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Ebrahim Rajabpour, Hazratgul Mohammadi, Azadeh Amoozegar, Mohammad Falahat, Sedigheh Shakib, Mahdi Mohamed Omar

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Silent strategies: navigating the complex web of quiet firing and quiet quitting with social capital mediation

**Ebrahim Rajabpour and
Hazratgul Mohammadi**

School of Business and Economics,
Persian Gulf University,
Bushehr, Iran
Email: e.rajabpour@pgu.ac.ir
Email: hazratgul.salik22@gmail.com

Azadeh Amoozegar

Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts,
INTI International University,
Persiaran Perdana BBN, Putra Nilai,
71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia
Email: azadeh.amoozegar@newinti.edu.my

Mohammad Falahat*

Strategic Research Institute (SRI),
Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU),
Technology Park Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: falahat@apu.edu.my
*Corresponding author

Sedigheh Shakib

ELTEM Research and Development,
Central Asian University Tashkent, Uzbekistan
Email: s.shakib@centralasian.uz

Mahdi Mohamed Omar

Faculty of Economics and Management,
Jamhuriya University of Science and Technology,
Mogadishu, Somalia
Email: mahdi@just.edu.so

Abstract: The workplace is expected to foster a shared sense of common objectives and direction among employees in order to encourage emotional bonding and promote high levels of engagement, rather than engaging in covert tit-for-tat strategies between employers and employees. This study aims to examine the effects of quiet firing on quiet quitting as covert workplace tactics.

The results indicate that quiet firing exerts a significant positive influence on quiet quitting, and that social capital functions as a negative mediator in the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting. This study extends the emerging literature by providing an empirical examination of the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting, while identifying the mediating role of social capital. Thereby, it advances understanding of the mechanisms through which organisational practices influence employee withdrawal behaviours and offers evidence from the underexplored context of the Iranian oil, gas, and petroleum industry.

Keywords: economic growth; social capital; quiet firing; developing countries; gas and petroleum industry.

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Biographical notes: Ebrahim Rajabpour is an Associate Professor in the Department of Business Management and a faculty member of the School of Business and Economics at Persian Gulf University. He holds a PhD in Human Resource Management from the University of Tehran and an MSc in Information Technology Management from Allameh Tabataba'i University. His areas of expertise include human resource management, organisational behaviour, strategic HRM, HRM in Industry 4.0, green HRM, and socially responsible HRM. He is also an experienced management consultant and professional trainer, specialising in managerial development, competency development, organisational effectiveness, and strategic human resource challenges across various industries.

Hazratgul Mohammadi holds a Master's in Business Management, specialising in Strategic Management, from the School of Business and Economics at Persian Gulf University. His research interests focus on human resource management and organisational behaviour, particularly the soft dimensions of HRM, including employee attitudes, behaviours, competencies, and organisational factors. He has published research articles in these fields and is interested in conducting applied research that contributes to a deeper understanding of human and organisational issues and supports effective management practices.

Azadeh Amoozegar is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education and Liberal Arts, INTI International University. She holds a PhD in Educational Technology from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM). She actively contributes to academic scholarship as a peer reviewer for several high-impact journals, demonstrating her commitment to advancing research quality in education. She has presented her work at numerous national and international conferences and has published extensively in reputable peer-reviewed journals. She has also received research awards and competitive grants in recognition of her scholarly contributions. In addition, she supervises postgraduate students and conducts workshops and training in data analytics, academic writing, and research methods. Her research interests include online learning, artificial intelligence in education, education for sustainable development, adaptive learning technologies, and instructional design.

Mohammad Falahat is a distinguished academic and researcher in the field of international entrepreneurship and SME development, currently serving as a Professor and the Director of the Strategic Research Institute (SRI) at the Asia Pacific University of Technology and Innovation (APU), Malaysia. He graduated as a Gold Medallist in International Entrepreneurship from Universiti Sains Malaysia. Over the years, he has published extensively in high-impact international journals (Scopus and Web of Science indexed), contributing significantly to knowledge on digitalisation, global market strategies, and emerging market enterprises. He is the recipient of multiple prestigious awards, including the Asian Research Excellence Award (2025) and the National Outstanding Researcher Award (2025), recognising his impactful contributions to academia and industry.

Sedigheh Shakib is an Associate Professor of English Teaching and the head of department of Education at New Uzbekistan University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan. She holds a PhD in TESL from Universiti Putra Malaysia and has over 20 years of experience in higher education, teaching, research, and teacher development. Her research interests include artificial intelligence in education, academic writing, corpus linguistics, technology-enhanced language learning, teacher education, and AI-assisted feedback. She has published extensively in Scopus-indexed and international peer-reviewed journals and has a strong interest in interdisciplinary research and publication. Her work particularly explores innovative and ethical applications of emerging technologies across language education and higher education.

Mahdi Mohamed Omar is the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management at Jamhuriya University of Science and Technology (JUST), Mogadishu, Somalia. His academic and research interests include applied economics, data analytics, sustainable development, climate variability, agricultural productivity, and economic policy, with particular attention to the Somali context. His recent research applies advanced econometric methods to examine the effects of climate conditions and production inputs on Somalia's agricultural output. In his leadership role, he supports academic quality, research development, and the preparation of graduates for careers in Somalia's public and private sectors.

1 Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic swept through every aspect of society, the realm of work was no exception to its effects. Within the chaos of the pandemic, a new trend known as 'quiet quitting' began to surface in workplaces. This intriguing concept was brought to light by the media and soon caught the attention of researchers, leading to analysis of its consequences (Formica and Sfodera, 2022). When younger employees began to quietly quit their jobs, discussions arose among employers and millennials alike. Employers viewed it as neglectful behaviour, while the younger generation saw it as simply fulfilling their contractual obligations (Atalay and Dağıstan, 2024; Richardson, 2023). New findings suggest that a large number of workers are reducing their work responsibilities, sparking conversations about the implication of quiet quitting (Formica and Sfodera, 2022; Hare, 2022). According to a recent Gallup survey, more than half of American employees are quietly disengaging, particularly impacting women and younger staff members who face restricted chances for advancement and a lack of meaningful

relationships in the workplace (Constantz, 2022). Therefore, characterising quiet quitting as a calibrated contribution, suggesting that employees are aligning their efforts with perceived rewards, or disengaging as a coping mechanism for stress, and burnout in the workplace (Richardson, 2023).

Engaging employees is essential in addressing the issue of quiet quitting, and it heavily relies on the implementation of effective management practices. According to an article in the *Harvard Business Review*, management plays a significant role, accounting for 70% of the variation in employee engagement. When management is ineffective, it becomes closely associated with quiet quitting, resulting in higher levels of disengagement among employees. Considering the significant role of managerial behaviour, organisations should focus on improving leadership practices to create highly engaged teams.

With the developing trend of quiet quitting in the business world getting the light of attention, a new concept emerges, that of quiet firing. This occurs when employers create unhealthy working environments, manipulatively pushing their workers to resign voluntarily (Ellera et al., 2023; Dai et al., 2023). In contrast to quiet quitting, where workers silently withdraw themselves due to the feeling that they are not valued, quiet firing involves deliberate actions by employers to indirectly terminate employment (Ellera et al., 2023), a tit-for-tat game with no risk of direct confrontation (Formica and Sfodera, 2022). Nevertheless, to address the problem of quiet quitting, managers do not need to resort to the understated approach, but rather they can work with the aspects of social capital. The strategy fosters active participation besides strengthening the bonds within the organisation (Ali et al., 2022). As researchers emphasise (Chang, 2017; Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), social capital fosters a cooperative atmosphere at the workplace, which enhances a smooth flow of communication and effective social interaction. Such relationships can result in cooperation and less responsibility to monitor, which relieves the pressure of working (Muniady et al., 2015). In addition, social capital is not limited to environments; it affects social exchange patterns and organisational behaviour (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Arregle et al., 2007).

In the same line of thought, our study hypothesises that social capital is a significant mediator between the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting. Social capital enables the promotion of desirable behaviours and the creation of essential resources including competence and a sense of belonging by enhancing the positive workplace environment (Anser et al., 2021; Chang, 2017; Lau and Cobb, 2010). Besides, it also works within the context of the crossover model, in which the stress and engagement of one person can affect the other in the same social group, and thus it has the potential to affect organisational dynamics (Bolger et al., 1989; Westman, 2001).

Given the critical role of petroleum and natural gas in meeting global energy demand – accounting for approximately 45% and 25%, respectively – the oil and gas industry exerts a substantial influence on international affairs and economic planning. Numerous petrochemical products rely on this sector, making it an integral component of daily life (Vasudevan et al., 2026). Consequently, the phenomenon of quiet quitting, which has been estimated to cost the global economy as much as US\$9 trillion annually – equivalent to roughly 9% of world GDP (Clifton, 2023) – cannot be overlooked in this industry. Therefore, this paper seeks to explore its effects in the Iranian oil, gas, and petroleum industry. Iran is among the most prolific crude oil and natural gas producers in the global community, which is why this country is the right place to discuss the outcomes of quiet quitting (Hosseini and Stefaniec, 2019). In the southern part of the Iran where a lot of

efforts are made to contribute to the national as well as the global economy, our study aims to enlighten the large-scale consequences of the quiet quitting in this crucial industry. Moreover, this research explores the usefulness of introducing the concept of quiet firing as a management technique used by employers to manage the issue of quietly quitting employees. In addition, the paper examines the potential of quiet quitting to become a massive industrial action in working environments that have strong social networks. This analysis is very crucial to organisations that want to be able to understand the factors that lead to collective behaviour among their employees. This study provides important information that can be used to shape organisational procedures in creating a cordial working environment and reducing the risk of employee discontent by illuminating the role of social capital in enhancing the likelihood of collective action.

Scholars have suggested that quiet quitting resembles low job engagement and diminished job satisfaction (Anand et al., 2024; Atiku et al., 2025). However, because QQ and quiet firing (QF) are relatively new constructs, their interrelationship has not yet been thoroughly examined in the academic literature. Accordingly, this study seeks to enhance researchers' understanding of how QQ and QF can be empirically measured and practically applied. More specifically, the paper aims to develop and validate measurement scales for QQ and QF to facilitate future research into these phenomena. Although quiet quitting (QQ) and quiet firing (QF) have received considerable attention in the popular press, scholarly discussions of these phenomena remain limited. To address this gap, a scoping review was conducted, involving searches across multiple databases to gather relevant information from credible sources in both the popular media and academic literature.

Given the limited empirical research on this topic, the present study advances several rationales for its investigation. First, quiet quitting (QQ) and quiet firing (QF) may fundamentally reshape the employee–employer relationship by reconfiguring the psychological contracts that underpin it. Second, this study contributes to the organisational, managerial, and human resource management (HRM) literature by developing a theoretically grounded and empirically validated measure of QQ and QF. Third, the findings are expected to assist HR practitioners, line managers, and senior executives in assessing a distinct dimension of employees' experiences, complementing routinely administered measures of engagement, job satisfaction, and turnover intention. Fourth, the study extends existing knowledge by positioning social capital as a mediating mechanism linking quiet firing to quiet quitting. By demonstrating that higher levels of social capital attenuate the adverse effects of quiet firing on employees' withdrawal behaviours, the research offers deeper insight into the organisational processes through which quiet firing shapes employee outcomes. Finally, the study provides contextual evidence from Iran's oil, gas, and petroleum sector, an underexamined setting in the QQ and QF literature. Investigating these phenomena within a collectivist cultural context and a strategically vital industry broadens the generalisability of existing theories and enhances the external validity of the findings. To clarify and operationalise these constructs, the subsequent sections review the relevant literature on QQ and QF, outline the methodology employed in scale development, and present directions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 *Quiet firing and quiet quitting*

The idea of ‘quiet quitting’, which refers to a situation in which workers continue to carry out their official duties while purposefully avoiding extra-role activities or discretionary efforts, has become popular in the workplace (Annasihi and Syaebani, 2026). Employees who are less productive and disengaged from work are often called ‘quiet quitters’ (Anand et al., 2024). Quiet quitting represents a significant and increasingly prevalent concern in contemporary workplaces (Campton et al., 2023; Hamouche et al., 2023; Kachhap and Singh, 2024). Quiet quitting reflects a growing trend of diminished work motivation among employees (Anand et al., 2024). It constitutes a form of workplace disengagement wherein employees intentionally limit their efforts to the minimum requirements of their roles to avoid termination (Talukder and Prieto, 2025). This behaviour involves performing only the essential duties stipulated in their job descriptions, deliberately refraining from any additional or discretionary contributions (Atiku et al., 2025). Consequently, quiet quitters remain employed but cease volunteering for additional responsibilities or engaging in activities that demonstrate strong job commitment, such as arriving early, staying late, or actively participating in meetings (Kachhap and Singh, 2024). Hence, quiet quitting occurs when individuals do the minimum amount of work required to avoid being fired, do not ‘go above and beyond’ the job requirements and/or are emotionally disengaged from work (Masterson, 2022).

In this approach, individuals fulfil all existing contractual obligations without extending their efforts beyond these parameters. The primary motivation behind this behaviour is to preserve their current employment status, with organisational objectives taking a backseat to personal well-being (Serenko, 2024). While definitions of quiet quitting differ, they all have one thing in common the employee does not literally quit one’s job but rather limits his/her activities to what is expected of the position and contractually agreed upon without going the extra mile (Scheyett, 2023; Hamouche et al., 2023; Boy and Sürmeli, 2023; Detert, 2023). Research regarding quiet quitting is divided, some think quiet quitting is a brand-new concept, while others argue that the only thing new about quiet quitting is, that it is no longer quiet. It has become loud and clear, and more people in increasing numbers are talking about it in the public fora. While it closely resembles collective industrial action like ‘work to rule’ and ‘acting your wage’ mechanisms unions in the past utilised to protest against the injustices in the workplace collectively, in its contemporary form quiet quitting resonates with younger generations and it has an individualistic psychological withdrawal connotation in it, employees resort to quiet quitting due to lack of wellbeing, burnout, extrinsic motivation, grudges against the managers and organisations in the workplace as well as unhealthy work environment (Serenko, 2024; Hamouche et al., 2023; Atalay and Dağıstan, 2024; Mohammadi et al., 2024). As per Gallup’s global workforce survey in 2022, only 33% of employees were engaged in the workplace, and the remaining 67% were either disengaged or actively disengaged in the workplace. It shows at least half of the workforce are disengaged which translates as quiet quitters, therefore it is a matter of great concern, regardless of which viewpoint is taken on quiet quitting, it has a tremendous effect on individuals, businesses and the economy as a whole (Yıldız, 2023; Campton et al., 2023).

Like ‘quiet quitting’, ‘quiet firing’ has also emerged in the workplace. Quiet firing is similar to quiet quitting in that the distancing and the potential separation between the

employer and employee are not communicated directly. They are also similar in that they are currently popular terms on social media and closely resemble other well-known organisational practices. However, QF is different from QQ in that it is an employer-driven behaviour (Anand et al., 2024). Quiet firing refers to passive-aggressive actions by management that create unfavourable working conditions, indirectly encouraging employees to resign (Annasihi and Syaebani, 2026). Quiet firing occurs when an employer intentionally creates a negative work situation, leading employees to resign (Ellera et al., 2023). QF can be referred to as a form of employers' passive-aggressive behaviour, such as nurturing a non-supportive work environment and subtly encouraging voluntary resignations (Atiku et al., 2025). Quiet firing describes managers' negligence or failure to provide sufficient coaching, support, and career advancement to employees to squeeze them out of the organisation (Ellera et al., 2023). Examples of quiet firing practices include increasing employees' workloads and tasks, restricting their participation in new projects, and impeding their access to career promotions (Nunes and Pimenta, 2024). Empirical evidence by Othman et al. (2025) confirms that quiet firing significantly influences quiet quitting behaviour. Similarly, Annasihi and Syaebani (2026) reported that quiet firing has a significant positive effect on quiet quitting. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1 Quiet firing has a significant positive impact on quiet quitting.

2.2 *Quiet firing and social capital*

There are various signs that a manager might be quietly letting go of an employee, such as altering work responsibilities (like shifting important tasks to others or changing job descriptions), making changes to compensation (such as pay cuts or withholding bonuses), adjusting working conditions (like changing hours or increasing workloads), and altering communication with the employee (like avoiding discussions about career growth or giving unfair evaluations) (Sartori et al., 2026). These outcomes could be a direct result of the gig economy. An increasing number of American workers are no longer engaged in traditional 'jobs' that involve a lasting commitment to a single company. Instead, they are engaged for short-term 'gigs' under 'flexible' arrangements as 'independent contractors' or 'consultants,' working solely to fulfil a specific task or for a set period, with minimal connection to their employer, akin to that between a consumer and a specific brand of soap or potato chips.

While some view the emergence of this 'gig' economy as a reflection of the desires of a more entrepreneurial generation, it is more probable that it is motivated by businesses' desires to reduce wages and benefit expenses during economic downturns, as well as to minimise their exposure to unjust dismissal lawsuits (Friedman, 2014; Healy et al., 2017). Many platforms utilise contractual agreements with workers in order to circumvent expenses related to employment and transfer financial risks to the workers (Cherry, 2015). The gig workers in high-income countries often face precarious employment conditions that can have detrimental effects on their health. This is also true for the majority of digital economy workers who are exposed to such conditions. Some people might argue that digital platform workers represent a specific social group or that they do not belong to any social group (Muntaner, 2018). The traditional social capital is experiencing significant challenges in the dynamic nature of the gig economy, where there are short-term commitments and temporary employment arrangements. As more

people are engaged in independent and flexible work, the social cohesiveness and mutual trust that come with social capital are slowly being destroyed (Muntaner, 2018; Wood et al., 2019).

Managers in a conventional workplace can use a number of methods to fire employees in a subtle manner, which eventually leads to a loss of social relationships. This may be so because, as businesses are tightening their belts, they will consider cutting the number of employees. Nevertheless, mass layoffs are dangerous and expensive, and the managers employ a less obvious method. They can also start by locking out an employee during significant meetings, projects, or decisions, thus reducing social interactions and creating an isolationist feeling. In addition, the managers can give out less feedback, coaching, or guidance, which prevents the professional development of the employees and makes them feel underestimated. Delegation of duties will send a signal of no trust or confidence to the employee, and this may affect their social status in the organisation. Negative performance reviews or feedback also led to a destroyed reputation and relationship. Besides, the participation in the behaviour of isolation, such as rumours or the development of a negative workplace atmosphere, may lead to the deprivation of social support and relationships (Sartori et al., 2026; Gallup, 2022). In this way, it is clear that the inconspicuous dismissal might lead to a negative influence on the social capital. Therefore, based on the empirical evidence, this study formulates the following hypothesis:

H2 Quiet firing has a significant negative impact on social capital.

2.3 *Social capital and quiet quitting*

Social capital is a multifaceted phenomenon that comprises different aspects, including structural, relational, and cognitive aspects. Various writers have emphasised on various aspects of this complex phenomenon. The term was applied originally in community studies to underscore its significance in the operation and sustenance of the neighbourhoods within cities. The social capital theory states that networks of relationships are useful social resources like economic resources (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Bourdieu, 1986). Among the central theses of the social capital theory, one may distinguish the fact that it allows achieving the goals that would not be possible or would be more expensive to reach. Social capital is unlike other types of capital because it is a collective possession of the members and there are no exclusive rights to it (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Burt, 1997). This implies that managers have difficulties in detecting and isolating those individuals who might be losing interest in an organisation. Social groups can be easily used to disseminate information and this may destabilise an already worsening workplace environment (Kelly et al., 2025).

It has already been demonstrated in the previous studies that social capital can affect the job satisfaction of employees either directly or indirectly (Hameed et al., 2022). It also relates to psychological capital and the mental condition of people and eventually affects their job satisfaction (Edinger and Edinger, 2018). It has also been determined that social capital is a strong predictor of turnover intention among employees and is mediated by job burnout and job satisfaction (Zhang et al., 2022). Thus, the third hypothesis is suggested, which assumes that social capital can reduce quiet quitting. When people feel that they are supported and related to one another, they become less determined to silently resign their duties and obligations. Social capital develops a

positive climate in which employees will be more willing to face challenges, demonstrate the desire to go out of their way, and offer support to their colleagues and management. Accordingly, this study formulates the following hypothesis based on the existing empirical evidence:

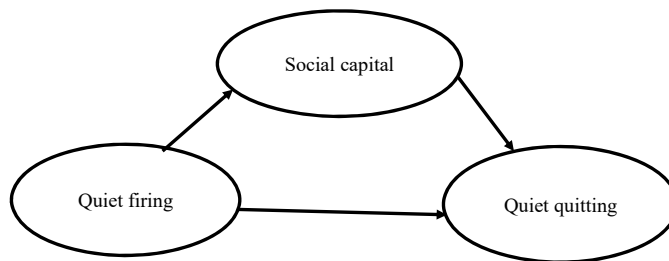
H3 Social capital has a significant negative impact on quiet quitting.

2.4 Social capital as a mediator

The social capital, which includes socialising, trust, and reciprocity, is important in protecting and improving health through an increased feeling of control. Poorer people are more likely to use social capital to develop and maintain a sense of control because of their limited access to monetary means (Han et al., 2023). As one of the most important factors defining the quality of life, social capital provides people with the resources and support they need to enhance their general well-being. Consequently, in order to enhance the quality of life within organisational settings, practitioners and managers may concentrate on cultivating social networks and relationships among employees, while ensuring equitable access to resources for all individuals (Nutakor et al., 2023). Moreover, there exists a moderate correlation between social capital and career engagement (Sou et al., 2022). Recent research on social capital consistently indicates that augmenting employees' well-being and job satisfaction in the workplace leads to reduced levels of burnout and disengagement (Nutakor et al., 2023; Hameed et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Sou et al., 2022). According to a Gallup report, disengagement in the workplace is akin to quiet quitting, and fostering social capital can also help mitigate signs of a toxic work environment (Jenkins and Fredrick, 2017). Consequently, the fourth hypothesis is proposed. Collectively, the reviewed literature and proposed hypotheses form the basis of the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.

H4 The indirect impact of quiet firing on quiet quitting is negatively mediated by social capital.

Figure 1 Conceptual framework



3 Research method

The study focused on employees in the southern region of the Iranian oil, gas, and petroleum industry. Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the industry experienced significant challenges such as increased costs, decreased revenue, delayed

deliveries, and failure to meet contractual obligations (Razavi et al., 2022). Consequently, there is a high likelihood of employees being quietly fired or quietly quitting within this industry. In order to collect data, a survey was conducted within the oil, gas, and petroleum industry in the southern part of Iran, where approximately 80 companies were operating. Data was collected using a Google form between 10 September 2023 and 10 December 2023, with a simple random sampling method. The human resources departments of 67 of these companies were first approached by the researchers to enable them to distribute the questionnaires. During the survey process, 800 questionnaires were given out. In December, a reminder was sent to elicit responses. In the end, 500 questionnaires were filled out and returned, and 410 of them were viewed as valid enough to be analysed, which resulted in a response rate of 51.25.

The distribution of the respondents is that of a male-dominated industry, due to the fact that 93.7% of the people involved are male. Additionally, 92% of the respondents were below the age of 40 years. The majority of participants held a master's degree and had between 5 and 10 years of work experience in the industry (refer to Table 1 for more details). The questionnaire utilised a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'totally disagree' and 5 representing 'totally agree'. Three questionnaires were used to collect data in this study. Quiet firing was measured using a questionnaire developed by Anand et al. (2024), consisting of seven questions. Sample items from this questionnaire include statements such as "my manager/supervisor has increased my workload, but there has been no raise or increase in pay" and "my manager/supervisor has shown less interest in my career trajectory/development." The measurement of social capital was adopted from the model proposed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998), which consisted of 12 questions. Sample items from this questionnaire include statements such as "my colleagues in the company critique each other in a healthy and constructive manner" and "employees share information, ideas, and other resources to accomplish their tasks." The instrument for measuring quiet quitting was developed by the authors, drawing inspiration from the work of Harter et al. (2002) and Maslach and Jackson (1981). Example questions from this instrument include statements such as "I feel emotionally drained by my work" and "I don't have the necessary materials and equipment I need to do my work right in the company." Data analysis was performed employing SmartPLS 3.2.8 and IBM SPSS 26.

Table 1 Profile of respondents

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>VP</i>	<i>CP</i>
Male	384	93.7	93.7
Female	26	6.3	100.0
Total	410	100.0	
<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>VP</i>	<i>CP</i>
Less than 30 years	45	11.0	11.0
30–40 years	332	81.0	92.0
40–50 years	33	8.0	100.0
Total	410	100.0	

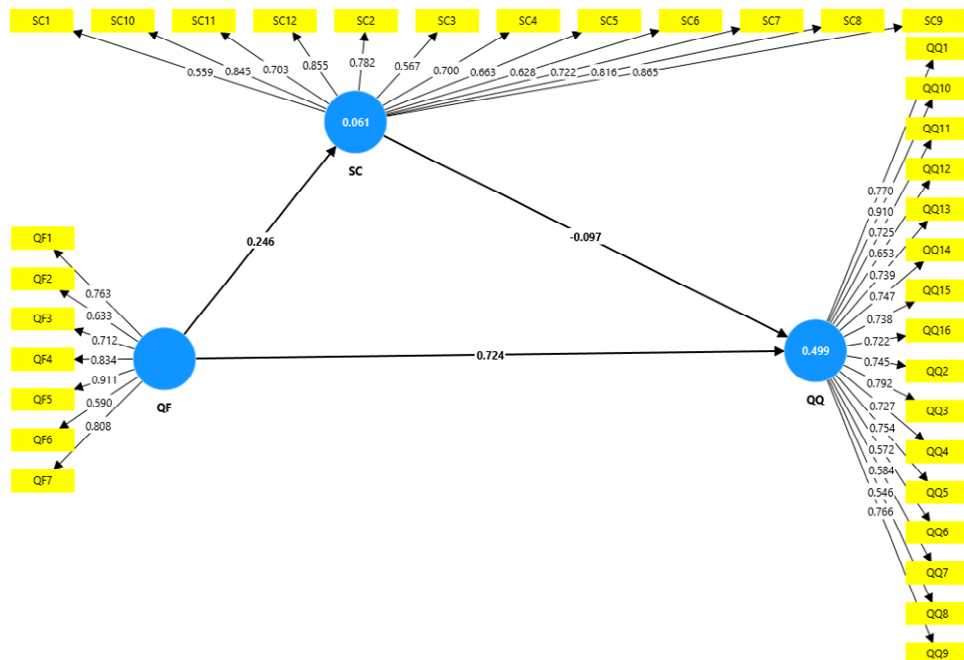
Notes: VP = valid percent; CP = cumulative percent.

4 Data analysis and results

4.1 Measurement model

The measurement model serves to establish the relationship between the indicators and the constructs (Osman et al., 2024) (Figure 2). This section plays a crucial role in evaluating the reliability and validity of the instruments. During the examination of the measurement model, indicators with low factor loadings (below 0.5) were removed from the study (Hair et al., 2016). As a result, no item was excluded from data analysis. The first aspect that needs to be addressed when assessing the measurement model is reliability, which is determined by Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Previous studies have suggested a desired threshold of above 0.7 and below 0.95 (Hair et al., 2017).

Figure 2 Measurement model (see online version for colours)



Based on this criterion, all the constructs in this study demonstrated the desired level of reliability (shown in Table 2). The second component of the measurement model is validity. Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), with a threshold of 0.5 (Chin, 1998), which all the constructs were this threshold (refer to Table 2). As for discriminant validity, researchers often rely on the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings. However, the HTMT ratio has recently been proposed, particularly in studies utilising PLS-SEM. The conservative cut-off for HTMT is 0.85 or lower when the concepts being measured are distinct (Hair et al., 2012; Henseler et al., 2015). In this study, all the HTMT values were below the mentioned cut-off (see

Table 3). The content and face validity of the instruments were confirmed by the industry professionals and academicians.

Table 2 Reliability and convergent validity

<i>Constructs and items</i>	<i>Loadings</i>	<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>	<i>CR</i>	<i>AVE</i>
Quiet firing		0.872	0.902	0.573
QF1	0.763			
QF2	0.633			
QF3	0.712			
QF4	0.834			
QF5	0.911			
QF6	0.590			
QF7	0.808			
Quiet quitting		0.938	0.945	0.524
QQ1	0.770			
QQ10	0.910			
QQ11	0.725			
QQ12	0.653			
QQ13	0.739			
QQ14	0.747			
QQ15	0.738			
QQ16	0.722			
QQ2	0.745			
QQ3	0.792			
QQ4	0.727			
QQ5	0.754			
QQ6	0.572			
QQ8	0.584			
QQ9	0.546			
Social capital		0.924	0.932	0.537
SC1	0.559			
SC10	0.845			
SC11	0.703			
SC12	0.855			
SC2	0.782			
SC3	0.567			
SC4	0.700			
SC5	0.663			
SC6	0.628			
SC7	0.722			
SC8	0.816			
SC9	0.865			

Table 3 Discriminant validity

<i>Items/variables</i>	<i>Quiet firing</i>	<i>Quiet quitting</i>	<i>Social capital</i>
<i>Cross-loadings</i>			
QF1	0.763	0.542	0.488
QF2	0.633	0.420	0.240
QF3	0.712	0.482	0.380
QF4	0.834	0.573	0.412
QF5	0.911	0.610	0.410
QF6	0.590	0.380	0.055
QF7	0.808	0.624	0.274
QQ1	0.541	0.770	0.390
QQ10	0.643	0.910	0.332
QQ11	0.388	0.725	0.263
QQ12	0.456	0.653	0.152
QQ13	0.529	0.739	0.320
QQ14	0.539	0.747	0.306
QQ15	0.463	0.738	0.292
QQ16	0.486	0.722	0.315
QQ2	0.492	0.745	0.301
QQ3	0.533	0.792	0.311
QQ4	0.529	0.727	0.345
QQ5	0.540	0.754	0.409
QQ6	0.524	0.572	0.147
QQ8	0.388	0.584	0.134
QQ9	0.512	0.546	0.315
SC1	0.322	0.285	0.559
SC10	0.393	0.271	0.845
SC11	0.189	0.210	0.703
SC12	0.522	0.405	0.855
SC2	0.290	0.283	0.782
SC3	0.260	0.285	0.567
SC4	0.223	0.154	0.700
SC5	0.339	0.308	0.663
SC6	0.346	0.371	0.628
SC7	0.340	0.288	0.722
SC8	0.353	0.311	0.816
SC9	0.284	0.282	0.865

Notes: QF = quiet firing; QQ = quiet quitting; SC = social capital.

Table 3 Discriminant validity (continued)

<i>Items/variables</i>	<i>Quiet firing</i>	<i>Quiet quitting</i>	<i>Social capital</i>
<i>Fornell-Larcker criterion</i>			
QF	0.757		
QQ	0.700	0.727	
SC	0.246	0.081	0.733
<i>Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)</i>			
QF			
QQ	0.767		
SC	0.221	0.111	

Notes: QF = quiet firing; QQ = quiet quitting; SC = social capital.

4.2 Structural model

Once the measurement model turns out to be satisfactory, the second step is to evaluate the structural model which shows the relationship between latent constructs (Figure 3). In this study, H1 assesses if quiet firing has significant positive impact on quiet quitting. The results appeared to be significant (direct effect: $\beta = 0.724$, $t = 26.909$ and $p = 0.000$). therefore, H1 is confirmed. The second hypothesis evaluates whether quiet firing has a significant negative impact on social capital. The result turned out to be insignificant ($\beta = 0.246$, $t = 5.969$ and $p = 0.000$). H3 examines whether social capital has a significant negative impact on quiet quitting. The result of the third hypothesis is supported ($\beta = -0.097$, $t = 2.513$ and $p = 0.012$). The last hypothesis evaluates the negative mediating role of social capital in the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting. The result of the H1 (direct impact) was significant, when the mediator was introduced into the model the total effect decreased ($\beta = 0.700$, $t = 25.338$ and $p = 0.000$). Hence, impact of quiet firing on quiet quitting is partially mediated through social capital, the results are demonstrated in Tables 4 and 5. As part of the structural model R^2 and Q^2 (in sample and out of sample predictive power of the model is necessary to be evaluated), the results are presented in Table 6.

Table 4 Hypotheses evaluation

	<i>Path coefficient</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>T statistics</i>	<i>P values</i>
H1 QF -> QQ	0.724	0.027	26.909	0.000
H2 QF -> SC	0.246	0.041	5.969	0.000
H3 SC -> QQ	-0.097	0.039	2.513	0.012

Notes: SD = standard deviation.

Table 5 Mediation analysis

<i>Paths</i>	<i>Path coefficient</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>P value</i>
Direct effects	0.727	0.027	26.909	0.000
Indirect effects	-0.024	0.011	2.248	0.025
Total effects	0.700	0.028	25.338	0.000

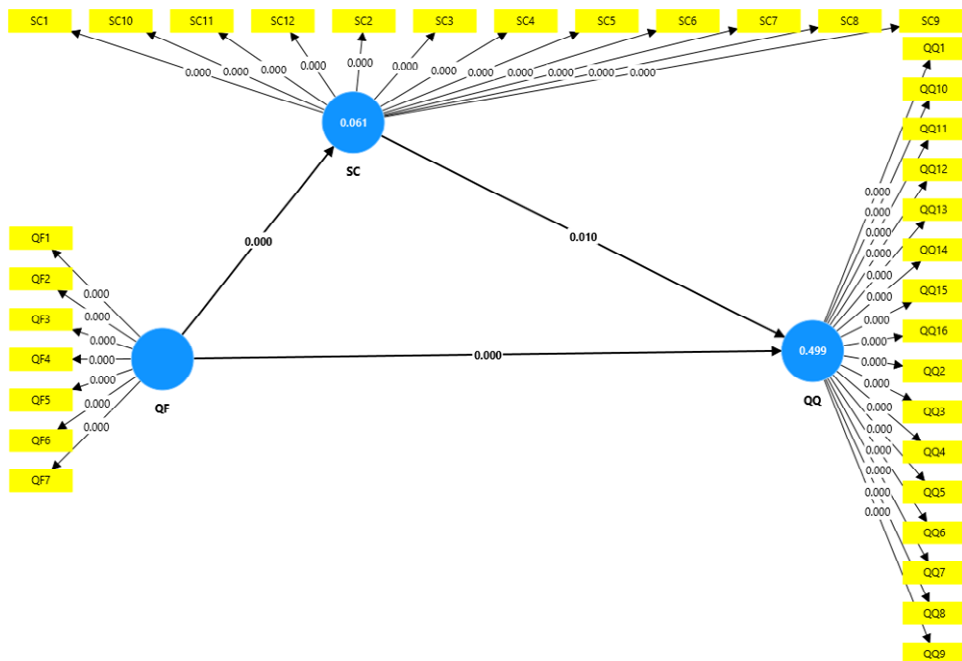
Table 6 Coefficient of determination and Q^2

	R^2	SD	T statistics	P values	Q^2
Quiet quitting	0.449	0.038	13.212	0.000	0.240
Social capital	0.061	0.021	2.890	0.004	0.022

Notes: R^2 = coefficient of determination; SD = standard deviation; Q^2 = model predictive relevance.

5 Discussion

The study investigated the impact of quiet firing on quiet quitting, considering the mediating function of social capital through the formulation of four hypotheses. With the exception of the second hypothesis, all hypotheses were substantiated through empirical evidence. Examination of demographics indicated that the oil, gas, and petroleum industry in the southern region of Iran is predominantly male-oriented, accounting for approximately 93.7%. However, this does not imply an unsupportive environment for female workers; rather, the limited number of female participants in the study had less than five years of industry experience, indicating a demographic transition. Most employees were aged between 30 and 40 years with a master degree level of education.

Figure 3 Structural model (see online version for colours)

H1 implies that there is a strong positive influence of quiet firing on quiet quitting. The observation is consistent with the thesis by Bailey and Madden (2019), who state that in case of dissatisfaction and absence of meaning in the work, employees use coping

mechanisms that include the unwillingness to take more duties. As analysis shows, those employees, who feel that the work they perform is not satisfying and fulfilling, are inclined to turn emotionally noncommittal to their work, which means that they are able to make only a minimum contribution. Rather they find meaning and satisfaction in other areas besides work like personal hobbies. It can be considered a deliberate reaction to the alleged meaninglessness of their work. Thus, the managers who deliberately establish an unsatisfactory and unfulfilling workplace atmosphere in order to promote voluntary resignation may lead to silent quitting by employees (Sartori et al., 2026). The effect of the quiet firing may be regarded as a passive-aggressive conduct that fills the whole organisation and results in the loss of highly treasured staff (Anand et al., 2024). COVID-19 and its post-pandemic consequences have caused employees to become more burdened, as well as other changes that have happened in the workplace. This has usually been at the cost of their health and personal life and no extra incentive other than job security. This has made employees feel that they have not been valued and appreciated to do the additional roles they have assumed. The absence of appreciation even in a small form of a simple thank you has disillusioned and demoralised employees. This has resulted in emotional exhaustion, resentment, and a psychological disengagement from work, known as quiet quitting. Research by Cartwright and Holmes (2006), Scheyett (2023) and Cohen (2022) supports the idea that employees align their efforts with the rewards they receive from their employers. However, the creation of a negative and unappreciative work environment may be unintentional or deliberate, as companies increasingly opt for subtle methods such as layoffs to avoid future repercussions, particularly during times of financial uncertainty (Richardson, 2023; Dai et al., 2023; Sartori et al., 2026).

The second hypothesis (H2) that quiet firing has a significant negative impact on social capital is rejected. This conforms with studies which claim that social capital rises during the youthful period and then falls with age. In this study the majority of participants were between the ages of 30 to 40 years, moreover, when there is a paucity of high-quality organisations and insurance, social capital provides a safety net especially during challenging times in developing countries (Glaeser et al., 2002; Rosenzweig, 1988; Fafchamps and Lund, 2003). Furthermore, to extract from disaster management, it is shown that a higher level of bonding is associated with a lower level of vulnerability, implying ‘better together’ (Fraser and Naquin, 2022), when employees sense vulnerability within organisations they form stronger social support to gain access to information on potential layoffs, collective bargaining power and emotional and psychological support to navigate the perceived stress of the potential job loss. In addition, although it may not be appropriate to distinguish between ‘good’ or ‘bad’ social capital, but contextual dependent nature of social capital should be taken into consideration (Baycan and Öner, 2023), in the context of this study as the country is under sanction, the companies experience extreme volatility and uncertainty, in this environment employees form social capital as a strategic response to possible tactical manoeuvres like discreet dismissing and quiet firing.

Social capital has a significant negative impact on quiet quitting (H3) has been accepted. This is in line with (Laurence and Kim, 2021) study which found that individual-level social capital is linked to lower psychological distress, moreover, social capital buffers the harm of distancing among individuals with stronger community ties with frequent interactions. This indicates that employees with stronger social capital when burdened with extra responsibilities or unpleasant circumstances are more inclined

to resist the urge of quiet quitting and channelise the emotional burden by interacting frequently with colleagues and social groups. Additionally, studies have also found a positive relationship between job security and perceived social capital (Parzefall and Kuppelwieser, 2012). Unlike other forms of capital, social capital is collectively owned by its members, and no one has exclusive rights to it (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Burt, 1997). This means that managers face challenges when trying to identify and isolate individuals who may be disengaging from the organisation. Information can easily spread through social groups, potentially destabilising an already deteriorating workplace environment (Kelly et al., 2025). When people feel supported and connected, they are less likely to quietly quit their responsibilities (Ruiz-Palomino et al., 2023). Social capital creates a positive atmosphere where employees are more willing to face challenges, show enthusiasm to excel, and offer help to their colleagues and bosses. They may go the extra mile in their tasks, knowing that if they are not rewarded for their efforts, they have a network of support to back them up in fighting against unfair treatment. This situation of not quietly quitting is reminiscent of the concept of ‘work to rule’, where employees collectively push back against perceived injustices, rather than dealing with them individually, although some degree of individual psychological detachment may still exist.

The support for the fourth hypothesis (H4), which states that social capital has a negative mediating role in the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting, has been demonstrated in Table 5. The finding aligns with previous studies that argue social capital, as a crucial factor in determining quality of life, empowers individuals by providing them with the necessary support and resources to enhance their overall well-being. Consequently, in order to improve the quality of life within organisations, practitioners and managers should focus on fostering social networks and relationships among employees, while ensuring equal access to resources for all individuals (Beausaert et al., 2023; Nutakor et al., 2023). This approach ultimately leads to increased career engagement (Sou et al., 2022). Recent research consistently indicates that enhancing employees’ well-being and job satisfaction in the workplace through social capital results in lower levels of burnout and disengagement (Nutakor et al., 2023; Hameed et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022; Sou et al., 2022). Hence, it can be deduced that organisations possessing robust social capital cultivate a heightened feeling of contentment and fulfilment in their workforce. Consequently, it can be interpreted that within such organisations, employees experience a greater sense of well-being and job satisfaction. Thus, when employees perceive subtle and strategic forms of termination, they are inclined to seek help and assistance from the social group and network they are in.

6 Theoretical and practical implications

This study holds immense significance, both in theory and practice, for both management and employees. In terms of theory, contributions regarding quiet quitting in the oil, gas, and petroleum industry remain significantly limited. The distinctive features and high-pressure nature of this industry necessitate a deeper exploration of quiet quitting, which is not adequately represented in current academic literature. This gap underscores the significance of our research, which provides a new perspective on the symptoms of quiet quitting and the factors that influence it in this industry specifically. Our findings

contribute to the general understanding of employee disengagement and its outcomes in a crucial and challenging industry since the study is done in an untapped field. Moreover, scholars have also argued whether quiet quitting is comparable to the traditional collective industrial action. This paper will respond to this issue by considering the notion of social capital. The results indicate that companies that have more social capital have a shift in the behaviour of quiet quitting, which is similar to the collective industrial action. To employees, the implication is that the understanding of the dynamics at the workplace and the importance of social capital in times of trouble and uncertainty is paramount. Conversely, to the management, it may be helpful to understand the possible adverse effects of quiet quitting. Through this research, the management is able to modify their organisational strategy in order to handle quiet quitters. By investing in open communication, trust, transparency, and a favourable work environment, the management can embrace the power of social capital, which will contribute to better work engagement.

This study advances theoretical understanding by conceptualising quiet firing and quiet quitting as covert, reciprocal behaviours within the psychological contract framework, thereby extending psychological contract theory to encompass low-visibility, non-confrontational breach and retaliation dynamics rather than overt conflict or formal exit. By revealing that social capital negatively mediates the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting, the findings enrich social exchange theory by demonstrating that strong relational networks and shared norms can buffer adverse managerial behaviours, mitigating negative reciprocity rather than merely promoting positive reciprocity. The result that over half of quiet quitting is attributable to quiet quitting challenges prevailing job withdrawal and disengagement models by foregrounding employer actions and organisational climate as key antecedents of withdrawal, rather than attributing quiet quitting solely to individual attitudes or job satisfaction. Furthermore, the observation that employees in high-social capital organisations may adopt a ‘work-to-rule’ approach despite psychological detachment introduces a nuanced coping and adaptation perspective, suggesting that employees may strategically preserve relational capital while limiting emotional investment, thus extending understanding of boundary-setting behaviours in adverse work contexts. Finally, by situating these dynamics within the collectivist, high-stakes Iranian oil, gas, and petroleum industry, the study enhances the contextual validity and cross-cultural applicability of organisational behaviour theories, underscoring the universality of covert reciprocal mechanisms across diverse cultural and industrial settings.

An increase in social capital has been established to be associated with reduced levels of quiet quitting. This implies that strong social ties, networks, and relationships in the workplace can be fostered to assist in reengaging the employees. The social capital assists employees in addressing the negative effects of quiet firing as a mediator, which eventually leads to a higher rate of employee retention and the overall well-being.

The shift between the passive quitting of the individual and an organised industrial reaction is possible in certain conditions. As employees experience repeated cases of covert dismissal, which leads to a loss of confidence in the organisation and a sense of injustice, they may seek the help of other people who may be in the same position. This common experience may foster a sense of solidarity and encourage employees to become involved in coordinated activities such as forming labour unions, mounting demonstrations, or becoming the subjects of collective bargaining.

Additionally, there is also the possibility that the probability of collective initiatives after quiet firing may be caused by other factors such as shared grievances associated with perceived injustices, absence of transparency, or dissatisfaction with organisational practices. These factors may help to develop a sense of unity among the employees, as they will consider taking collective action to address their problems.

7 Limitation and upcoming research directions

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted in a country characterised by Islamic values and strong family ties. These cultural characteristics may influence employees' perceptions and behaviours related to quiet quitting, thereby limiting the generalisability of the findings to other cultural contexts. Second, the study focused on a single industry, which may restrict the applicability of the findings to organisations operating in other sectors. Third, social capital was examined as a higher-order construct without investigating the individual effects of its three dimensions. Finally, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to establish causal relationships among the study variables.

Future research should address these limitations by conducting empirical validation in different cultural settings, particularly in more individualistic societies, to examine the robustness and generalisability of the proposed relationships. Comparative studies across countries, industries, and organisational contexts would provide a deeper understanding of how cultural and sectoral differences influence quiet quitting behaviour. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate the phenomenon in diverse industries, such as banking, information technology, healthcare, and manufacturing, to determine whether the findings remain consistent across organisational settings.

In addition, future studies should examine the individual dimensions of social capital (structural, relational, and cognitive social capital) to determine their distinct contributions to quiet quitting behaviour. Further research may also incorporate organisational factors, such as leadership styles, organisational culture, employee engagement, and psychological safety, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the antecedents and boundary conditions of quiet quitting.

Finally, future studies are encouraged to employ alternative methodological approaches to strengthen and extend the current findings. Longitudinal research designs would help establish causal relationships and capture changes in employee behaviour over time, while mixed-methods or qualitative approaches could provide richer insights into employees' experiences and motivations. Multi-source data collection, experimental designs, and cross-cultural comparative research would further enhance the validity, reliability, and generalisability of the findings.

8 Conclusions

The literature on the constructs of quiet firing and quiet quitting has largely neglected the factors that influence them. This study is the first to empirically establish a connection between quiet firing and quiet quitting, highlighting the mediating role of social capital.

Although the intention behind quiet firing may remain hidden and covert, the study confirms that its consequences and repercussions are not. The findings reveal that nearly half of quiet quitting instances can be attributed to quiet firing.

The findings of this study indicate that fostering motivation and encouraging employees to participate in extra-role behaviours should not depend on punitive strategies that generate fear of job loss or contribute to an unpleasant and toxic work atmosphere. Such approaches may lead to employees psychologically disengaging from their work without openly expressing their dissatisfaction.

The adverse effect of social capital on the quiet quitting phenomenon suggests that the tendency of employees to withdraw can be mitigated by stronger and more effective social networks and interpersonal relationships at the workplace. Moreover, the presence of social capital also affects the relationship between quiet firing and quiet quitting in that higher social capital may reduce the adverse effects of quiet firing on incidences of quiet quitting. To conclude, quiet quitting can be minimised by creating a supportive and interconnected workplace, and the negative effects of quiet firing can be minimised. Therefore, organisations are advised to pay attention to building a good social network and creating favourable relations between employees to enhance engagement and work satisfaction in general.

Data analysis also resulted in an interesting observation that quiet firing seems to positively affect social capital. This is what happens whereby a marginalisation or exit of an employee can be subtle, but it may support social networks in the organisation inadvertently. This effect may occur because the rest of the employees will be coming together to deal with the loss of a workmate, which will lead to increased cooperation and support. Nevertheless, even though the social capital may be improved, the net effect on quiet quitting is negative. This implies that although social capital might be enhanced after cases of quiet firing, it does not serve effectively in reducing the tendencies of disengagement among employees. It is argued that the changes in the collective perception of the employment practices prompt a parallel change in the collective response, which may be positive or negative. This response eventually affects the performance benefits of organisational social capital, which leads to either profit or loss (Minbaeva and Navrbjerg, 2016). This scenario depicts the complexity of the interaction between these variables, which explains why organisations should plan how their employees leave the organisation and which mechanisms should incentivise the balance between the benefits of social capital and the need to maintain high rates of engagement and morale.

Declarations

During revisions, the authors used Grammarly (an AI-assisted proofreading tool) solely for grammar and abbreviations consistency checks. No AI tools were used to generate scientific content, conduct analyses, or draw conclusions. While such tools are useful for limited support tasks, they do not replace human expertise. After using Grammarly, the authors reviewed and edited all content and take full responsibility for the accuracy and integrity of the manuscript.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation in this study. Participants were provided with information regarding the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Consent was indicated electronically before completing the online survey.

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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