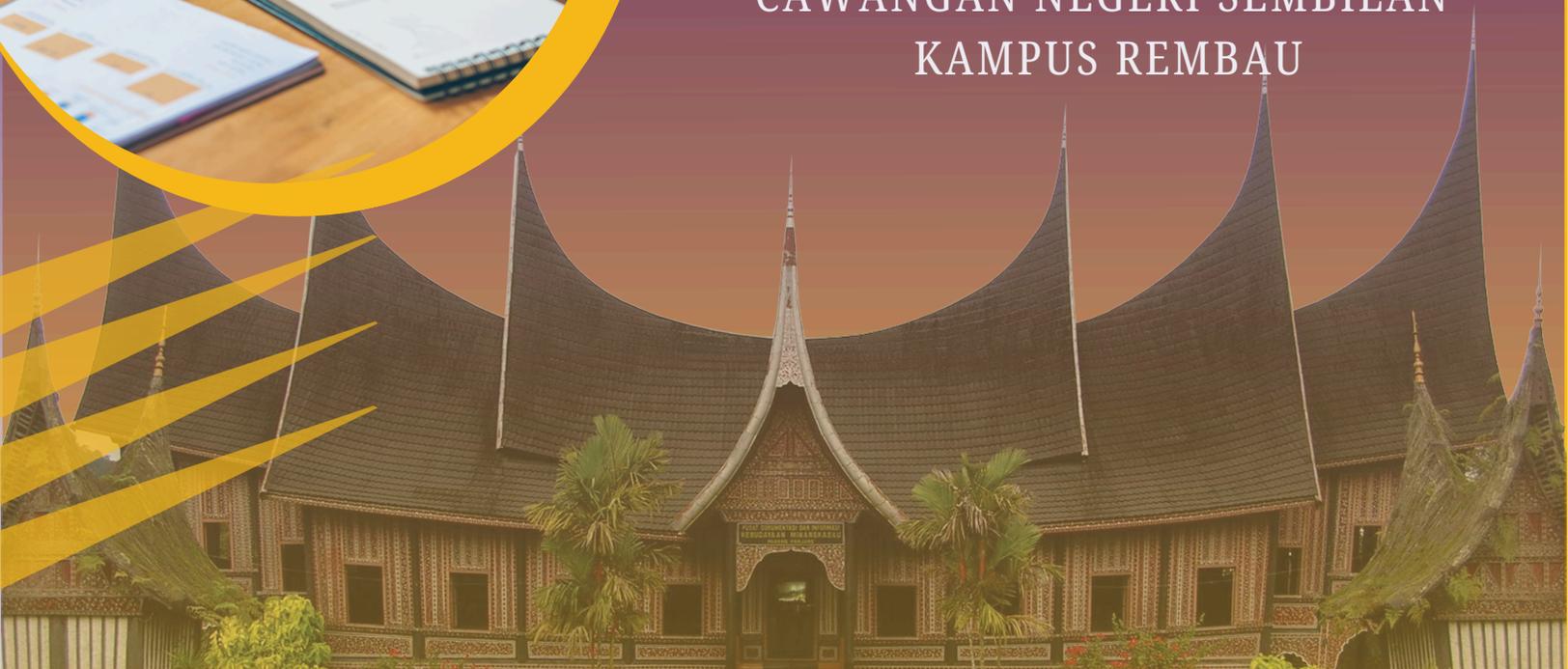# RONA TINTA

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BEYOND THE JOB DESCRIPTION: A NEW WORKPLACE MINDSET IN MALAYSIA

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In recent years, the phrase "quiet quitting" has entered workplace conversations worldwide. It does not mean employees are resigning but instead refers to a situation where they perform only what is required in their job descriptions without going the extra mile. In practice, this means clocking in on time, clocking out on time, and focusing strictly on assigned tasks. The trend, which first gained attention on TikTok in 2022, reflects a growing desire among employees to push back against burnout, lack of recognition, and blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Xueyun et al., 2023). In Malaysia, where workplace stress levels rank among the highest in Asia and where many employees already feel undervalued (Lahap, 2022; Hassan et al., 2022), quiet quitting has become more than a buzzword. It offers a lens to understand deeper challenges in employee engagement, productivity, and organizational culture.

Why Are Employees Quiet Quitting

The reasons behind quiet quitting are not one-dimensional. Many employees are tired of doing extra work without reward. When promotions, pay raises, or recognition fail to follow discretionary effort, workers begin to question why they should contribute beyond their official roles (Efendi et al., 2023). Burnout is another factor. Nearly half of Malaysia's workforce report high levels of stress, often due to long hours, increased performance monitoring, and constant pressure to prove competence.

For many, pulling back to "just the basics" becomes a survival strategy (Lahap, 2022; Ling et al., 2025). A third reason is the search for better work-life balance. The COVID-19 pandemic was a turning point that highlighted the value of rest, family, and personal time. As a result, employees are less willing to sacrifice well-being in exchange for endless organizational demands (Au & Ahmed, 2014).

The Malaysian Context

Quiet quitting in Malaysia is not simply about individual choices. It also reflects systemic workplace challenges. Research shows that employee engagement levels in Malaysia are among the lowest in Asia (Hassan et al., 2022). Many workers feel overqualified, underpaid, or overlooked when it comes to career development opportunities (Chen et al., 2021). This disengagement is not open rebellion but rather a silent withdrawal of discretionary effort. Employees remain in their roles but mentally and emotionally detach from their work. If left unaddressed, this disengagement can escalate into turnover crises, something Malaysian industries have struggled with for years (Ahmad & Som, 2013). The issue also ties back to broader organizational design. Performance management systems, reward structures, and leadership styles shape whether employees feel motivated to give more than the basics (Subramaniam et al., 2019). A lack of psychological safety, where employees fear backlash for voicing concerns, further reinforces disengagement and silence (Milliken et al., 2003; Newman et al., 2017).

The Risks of Quiet Quitting

While some see quiet quitting as a healthy way to set boundaries, it also brings risks. For organizations, the absence of extra effort can lead to lower productivity, reduced innovation, and weaker problem-solving capacity (Xing & Li, 2022; Ouyang et al., 2022). Quiet quitting may also encourage knowledge hiding, where employees deliberately withhold ideas or information. Over time this erodes trust, stifles collaboration, and creates silos that weaken competitiveness (Jasimuddin & Saci, 2022; Wen & Ma, 2021). For employees, quiet quitting may provide short-term relief but it can limit career progression. Disengagement reduces visibility, weakens professional relationships, and narrows opportunities for advancement (Patnaik et al., 2015). In the long run, detachment may foster cynicism and deeper dissatisfaction, leading to frustration rather than true balance (Westover, 2024).

Rethinking Work Culture in Malaysia

Instead of treating quiet quitting as a negative trend, organizations can view it as a signal. Employees are not necessarily lacking ambition. Many are asking for healthier boundaries, recognition, and fair treatment. To address this, Malaysian employers need to rethink workplace culture by creating fair reward systems where extra effort is acknowledged and matched with real opportunities (Subramaniam et

al., 2019). Employers should also promote work-life balance initiatives that respect personal time and help prevent burnout (Au & Ahmed, 2014). Another important step is to build psychological safety so that employees feel confident to share their views without fear of negative consequences (Newman et al., 2017). Supportive leadership also plays a key role. Managers who adopt ethical and empathetic practices are more likely to build trust and reduce disengagement (Men et al., 2018). Digital transformation must also be managed carefully. While technology can improve efficiency, poorly designed systems often overwhelm employees and increase stress. To prevent quiet quitting, organizations should adopt human-centered strategies that ensure technology supports employee well-being rather than undermines it (Kim & Sohn, 2024).

Conclusion

Quiet quitting is not about laziness or lack of ambition. In Malaysia, it reflects deeper struggles for balance, recognition, and fairness in the workplace. Rather than dismissing it, employers should see it as a wake-up call that employees want change. The way forward is to build a more sustainable model of work where productivity and well-being support one another. If Malaysian organizations can create environments that respect boundaries, value contributions, and nurture growth, they will not only reduce disengagement but also foster a healthier, more resilient, and innovative workforce.

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