



ARTICLE

## Quiet Quitting among Tunisian Civil Servants: A Quantitative Analysis of Organizational Antecedents

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### ABSTRACT

Quiet quitting—employees’ strategic reduction of discretionary effort while maintaining contractual obligations—has emerged as a critical concern in organizational psychology. Yet empirical research remains largely Western-centric and private-sector focused. This study addresses these gaps through the first quantitative analysis of quiet quitting antecedents among Tunisian public servants, integrating Job Demands–Resources (JD-R), social exchange, and Conservation of Resources (COR) frameworks. Drawing on a context-sensitive perspective, the study conceptualizes quiet quitting as a rational adaptive response to sustained organizational imbalance rather than as an individual or generational deviation. Based on data collected from 124 Tunisian civil servants across multiple public sectors, hierarchical regression analysis ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) reveals organizational recognition ( $\beta = -0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and workload ( $\beta = 0.23$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) as dominant predictors, confirming their roles as core motivational resources and stress-inducing demands within the JD-R framework. Managerial support and organizational justice show expected directional trends ( $p \approx 0.09$ ) but limited direct effects, suggesting that their influence may be constrained by bureaucratic rigidity and centralized decision-making structures characteristic of public administration. Findings position quiet quitting as a form of psychological adjustment shaped by high job security and limited exit opportunities, rather than as individual deviance. Theoretically, results advocate greater contextualization of disengagement models by integrating institutional constraints and employment regimes. In

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#### ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 October 2025 | Revised: 5 December 2025 | Accepted: 13 December 2025 | Published Online: 19 December 2025  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63385/hrsp.v1i1.442>

#### CITATION

Achour, Z., 2025. Quiet Quitting among Tunisian Civil Servants: A Quantitative Analysis of Organizational Antecedents. *Human Resource Strategy and Practice*. 1(1): 14–28. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63385/hrsp.v1i1.442>

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practice, interventions should prioritize recognition systems and workload management to restore reciprocity, conserve employee resources, and sustain functional engagement within public-sector organizations.

**Keywords:** Quit Quitting; Organizational Recognition; Workload; JD-R Model; Tunisian Public Sector

## 1. Introduction

Quiet quitting has emerged today as one of the most debated forms of employee disengagement. It refers to a deliberate psychological withdrawal in which employees limit themselves strictly to contractual obligations—maintaining their physical presence while reducing cognitive and emotional engagement<sup>[1,2]</sup>. Unlike turnover, which involves a formal departure, this attitude corresponds to a lasting withdrawal without a contractual break—a true “paradox of presence.”

Although rooted in classical research on work engagement and organizational loyalty, quiet quitting has experienced renewed scholarly attention in the post-pandemic period<sup>[3–5]</sup>. It differs from other forms of disengagement, such as burnout or organizational cynicism, by its behavioral nature—it represents a strategic recalibration of effort: doing what is strictly required rather than exceeding expectations<sup>[3]</sup>. This phenomenon is interpreted less as an individual pathology and more as an adaptive response to unsatisfactory organizational conditions<sup>[4]</sup>.

Quiet quitting takes on particular significance in the Tunisian public service, marked by persistent structural constraints—budgetary restrictions inherited from economic transitions, rigid hierarchies, limited mobility, and growing societal expectations<sup>[6]</sup>. Combined with workload pressures, lack of recognition, and managerial dysfunctions, these conditions are commonly associated with psychological withdrawal. According to the 2025 Gallup Global Report<sup>[7]</sup>, only 8% of Tunisian employees declare themselves engaged—one of the lowest rates worldwide. In a public sector representing 13% of the labor force, where job security limits mobility, amid high youth unemployment, massive underemployment, and scarce private sector alternatives, disengagement manifests more often through psychological withdrawal than formal exit.

While several of these organizational features—such as budgetary constraints, centralized decision-making, and bureaucratic rigidity—are common to public administrations

worldwide, the Tunisian public sector presents distinctive contextual characteristics that warrant specific empirical investigation. Beyond structural similarities with public bureaucracies, Tunisia’s administrative landscape is shaped by unique cultural and institutional factors: high power distance and hierarchical acceptance rooted in Arab-Mediterranean cultural traditions, ongoing institutional instability following the 2011 political transition<sup>[6]</sup>, and tensions between traditional administrative norms and rising demands for transparency and meritocracy. These factors may amplify or alter the mechanisms through which organizational conditions influence employee disengagement. Consequently, this study examines how these culturally and institutionally specific conditions shape the antecedents of quiet quitting.

Despite the growing debate, empirical research remains concentrated in Western contexts. Three major gaps persist: (a) geographical—a lack of studies within Arab public administrations<sup>[8]</sup>; (b) sectoral—research remains dominated by private-sector samples<sup>[9,10]</sup>, and (c) methodological—few validated quantitative approaches have been developed<sup>[2,3,11]</sup>.

This study addresses these gaps by offering the first quantitative analysis of the organizational antecedents of quiet quitting within the Tunisian civil service. It pursues two main objectives:

- To estimate the prevalence and intensity of the phenomenon;
- To identify its organizational determinants through statistical modeling, controlling for individual variables.

Three research questions guide the investigation:

- RQ1: What is the prevalence of quiet quitting among Tunisian public servants?
- RQ2: Which organizational factors—recognition, workload, managerial support, and perceived justice—predict its occurrence?
- RQ3: What is the relative contribution of these variables within the specific institutional con-

text of Tunisia's public administration?

To answer these questions, a quantitative methodological approach was adopted, based on a questionnaire survey administered to a sample of 124 civil servants from various sectors of the Tunisian public service. The measurement instrument incorporated a six-item scale of quiet quitting adapted from recent validation efforts<sup>[3]</sup>, as well as standardized measures of organizational antecedents (recognition, workload, managerial support, and perceived justice). Statistical analysis combined descriptive, correlational, and hierarchical multiple regression procedures.

This empirical investigation aims to enrich theoretical knowledge on workplace disengagement by proposing a context-sensitive conceptualization of quiet quitting in an administrative environment shaped by North African realities. Practically, it provides public decision-makers with concrete analytical and operational insights for understanding and managing this particular form of professional disengagement. The adopted methodological framework also contributes to the development and validation of a culturally adapted measurement instrument, offering a reusable diagnostic tool for future research and organizational assessment in similar contexts. The empirical results show that quiet quitting is moderately to highly prevalent among Tunisian civil servants and is primarily driven by organizational factors rather than individual characteristics. More specifically, organizational recognition and workload emerge as the strongest predictors of quiet quitting, whereas managerial support and perceived organizational justice display weaker direct effects once structural conditions are taken into account. These findings suggest that quiet quitting should be interpreted as a rational adaptive response to persistent organizational imbalances within a high job-security context.

The article is structured as follows: the second section develops a theoretical framework of the quiet quitting concept, leading to the formulation of four research hypotheses regarding its organizational antecedents. The third details the methodological approach, including the study designs, sampling strategy, and data analysis procedures. The fourth section presents the empirical results, followed by a fifth that discusses them in light of existing theoretical models. The sixth section concludes by summarizing the study's contributions and practical recommendations, emphasizing recognition and workload management as key levers of action.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1. Theoretical Foundations and Conceptualization of Quiet Quitting

Understanding quiet quitting requires integrating insights from several theoretical streams in organizational psychology. This study adopts the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model as its primary theoretical framework, complemented by Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory to explain specific underlying mechanisms.

The JD-R model<sup>[12, 13]</sup> serves as the overarching lens through which we examine quiet quitting. This framework posits that workplace well-being and engagement result from the balance between job demands (physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects requiring sustained effort) and job resources (aspects that facilitate goal achievement, reduce demands, or stimulate personal growth). When demands chronically exceed resources without compensatory mechanisms, disengagement ensues. From this perspective, quiet quitting represents a strategic response to sustained demand-resource imbalance: employees reduce their contributions to match available resources and perceived returns, maintaining only the minimum required to fulfill formal obligations.

In line with burnout research, excessive workload and chronic stress generate emotional exhaustion, making sustained engagement increasingly difficult<sup>[14]</sup>. Emotional exhaustion reflects the depletion of core energetic resources, thereby reducing employees' capacity to remain cognitively and emotionally invested in their roles. Contemporary research on work disengagement further highlights how psychological distancing from work arises when job demands overwhelm resources and intrinsic motivation erodes<sup>[15]</sup>.

Two complementary theories enrich our understanding of the mechanisms through which this imbalance produces quiet quitting. First, Social Exchange Theory, originating from Homans<sup>[16]</sup> and extensively developed by Blau<sup>[17]</sup>, offers insight by viewing work relationships as fundamentally reciprocal. This theory posits that individuals implicitly assess whether their contributions to the organization are matched by appropriate returns: compensation, recognition, development opportunities, and equitable treatment. When

this reciprocity balance tips—when employees perceive their investments exceed organizational reciprocity—adjustment becomes likely. Recent research confirms that perceived imbalances in the employer-employee exchange relationship predict reduced proactive behaviors and weakened organizational engagement<sup>[18, 19]</sup>. In this view, quiet quitting constitutes a strategic recalibration: employees scale back their contributions to a level proportional to perceived reciprocity, while continuing to meet formal role requirements<sup>[3, 20]</sup>.

Second, Hobfoll's<sup>[21]</sup> Conservation of Resources theory explains the resource depletion mechanism underlying withdrawal behaviors. Its core principle holds that people strive to obtain, retain, and protect their precious resources: time, energy, emotional reserves, and self-esteem. When environmental conditions threaten these resources or demand their expenditure without adequate replenishment, individuals adopt protective strategies to prevent depletion. Recent research grounded in the Conservation of Resources theory demonstrates that chronic stress and sustained threats of resource loss foster withdrawal and disengagement as self-protective responses<sup>[22, 23]</sup>. From this perspective, quiet quitting emerges as a resource preservation strategy: rather than maintaining unsustainable levels of engagement that exhaust psychological reserves, employees deliberately recalibrate their investment to a viable minimum.

These three theoretical perspectives converge on an integrated understanding of quiet quitting as a rational adaptive response, rather than individual deviance or generational entitlement. The foundation rests on Kahn's<sup>[1]</sup> work engagement model, which identifies three dimensions through which employees invest in their professional roles: physical, cognitive, and emotional engagement. From this perspective, quiet quitting represents selective disengagement: physical presence persists (employees remain on site and fulfill basic obligations), while cognitive and emotional investment diminishes substantially. The individual stays within the organization but becomes psychologically detached—a form of disengagement particularly challenging for organizations to detect, as it remains largely invisible through conventional performance indicators. Recent extensions of engagement theory have clarified the underlying mechanisms of this disengagement, highlighting how lack of recognition and insufficient managerial support erode intrinsic motivation<sup>[12, 13]</sup>, while excessive workload and chronic stress generate emotional

exhaustion that makes sustained engagement increasingly difficult<sup>[14]</sup>. Contemporary research on work disengagement highlights how psychological distancing from work arises when job demands overwhelm resources and intrinsic motivation erodes<sup>[15]</sup>.

From an integrated JD-R perspective, quiet quitting occurs when work demands chronically exceed available resources without compensatory mechanisms. Through a social exchange lens, it reflects deliberate withdrawal to restore reciprocity balance. From COR, it represents resource preservation, averting heightened psychological exhaustion.

Crucially, these mechanisms likely operate differently across institutional contexts. In high job security environments like the Tunisian public administration—where formal exit is constrained by strong employment protection and limited labor market alternatives—psychological withdrawal may become the primary adaptive response<sup>[6]</sup>. While private-sector employees facing similar conditions might consider quitting, civil servants enjoying job security with constrained career progression prospects can instead reduce engagement while retaining their positions. This contextual specificity demands empirical validation of theoretical predictions within the target setting, rather than assuming direct transferability from Western private-sector contexts where most existing research has been conducted.

## 2.2. Organizational Antecedents: Theoretical Predictions and Hypotheses

Building on this integrated framework, we formulate four testable hypotheses linking specific organizational conditions to quiet quitting. Each hypothesis draws on established theories, is supported by recent empirical evidence, and considers how Tunisia-specific administrative factors may shape the predicted relationships.

### 2.2.1. Organizational Recognition as a Motivational Resource

Organizational recognition—the explicit or implicit acknowledgment of employees' contributions, competencies, and value added to the organization<sup>[24]</sup>—serves as an essential motivational resource within the JD-R framework. From a social exchange perspective, the theoretical mechanism linking recognition to engagement rests on reciprocity norms: recognition fulfills employees' psychological needs by sig-

nalling that contributions matter, competencies are valued, and the individual's organizational presence creates meaningful impact<sup>[12]</sup>. Conversely, lack of recognition implies that efforts go unnoticed or undervalued, gradually eroding intrinsic motivation and encouraging a recalibration of effort in line with perceived reciprocity<sup>[20]</sup>.

Empirical research consistently supports the central role of recognition and perceived organizational support in sustaining employee motivation and engagement. Evidence from well-established studies demonstrates that recognition practices and supportive organizational signals are associated with higher engagement levels and lower tendencies toward withdrawal and disengagement behaviours<sup>[25–27]</sup>. Rather than triggering abrupt withdrawal, insufficient recognition tends to foster subtle and progressive forms of disengagement, in which employees remain formally compliant while reducing discretionary effort and psychological investment, a pattern well documented in engagement research grounded in social exchange theory.

Within the Tunisian public administration, recognition systems appear particularly underdeveloped. Structural features of the administrative system create barriers to effective recognition, including limited feedback mechanisms, rigid promotion criteria based primarily on seniority rather than performance—traits common across public bureaucracies worldwide, but amplified in Tunisia by high power distance and post-2011 institutional instability that foster cultural hierarchy acceptance alongside emerging meritocracy demands, substantial hierarchical distance separating frontline agents from recognition-granting decision-makers, and highly formalized interactions that leave little room for personalized acknowledgment<sup>[28, 29]</sup>. In such contexts, recognition deficits are likely to be especially salient, increasing the risk of disengagement behaviors that manifest not through overt exit but through quiet, strategic withdrawal.

**H1.** *Low organizational recognition is positively associated with greater frequency of quiet quitting among Tunisian civil servants.*

## 2.2.2. Perceived Organizational Injustice as an Imbalance in Exchanges

Organizational justice encompasses multiple dimensions through which fairness manifests itself in work relationships: distributive justice (fairness in outcome distribution),

procedural justice (fairness in decision-making processes), interpersonal justice (fairness in interpersonal treatment), and informational justice (fairness in communication and explanations)<sup>[30, 31]</sup>. Each dimension contributes to employees' overall perception of how fairly they are treated by their organization.

From a social exchange perspective, the theoretical link to quiet quitting lies in the perceived violation of psychological contracts and reciprocity norms. When employees perceive systemic injustice—whether in resource distribution, decision-making, interpersonal relations, or information sharing—their expectations of fair exchange are violated. Social exchange theory<sup>[20]</sup> predicts that such violations trigger corrective adjustments aimed at restoring balance. Quiet quitting represents one such adaptive response: when the organization fails to reciprocate fairly, employees reduce their contributions accordingly.

Empirical research demonstrates that perceived injustice predicts withdrawal attitudes and behaviors across different cultural contexts<sup>[32–34]</sup>. However, the strength of this effect varies substantially depending on institutional contexts and cultural dimensions such as power distance and the availability of grievance expression mechanisms.

The context of the Tunisian public sector provides mixed signals regarding the effects of perceived injustice. On the one hand, hierarchical structures characterized by centralized decision-making and limited participatory governance can foster perceptions of both distributive and procedural injustice, particularly concerning workload allocation, promotion decisions, and resource distribution. Resource scarcity, combined with competing demands, further exacerbates inequalities in distribution. On the other hand, in cultures with high power distance and limited channels for expressing dissatisfaction, injustice may become normalized rather than challenged. When employees perceive little influence over decisions or the capacity to contest unfair treatment, injustice may be accepted as an immutable reality rather than prompting active withdrawal.

Despite this complexity, both theory and prior evidence suggest that perceptions of justice are likely to exert an influence. We therefore posit an effect while remaining mindful of contextual factors that may moderate its intensity.

**H2.** *A higher perception of organizational injustice is positively associated with greater frequency of quiet quitting,*

after controlling for other organizational factors.

### 2.2.3. Managerial Support as a Buffering Resource

Managerial support—characterized by active listening, genuine concern for employee well-being, two-way communication, and acknowledgment of individual contributions—constitutes a critical professional resource within the JD-R framework<sup>[13]</sup>. Theories of transformational and authentic leadership<sup>[35–37]</sup> emphasize how benevolent leadership fosters psychological safety, strengthens the quality of hierarchical relationships (leader–member exchange theory)<sup>[38]</sup>, and provides emotional resources that help employees cope with professional demands.

The theoretical mechanism linking benevolent management to reduced quiet quitting unfolds along several dimensions. First, caring managers provide recognition, feedback, and appreciation necessary to sustain motivation. Second, they offer tangible support that helps employees manage workload and overcome organizational obstacles. Third, high-quality relationships with supervisors meet fundamental needs for belonging and connectedness, reinforcing organizational attachment. Fourth, benevolent leadership conveys the organization's appreciation of employee value, thereby enhancing a sense of reciprocity.

Meta-analyses confirm that supportive leadership significantly reduces withdrawal behaviors while improving engagement<sup>[39]</sup>. High-quality leader–member exchanges consistently predict decreased turnover intentions, reduced absenteeism, and sustained discretionary engagement, regardless of organizational setting.

However, bureaucratic environments introduce an important nuance. In organizations characterized by highly formalized procedures and strict hierarchies, managers' discretionary power may be considerably constrained. They often lack autonomy to modify working conditions, recognition systems, or workload distribution, or to make decisions with immediate impact on employees' situations. Senior managers may be perceived as lacking real agency—viewed more as executors of centralized policies than autonomous leaders—and their supportive behaviors may therefore yield limited tangible benefits beyond emotional validation.

This observation points to two possible empirical scenarios. In the first, managerial support retains an independent

protective role even in bureaucratic settings, as emotional support and relational quality remain valuable despite limited managerial autonomy. In the second, the contribution of managerial support may become less pronounced when broader organizational conditions—such as recognition and workload—are taken into account. The hierarchical regression analysis allows us to examine which of these patterns is more consistent with the empirical evidence.

**H3.** *Higher perceived managerial support is negatively associated with the frequency of quiet quitting.*

### 2.2.4. Workload as the Primary Job Demand

Workload—encompassing both quantitative dimensions (volume of tasks, time pressure) and qualitative ones (task complexity, role ambiguity)—is arguably the most fundamental job demand within the JD-R model<sup>[13, 40]</sup>. The theoretical mechanism is straightforward: when job demands chronically exceed available resources—whether in time, skills, autonomy, or support—employees experience progressive exhaustion. This exhaustion activates protective withdrawal mechanisms, as the individual's system of resource conservation mobilizes to prevent complete depletion.

Quiet quitting represents an effective, though suboptimal, solution to an unsustainable workload. Rather than maintaining high engagement levels that accelerate burnout or officially leaving the organization, employees adopt an intermediate path: they reduce their effort to a manageable level, doing enough to maintain acceptable performance and avoid sanctions while preserving their psychological resources<sup>[14, 21]</sup>. This strategic withdrawal allows them to remain employed under less taxing conditions.

Empirical evidence supporting the role of workload in disengagement is both extensive and robust. Studies consistently show that excessive workload predicts lower engagement, increased emotional exhaustion, and various forms of withdrawal behaviors across professional contexts<sup>[15, 41, 42]</sup>.

The context of the Tunisian public sector likely amplifies the effects of workload. Administrations with limited resources simultaneously face pressures for service expansion and fiscal austerity, generating an intensification of work demands without proportional increases in resources. Combined with limited professional autonomy—the restricted ability to control when and how tasks are performed—and rigid job structures typical of bureaucratic organizations,

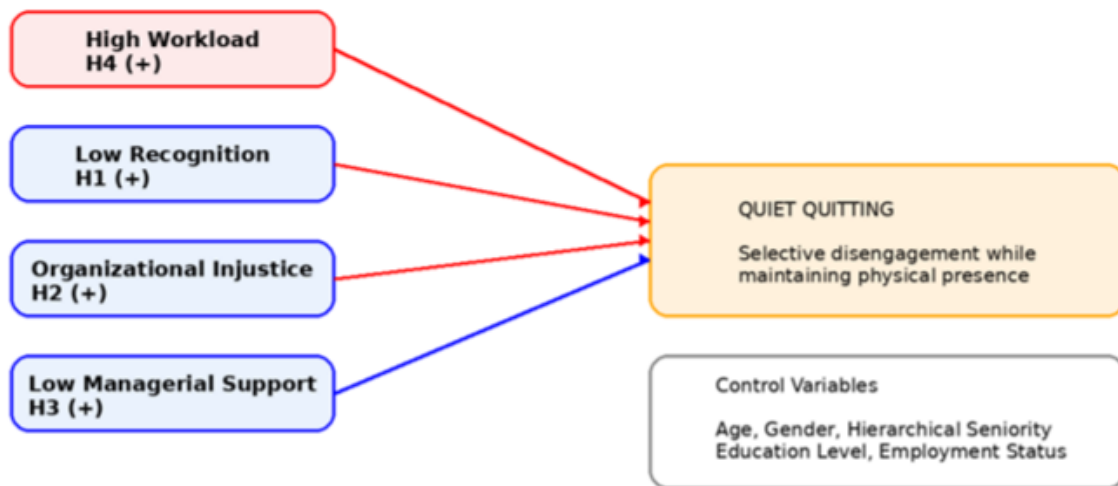
these conditions create an environment particularly conducive to disengagement linked to emotional exhaustion. When employees can neither reduce demands, increase resources, nor leave their jobs, psychological withdrawal becomes their only viable adaptation strategy.

**H4.** *Higher perceived workload is positively associated with greater frequency of quiet quitting among Tunisian civil servants.*

**Figure 1** presents the integrated model incorporating the four organizational antecedents and their hypothesized relationships with quiet quitting. Consistent with the JD-R framework, the model distinguishes between demands (workload) and resources (recognition, managerial support, and, conversely, low perceived justice). The model also controls for five sociodemographic variables—age, gender, hierarchical

seniority, education level, and employment status—in order to isolate organizational effects from potentially confounding individual differences.

Based on theoretical predictions and prior empirical findings, we anticipate that recognition and workload will emerge as the strongest predictors, given their conceptual centrality and consistent validation across contexts. Managerial support and organizational justice, by contrast, may display attenuated effects due to contextual constraints: bureaucratic rigidity potentially limiting managerial influence and hierarchical distance possibly normalizing perceptions of injustice. The forthcoming hierarchical regression analysis will empirically test these hypotheses, providing evidence of the organizational factors that most strongly predict quiet quitting within the specific institutional setting of the Tunisian public administration.



**Figure 1.** Research Framework.

### 3. Methodology

This research employs a quantitative, cross-sectional, descriptive, and explanatory design. This methodological choice aligns fully with contemporary research practices in organizational psychology, where quantitative survey approaches are commonly used to examine the prevalence and determinants of employee disengagement<sup>[3, 15, 43]</sup>.

#### 3.1. Population and Sampling Strategy

Data collection relied on the targeted dissemination of a questionnaire through social media—particularly

Facebook—by engaging groups dedicated to Tunisian civil servants. This recruitment method used a convenience sampling approach, leveraging the high level of activity of the target population on these platforms. Although non-probabilistic, this strategy enabled the construction of a geographically and occupationally diverse sample, thereby enhancing the study’s relative external validity. Participant anonymity was strictly maintained throughout the data collection process to ensure confidentiality and encourage candid responses.

In total, 124 complete and usable questionnaires were collected between March and June 2025, meeting recommended sample-size thresholds for the planned multivariate

statistical analyses. This multi-channel recruitment, combined with rigorous data cleaning, ensures a sound degree of methodological robustness within the specific context of studying quiet withdrawal in the Tunisian public sector.

### 3.2. Instrumentation and Psychometric Validation

The measurement instrument comprised several validated scales adapted to the Tunisian Francophone context. The principal scale measuring quiet withdrawal (quiet quitting) was based on recent developments in the international literature and included six items assessing behavioral and attitudinal dimensions characteristic of the phenomenon. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly disagree” (1) to “Strongly agree” (5).

The selected items capture the typical manifestations of discrete professional withdrawal, including strict limitation to formal job duties, refusal of extra-role tasks, and reduction of voluntary involvement. The composite quiet quitting score was calculated as the arithmetic mean of responses to the six items, producing a continuous indicator from 1 to 5, with higher values indicating greater disengagement intensity.

The organizational antecedents were assessed using standardized scales adapted to public-sector contexts:

- Organizational recognition was measured using a five-item scale inspired by Brun and Dugas<sup>[24]</sup>, assessing perceived appreciation of contributions and institutional valorization.
- Workload was measured via four items adapted from Karasek’s Job Content Questionnaire<sup>[40]</sup>, capturing perceived task intensity and time pressure.
- Managerial support was measured through six items derived from the Leader–Member Exchange questionnaire<sup>[38]</sup>, evaluating the quality of hierarchical relationships and perceived support from supervisors.
- Organizational injustice was captured using an eight-item composite scale integrating distributive and procedural dimensions based on Colquitt’s justice framework. Consistent with the study’s focus on structural organizational conditions, this operationalization captures distributive and procedural injustice only and does not include interpersonal or informational justice dimen-

sions.

### 3.3. Validation Procedures and Quality Control

Internal consistency of the scales was evaluated using Cronbach’s alpha coefficients, complemented by an analysis of inter-item coherence to ensure measurement reliability. The predictive model of discrete withdrawal was specified as follows:

$$QQ_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Recog_i + \beta_2 Workload_i + \beta_3 SupportMgmt_i + \beta_4 OrgInjustice_i + \sum \gamma_k Controls_{ik} + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

$QQ_i$ : The quiet quitting score of respondent  $i$ .

$Recog_i$ : The perceived level of organizational recognition.

$Workload_i$ : The intensity of workload.

$SupportMgmt_i$ : The quality of supportive management perceived.

$OrgInjustice_i$ : The perceived organizational injustice.

$\sum \gamma_k Controls_{ik}$ : The set of control variables (*age, gender, seniority, education level, and employment status*).

$\varepsilon_i$ : The random error term.

## 4. Results

Empirical results are presented in two analytical stages. First, we describe the characteristics of the sample and the descriptive statistics of all study variables. Second, we test the predictive model assessing the effects of organizational recognition, workload, managerial support, and perceived organizational injustice on *quiet quitting*.

### 4.1. Sample Overview and Descriptive Results

The final sample included 124 Tunisian civil servants employed in education, general administration, and technical services. Women represented a slight majority (58.1%), and nearly 70% of participants were under 40 years old, reflecting the relative youth of the public-sector workforce. Seniority was evenly distributed across career stages, ensuring diversity of professional experience. Respondents were mainly located in the northern and central regions, mirroring the geographic distribution of public administration jobs in Tunisia.

Descriptive statistics (**Table 1**) indicated moderate to relatively high levels of quiet quitting ( $M = 3.20, SD = 0.67$ ), exceeding the theoretical midpoint of the scale. Among the antecedent variables, *supportive management* displayed the highest mean value, while *organizational recognition*

showed the lowest, suggesting a general deficit of recognition within the public administration. All measurement scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.65$ ), confirming their reliability for regression analyses.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Coefficients (N = 124).

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Quiet Quitting	3.20	0.67	0.82
Organizational Recognition	2.87	0.73	0.67
Workload	3.35	0.89	0.78
Supportive Management	3.39	0.83	0.86
Organizational Injustice	3.18	0.82	0.80

**Table 2** presents the bivariate correlations among all variables. Consistent with expectations, quiet quitting correlated negatively with recognition ( $r = -0.51, p < 0.001$ ) and managerial support ( $r = -0.38, p < 0.001$ ), and positively with workload ( $r = 0.44, p < 0.001$ ) and injustice ( $r = 0.39,$

$p < 0.001$ ). These moderate correlations provide preliminary support for the hypotheses and confirm sufficient specificity among predictors for multivariate modeling. Among control variables, only seniority showed a significant correlation with quiet quitting ( $r = 0.19, p = 0.035$ ).

**Table 2.** Bivariate Correlations among Study Variables (N = 124).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Quiet Quitting	—							
2. Recognition	-0.51***	—						
3. Workload	0.44***	-0.28**	—					
4. Mgmt Support	-0.38***	0.52***	-0.19*	—				
5. Injustice	0.39***	-0.45***	0.31**	-0.41***	—			
6. Age	0.08	-0.12	0.15	-0.06	0.11	—		
7. Seniority	0.19*	-0.16	0.22*	-0.14	0.18*	0.68***	—	
8. Education	-0.07	0.13	-0.11	0.09	-0.10	-0.22*	-0.18*	—

Note: \*\*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed).

## 4.2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

**Table 3** presents the results of the hierarchical multiple regressions. The control-only model (Block 1) explained a modest portion of variance ( $R^2 = 0.08, F(5, 118) = 1.98, p = 0.087$ ), with seniority approaching significance ( $\beta = 0.19, p = 0.078$ ). This confirms that demographic characteristics alone account for a limited share of the variance. Introducing organizational predictors (Block 2) significantly increased explained variance ( $\Delta R^2 = 0.44, p < 0.001$ ), bringing total variance explained to  $R^2 = 0.52$  (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.48$ ). This indicates a strong explanatory power: organizational conditions explain roughly half of the systematic variance in quiet quitting.

Organizational recognition emerged as the strongest

predictor ( $\beta = -0.34, t = -3.85, p < 0.001$ ), supporting Hypothesis 1. The standardized coefficient indicates that a one-standard-deviation increase in recognition corresponds to roughly a one-third standard-deviation decrease in quiet quitting—an effect both statistically and substantively significant.

Workload showed significant positive effects ( $\beta = 0.23, t = 2.48, p = 0.015$ ), confirming Hypothesis 4: higher perceived workload predicts increased quiet quitting, in line with the job demands–resources (JD-R) model.

Managerial support exhibited the expected negative direction but did not reach conventional significance ( $\beta = -0.16, t = -1.68, p = 0.095$ ). This trend ( $p < 0.10$ ) suggests possible moderating effects that warrant examination using larger samples. Organizational injustice also displayed the

expected positive direction without achieving statistical significance ( $\beta = 0.15, t = 1.69, p = 0.093$ ), suggesting potential masked or underpowered effects.

Control variables remained non-significant in the full model, confirming that organizational factors are the primary

determinants of quiet quitting variation. Notably, the seniority coefficient decreased substantially once organizational variables were incorporated ( $\beta = 0.08, p = 0.429$ ), indicating that its influence operates through perceived organizational conditions.

**Table 3.** Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Quiet Quitting (N = 124).

Predictor	Block 1 $\beta$	$p$	Block 2 $\beta$	$p$
Controls				
Age	-0.06	0.598	-0.07	0.398
Gender (female)	0.04	0.665	0.04	0.623
Seniority	0.19	0.078	0.05	0.542
Education level	-0.08	0.359	-0.09	0.293
Employment status	0.07	0.419	0.06	0.485
Organizational Predictors				
Recognition	—	—	-0.34***	<0.001
Workload	—	—	0.23*	0.015
Supportive Management	—	—	-0.16†	0.095
Organizational Injustice	—	—	0.15†	0.093
Model Fit				
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08		0.52	
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.04		0.48	
$\Delta R^2$	—		0.44***	<0.001
F-statistic	1.98	0.087	13.69***	<0.001

Note:  $\beta$  = standardized coefficient. †  $p < 0.10$ . \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

Multicollinearity diagnostics confirmed appropriate model specification. Variance inflation factors (VIF) ranged from 1.18 to 2.86 (M = 1.94), well below the standard threshold of 10. Tolerance values exceeded .35 for all predictors. Although organizational variables displayed moderate inter-correlations (see **Table 2**), these were sufficiently low to permit reliable estimation of independent effects. Residual analysis indicated homoscedasticity and approximate normality, with no influential outliers detected (Cook’s Distance < 0.15 for all cases).

Taken together, the results confirm Hypotheses 1 and 4, reveal trends consistent with Hypotheses 2 and 3, and establish that organizational conditions play a determining role in quiet quitting behaviors. The substantial explained variance and the clearly significant effects of recognition and workload position these constructs as priority intervention targets for mitigating disengagement among Tunisian public servants.

## 5. Discussion

This study contributes to the growing literature on quiet quitting by identifying its organizational antecedents

within the Tunisian public sector. By comparing empirical findings with established theoretical frameworks, the analysis highlights quiet quitting not as an individual behavioral anomaly but as a structurally embedded response to persistent organizational constraints. Overall, the results confirm the central role of organizational recognition and workload as the main predictors of disengagement, while revealing limited direct effects for managerial support and perceived justice.

### 5.1. Prevalence and Contextual Significance of Quiet Quitting

Descriptive analyses indicate that quiet quitting is moderately to highly prevalent among Tunisian civil servants (M = 3.20). The above-median level points to a widespread trend of reduced discretionary effort. Within a highly formalized administrative system marked by rigid procedures and limited promotion prospects, quiet quitting appears less as a form of protest than as an adaptive balance—a strategy through which employees adjust their engagement to preserve psychological energy while maintaining formal compliance.

## 5.2. Recognition and Workload as the Main Predictive Factors

The findings strongly support Hypothesis 1, confirming that low organizational recognition significantly increases quiet quitting behaviors. Recognition emerges as an essential motivational resource: in the absence of acknowledgment for effort and contribution, public employees tend to restrict their involvement to contractual obligations. The particularly low mean score for recognition suggests a structural deficit linked to hierarchical distance and limited feedback mechanisms within Tunisian administration.

Hypothesis 4 is also confirmed, demonstrating that perceived workload exerts a positive and significant effect on quiet quitting. Excessive demands—especially under resource scarcity and administrative rigidity—are associated with higher levels of cognitive and emotional exhaustion. The combination of high workload and low recognition thus constitutes a dual stressor consistent with the Job Demands–Resources model, in which disengagement functions as a form of self-protection and resource preservation.

## 5.3. Managerial Support and Organizational Justice: Contextual Weakness

Contrary to expectations, Hypotheses 2 (organizational injustice → higher quiet quitting) and 3 (supportive management → lower quiet quitting) are not statistically confirmed. Although their coefficients trend in the expected direction, neither achieves conventional significance once recognition and workload are accounted for. This suggests that in bureaucratic environments such as the Tunisian public service, the mitigating power of perceived fairness or managerial support is limited when the structural foundations—recognition and manageable workload—remain deficient. Managerial influence may therefore be constrained by systemic rigidity, reducing its capacity to alleviate disengagement.

These contextual effects reinforce the argument for cautious transferability of engagement models across institutional settings, as seen in union officers' "turnaway" behaviors driven by values incongruence<sup>[44]</sup>. Leadership and justice-related variables may operate indirectly through recognition and workload, rather than exerting independent influence.

## 5.4. Integrative Interpretation and Theoretical Implications

Taken together, the four hypotheses frame quiet quitting as a rational response to organizational imbalance rather than individual failure. The model's robust explanatory power ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ) demonstrates that disengagement among Tunisian civil servants originates primarily from modifiable organizational factors, not from demographic or personality differences.

From an integrated theoretical perspective, our findings support the complementary explanatory power of the JD-R model, Social Exchange Theory, and Conservation of Resources theory. Recognition functions as a relational and motivational resource grounded in reciprocity principles<sup>[20]</sup>, (consistent with social exchange theory), while workload acts as a stress-inducing demand<sup>[13]</sup>, aligned with the JD-R framework. The strong effect of workload also validates COR theory's prediction that employees adopt protective withdrawal strategies when chronic demands threaten resource depletion<sup>[21, 23]</sup>. The imbalance between demands (workload) and resources (recognition) disrupts psychological equilibrium, pushing employees toward withdrawal.

The limited direct effects of managerial support and organizational justice, once recognition and workload are controlled, suggest that these variables may operate indirectly or be constrained by bureaucratic rigidity in the Tunisian public sector context. This finding aligns with COR theory's emphasis on structural resource availability: when fundamental resources (recognition) are chronically deficient and demands (workload) are excessive, secondary resources (managerial support) may offer limited compensatory value<sup>[22]</sup>. From a social exchange perspective, the recognition deficit signals a fundamental breach of reciprocity that cannot be offset by supportive supervision alone, explaining why employees recalibrate their contributions downward to restore perceived balance.

Practically, interventions to counter quiet quitting in the public sector should prioritize improving recognition systems, balancing workloads, and empowering managers to deliver timely and authentic feedback within bureaucratic constraints. These levers—rather than abstract appeals to engagement—offer tangible, contextually grounded responses capable of restoring reciprocity (social exchange), resource equilibrium (COR), and demand-resource balance.

(JD-R) in administrative work settings.

## 6. Conclusions

This study provides exploratory empirical evidence that quiet quitting represents a widespread and structurally embedded form of disengagement within the Tunisian public sector. Far from being a generational fad or transient trend, quiet quitting emerges as a rational adaptive response to enduring organizational imbalances. Specifically, the results underscore that lack of recognition and excessive workload—two fundamental components of job design—are the most powerful and consistent predictors of disengagement. In a system characterized by limited advancement opportunities and rigid administrative procedures, these conditions erode reciprocity and prompt employees to reduce their contributions to the contractual minimum.

The findings thus reveal quiet quitting less as a signal of imminent exit than as a stable equilibrium shaped by structural constraints. In a context of strong job security and limited mobility, psychological withdrawal becomes the most viable adaptation strategy. This pattern reinforces the interpretation of quiet quitting as a resource-preserving mechanism, consistent with the combined logic of the Job Demands-Resources and Social Exchange frameworks: when job demands chronically exceed resources and recognition, disengagement becomes a functional coping process rather than a personal deficiency.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study refines disengagement models by highlighting the determinant influence of institutional context. Managerial support and organizational justice—often dominant predictors in Western research—exert only limited direct effects when fundamental structural resources such as recognition and manageable workload are lacking. This finding advocates for a contextualized theorization that integrates institutional rigidity and cultural norms into analyses of workplace engagement and withdrawal.

Practically, the implications are clear. Quiet quitting should be viewed as an organizational warning signal, not an individual deviance. Because its antecedents are largely structural and therefore modifiable, meaningful improvement is achievable. Strengthening everyday recognition systems, ensuring fair workload distribution, and expanding manage-

rial autonomy to acknowledge performance can restore reciprocity and engagement. More broadly, addressing quiet quitting is inseparable from restoring trust, motivation, and legitimacy within public service. Investing in recognition and balanced workload management is thus not a peripheral reform, but a core condition for building a resilient and credible public administration—one capable of meeting the challenges of institutional modernization in Tunisia.

Several limitations qualify the scope and generalizability of these findings. First, the sample size ( $N = 124$ ) and non-probabilistic recruitment via social media—primarily Facebook—limit statistical representativeness. While the sample's sectoral and socio-demographic characteristics align with the Tunisian public sector workforce, and younger employees constitute a substantial proportion of public administration, these results should be interpreted as exploratory rather than nationally representative. Future research employing larger probability samples would strengthen the generalizability of these patterns.

Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences. Third, the study focused on formal organizational factors but did not examine other potentially significant dimensions, such as relationships with colleagues and person-organization value congruence. Collegial relationships provide critical social support that may buffer disengagement<sup>[45]</sup>, while value misalignment can generate profound dissatisfaction, particularly in mission-driven public sectors such as education<sup>[46]</sup>. In high job-security contexts where exit options are constrained, these relational and value-based tensions may manifest primarily through quiet quitting rather than turnover. Future research should extend this framework by incorporating peer relationships and person-organization fit to capture a more comprehensive understanding of quiet quitting in contexts where employees must negotiate dissatisfaction through psychological withdrawal rather than organizational exit.

## Funding

No external funding was received for this research.

## Institutional Review Board Statement

Ethical review and approval were waived for this study because the research involved an anonymous questionnaire

survey with voluntary participation and did not collect identifiable personal data.

## Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study. The questionnaire was administered via social media platforms, and participation was voluntary and anonymous.

## Data Availability Statement

The datasets supporting this research have been deposited on Zenodo.org (<https://zenodo.org/>) and are available from the author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## AI Use Statement

The author acknowledges the support received from AI-based tools in verifying spelling and formatting references during the preparation of this manuscript. The final content and interpretations remain the sole responsibility of the author.

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