



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



Career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior: The mediating role of organizational commitment among gen Z employees

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2026, 30(03), 1621-1629

Publication history: Received on 09 May 2026; revised on 16 June 2026; accepted on 18 June 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2026.30.3.1696>

Abstract

Quiet quitting has emerged as a growing challenge for organizations, particularly among Generation Z employees who increasingly value career growth and personal development in the workplace. This study investigates the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior, with organizational commitment serving as a mediating mechanism. Drawing on Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, the study argues that employees who perceive greater opportunities for career development are more likely to develop stronger organizational commitment, thereby reducing their tendency to disengage from work. Data were collected from 408 Generation Z employees working in Hanoi and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings confirm that career development opportunities positively influence organizational commitment, while organizational commitment negatively affects quiet quitting behavior. In addition, organizational commitment plays a significant mediating role in the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting. These results highlight the importance of career development as a strategic human resource practice for strengthening employee commitment and mitigating quiet quitting among younger employees. The study contributes to the emerging literature on quiet quitting by clarifying the psychological mechanism linking organizational resources to employee behavioral outcomes.

Keywords: Career development opportunities; Organizational Commitment; Quiet quitting; Gen Z employees; Employee behavior

1. Introduction

In recent years, quiet quitting has emerged as a growing concern in contemporary workplaces, attracting considerable attention from both scholars and practitioners. Unlike traditional turnover, quiet quitting refers to employees' tendency to perform only the minimum requirements of their jobs, avoiding discretionary efforts and reducing their psychological investment in work. Although employees remain formally employed, this behavior may negatively affect individual performance, team effectiveness, and organizational competitiveness. The phenomenon is particularly relevant among Generation Z employees, who increasingly prioritize personal growth, meaningful work, flexibility, and career advancement opportunities when evaluating employers (Schroth, 2019; Twenge, 2017).

Among the factors influencing employee attitudes and behaviors, career development opportunities have been widely recognized as an important organizational resource. Career development opportunities refer to employees' perceptions of the extent to which their organization provides learning, skill development, and advancement prospects. Previous studies have demonstrated that career development opportunities are associated with various positive outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee retention, and career success. However, research examining their influence on quiet quitting behavior remains limited. Furthermore, while the beneficial effects of career

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development opportunities are well documented, the underlying psychological mechanisms through which these opportunities shape employees' withdrawal tendencies have not been sufficiently explored.

To address this gap, the present study draws on Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR). SET suggests that employees tend to reciprocate organizational support and investment through positive attitudes and behaviors, while COR proposes that individuals strive to acquire, maintain, and protect valuable resources. Within this theoretical framework, organizational commitment may serve as a critical mechanism linking career development opportunities to employee behavior. Employees who perceive greater opportunities for career growth are likely to develop stronger commitment to their organization, which in turn reduces their tendency to engage in quiet quitting behavior.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the impact of career development opportunities on quiet quitting behavior through the mediating role of organizational commitment among Generation Z employees in Hanoi, Vietnam. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the question of how career development opportunities influence quiet quitting behavior and whether organizational commitment functions as a key explanatory mechanism in this relationship.

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it extends the emerging body of research on quiet quitting by identifying career development opportunities as an important antecedent of this behavior. Second, it advances understanding of the psychological mechanism underlying quiet quitting by examining the mediating role of organizational commitment. Third, by integrating SET and COR within a single analytical framework, the study provides a more comprehensive explanation of how organizational resources are translated into employee behavioral outcomes. From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for organizations seeking to strengthen employee commitment and reduce quiet quitting tendencies among Generation Z employees through effective career development practices.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

2.1. Career development opportunities and organizational commitment

Career development opportunities refer to employees' perceptions of the extent to which their organization provides opportunities for learning, skill enhancement, professional growth, and career advancement. Such opportunities represent an important organizational resource that signals long-term investment in employees and supports their future career aspirations. This aspect is particularly relevant for Generation Z employees, who tend to place strong emphasis on continuous learning, self-development, and career progression.

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), employees tend to reciprocate favorable organizational treatment with positive attitudes and behaviors (Blau, 1964). When organizations invest in employees' development through training, mentoring, and promotion opportunities, employees are more likely to perceive organizational support and develop stronger attachment to the organization. Similarly, Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) suggests that individuals strive to acquire and maintain valuable resources. Career development opportunities can be viewed as important resources that enhance employees' competencies, career prospects, and job security, thereby fostering stronger organizational commitment (Hobfoll, 1989).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated a positive relationship between career development opportunities and organizational commitment. Employees who perceive clear opportunities for growth and advancement tend to exhibit higher levels of emotional attachment, loyalty, and willingness to remain with their organizations over the long term.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: H1: Career development opportunities positively influence organizational commitment.

2.2. Organizational commitment and quiet quitting behavior

Organizational commitment refers to the psychological attachment and sense of belonging that employees develop toward their organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Employees with strong organizational commitment are more likely to identify with organizational goals, invest effort in their work, and maintain long-term relationships with their employers.

From the perspective of Social Exchange Theory, committed employees tend to reciprocate organizational support through greater dedication and contribution. Conversely, when employees experience low levels of commitment, they may reduce their effort and involvement as a means of restoring perceived imbalance in the exchange relationship. Furthermore, Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that individuals seek to protect their personal resources when they perceive insufficient returns from their work environment. As a result, employees may intentionally limit their work-related efforts and responsibilities, leading to behaviors associated with quiet quitting.

Quiet quitting is characterized by employees performing only the minimum requirements of their jobs while avoiding discretionary efforts beyond formal role expectations. Given their stronger emotional attachment and identification with organizational objectives, highly committed employees are less likely to engage in such withdrawal behaviors.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed: H2: Organizational commitment negatively influences quiet quitting behavior.

2.3. The mediating role of organizational commitment

The relationships proposed above suggest that organizational commitment may function as an important mechanism linking career development opportunities to quiet quitting behavior. Career development opportunities provide employees with valuable resources and signal organizational support, which strengthens their commitment to the organization. In turn, stronger commitment reduces employees' tendency to disengage from work and adopt quiet quitting behaviors.

From a Social Exchange Theory perspective, employees respond to organizational investments in their development by strengthening their attachment and commitment, which subsequently encourages more positive work behaviors. Likewise, Conservation of Resources Theory suggests that organizational commitment represents a psychological resource that motivates employees to maintain engagement and continue investing effort in their work rather than withdrawing from organizational activities.

Therefore, organizational commitment is expected to mediate the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior.

H3: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior.

2.4. Proposed research model

Based on Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory, this study proposes a research model in which career development opportunities serve as an organizational resource that enhances employees' organizational commitment. Increased organizational commitment, in turn, reduces the likelihood of quiet quitting behavior. Accordingly, organizational commitment is expected to act as a mediating mechanism through which career development opportunities influence employees' behavioral responses in the workplace. The proposed research model is presented in Figure 1.



Source: Developed by the authors; Note: Organizational commitment is proposed as a mediating variable linking career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior.

Figure 1 Proposed research model

Based on the proposed theoretical framework, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Career development opportunities positively influence organizational commitment.
- H2: Organizational commitment negatively influences quiet quitting behavior.

- H3: Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a quantitative research approach to examine the relationships among career development opportunities, organizational commitment, and quiet quitting behavior among Generation Z employees. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to employees working in various organizations in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The target population consisted of Generation Z employees, defined in this study as individuals born between 1995 and 2010 who had accumulated practical work experience. Given the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame and the difficulty of accessing the target population, a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques was employed. Initially, questionnaires were distributed through professional and social networks, and respondents were subsequently encouraged to share the survey with other eligible participants.

A total of 450 questionnaires were collected. After screening for incomplete responses and invalid cases, 408 valid questionnaires were retained for data analysis, yielding a valid response rate of 90.7%. This sample size exceeds the minimum requirements for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), ensuring adequate statistical power for hypothesis testing.

3.2. Measurement scale and research variables

All constructs in the proposed research model were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The measurement items were adapted from established scales in prior studies and modified to fit the context of Generation Z employees in Vietnam. Specifically, the scale for Career Development Opportunities (CDO) was adapted from De Vos et al. (2011), Organizational Commitment (OC) was measured based on the scale developed by Meyer and Allen (1991), and Quiet Quitting (QQ) was adapted from Samnani (2023).

Career Development Opportunities (CDO) refer to employees' perceptions of the extent to which their organization provides opportunities for learning, skill development, career advancement, and professional growth. Organizational Commitment (OC) reflects employees' psychological attachment, loyalty, and sense of belonging to their organization. Quiet Quitting (QQ) represents employees' tendency to limit their work efforts to the minimum required level and avoid discretionary contributions beyond formal job expectations.

To ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts in human resource management and organizational behavior. A pilot study was subsequently conducted with a small group of respondents to assess item clarity, wording, and comprehensibility. Based on the feedback received, several minor adjustments were made before the questionnaire was finalized and administered in the main survey.

3.3. Data analysis methods

The collected data were analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 following the two-step approach commonly recommended for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This method was considered appropriate because the study focuses on examining predictive relationships among latent constructs and testing the mediating effect of organizational commitment.

In the first stage, the measurement model was assessed to evaluate the reliability and validity of the constructs. Internal consistency reliability was examined using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), while convergent validity was assessed through the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion.

In the second stage, the structural model was examined to test the proposed hypotheses. The relationships among the constructs were evaluated using path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and the coefficient of determination (R^2). To assess the statistical significance of the direct and indirect effects, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was conducted. Particular attention was given to examining the mediating role of organizational commitment in the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior.

3.4. Common method bias assessment

Since all data were collected from a single source using a self-reported questionnaire at one point in time, common method bias (CMB) could potentially affect the validity of the findings. Therefore, several statistical procedures were employed to assess the extent of this issue.

First, Harman's single-factor test was conducted to determine whether a single factor accounted for the majority of the variance in the data. The results indicated that no single factor dominated the variance, suggesting that common method bias was unlikely to be a serious concern.

Second, following the recommendation of Kock (2015), a full collinearity assessment was performed by examining the variance inflation factor (VIF) values for all latent constructs. The results showed that all VIF values were below the threshold of 3.3, indicating the absence of substantial common method bias. Therefore, common method bias was not considered a significant threat to the validity of the research model.

4. Research results

4.1. Evaluating the measurement model

The measurement model was assessed in terms of internal consistency reliability and convergent validity. According to Hair et al. (2022), Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values should exceed 0.70 to demonstrate adequate reliability, while the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) should be greater than 0.50 to confirm convergent validity.

As presented in Table 1, the Cronbach's Alpha values range from 0.831 to 0.860, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70. Similarly, the Composite Reliability (CR) values range from 0.881 to 0.890, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. Furthermore, all AVE values are above 0.50, ranging from 0.585 to 0.597, suggesting that the constructs explain more than half of the variance of their respective indicators.

Overall, the results confirm that the measurement scales exhibit adequate reliability and convergent validity, supporting their suitability for subsequent structural model analysis.

Table 1 Reliability and convergent validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
CDO	0.831	0.881	0.597
OC	0.860	0.890	0.585
QQ	0.8590	0.890	0.590

Source: Author's analysis results

4.2. Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), which is widely regarded as a robust criterion for evaluating discriminant validity in PLS-SEM. According to Henseler et al. (2015), HTMT values below the recommended threshold of 0.85 indicate that the constructs are empirically distinct from one another.

As presented in Table 2, all HTMT values are below the threshold of 0.85, ranging from 0.570 to 0.721. Specifically, the HTMT value between Career Development Opportunities (CDO) and Organizational Commitment (OC) is 0.673, between Organizational Commitment (OC) and Quiet Quitting (QQ) is 0.721, and between Career Development Opportunities (CDO) and Quiet Quitting (QQ) is 0.570. These findings suggest that each construct captures a distinct conceptual domain and that the observed variables adequately differentiate the latent constructs included in the research model. Therefore, discriminant validity is established for all constructs.

Table 2 Discriminant Validity Assessment Using HTMT

Variable pair	HTMT
CDO - OC	0.673
OC - QQ	0.721
CDO - QQ	0.570

Source: Author's analysis results

4.3. Evaluating the structural model

The structural model was evaluated by examining the path coefficients (β), t-values, p-values, and effect sizes (f^2) obtained from the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 Hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Relationship	β	T-stat	p-value	f^2	Result
H1	CDO \rightarrow OC	0.537	15.659	0.000***	0.350	Supported
H2	OC \rightarrow QQ	-0.609	20.056	0.000***	0.588	Supported

Source: Author's analysis results

The results indicate that career development opportunities have a significant positive effect on organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.537$, $t = 15.659$, $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. This finding suggests that employees who perceive greater opportunities for learning, development, and career advancement are more likely to develop stronger commitment to their organization. The effect size ($f^2 = 0.350$) indicates a substantial impact of career development opportunities on organizational commitment.

Furthermore, organizational commitment exerts a significant negative effect on quiet quitting behavior ($\beta = -0.609$, $t = 20.056$, $p < 0.001$), providing support for H2. This result implies that employees with higher levels of organizational commitment are less likely to engage in quiet quitting behavior. The effect size ($f^2 = 0.588$) indicates a strong influence of organizational commitment on quiet quitting behavior.

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the proposed theoretical relationships and confirm the important role of organizational commitment in explaining employees' withdrawal tendencies.

4.4. Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the structural model. R^2 values indicate the proportion of variance in an endogenous construct that can be explained by its predictor variables. According to Hair et al. (2022), higher R^2 values indicate greater explanatory power of the model.

Table 4 Coefficient of determination (R^2)

Dependent variable	R^2
OC	0.429
QQ	0.370

Source: Author's analysis results

The results show that career development opportunities explain 42.9% of the variance in organizational commitment ($R^2 = 0.429$). In addition, organizational commitment explains 37.0% of the variance in quiet quitting behavior ($R^2 = 0.370$). These findings indicate that the proposed model possesses moderate explanatory power and provides meaningful insights into the factors influencing organizational commitment and quiet quitting behavior among Generation Z employees.

Overall, the results suggest that career development opportunities and organizational commitment play important roles in explaining employees' attitudes and behavioral responses in the workplace.

4.5. Mediation analysis

To examine the mediating role of organizational commitment, the indirect effect of career development opportunities on quiet quitting behavior was assessed using the bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples. The significance of the mediation effect was evaluated based on the bootstrapped confidence interval and p-value.

Table 5 Mediation Analysis Results

Relationship	b	P-value	CI 95%	Result
CDO → OC → QQ	-0.156	0.000***	[-0.194; -0.117]	Supported

Source: Author's analysis results

The results indicate that the indirect effect of career development opportunities on quiet quitting behavior through organizational commitment is statistically significant ($\beta = -0.156$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval does not include zero, confirming the significance of the mediation effect. Therefore, organizational commitment mediates the relationship between career development opportunities and quiet quitting behavior, providing support for H3.

This finding suggests that career development opportunities reduce employees' tendency to engage in quiet quitting behavior by strengthening their organizational commitment. In other words, employees who perceive greater opportunities for learning, growth, and career advancement are more likely to develop stronger commitment to their organization, which subsequently decreases their likelihood of withdrawing psychologically from work.

5. Discussion and managerial implications

5.1. Discussion of research results

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence regarding the mechanisms through which career development opportunities influence quiet quitting behavior among Generation Z employees. More importantly, the results highlight the pivotal role of organizational commitment in translating organizational resources into employee behavioral outcomes.

First, the results demonstrate that career development opportunities have a significant positive effect on organizational commitment. This finding is consistent with Social Exchange Theory (SET), which posits that employees tend to reciprocate organizational investments with positive attitudes and stronger attachment to the organization. It also supports previous studies indicating that career development opportunities enhance employees' sense of value, future prospects, and long-term relationship with the organization. For Generation Z employees, who place considerable emphasis on learning and career advancement, development opportunities may serve as a strong signal of organizational support and future career potential, thereby fostering greater organizational commitment.

Second, organizational commitment was found to have a significant negative effect on quiet quitting behavior. This result is consistent with both Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory (COR). Employees who are emotionally attached to their organizations are more willing to invest effort and contribute beyond formal job requirements. Conversely, when commitment declines, employees may reduce discretionary effort and limit their involvement in work as a means of preserving personal resources. The findings therefore suggest that quiet quitting is closely associated with the quality of the employee-organization relationship rather than being solely attributable to individual attitudes or work motivation.

Third, the mediation analysis confirms that organizational commitment serves as an important mechanism linking career development opportunities to quiet quitting behavior. The significant indirect effect indicates that career development opportunities influence employee behavior primarily through strengthening organizational commitment. This finding extends existing research by demonstrating that organizational resources alone may not be sufficient to reduce withdrawal tendencies unless they are translated into stronger psychological attachment to the organization. In this sense, organizational commitment acts as a bridge through which career development opportunities shape employee behavioral responses.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature by integrating Social Exchange Theory and Conservation of Resources Theory within a unified framework. While SET explains why employees develop stronger

commitment when organizations invest in their development, COR helps explain how such commitment discourages withdrawal behavior and encourages continued investment of effort. Together, these perspectives provide a more comprehensive explanation of quiet quitting behavior among Generation Z employees.

Finally, the findings suggest that organizational commitment among Generation Z employees is increasingly shaped by opportunities for growth and self-development rather than by traditional notions of job security or organizational loyalty. This reflects a shift in employment expectations, whereby commitment is closely linked to employees' perceptions of future development opportunities and meaningful career progression.

5.2. Managerial implications

Based on the findings, several managerial implications can be derived for organizations seeking to reduce quiet quitting behavior among Generation Z employees.

First, organizations should view career development as a strategic human resource investment rather than a supplementary employee benefit. Transparent career pathways, promotion criteria, mentoring systems, and continuous learning opportunities can strengthen employees' perceptions of organizational support and future career prospects.

Second, managers should integrate career development initiatives into broader talent management strategies. Development programs should be implemented consistently and fairly to ensure that employees perceive advancement opportunities as attainable and merit-based. A lack of transparency in development practices may undermine trust and weaken organizational commitment.

Third, organizations should prioritize the enhancement of organizational commitment as a key mechanism for preventing quiet quitting behavior. This can be achieved by creating meaningful work experiences, recognizing employee contributions, fostering supportive leadership, and cultivating a positive organizational culture. Such practices can strengthen employees' emotional attachment to the organization and encourage greater work engagement.

Fourth, managers should recognize quiet quitting as a potential indicator of weakened employee-organization relationships rather than merely a performance or disciplinary issue. Addressing the underlying causes of disengagement through communication, support, and developmental opportunities is likely to be more effective than relying solely on monitoring or control mechanisms.

Finally, given the distinctive characteristics of Generation Z employees, organizations should adopt flexible and personalized approaches to employee development. Tailoring learning opportunities, career pathways, and development programs to employees' individual aspirations can enhance commitment, improve retention, and reduce the likelihood of quiet quitting behavior.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge the support of Hanoi University of Industry, Vietnam in funding this study. Additionally, the author expresses sincere gratitude to the reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive feedback, which greatly contributed to enhancing the quality and clarity of the paper.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Statement of Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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