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UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING QUIET QUITTING

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Introduction

Quiet quitting has rapidly emerged as a critical topic in the contemporary workplace. The term describes an employee's deliberate decision to fulfil only the minimum requirements of their job, consciously refraining from tasks or efforts that go above and beyond their formal job description. Unlike conventional resignation, quiet quitting involves employees remaining in their positions while psychologically and emotionally disengaging from discretionary contributions. They may prioritise personal well-being and establish healthier work-life boundaries.

Understanding quiet quitting is critical for HR practitioners, as it poses substantial challenges to employee engagement, productivity, and organisational culture. It also reflects evolving workforce values and expectations. The pandemic significantly accelerated remote and hybrid work patterns, blurring professional and personal life boundaries and contributing to heightened stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction, which are key drivers of this trend. This Fact Sheet aims to provide HR professionals with an understanding of quiet quitting, encompassing its conceptual underpinnings, antecedents, manifestations, and strategic interventions. It points out some recommendations to mitigate disengagement, foster authentic engagement, and support employee well-being, thereby enabling organisations to cultivate strong, healthy, and resilient work environments aligned with good people practices and effective governance.

Understanding Quiet Quitting: Definitions and evolution

Quiet quitting, a term popularised through social media in 2022, particularly on platforms like TikTok, has rapidly become a focal point in discussions about employee behaviour^{1 2}. While the term is new, the underlying behaviours are not entirely novel and have existed for decades under various labels such as "work-to- rule," "social loafing," "disengagement," or "presenteeism"³.

Defining Quiet Quitting

At its core, quiet quitting is defined as an employee's conscious decision to limit their work effort to essential job responsibilities, intentionally avoiding tasks beyond the minimum required. This involves meeting pre-established expectations but not exceeding them, setting clear boundaries, and generally not volunteering for or ignoring additional tasks. It is characterised by employees being physically present but emotionally and psychologically disengaged from tasks that are not strictly part of their core duties.



¹ Agarwal, P., Kaur, P., & Budhwar, P. (2025). Silencing Quiet Quitting: Crafting a Symphony of High-Performance Work Systems and Psychological Conditions. *Human Resource Management*, 64(3), 621–635. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22275>.

² Thu Trang, P., & Thi Thu Trang, N. (2024). Job burnout and quiet quitting in Vietnamese banking sector: the moderation effect of optimism. *Cogent Business and Management*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2024.2371549>

³ Solymosi-Szekeres, B., & Zlatanović, S. S. (2024). APPROACHING QUIET QUITTING FROM THE LABOR LAW PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY OF HUNGARIAN AND SERBIAN LEGISLATION. In *Pravni Zapisi* (Vol. 15, Issue 1, pp. 218–238). Faculty of Law, Union University in Belgrade. <https://doi.org/10.5937/PRAVZAP0-50313>

⁴ Samnani, A. K., & Robertson, K. (2025). More Than a Personal Decision: A Relational Theory of Quiet Quitting. *Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22314>

⁵ Bennett, A. A., Epler, R. T., Thomas, V. L., & Jalil, D. (2025). Exploring Coworker Perceptions of and Reactions to Quiet Quitting. *Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.70014>

Distinction from Related Concepts

Quiet quitting should be differentiated from:

- **Burnout:** While burnout is an involuntary state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion that can lead to quiet quitting, quiet quitting itself is a conscious and intentional choice about effort allocation.
- **General Disengagement:** Quiet quitting is a distinct form of workplace withdrawal, characterised by intentionality and a conscious calibration of effort, rather than a broader, often unintentional, withdrawal from work.
- **Social Loafing:** This refers to individuals working less hard in a group setting. Quiet quitting, however, is an individual response to work demands and personal priorities, not necessarily a free-riding behaviour within a team.
- **Quiet Thriving:** This is a contrasting strategy where individuals actively manage stress and foster well-being to achieve high motivation and productivity.
- **Work-to-Rule:** Historically a collective industrial action by unions, quiet quitting is more typically an individualised response to manage personal well-being and work-life balance.

Antecedents and Underlying Causes

Quiet quitting is a complex phenomenon driven by a confluence of individual, organisational, and broader societal factors. Understanding these antecedents is crucial for HR professionals to develop targeted and effective interventions.

Individual Factors

- **Burnout:** A primary driver of quiet quitting, characterised by emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion. Employees experiencing burnout may intentionally reduce effort as a self-protection mechanism to conserve dwindling resources.
- **Work-Life Conflict and Imbalance:** The desire to achieve a better work-life balance and prioritise personal lives, family, and well-being over work is a fundamental motivation for many quiet quitters. The "always-on" work culture, exacerbated by remote work, contributes significantly to this conflict.

⁶ Henry, S. E., Bolino, M. C., & Whitney, J. M. (2025). Keep Up the Good Work... or Else! Exploring Supervisor Responses to Quiet Quitting. *Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22319>

⁷ Farawowan, F. F., Lerebunan, S. L., Fadhilah, N., & Tasya, A. (2025). Human Resources Strategy in Dealing with Quiet Quitting Among Millennials. *Oikonomia: Journal of Management Economics and Accounting*, 2(3), 113–122. <https://doi.org/10.61942/oikonomia.v2i3.341>

- **Diminished Intrinsic Motivation and Purpose:** A lack of interest in tasks, questioning the value of extra effort, and a feeling of being unfulfilled or disconnected from work's purpose can lead to quiet quitting.
- **Perceived Lack of Control/Agency:** Reduced perceptions of control over one's work environment or life outcomes can trigger quiet quitting as a coping mechanism, particularly during uncertain times.
- **Psychological Contract Breach:** When employees perceive that their employer has failed to meet promises or expectations regarding their contributions, they may engage in quiet quitting to rebalance the exchange relationship⁹.

Organisational Factors

- **Lack of Appreciation and Recognition:** Employees are motivated to quiet quit when they feel their contributions are ignored or undervalued.
- **Excessive Workloads:** Unrealistic expectations and heavy workloads are significant drivers of stress and burnout, pushing employees to limit their efforts.
- **Limited Career Development and Growth Opportunities:** A perceived absence of opportunities for professional development and progression is a key factor.
- **Inadequate Compensation/Salary:** Employees may quiet quit if they perceive their salary as insufficient for their efforts, especially when coupled with increasing workloads.
- **Poor Leadership and Management Practices:** Bad bosses, micromanagement, lack of supportive or inspiring leadership, and a failure to honour fundamental leadership responsibilities contribute to quiet quitting.
- **Organisational Injustice and Unfair Practices:** Perceptions of unfairness in organisational practices, such as wage inequality, nepotism, or a lack of fairness in treatment, can lead to quiet quitting.
- **Toxic Workplace Environment:** Bullying, negative gossip, and a general lack of a supportive or healthy work environment are significant contributors.
- **Inadequate Organisational Support:** Insufficient support from the organisation to manage work demands or personal well-being can trigger disengagement.
- **Job Insecurity:** The perception of job instability can lead employees to quiet quit as a coping mechanism, as they may reduce effort while maintaining employment.

⁸ Hervé, J., & Oh, H. (2025). Quiet Quitting in Times of Uncertainty: Definition and Relationship With Perceived Control. *Human Resource Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22317>

⁹ Georgiadou, A., Vezyridis, P., & Glaveli, N. (2025). "You Pretend to Pay Me; I Pretend to Work": A Multi-Level Exploration of Quiet Quitting in the Greek Context. *Human Resource Management*, 64(4), 923–941. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22292>

External and Societal Factors

- ◆ **Post-Pandemic Re-evaluation:** The COVID-19 pandemic prompted a widespread re-evaluation of life priorities, shifting focus towards well-being and family, and away from work-centric lifestyles.
- ◆ **Digitalisation and AI Integration:** The rapid evolution of the digital work environment, including AI integration and hybrid work paradigms, can create new demands and pressures, influencing employee behaviour and aspirations.
- ◆ **Evolving Workforce Values:** Particularly among younger generations like Gen Z, there is a growing rejection of "hustle culture" and "always-on" expectations, favouring a more relaxed lifestyle and clearer boundaries between work and personal life.

Manifestations and Organizational Outcomes

The behaviours and attitudes associated with quiet quitting can manifest in various ways, impacting individual performance, team dynamics, and overall organisational effectiveness.

Manifestations of Quiet Quitting (Individual Level)

Quiet quitting is primarily characterised by employees consciously limiting their efforts to explicitly stated job requirements, leading to:

- ◆ **Performance of Minimum Duties:** Employees adhere strictly to their job descriptions, accomplishing tasks but consistently avoiding going above and beyond.
- ◆ **Withholding Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCBs):** This includes a reduction in voluntary extra-role behaviours, such as helping colleagues, taking on additional responsibilities not formally required, or actively participating in non-mandatory organisational activities.
- ◆ **Emotional and Psychological Disengagement:** While physically present, quiet quitters are mentally and emotionally detached from their work, exhibiting apathy or indifference.
- ◆ **Reduced Initiative and Proactiveness:** Employees may procrastinate, evade new activities, or emphasise minimal effort.
- ◆ **Increased Absenteeism and Withdrawal Behaviours:** Quiet quitting can lead to higher levels of absenteeism and other withdrawal behaviours.
- ◆ **Social Isolation:** Disconnected employees may withdraw from non-necessary conversations or activities, potentially leading to social isolation from team members.
- ◆ **Attitudinal and Emotional Changes:** These can range from resentment towards the organisation to a sense of contentment and relaxation stemming from protected well-being.

¹⁰ Gün, İ., Balsak, H., & Ayhan, F. (2025). Mediating Effect of Job Burnout on the Relationship Between Organisational Support and Quiet Quitting in Nurses. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 81(8), 4644–4652.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16599>

Organisational Outcomes

The collective impact of quiet quitting behaviours can have significant detrimental effects on an organisation:

- ◆ **Decreased Productivity and Job Quality:** Quiet quitting directly impacts productivity and can lead to a decline in the quality of work, resulting in errors or below-average outcomes.
- ◆ **Increased Turnover and Turnover Intention:** While not an immediate resignation, quiet quitting often precedes higher turnover rates as disengaged employees seek opportunities elsewhere or eventually resign.
- ◆ **Erosion of Organisational Values and Culture:** Quiet quitting can cause a decrease in commitment to the organisation's mission and values, weakening team dynamics and potentially fostering a toxic organisational culture.
- ◆ **Damage to Organisational Effectiveness:** The phenomenon can damage overall organisational effectiveness and functioning.
- ◆ **Reduced Knowledge Sharing:** Without proactive human capital management practices, quiet quitting may lead to a knowledge-sharing disaster due to reduced engagement in active socialising.
- ◆ **Negative Impact on Team Dynamics:** Disconnected employees can negatively influence team morale, behaviour, and collaboration, leading to strained relationships and potentially increasing the workload for other team members.



HR Strategies and Interventions

Addressing quiet quitting requires a strategic, human-centric approach that moves beyond punitive measures. HR professionals are uniquely positioned to transform workplace conditions and foster environments that encourage authentic engagement.

1. Foster a Culture of Psychological Safety and Open Communication

- Establish an environment where employees feel comfortable expressing ideas, concerns, and needs without fear of negative consequences.
- Encourage open and constructive dialogue between managers and employees, especially concerning motivations for quiet quitting, such as burnout or perceived injustices. Regular check-ins, beyond formal reviews, are crucial.
- Equip managers with the skills to identify signs of quiet quitting and respond empathetically and constructively, rather than punitively.



2. Enhance Job Autonomy and Meaningfulness

- Focus on efforts that enhance employees' jobs by increasing their control and the perceived meaningfulness of their work.
- Connect individual tasks to broader organisational goals and impact to boost intrinsic motivation and a sense of purpose.
- Empower employees with decision-making authority over their work processes where appropriate, aligning with psychological empowerment theories.

3. Prioritise Employee Well-being and Work-Life Balance

- Implement comprehensive programmes that support mental and physical health, stress management, and resilience.
- Support employees in establishing clear boundaries between work and personal life, recognising the "right to disconnect" is gaining traction in policy discussions. Organisations should set examples by limiting after-hours communications.
- Continue to evaluate and offer remote or hybrid work options, while actively managing potential for blurred boundaries.

4. Strengthen Leadership and Recognition

- Develop leaders who exhibit empathy, foster uniqueness, strengthen belongingness, and show appreciation for employees' contributions.
- Implement systems for regular personal communication, feedback, and recognition that acknowledge efforts, not just outcomes. This can address feelings of being unappreciated or inadequately compensated.
- Revise performance management systems that may overvalue extra-role behaviours, instead of supporting sustainable contributions and flexible career paths.

5. Invest in Career Development and Growth

- Publicise career paths, provide opportunities for skill development, and progression within the company.
- Implement coaching and mentoring programs to address employee deficiencies and foster professional advancement.

6. Address Psychological Contract Fulfilment and Organisational Justice

- Clearly communicate job requirements, responsibilities, and performance expectations to prevent psychological contract breaches.
- Proactively evaluate and ensure fairness in organisational practices, compensation, workload distribution, and opportunities to mitigate perceptions of injustice.

7. Tailored Interventions

- Recognise that quiet quitting is not a monolithic phenomenon. Distinguish between "passive quiet quitting" (less intentional, aimed at retaining employment) and "deliberate quiet quitting" (conscious effort to protect well-being). Strategies should be tailored accordingly.
- Understand that quiet quitting can vary across different cultural and economic contexts, as well as generations. Interventions should be sensitive to these nuances.

Legal and Ethical Considerations

From a labour law perspective, quiet quitting presents unique challenges as it often operates in a "grey area" between non-legal and legal spheres. HR professionals must navigate these considerations with careful attention to workers' rights and ethical practice.

1. Quiet Quitting vs. Contractual Obligations

- Quiet quitting involves an employee fulfilling only the minimum work duties as specified in their employment contract, without going above and beyond.
- If an employee performs duties stemming from the employment contract at an average, acceptable level and respects the work organisation, it is challenging for employers to legally sanction them for a breach of contract.
- Quiet quitting is distinct from resignation, as the employee intends to retain their job. Therefore, employers may not have legal grounds for termination, necessitating alternative HR approaches.

2. Protecting Worker's Rights and Well-being

- Quiet quitting can be understood as an idea related to fundamental labour rights protection, grounded in respect for worker's dignity and the work-life balance concept.
- It can also be perceived as a worker's attempt to prioritise their mental health and overall well-being in an environment of "hustle culture" and "always-on" expectations.
- HR's approach should include the introduction of a comprehensive, integrated, proactive psychosocial risk assessment model across all work units. This is part of an occupational health law approach, emphasising a risk- assessment culture in the changing world of work.

3. Ethical Employer Responses

- Instead of penalising quiet quitting, which is difficult legally, the focus should shift to solving the underlying issues through human resource management strategies.
- It is unreasonable and unwise to penalise employees who are performing satisfactorily to their core job responsibilities, even if they are not going "above and beyond". Labelling quiet quitters as low performers can lead to feelings of resentment and injustice.
- Abandoning "hustle culture" and "always-on" expectations, developing employee recognition, and enhancing employer empathy are ethical steps forward.

Conclusion

Quiet quitting, while a seemingly new phenomenon, reflects deeply rooted employee disengagement and evolving priorities in the post-pandemic work landscape. It is a hidden challenge to organisations, affecting employee commitment, behaviour, productivity, and overall organisational culture. HR professionals are at the forefront of understanding and responding to this complex trend, which is driven by factors ranging from individual burnout and the pursuit of work-life balance to organisational issues like a lack of recognition, excessive workloads, and psychological contract breaches.

Key Takeaways for HR Professionals:

- Quiet quitting is a conscious, intentional act by employees to limit their efforts to job requirements, often as a self-preservation mechanism to protect their well-being.
- It is not merely a fad but a significant indicator of systemic issues within organisations, highlighting a misalignment between organisational demands and individual psychological needs.
- The phenomenon is multi-faceted, influenced by a blend of individual, organisational, and societal factors, accelerated by the pandemic and changing workforce values.
- Its consequences extend beyond the individual, impacting organisational performance, turnover rates, team dynamics, and overall culture.

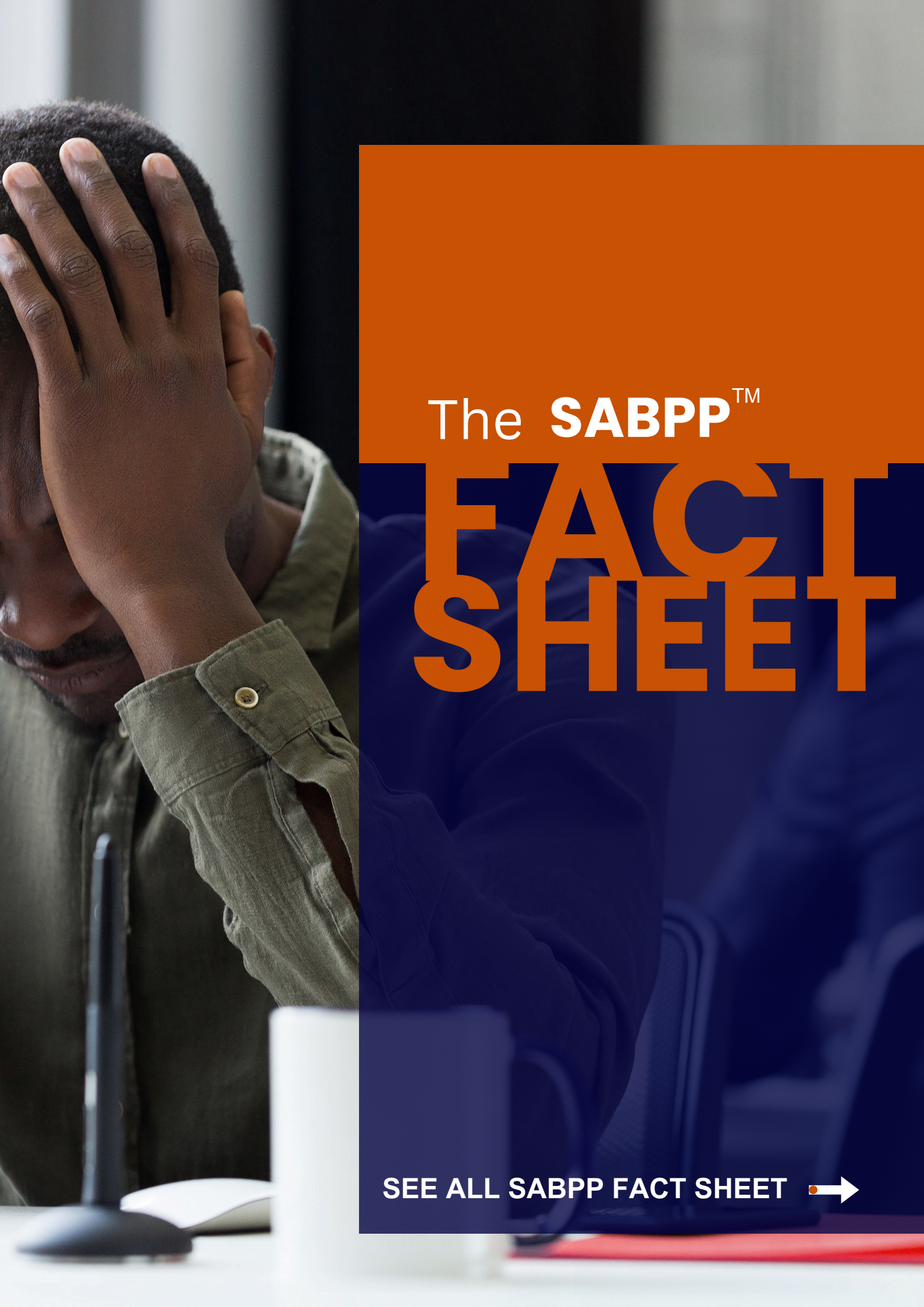
Implications for HR:

HR's role is critical in transforming these challenges into opportunities for growth and sustainability. This requires a shift towards proactive, human-centric, and adaptive strategies:

- Move beyond traditional metrics to understand the nuanced motivations behind employee behaviours, including the desire for work-life balance and mental health protection.
- Implement strategies that focus on prevention rather than reaction, such as enhancing job meaningfulness, fostering psychological safety, and investing in empathetic leadership.
- Recognise that "one-size-fits-all" solutions are ineffective. Tailor interventions to specific individual, team, and organisational contexts, and consider cultural nuances.
- Champion ethical practices that protect employee rights, promote well-being, and ensure fairness, avoiding punitive responses that can exacerbate disengagement and resentment.

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