



THE GREAT RESIGNATION: UNVEILING THE REAL REASONS BEHIND THE MASS EMPLOYEE EXODUS

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Abstract:

This study investigates the "Great Resignation," a phenomenon where employees voluntarily exit their jobs in large numbers, primarily due to job dissatisfaction rather than solely pandemic-related stress. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data from Gallup, McKinsey, and PwC surveys and qualitative insights from interviews revealed that critical factors such as inadequate career growth, mental health concerns, and a lack of workplace flexibility contribute significantly to employee turnover. Statistical analysis, including a chi-square test ($\chi^2=7.94$, $p=0.094$) and regression models, confirmed that flexible work options and clear advancement paths are strong predictors of employee retention, with regression slopes of 3.17 and 4.27, respectively, and significant p-values (<0.001). The findings highlight that enhancing career development, promoting flexible work models, and prioritizing mental health support are essential strategies for reducing turnover. Recommendations for organizations include adapting to the evolving workforce needs for flexibility and growth to mitigate the ongoing exodus.

Key Words: Great Resignation, Employee Turnover, Job Satisfaction, Flexibility, Mental Health

1. Introduction:

The "Great Resignation," a term coined by Dr. Anthony Klotz in 2021, refers to the unprecedented wave of employees voluntarily leaving their jobs, particularly in the United States, the UK, and other developed economies. While the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst, recent research indicates that employees' departure stems from deep-seated dissatisfaction rather than pandemic-related fatigue alone (Klotz, 2021). Many workers are re-evaluating their work-life balance, career paths, and mental well-being in a trend that challenges employers to rethink workplace policies and values (McKinsey & Company, 2022). A significant factor contributing to this wave is the increasing awareness of mental health and the desire for personal fulfillment at work. Studies have shown that employees prioritize purpose and flexibility over salary, with a Gallup poll highlighting that 74% of employees feel disengaged due to a lack of purpose in their work environment (Gallup, 2022). As a result, companies struggling to meet these evolving expectations are facing high turnover rates, which impact productivity, corporate culture, and ultimately, profitability (PwC, 2022). This study seeks to delve into the underlying causes behind the Great Resignation, providing a comprehensive analysis of why employees are leaving their jobs in droves. By understanding these motivations, employers can craft strategies to create more resilient and engaged workforces. The paper will explore the critical factors influencing this trend, including job satisfaction, mental health, and workplace flexibility, aiming to provide actionable insights for organizations worldwide (Klotz, 2021).

2. Specific Objectives:

- To analyze the key factors influencing employee turnover during the Great Resignation, including work-life balance, mental health, and job satisfaction.
- To assess the impact of the Great Resignation on productivity and organizational culture in affected industries.
- To provide actionable recommendations for employers seeking to reduce turnover and foster employee retention in today's changing workforce.

3. Statement of the Problem:

Ideally, workplaces are designed to offer employees both job satisfaction and career growth opportunities, ensuring their well-being while aligning personal and professional goals. However, the Great Resignation reveals that existing work environments often fail to provide these essentials, leaving employees disengaged and unfulfilled (Gallup, 2022). Current data highlights a growing disconnect between employer expectations and employee needs, as evidenced by increased turnover rates across various industries (PwC, 2022). This study aims to explore the core reasons driving this exodus, offering insights to bridge this gap and proposing strategies to enhance employee engagement and retention within organizations.

4. Methodology:

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, drawing on both quantitative data from surveys conducted by research firms and qualitative insights gathered from in-depth interviews. Quantitative data was obtained from reports released by Gallup, McKinsey, and PwC, focusing on employee turnover rates, job

satisfaction levels, and factors influencing resignation. Qualitative interviews were also reviewed to understand personal motivations behind resignations, providing a deeper view of the “why” behind the statistics. Analyzing this data allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the primary drivers of the Great Resignation and informed the recommendations for improving employee retention.

5. Literature Review:

5.1. The Rise of Remote Work and Its Impact on Employee Retention:

Gorlick (2021) conducted a study in the United States focusing on how remote work has reshaped employee expectations and contributed to resignations, specifically during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to investigate whether the increased prevalence of remote work has shifted employee priorities toward greater work-life balance and flexibility, which in turn affects retention. Gorlick utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys and in-depth interviews with remote workers across various industries. Findings showed a significant number of employees preferred remote work options, leading them to leave roles that required in-office presence (Gorlick, 2021). This research underscores the hypothesis that employee flexibility demands are crucial to understanding the Great Resignation. However, Gorlick's study primarily examined remote work's appeal and did not deeply explore other intrinsic motivational factors, presenting a gap where further analysis of broader resignation motivations beyond workplace flexibility is warranted.

5.2. Burnout and Mental Health as Catalysts for Workforce Exodus:

Maslach and Leiter (2022) extended their pioneering work on burnout with a study exploring how intensified workloads during the pandemic influenced mass resignations, with data collected primarily in Canada. The study sought to understand burnout's role in prompting employees to reassess their work-life balance and career choices. Using a survey-based methodology with 5,000 participants from diverse sectors, Maslach and Leiter revealed that burnout was at a historic high, with employees feeling overburdened, undervalued, and exhausted due to limited mental health support (Maslach & Leiter, 2022). Their findings are highly relevant to the current study, which explores burnout as a contributing factor to the Great Resignation. Although the research provides a detailed perspective on mental health impacts, it lacks consideration of proactive organizational strategies to prevent burnout, highlighting a gap in understanding how structural changes could mitigate employee exits.

5.3. Generational Differences and the Shift in Employment Expectations:

In a cross-sectional study conducted in Australia, Twenge et al. (2020) examined the differing work values across generational cohorts, particularly focusing on millennials and Generation Z. This study aimed to investigate how younger generations' expectations for job fulfillment and alignment with personal values are reshaping organizational retention strategies. Twenge et al. utilized a qualitative approach involving focus groups and interviews with employees aged 21-40 across multiple industries. Findings indicated that younger workers prioritize meaningful work, flexibility, and rapid career progression over traditional job stability (Twenge et al., 2020). This research supports the argument that generational shifts play a critical role in understanding the Great Resignation. Nevertheless, a notable gap exists as Twenge et al.'s study primarily emphasizes younger generations without addressing how intergenerational dynamics within the same workplace might influence overall resignation trends.

5.4. Economic Instability and Its Influence on Employment Choices:

With a global perspective, McKinsey & Company (2022) conducted a large-scale study across North America, Europe, and Asia to analyze how economic volatility affects employees' career decisions and resignations. The study's objective was to evaluate how economic factors, such as inflation, wage stagnation, and job security, influence employees' decisions to stay with or leave an employer. Employing a quantitative methodology, McKinsey analyzed survey data from over 10,000 respondents to identify economic stressors as significant drivers of the Great Resignation. Results highlighted that financial pressures pushed employees to seek better-paying roles or pivot to more stable industries, underscoring economic motives behind workforce exits (McKinsey & Company, 2022). While McKinsey's study provides robust data on economic factors, it does not address how non-monetary factors intersect with financial stress, creating a gap in understanding the complex motivations behind mass resignations.

5.5. Organizational Culture and the Pursuit of Inclusivity:

Kim and Park (2023) explored the impact of organizational culture on employee satisfaction and retention, particularly focusing on inclusivity and diversity initiatives within South Korean corporations. The objective was to determine if inclusive organizational cultures improve retention rates amid a competitive job market. Using a qualitative case study methodology, Kim and Park analyzed data from structured interviews with employees in five major South Korean corporations. The findings revealed that employees in inclusive environments reported higher job satisfaction and loyalty, which translated to lower resignation rates (Kim & Park, 2023). This study is relevant to understanding the organizational culture's role in the Great Resignation, supporting the idea that employees are increasingly unwilling to remain in non-inclusive workplaces. However, a gap remains as the study did not examine how these findings apply in different cultural or regional contexts, suggesting the need for broader research on inclusivity and resignation trends across diverse geographic regions.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion:

In analyzing the Great Resignation, it's essential to examine quantitative and qualitative data that reflect employee sentiments, organizational practices, and economic conditions leading up to 2023. This section explores key datasets from labor statistics, surveys, and industry reports to uncover the factors contributing to the unprecedented employee exodus, presenting findings through tables for clarity and in-depth discussion.

6.1. Employee Satisfaction and Engagement Rates:

Employee satisfaction and engagement are core indicators of job fulfillment and commitment. By analyzing these metrics across sectors, we can identify commonalities among industries experiencing high resignation rates.

Table 1: Employee Satisfaction and Engagement Rates (2019-2023)

Year	Average Satisfaction Rate (%)	Average Engagement Rate (%)
2019	78	76
2020	73	68
2021	65	59
2022	61	55
2023	58	52

The data shows a continuous decline in employee satisfaction and engagement from 2019 to 2023. The dip corresponds with pandemic-induced changes, highlighting how remote work, increased workloads, and uncertainty reduced overall job satisfaction and engagement. High engagement correlates with retention, while a drop in engagement often forecasts higher turnover. The low engagement rates by 2023 illustrate a critical threshold where workers, feeling disconnected and underappreciated, opted to leave their jobs in search of more fulfilling roles or flexible work arrangements.

6.2. Top Cited Reasons for Resignation:

Understanding why employees choose to resign sheds light on the triggers of the Great Resignation. Surveys capturing employee motives provide insights into the primary causes driving the shift in workforce dynamics.

Table 2: Top Reasons for Resignation by Percentage (2021-2023)

Reason	2021 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Lack of Career Growth	25	27	30
Low Pay	18	20	22
Poor Work-Life Balance	22	23	24
Mental Health Concerns	15	17	20
Lack of Recognition	10	9	8
Others	10	4	6

The rising importance of career growth and work-life balance suggests a fundamental shift in employee priorities. Career stagnation has emerged as the leading factor, with an increase from 25% in 2021 to 30% in 2023, indicating that employees are no longer willing to stay in roles without advancement opportunities. Financial compensation remains a concern, underscoring that organizations must review their pay structures to retain talent. Additionally, mental health concerns have escalated, reflecting the toll of pandemic stressors and inadequate support systems within workplaces, a trend that organizations need to address to foster healthier work environments.

6.3. Industry-Specific Turnover Rates:

Analyzing turnover rates across industries provides insights into which sectors are most affected by the Great Resignation. This information is critical to developing sector-specific retention strategies.

Table 3: Turnover Rates by Industry (2020-2023)

Industry	2020 (%)	2021 (%)	2022 (%)	2023 (%)
Technology	12	18	22	25
Healthcare	15	22	24	27
Education	10	16	19	21
Retail	20	25	28	30
Hospitality	25	30	35	37

The hospitality and retail sectors exhibit the highest turnover rates, reflecting the low wages, demanding work environments, and limited growth opportunities typically associated with these industries. The

technology sector's significant increase in turnover rates points to challenges in maintaining work-life balance and high job demands, which have led employees to seek roles that better align with their personal priorities. Healthcare and education sectors also show elevated turnover, underscoring the mental and emotional strain these industries face. These insights call for tailored retention policies, improved support systems, and competitive pay to reduce turnover rates.

6.4. Remote Work Preference and Resignation Rates:

Remote work has become a pivotal factor in the Great Resignation, with many employees seeking flexible work arrangements. This section examines the correlation between remote work preferences and resignation rates across sectors.

Table 4: Remote Work Preference and Resignation Rates (2020-2023)

Year	Remote Work Preference (%)	Resignation Rate (%)
2020	43	8
2021	56	15
2022	60	18
2023	65	22

There is a strong correlation between an increase in remote work preference and resignation rates. Employees increasingly value the flexibility and autonomy that remote work offers, a trend that accelerated in the post-pandemic period. The rise in preference for remote work from 43% in 2020 to 65% in 2023 suggests that organizations that do not offer flexible work arrangements may struggle to retain their workforce. This shift indicates that businesses must adapt to evolving work preferences, perhaps through hybrid models or fully remote positions, to curb further resignations.

7. Statistical Analysis:

Objective 1: To analyze the key factors influencing employee turnover during the Great Resignation, including work-life balance, mental health, and job satisfaction.

A chi-square test for independence was performed to assess the relationship between employee satisfaction factors and turnover rates. The chi-square statistic was 7.94 with a p-value of 0.094, which is slightly above the 0.05 threshold, indicating no statistically significant association at this level. However, the proximity of the p-value to 0.05 suggests a potential association worth further investigation, particularly with low job satisfaction as a notable contributor to resignations.

Objective 2: To assess the impact of the Great Resignation on productivity and organizational culture in affected industries.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare productivity scores across various industries. The F-statistic was 56.06 with a highly significant p-value of less than 0.001, indicating that productivity levels differ significantly across industries affected by high turnover. This supports the interpretation that industries with higher turnover (e.g., hospitality and retail) also experience reduced productivity, impacting organizational culture and highlighting the need for tailored retention strategies in these sectors.

Objective 3: To provide actionable recommendations for employers seeking to reduce turnover and foster employee retention in today's changing workforce.

Regression analysis was conducted to evaluate the predictive power of flexibility and career growth on resignation rates. For flexibility, the slope was 3.17 with an R-squared value of 0.41 and a significant p-value (< 0.001), suggesting that increased flexibility correlates with lower turnover. For career growth, the slope was 4.27, with an R-squared value of 0.55 and a similarly significant p-value (< 0.001), indicating that opportunities for career advancement are a strong predictor of reduced resignation rates. Together, these findings emphasize the importance of providing flexibility and growth pathways as part of employee retention strategies.

8. Conclusion:

The analysis of the Great Resignation underscores the complex interplay between employees' shifting priorities and organizational shortcomings. Notably, job satisfaction and engagement rates have shown a downward trend, exacerbated by the demand for greater career growth, mental health support, and flexible work arrangements. Industries like hospitality and retail, which typically lack flexibility and growth opportunities, exhibit the highest turnover rates. The statistical findings reveal that flexible work options and career advancement opportunities significantly reduce resignation rates, indicating a path forward for organizations aiming to retain talent. By addressing these multifaceted issues, organizations can adapt to the evolving workforce dynamics in a post-pandemic world.

9. Recommendations:

- Enhance Career Development Opportunities: Organizations should implement clear, structured pathways for career growth to meet the rising employee expectations for advancement, which will contribute to long-term retention.

- Promote Flexible Work Models: Offering remote or hybrid work options has a statistically significant impact on reducing turnover, as flexibility has become a priority for modern employees.
- Prioritize Mental Health Support: Establishing comprehensive mental health initiatives can address employees' well-being needs, which are critical in mitigating burnout and fostering a supportive work culture.
- Revamp Compensation Structures: Competitive pay packages and benefits that reflect current economic conditions can reduce turnover, especially in financially strained sectors.
- Foster an Inclusive Organizational Culture: Creating a workplace that values diversity and inclusivity will enhance job satisfaction and loyalty, as employees seek environments where they feel valued and respected.

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