investing in employee development and fostering a culture of continuous learning, organizations can establish a competitive advantage and position themselves for long-term success. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need for companies to prioritize employee welfare. Companies such as Johnson and Johnson and AstraZeneca have demonstrated the significant role that employees can play in driving organizational success. Therefore, organizations must prioritize employee experience and growth to attract and retain top talent, increase innovation, and promote long-term success.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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