

Original Article

A Study of Great Resignation on Work-Life Balance: Global Perspective

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Citations: Kehinde, S., Moses, C., Taiye, B., Oladele, K., Ilogho, B.S., Kehinde, T. & Kehinde, K. (2023). A Study of Great Resignation on Work-Life Balance: Global Perspective. *International Journal of Finance, Economics and Business*, 2(4), 280-300.

Received: 24 August 2023

Accepted: 4 December 2023

Published: 31 December 2023

Abstract: The great resignation is an unprecedented labour force phenomenon that has garnered significant attention in contemporary employment dynamics. This multifaceted phenomenon, characterised by an exodus of employees from their current positions, has initiated a profound transformation in the work landscape. The paramount concern of this research endeavour is to elucidate the intricate relationship between the Great Resignation and its consequential impact on work-life balance. A compelling exploration of the shifting priorities of the modern workforce is paramount to understanding the underlying dynamics of this phenomenon, especially in light of the profound influence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Central to this examination is an in-depth analysis of the concept of work-life balance itself. By scrutinising the varying definitions and perceptions of work-life balance, we aim to unveil the underpinnings of this critical construct. Also, the study delves into the emergence of hybrid work models as potential solutions to the challenges posed by the Great Resignation. Employers, recognising the significance of work-life balance as a pivotal driver of employee retention, have begun to implement strategies and adaptations to address the evolving needs of their workforce. This study scrutinises the measures taken by organisations to facilitate work-life balance and explores their efficacy. Complementing this, we scrutinise the expectations and demands of employees in the post-Great Resignation landscape, shedding light on the pivotal role of benefits and perks in influencing workplace choices. Lastly, the research offers a forward-looking perspective on the future of work-life balance, envisioning the contours of post-pandemic work culture and predicting long-term implications stemming from this seismic labour market shift.

Keywords: Employee retention; Work life balance; Employee turnover; COVID-19 pandemic.



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1. Introduction

As an intricate ecosystem of human capital and economic dynamics, the labour market has long been subjected to fluctuations and evolutionary forces. Yet, in the annals of contemporary employment history, few phenomena have captivated the collective consciousness of scholars, employers, and employees alike as resoundingly as the "Great Resignation." Marked by a palpable surge in voluntary resignations from the workforce, this multifaceted phenomenon has sent reverberations through the employment landscape, reshaping the foundations of work and its intersection with life. The Great Resignation, a term swiftly permeating discourse in recent years, signifies a pivotal inflexion point in the nexus between labour supply and demand. Its emergence can be attributed to a confluence of factors, ranging from a global pandemic that radically altered work arrangements and priorities to a workforce that increasingly seeks meaning, flexibility, and a recalibration of the oft-tenuous equilibrium between professional commitments and personal life. Within this crucible of change and transformation, the delicate balance of work and life has taken centre stage as a critical determinant of employee satisfaction, retention, and, ultimately, the sustainability of organisations. The great resignation refers to the unprecedented wave of voluntary quits and job changes that workers across various sectors and countries have initiated since mid-2020. On the other hand, work-life balance refers to the degree of harmony and satisfaction that workers experience in their professional and personal lives.

2. Literature Review

The contemporary workforce is amidst a profound and transformative phenomenon called the "Great Resignation." This pivotal shift, characterised by a substantial surge in voluntary resignations from employment, has undeniably reshaped the work landscape. As employees reassess their priorities and seek to reestablish a harmonious equilibrium between professional and personal life, the concept of work-life balance has surged to the forefront of academic, corporate, and societal discussions. The term "Great Resignation" gained prominence in mid-2021 as media outlets and industry analysts attempted to encapsulate a significant and multifaceted labour market shift. It reflects a profound departure from traditional employment patterns, characterised by a substantial wave of employees voluntarily exiting their current roles across diverse industries and occupational sectors (Lambert, 2023). This exodus has initiated a fundamental transformation in the labour market, transcending statistical anomalies into a salient and pervasive phenomenon. The 2020s have undeniably started with noteworthy events, establishing a distinct historical backdrop in just three short years. This decade has been marked by a slew of headline-worthy occurrences, from the rapid spread of a global pandemic to conflicts in Eastern Europe and disruptions in the international supply chain.

However, beneath these top-level events lies a phenomenon poised to leave its lasting impact: The Great Resignation. Emerging from widespread work-from-home policies necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic's social distancing measures, 2021 witnessed a wave of mass resignations driven by burnout, a sense of disconnection from work, and the allure of better prospects elsewhere. In the United States, an average of 3.98 million workers voluntarily left their jobs each month throughout 2021, according to a report by Zippia. While it gained momentum in 2021, the Great Resignation continues to challenge the business sector. A recent survey conducted by the Gloat Research Group among over 1,300 workers and HR leaders in the US revealed that employee sentiments have remained largely consistent with those of 2021. High burnout rates, disengagement, and the belief in superior opportunities beyond their current organisations were cited as the primary reasons prompting consideration of leaving current workplaces. Remarkably, 52% of US workers are actively seeking new employment or plan to do so within the next three months, with 40% willing to explore opportunities beyond their present employers. The trend extends beyond the US, with Israel experiencing a 2021 resignation rate of approximately 13%, nearly double the 6.8% rate of 2020, as reported by a study by Zviran.

Simultaneously, the current talent pool is notably shallow, rendering the loss of any number of employees a substantial threat to a company's productivity and sustainability. Understandably, this has left Human Resources professionals apprehensive. More than half (56%) of surveyed HR leaders disclosed their struggles in retaining employees, meeting recruitment targets, and addressing future skill requirements. To prevent a mass exodus of employees, HR teams diligently strive to meet critical employee needs satisfactorily. As per Gloat's findings, three out of four HR representatives reported that they are either studying or implementing new "systems of agile work" to engage their workforce. Also, Israel has witnessed a salary increase as companies strive to retain their workforce and deter employees from seeking better opportunities elsewhere. In 2021, 90% of Israeli hi-tech companies raised wages by an average of 6.5%, a

substantial increase from 2020's 2.3%. A fundamental aspect of the Great Resignation's impact on employees' work mentality is a shift in their relationship with work. There is an increased emphasis on opportunities, the alignment of company objectives with personal values, and a growing demand for flexible work arrangements.

A recent survey by the Pew Research Center sheds light on the primary reasons Americans quit their jobs in the past year. The survey reveals that low pay, limited opportunities for career advancement, and experiencing disrespect at work emerged as the leading factors driving employees to leave their positions. Furthermore, among those who resigned and found new employment, most express satisfaction with their current jobs, citing better compensation, improved prospects for advancement, and enhanced work-life balance and flexibility. Specifically, the survey, conducted from February 7 to 13, indicates that the majority of individuals who left their jobs in 2021 identified low pay (63%), a shortage of opportunities for advancement (63%), and feeling disrespected at the workplace (57%) as key motivators for their decision to resign. For many respondents, each factor played a significant role in their departure. Nearly half mentioned childcare concerns as a factor prompting them to quit their job (48%, particularly prevalent among those with children under 18 in their households). A similar percentage cited a lack of flexibility in determining their work hours (45%) or the absence of desirable benefits such as health insurance. It paid time off (43%) as a significant contributing factor—approximately a quarter considered each of these issues as major reasons behind their job change.

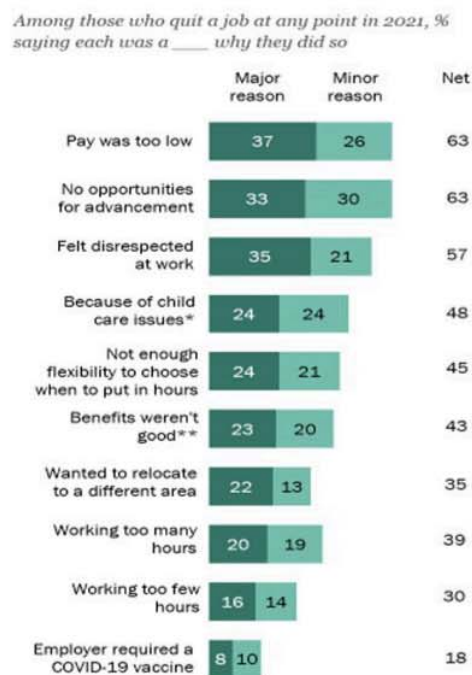


Figure 1. Top Reasons Why US Workers Left a Job in 2021

Figure 1 shows that approximately 39% of adults who left their jobs in the past year attribute their departure to excessive working hours, while 30% mention working insufficient hours as a contributing factor. Around 35% express a desire to relocate to a different area, while a smaller proportion (18%) indicate their employer's COVID-19 vaccine requirement as a reason for quitting. When asked about the pandemic's influence on their quitting, 31% acknowledged it played a role. Notably, individuals without a four-year college degree (34%) are more inclined to attribute their job departure to the pandemic than those with a bachelor's degree or higher (21%). The primary reasons for quitting are relatively consistent among both men and women. However, notable distinctions emerge when considering educational attainment. A chart illustrating the reasons for job resignations in 2021 reveals variations based on education levels. Among adults who voluntarily left their jobs in 2021, those without a four-year college degree are more likely to attribute several reasons for their decision than their peers with at least a bachelor's degree. These factors include the lack of flexibility in determining their work hours (49% of non-college graduates compared to

34% of college graduates), having to work insufficient hours (35% vs. 17%), and their employer's requirement for a COVID-19 vaccine (21% vs. 8%).

Additionally, differences are evident when considering race and ethnicity. Non-White adults who resigned from their jobs in the previous year are more likely than their White counterparts to cite various reasons for their decision. These include inadequate flexibility (52% vs. 38%), a desire to relocate to a different area (41% vs. 30%), working too few hours (37% vs. 24%), or their employer's COVID-19 vaccine mandate (27% vs. 10%). The non-White category encompasses individuals identifying as Black, Asian, Hispanic, and those from other racial backgrounds or of multiple races. Due to sample size limitations, these groups could not be analysed separately.

2.1. Many of Those Who Switched Jobs See Improvements

Most individuals who resigned from their jobs in 2021 and are not retired have transitioned into new employment, either on a full-time basis (55%) or part-time (23%). Of these individuals, 61% express that finding their current job was at least somewhat easy, with 33% characterising it as easy. One-fifth of respondents describe it as very or somewhat difficult, while 19% consider it neither easy nor difficult. In general, individuals who left their jobs in the previous year and are now employed elsewhere view their current work situation as an improvement compared to their previous positions. Over half of these individuals report positive changes, indicating that, compared to their last job, they now earn more income (56%), have increased opportunities for career advancement (53%), find it easier to balance work and family responsibilities (53%) and enjoy greater flexibility in determining their work hours (50%). Nevertheless, significant portions acknowledge that their current situations are either worse or unchanged in these aspects compared to their previous jobs. Regarding benefits, fewer than half of those who quit their jobs in 2021 (42%) state that they now receive better benefits, such as improved health insurance and paid time off, while a similar portion (36%) notes that their benefits remain largely unchanged.

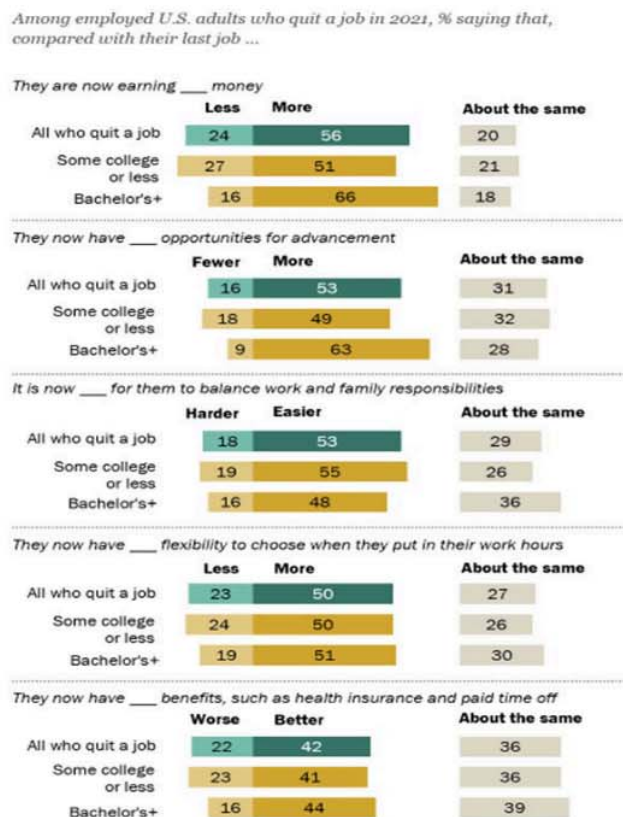


Figure 2. College Graduate Who Quit a Job in 2021

Figure 2 indicates that approximately 22% indicate that their current benefits are now worse than what they had in their previous jobs. Additionally, a bar chart illustrates that college graduates who resigned from

their jobs are more likely than those with lower levels of education to report higher earnings and increased opportunities for career advancement.

Differences in perspectives emerge when considering the educational background of individuals who have resigned from their jobs. College graduates are more inclined to report positive changes than those with lower educational attainment. Specifically, college graduates are more likely to affirm that their current job yields higher earnings (66% compared to 51%) and offers increased opportunities for career advancement (63% compared to 49%). Conversely, individuals with less education are more prone to express a decrease in income in their current job (27% compared to 16%) and perceive fewer opportunities for advancement (18% compared to 9%). When assessing their current jobs compared to their previous positions, employed men and women who quit in 2021 generally offer similar evaluations. However, there is a notable difference in terms of work-life balance: Six out of ten men believe that their current job makes it easier for them to balance work and family responsibilities, a higher proportion than women who share the same sentiment (48%) Furthermore, a significant portion of employed adults who left their jobs in 2021 (53%) state that they have changed their field of work or occupation at some point in the past year this trend is particularly pronounced among workers under the age of 30 and those without a postgraduate degree.

2.2. Younger Adults with Lower Incomes Were More Likely to Quit A Job in 2021

A bar chart illustrates that approximately one-quarter of adults with lower incomes indicated they voluntarily left a job in 2021. In total, 19% of non-retired U.S. adults, including similar proportions of men (18%) and women (20%), reported quitting a job during the year. This departure was a matter of choice and not due to termination, layoffs, or the conclusion of a temporary job. Among age groups, young adults are significantly more likely to have left their jobs voluntarily in the previous year. Specifically, 37% of individuals under 30 report doing so. In contrast to 17% of those aged 30 to 49, 9% of those aged 50 to 64, and 5% of those aged 65 and older. Experiences also diverge based on income, education, race, and ethnicity. Approximately 24% of adults with lower incomes disclosed quitting a job in 2021, while this figure was 18% for middle-income individuals and 11% for those with higher incomes.

Among those who are not retired, % saying they quit a job at any point in 2021

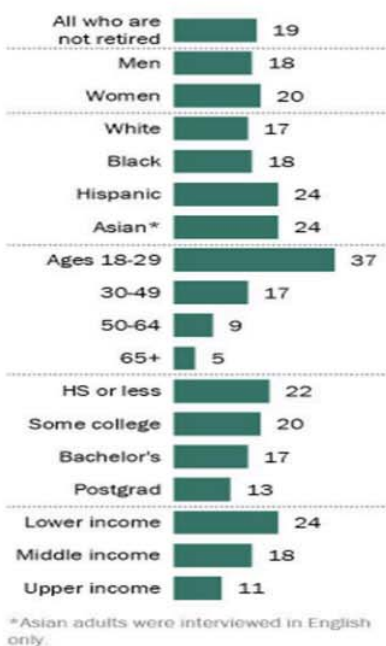


Figure 3. A Quarter of Adults with Lower Income Quit a Job in 2021

When considering educational background, individuals with a postgraduate degree emerge as the least likely to have voluntarily left a job in 2021. Specifically, only 13% of those with a postgraduate degree reported quitting a job during that period. In comparison, 17% of individuals with a bachelor's degree, 20%

with some college education, and 22% with a high school diploma or lower levels of education acknowledged doing the same. In terms of racial and ethnic groups, about a quarter of non-retired Hispanic and Asian adults (24% each) they were reported quitting a job in the previous year. This contrasts with 18% of Black adults and 17% of White adults who indicated doing so.

2.3. What are workers looking for?

Several key concepts can significantly impact a company's employee retention rate, as highlighted by Ronni Zehavi, CEO and co-founder of Hi Bob, a startup specialising in HR management platforms recognised by TIME magazine's Best Inventions 2022 for its innovative contributions to the Human Resources industry. Zehavi emphasises that a company's culture is the foremost driver leading individuals to seek alternative employment. A corporate culture founded on trust, transparency, teamwork, prioritising employee well-being, and investing in their development is more likely to achieve high retention rates. Second in importance is career development, encompassing opportunities to learn from exceptional peers and the sense of contributing to the organisation's success. Surprisingly, compensation ranks last on the list of factors influencing employee retention. Zehavi notes that the Great Resignation has ushered in a transformative shift in the way workers perceive their work, particularly in the hi-tech sector. He identifies a new era characterised by "life-work balance" instead of the traditional "work-life balance," highlighting the primacy of personal life over professional obligations. This represents a significant departure from previous generations' work ethics and mentalities. Historically, many individuals, like Zehavi's father and grandfather, followed fixed work patterns, maintaining a clear boundary between their job and personal life. However, the new generation of workers has brought about a fundamental change, blurring the lines between work and life. Zehavi emphasises that this "life first, work second" mindset will shape the future of the labour market. These emerging workers, driven by a focus on well-being, are poised to dominate the job market in the coming five to ten years and will play a pivotal role in setting the tone for the workplace.

2.4. Work from home is here to stay

Another aspect of the evolving employee mindset is the strong insistence on hybrid work models. Ronni Zehavi, CEO and co-founder of Hi Bob underscores that hybrid work is thriving and irreversible, with employers attempting to mandate a return to the traditional office environment facing resistance. Zehavi emphasises that the transition to hybrid work symbolises the new era and is expected to endure indefinitely. This trend towards hybrid work has firmly taken root in office workers' expectations worldwide. Leading experts further reinforced this sentiment during a recent panel discussion held by Herzog Law Firm and DLA Piper, a global firm led by Jeremy Lust with a longstanding presence in Israel. Representatives from DLA Piper offices worldwide discussed the enduring impact of COVID-19 on the work-from-home mindset.

For instance, in the Netherlands, flexible labour regulations predating COVID-19 persist today. Employees can request remote work, and employers cannot refuse without a valid reason. This shift prioritises the employee's interests, making it an attractive hiring incentive. In the United States, remote work is well-established and expected to continue. Many firms have adopted remote or hybrid work options as a recruitment strategy, no longer solely driven by pandemic-related concerns. Attorney Moriah Tam-Harshoshanim, a partner in Herzog's Labor and Employment Department, emphasised that remote work is here to stay in Israel, particularly in the hi-tech sector. In the public sector, remote work arrangements have been addressed in collective agreements, allowing employers to determine the extent and schedule of remote work. Employees are entitled to their full salary and benefits while working remotely, as it has become an integral part of the employer's approach in the current era.

2.5. Toxic Culture is Driving the Great Resignation

At the outset of 2021, over 40% of all employees contemplated leaving their jobs, and as the year unfolded, a record number of workers resigned. Between April and September 2021, more than 24 million American employees voluntarily left their positions, marking an unprecedented exodus. As the Great Resignation persists, business leaders grapple with the enigmatic forces driving this mass departure. Crucially, they are actively seeking ways to retain their valuable workforce. To gain deeper insights into the origins of the Great Resignation and to aid leaders in crafting effective responses, we analysed 34 million online employee profiles. This analysis focused on identifying U.S. workers who departed from their employers for various reasons, including voluntary resignations, retirements, or layoffs, from April to

September 2021. Our data, sourced from Revelio Labs, where one of our team members (Ben) serves as CEO, allowed us to estimate attrition rates at the company level within the Culture 500. This group represents a sample of predominantly for-profit, large companies employing nearly a quarter of the U.S. private-sector workforce. While resignation rates exhibited a significant overall increase, they displayed non-uniformity across different companies. Over the six-month study period, attrition rates varied from less than 2% to exceeding 30% among companies. One contributing factor to this disparity is the industry in which a company operates. The provided graph illustrates the estimated attrition rate for 38 industries from April to September, illustrating the wide range across sectors. Notably, industries such as apparel retail experienced three times the attrition rate of sectors like airlines, medical device manufacturers, and health insurers. It's important to note that the impact of the Great Resignation is pervasive, affecting both blue-collar and white-collar sectors equally. Some of the hardest-hit industries, including apparel retail, fast food, and specialty retail, employ the highest proportion of blue-collar workers across all the industries we examined.

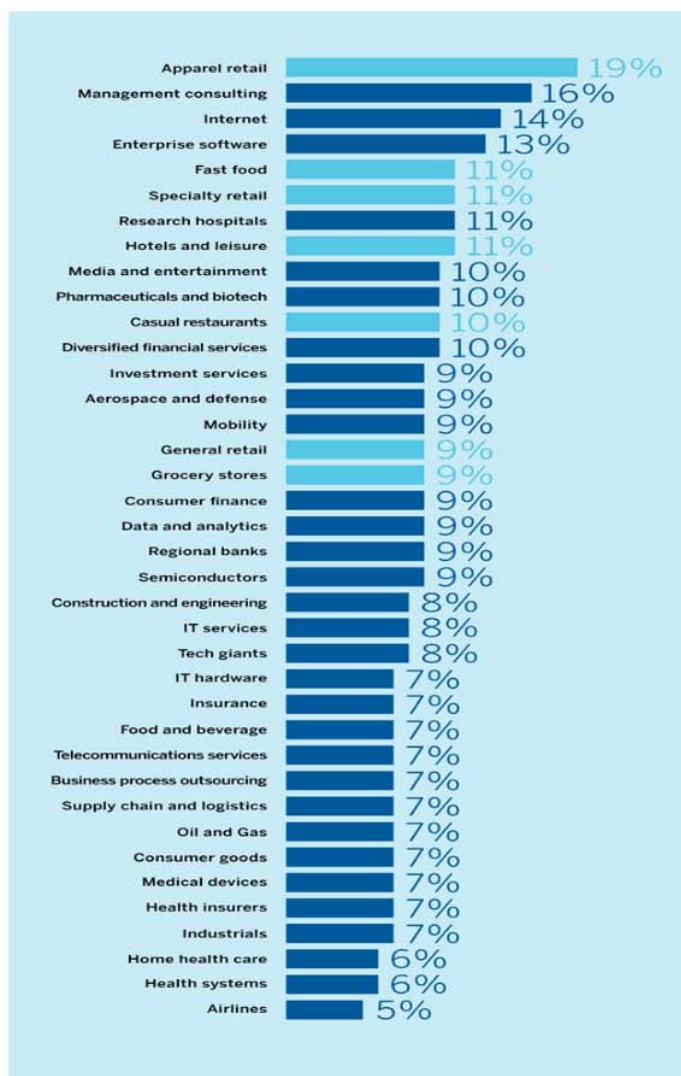


Figure 4. Comparing the Competitors With High and Low Attrition Rates Within Their Respective Industries

In contrast, management consulting exhibited the second-highest attrition rate but boasted the highest proportion of white-collar professionals among all the industries within the Culture 500. Enterprise software, which also faced considerable workforce turnover, employs the largest percentage of engineering and technical personnel. While industry affiliation accounts for a portion of the variance in company attrition rates, it does not provide a comprehensive explanation. Even within the same industry, we observed

substantial disparities in attrition rates. Figure 5 compares competitors with high and low industry attrition rates. For instance, employees are 3.8 times more likely to depart from Tesla than Ford and more than twice as likely to resign from JetBlue compared to Southwest Airlines.

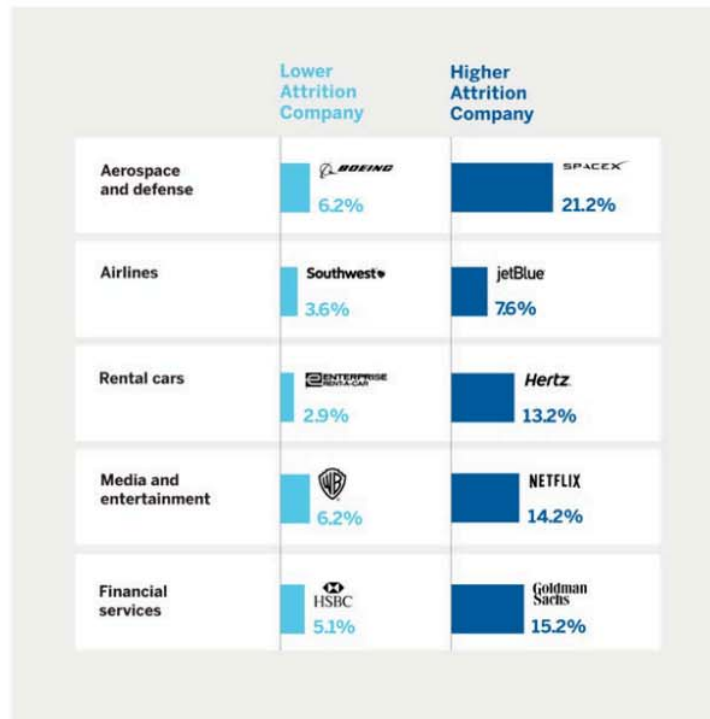


Figure 5. Comparing the Competitors with High and Low Industry Attrition Rates

Unsurprisingly, companies known for fostering a healthy workplace culture, such as Southwest Airlines, Johnson & Johnson, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and LinkedIn, experienced below-average turnover rates during the initial six months of the Great Resignation. While the sample size is limited, these instances suggest another noteworthy pattern. Companies prioritising innovation, including Space X, Tesla, Nvidia, and Netflix, are contending with higher attrition rates than their more conventional counterparts. This trend extends beyond technology-intensive industries, as innovative firms like Goldman Sachs and Red Bull have also grappled with elevated turnover rates. To delve further into the factors influencing intra-industry turnover, we calculated each Culture 500 company's attrition rate relative to the industry-wide average. This metric, known as industry-adjusted attrition, quantifies each company's attrition rate in standard deviations above or below the industry norm.

2.6. Top Predictors of Employee Turnover During the Great Resignation

While much of the media discourse surrounding the Great Resignation has focused on employee dissatisfaction with their wages, it's worth noting that the frequency and positivity of employee mentions regarding compensation rank 16th among all topics when predicting employee turnover. This finding aligns with a substantial body of evidence indicating that pay has only a moderate impact on employee turnover. However, compensation can be a crucial predictor of attrition in specific contexts, such as nurses in large healthcare systems. Corporate culture emerges as a much more reliable predictor of industry-adjusted attrition than how employees evaluate compensation.

One of the most influential factors driving employee attrition is a toxic corporate culture, which stands out as the strongest predictor of industry-adjusted attrition, surpassing compensation's influence by a factor of ten. Our analysis has identified key elements contributing to toxic cultures, including the failure to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, employees feeling disrespected, and instances of unethical behaviour. In an upcoming article, we will delve deeper into these factors, exploring how managers and employees can recognise signals of a toxic culture. For now, it is essential to recognise that a toxic culture ranks as the primary driver pushing employees to seek alternative opportunities during the Great

Resignation. Job insecurity and organisational restructurings also exert a significant impact on employee turnover. Unsurprisingly, employment instability and reorganisations influence employee turnover since managers often resort to layoffs and restructuring during challenging times. Previous research indicates that employees' negative assessments of their company's future outlook strongly predict attrition. When a company faces adversity, employees are more inclined to explore new opportunities, offering greater job security and professional growth. In addition, previous layoffs often result in surviving employees shouldering heavier workloads, potentially increasing their likelihood of leaving. Job insecurity may predict turnover due to our measure of employee attrition, which encompasses job changes for all reasons, including layoffs and involuntary terminations. While data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that involuntary separations have accounted for less than a quarter of all employee exits among large companies during the Great Resignation, it is likely that poor career prospects and job insecurity significantly contributed to employees leaving voluntarily.

Furthermore, the company's innovation level is a surprising factor influencing employee turnover. While it is expected that workers might leave companies with toxic cultures or frequent layoffs, it is unexpected that employees are more prone to depart from innovative companies. Within the Culture 500 sample, we observed that the more positively employees discussed innovation within their company, the higher the likelihood of them leaving. Attrition rates at the three most innovative Culture 500 companies—Nvidia, Tesla, and Space X—are three standard deviations above those in their respective industries. Staying at the forefront of innovation often demands longer working hours, a faster pace, and heightened stress levels compared to slower-paced companies. While the work can be exhilarating and fulfilling, it can also be challenging to sustain over the long term. During the Great Resignation, employees may be reevaluating the personal toll of relentless innovation. Finally, employees are more inclined to depart from companies that fail to distinguish between high-performing individuals and underachievers regarding recognition and rewards. Companies that neglect to recognise and reward strong performers tend to experience higher attrition rates than employers that tolerate underperformance. The central issue lies not in compensation falling below market rates but in the lack of recognition—both informal and financial—that correlates with effort and results. High-performing employees are particularly prone to resent the absence of recognition for their achievements, indicating that companies may lose some of their most productive workers during the Great Resignation.

2.7. Short-Term Actions to Boost Retention

The potent predictors of attrition outlined above pose significant challenges to address. Factors such as a bleak future outlook leading to restructuring and layoffs, the consequences of a poor pandemic response, and entrenched toxic corporate cultures cannot be rectified overnight. Likewise, relentless innovation, which provides companies like Tesla and Nvidia with a competitive edge, must be maintained without sacrificing their innovation capabilities. However, there are actionable strategies that organisations can implement to improve employee retention:

1. **Provide Opportunities for Lateral Job Moves:** Not all employees aspire to climb the corporate ladder or take on increased responsibilities. Many seek a change of pace or the chance to explore new roles without promotion. Employees who express positivity about lateral opportunities, such as trying different roles that offer fresh challenges, are less likely to leave. Lateral career opportunities are 12 times more predictive of employee retention than promotions. This pattern extends to international postings in multinational companies, where discussing the potential for overseas assignments increases employee retention.
2. **Sponsor Corporate Social Events:** Organising company-sponsored social events, such as happy hours, team-building outings, potluck dinners, and other extracurricular activities, contributes to a healthy corporate culture and is associated with higher retention rates. These events are cost-effective ways to reinforce corporate culture, especially as employees return to the office and foster stronger personal connections among team members.
3. **Offer Remote Work Options:** While remote work has received significant attention in the context of the Great Resignation, its impact on retention is moderately more influential than compensation. Positive discussions about remote work options correlate with lower attrition rates. However, because many companies in an industry tend to converge on similar remote work policies, its impact on employee turnover may be limited. Companies can explore other retention strategies to stand out, such as lateral job opportunities or enhanced schedule predictability.

- 4. Enhance Predictability of Schedules for Front-Line Employees:** A predictable schedule significantly reduces the risk of attrition for blue-collar workers. A predictable schedule is six times more predictive of front-line employee retention than a flexible one. Implementing scheduling practices that give employees two weeks' advance notice and prevent last-minute shift cancellations can significantly improve retention rates, particularly among experienced associates. This approach has been shown to boost the quality of sleep among employees and reduce stress, with even more pronounced benefits for workers with children.

While much of the media's attention on the Great Resignation has centred on the high turnover rates among overworked knowledge workers dissatisfied with their stagnant wages, our research largely aligns with this narrative. Industries heavily reliant on professional and technical employees, such as management consulting and enterprise software, have witnessed elevated attrition. We also found subtle indications that burnout might increase turnover, especially within highly innovative companies. Notably, our direct measures of burnout, workload, and work-life balance did not emerge as prominent predictors of industry-adjusted attrition. However, the straightforward narrative of white-collar burnout overlooks other crucial aspects of the Great Resignation. Our findings reinforce recent government statistics revealing that industries with a strong presence of blue-collar workers, like retail and fast food, grapple with unprecedented attrition rates. Moreover, we have discovered that corporate culture exerts a more substantial influence than burnout or compensation when predicting which companies experience higher-than-average employee departures compared to their respective industries. Notably, a toxic corporate culture emerges as the most reliable predictor of companies facing significant attrition during the initial six months of the Great Resignation. Another cultural factor tied to attrition is the failure to appropriately acknowledge high-performing employees through formal and informal recognition. Neglecting recognition for performance can drive away a company's most productive workers. It is important to clarify that compensation and burnout still play essential roles in influencing attrition – they undoubtedly matter. However, the key takeaway is that various cultural elements seem to exert an even greater impact on attrition rates.

2.8. It is time to replace work-life balance with 'life-work integration'

The Great Resignation has prompted a profound reevaluation of the role of work in our lives. It's not merely about people leaving their jobs; it's a broader reconsideration of what they truly desire from life. Individuals are resigning from a prevailing culture of "workism," which has long portrayed our identity as primarily defined by our careers, squeezing everything else – life – into an increasingly limited space. It's becoming clear that our perspective on work-life has been somewhat misguided. Certainly, work holds significance. It can provide us with purpose and meaning, constituting an integral part of a fulfilling life. However, it should never supplant life itself. It's time to discard the very concept of "work-life" altogether. The language we use matters. In the pre-pandemic era, much of our work-related terminology drew from the language of warfare – "killing it," "crushing it," and "defeating competitors." It fostered a perpetual state of fight-or-flight, fueling burnout. It also perpetuated the zero-sum perception of work and life that underlies the myth of "work-life balance." In truth, work and life are aligned, so they do not require balancing. They ebb and flow together – enhancing your overall well-being in life will, in turn, bolster your effectiveness at work. Believing in the attainability of balance and having it all is a recipe for inevitable failure. "Work-life integration" represented a step in the right direction, as it acknowledged that we do not need to choose between succeeding at work and excelling in other aspects of life when we bring ourselves to work, in-person or remotely. Our work and life are inherently integrated, so recognising this reality in our language makes it more sustainable. We can take this a step further with "life-work integration."

This shift in language represents an effort to rectify a fundamental flaw in the code that has led to an increasingly unstable operating system, resulting in more frequent system crashes. People are indeed experiencing these crashes. Even before the pandemic, we found ourselves during a growing epidemic of stress and burnout. In May 2019, just months before the pandemic, the World Health Organization officially acknowledged burnout as a workplace crisis. Simultaneously, the Great Resignation persists, with a new record number of workers – 4.5 million – choosing to depart from their jobs just before the holiday season in November. Burnout and the demand for greater flexibility are the reasons for this departure. According to a recent global survey by Future Forum, 76% of workers desire more flexibility regarding where they work, and a staggering 93% seek increased flexibility regarding when they work. However, this desire for flexibility is not an end; it reflects a deeper aspiration to recalibrate the balance between our lives and work.

It is the essence of the Great Reevaluation – prioritising life above all else. In response to this collective shift in mindset, forward-thinking companies are reevaluating their approach to well-being. Well-being is no longer merely a perk or an afterthought; instead, it is integrated into the very fabric of the work process. Life-work integration revolves around incorporating well-being as a set of guiding principles that we can use to structure our daily routines. The journey begins by identifying our non-negotiable – those aspects of our lives that define who we are and who we aspire to become, enabling us to present our best selves. In a world where life-work integration prevails, we redefine success on our terms, with work being just one avenue through which we fulfil that definition. As organisational psychologist Adam Grant recently noted in *The Wall Street Journal*, "For several generations, we have organised our lives around our work. Our jobs have determined where we make our homes when we see our families, and what we can fit into our downtime. Perhaps it's time to start arranging our work around our lives." The Great Resignation serves as a testament to the fact that millions share this sentiment. Life-work integration provides a framework for constructing a way of living and working that enables us to thrive truly.

2.9. Drivers and Determinants of the Great Resignation

The drivers and determinants of the Great Resignation are deeply rooted in the intricate interplay of societal, economic, and individual factors. While the phenomenon's complexity defies singular categorisation, several key factors have consistently emerged in extant literature.

1. **Pandemic Disruptions:** The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 catalysed an unprecedented reevaluation of work arrangements. The rapid adoption of remote work, widespread lockdowns, and public health concerns prompted individuals to reconsider their professional roles in their personal lives ([World Health Organization, 2020](#)).
2. **Workplace Flexibility:** The demand for increased workplace flexibility, notably in remote or hybrid work arrangements, has been a central theme in the Great Resignation ([Bloom et al., 2015](#)). Having experienced the advantages of remote work, employees are increasingly seeking positions that offer greater flexibility ([Jooss et al., 2021](#)).
3. **Career Reassessment:** The Great Resignation has prompted individuals to reevaluate their career trajectories and question the traditional benchmarks of success ([Moen et al., 2013](#)). This introspective examination often leads to decisions prioritising personal fulfilment and well-being over traditional notions of career advancement.
4. **Demographic Shifts:** Demographic factors, including generational transitions, have been pivotal. Millennials and Generation Z, in particular, have exhibited a pronounced inclination toward career mobility and a willingness to switch jobs for enhanced work-life balance ([Fry, 2016](#)).

2.10. Reasons Why Employees Leave and Possible Solutions

A total of 88% of HR decision-makers anticipate hiring in 2023 will be equally challenging or even more so compared to 2022. In HR and recruitment within the Life Science industry, attracting top talent is merely the initial hurdle. The industry's subsequent and increasingly vital challenge is retaining employees, particularly in today's volatile job market. To enhance employee retention, companies must gain insight into what employees genuinely seek from their employers in 2023 and what prompts them to explore new opportunities elsewhere. According to Employer's comprehensive 2022 survey involving over 1,200 HR decision-makers and recruiters, employees are primarily motivated to leave their current jobs due to the following top 8 reasons:

1. More money (37.1%)
2. Ability to work remotely (18.6%)
3. Career advancement (13.4%)
4. A change/new challenge (12.4%)
5. Leaving a bad manager or company culture (5.2%)
6. A more inclusive/diverse workplace (5.1%)
7. Unemployment or fear of becoming unemployed (4.2%)
8. Ability to work in an office (4%)

More Money: Given the current cost-of-living crisis that has impacted employees across the globe, it is no surprise that money is the top motivation for finding a new job. However, especially if your organisation is smaller, giving all your employees a pay rise is not always so simple. Despite this, there are other ways you

can support your employees with the rising costs of living, including rethinking the benefits you are offering. Benefits that could help your employees to earn and save more money include:

1. Salary sacrifice schemes
2. Company Share save schemes
3. Commuting support including cycle-to-work schemes, secure bike sheds, discounted travel fares, and electric charging points
4. Discounts on retail, leisure, entertainment and health and wellbeing products/services
5. Opportunity to sell unused holiday
6. Free or subsidised snacks, drinks, and meals in the office
7. Financial advice workshops/online support

Ability to Work Remotely: Although not possible for every role – especially for laboratory and field-based work there is a place for hybrid and remote working within the industry. Some of the world's leading Life Science organisations already offer these flexible working options. Whilst it might not be possible – or even beneficial – for you to become a fully remote organisation, you should be looking at ways to support your employees in having a healthier work-life balance and more flexibility over their workload. As well as offering remote working, consider the following hybrid work models:

1. **Adaptive Hybrid Work Model:** Employees have the autonomy to determine their work location and hours in alignment with their priorities.
2. **Structured Hybrid Work Model:** The organisation prescribes specific days and timeframes during which employees can work remotely or in the office.
3. **Office-Prioritised Hybrid Work Model:** While employees are generally expected to work on-site, they can select certain days for remote work.
4. **Remote-Centric Hybrid Work Model:** Employees predominantly work remotely, occasionally attending meetings or gatherings at co-working spaces or the central office.

Career Advancement: Establishing an internal mobility strategy within your organisation can prove exceptionally effective in enhancing employee retention and curbing turnover rates. It also serves as a means to address vital skill shortages. There are two primary forms of internal mobility:

1. **Vertical Mobility:** In this scenario, an employee assumes a new role at a higher level than their current position, often involving added responsibilities.
2. **Lateral Mobility:** Employees transition into a new role at the same hierarchical level as their existing position, typically entailing diverse responsibilities or involvement in a distinct business sector.

Both provide space for employees to develop their careers with you rather than going elsewhere to progress.

A Change/New Challenge: Career development is not just about allowing employees to take on new roles within your organisation. You should give your employees the time and resources to develop their skills, not only based on their current job responsibilities but also on their personal interests and future career aspirations. If you start to notice an employee becoming demotivated, look at how their role has progressed over time:

1. Have they had the opportunity to work with different people within the organisation, or do they tend to be put on the same team?
2. Do they work on different projects, or have they worked on the same projects since they started?
3. Is there enough variety in their workload?
4. How many different skills have they learnt since they started in the role?
5. Have they been given enough autonomy over their learning and development?
6. How have their colleagues' roles changed over time? Are they being left behind?
7. How much of a voice have they been given? Do they have the opportunity to influence how things are within the team/organisation?

Remember that not all employees are driven by change and the thought of taking on more challenging work, but do try to ensure you're getting the most out of your employees by offering interesting work, as well as a job that allows them to explore their potential outside of the duties set in their job descriptions.

Leaving a Bad Manager or Company Culture: Remember the saying, ‘People leave managers, not companies.’ Whilst you cannot expect every employee to be best friends with their managers, they must be able to have a positive, professional relationship with them. Ensure you provide regular management training to ensure managers have the right skills to be effective leaders. Use employee feedback to understand what support they are currently lacking. Building more positive relationships between your employees will improve your organisation’s company culture, creating an environment where employees are heard and change is made.

A More Inclusive/Diverse Workplace: Employees increasingly seek employers to foster a more diverse and inclusive workplace as they recognise the benefits of working in an environment that values differences and promotes fairness and equality. A diverse and inclusive workplace can help employees feel a sense of belonging, increase creativity and innovation, provide more opportunities for career development, and ultimately improve business success.

Unemployment or Fear of Becoming Unemployed: Since the start of 2023, news stories of organisations’ laying off large numbers of employees seem to be cropping up more and more, which has undoubtedly made employees wary of their job security.

One of the most important things you can do to prevent employees from leaving due to the fear of becoming unemployed is to communicate clearly and regularly with your staff, keeping people informed of the company’s performance as well as changes in the business landscape. Celebrate the wins, opportunities, and challenges, and don’t let rumours lie. When employees are kept in the loop, they’ll feel valued and more likely to trust you, which can alleviate any anxiety they may be feeling. Another important step to take is to invest in your employees’ professional development. By providing opportunities for training and development, you’ll demonstrate your commitment to your employee’s long-term success, proving that you’re invested in their future. Providing a clear career path and opportunities for advancement can give employees a sense of purpose and direction, which can also alleviate anxiety about job security. Ability to Work in an Office: Whilst remote working brings many benefits, not everyone will thrive in this environment. If you’re a fully remote organisation without a central office, consider how you’re keeping your employees connected. Are you doing enough to maintain a positive company culture where people feel supported and part of a team? Are you giving people the space to communicate on a personal level as well as professionally? Are you looking out for signs of burnout and helping your employees to set healthy work-life boundaries? Even if you’re doing everything you can to make remote working successful, some people still need that face-to-face communication to thrive. Consider some of the following:

1. Renting a small ‘hub’ where employees can work from
2. Organising in-person socials as well as virtual
3. Allowing employees to work in a nearby co-working space
4. Ensuring employees have a portable work set up, allowing them to work from coffee shops, a colleague’s house, etc.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Work-Life Balance

The concept of work-life balance is foundational to this study, as it serves as the fulcrum upon which the Great Resignation pivots. Work-life balance is a multifaceted and evolving construct subject to various interpretations and definitions within the academic and corporate spheres (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). Work-life balance, in its essence, refers to the equilibrium individuals seek to establish between their professional and personal lives (Clark, 2000). It encompasses managing work-related responsibilities and obligations while nurturing personal relationships, pursuing leisure activities, and preserving one’s physical and mental well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Various paradigms of work-life balance have emerged over the years, reflecting the evolution of societal norms, technological advancements, and the changing nature of work. Early conceptualisations viewed work and personal life as separate domains requiring strict demarcation to prevent interference (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). However, contemporary perspectives recognise the interconnectivity between these domains, emphasising the need for integration, flexibility, and harmony (Kossek et al., 2012).

3.2. The Significance of Work-Life Balance

The importance of work-life balance extends far beyond individual well-being. It is intrinsically linked to broader organisational and societal outcomes. Research has consistently demonstrated that employees who perceive a satisfactory work-life balance tend to exhibit greater job satisfaction, lower turnover intentions, and improved overall mental and physical health (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009; Shockley et al., 2017). For organisations, fostering a work environment that supports work-life balance is associated with enhanced employee productivity, engagement, and retention (Allen et al., 2013). Moreover, an organisation's reputation as a work-life balance advocate can become a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining top talent (Abdullahi et al., 2022).

3.3. The Intersection of the Great Resignation and Work-Life Balance

The emergence of the Great Resignation has brought the relationship between work-life balance and employment dynamics into sharp focus. As employees reassess their professional commitments and seek opportunities that align with their evolving priorities, organisations must adapt to accommodate changing expectations. In the wake of the Great Resignation, employers face the challenge of retaining talent by addressing work-life balance concerns, offering flexible work arrangements, and reevaluating their benefits and perks packages (PWC, 2021). Simultaneously, employees are navigating the intricacies of remote work, hybrid work models, and the redefined boundaries between work and personal life. Understanding the evolving dynamics of work-life balance within the context of the Great Resignation is imperative for organisations striving to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving labour market. This study aims to unravel the multifaceted dimensions of this phenomenon by drawing from a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, thereby contributing to the burgeoning discourse surrounding the Great Resignation and its profound implications for the modern workforce.

3.4. The COVID-19 Pandemic on Work-Life Balance in the Context of the Great Resignation

The COVID-19 pandemic, an unparalleled global crisis, engendered multifaceted and profound repercussions across numerous aspects of society, including the world of work. The pandemic's impact on work-life balance has been especially notable in the context of the Great Resignation, a labour market phenomenon characterised by a substantial increase in voluntary job resignations. This section delves into how the pandemic has influenced work-life balance and explores organisations' strategies to address these changes. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid reconfiguration of work arrangements across industries. Governments, organisations, and employees were confronted with the imperative of adapting to mitigate the spread of the virus. Central to these adaptations was the widespread implementation of remote work (Bloom et al., 2015). Overnight, traditional office spaces gave way to home offices, with employees grappling with the convergence of professional and personal life within the confines of their homes. Remote work, while essential for maintaining business continuity during lockdowns, brought new challenges and opportunities for work-life balance. For some employees, removing daily commutes offered newfound time and flexibility. However, this newfound flexibility often blurred the boundaries between work and personal life, potentially leading to "always-on" work expectations and burnout (Allen et al., 2013). Employees also faced the challenge of managing family responsibilities, childcare, and homeschooling while meeting job demands. The pandemic underscored the importance of flexibility, adaptability, and support mechanisms in achieving work-life equilibrium (Rudolph et al., 2021). The pandemic's impact on work-life balance is inextricably linked to the Great Resignation. As employees were compelled to reassess their priorities and rethink the balance between work and personal life, many chose to opt out of traditional employment structures (Moen et al., 2013). In many ways, the pandemic catalysed a collective introspection about the compatibility of existing work arrangements with individual well-being and fulfilment (Clark, 2000).

3.5. Organisational Strategies to Address Work-Life Balance

Organisations have initiated several strategies to adapt and support their workforce in response to the evolving dynamics of work-life balance during the pandemic and the subsequent Great Resignation.

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Recognising the need for flexibility, organisations have formalised and expanded flexible work arrangements, including remote work, part-time schedules, and compressed workweeks (Kossek et al., 2012).

2. **Mental Health and Well-being Initiatives:** Many organisations have augmented their mental health support programs, offering resources, counselling, and wellness initiatives to mitigate the mental strain brought about by the pandemic and remote work (Shockley et al., 2017).
3. **Technology Infrastructure:** Investments in robust technology infrastructure have enabled remote work while maintaining productivity. Organisations have embraced digital tools for collaboration and communication (PWC, 2021).
4. **Benefits and Perks:** The pandemic prompted organisations to reevaluate their benefits packages, with some introducing additional benefits such as childcare support, flexible time off, and extended healthcare coverage (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021).
5. **Communication and Training:** Clear communication and training on work-life balance and remote work expectations have been instrumental in helping employees navigate the challenges of this new work paradigm (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

3.6. The Role of Organisational Policies, Benefits, and Incentives in Mitigating or Exacerbating Work-Life Balance Challenges during the Great Resignation

The Great Resignation, marked by an unprecedented wave of voluntary resignations from employment, has forced organisations to reevaluate their approach to talent retention and employee well-being. At the heart of this reassessment lie organisational policies, benefits, and incentive tools that influence employees' work experiences. This section delves into the multifaceted role of these elements in mitigating or exacerbating work-life balance challenges during the Great Resignation.

3.6.1. Organisational Policies and Work-Life Balance

Organisational policies encompass a wide spectrum of rules, guidelines, and procedures that govern the workplace. Depending on their design and implementation, these policies can either facilitate or impede work-life balance (Allen et al., 2013).

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Policies permitting flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting, flexible hours, and job sharing, have emerged as pivotal tools in supporting work-life balance (Kossek et al., 2012). Organisations that have embraced these policies have allowed employees to adapt their work schedules to better align with personal commitments and responsibilities.
2. **Leave Policies:** The availability of comprehensive leave policies, encompassing parental leave, sick leave, and vacation days, can significantly influence work-life balance (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009). Generous leave options enable employees to address personal and family needs without fearing negative repercussions.
3. **Workload Management:** Organisational policies related to workload distribution and time management are equally consequential (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Ensuring employees are not overwhelmed with excessive work demands is crucial for preserving their work-life equilibrium.

3.6.2. Employee Benefits and Work-Life Balance

Employee benefits, ranging from healthcare coverage to retirement plans, substantially impact the overall well-being of employees. However, their relevance in the context of work-life balance extends beyond the traditional realm of compensation.

1. **Childcare and Eldercare Support:** Benefits that offer childcare and eldercare support, such as subsidies or on-site facilities, can substantially alleviate the burden of caregiving responsibilities, thereby enabling employees to maintain their work commitments (Shockley et al., 2017).
2. **Mental Health Services:** Benefits encompassing mental health services, including counselling and access to therapy, have become increasingly vital during the Great Resignation, given the mental strains associated with the pandemic and changing work dynamics (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011).
3. **Wellness Programs:** Organisations that invest in wellness programs, encompassing fitness initiatives and stress management resources, contribute to a healthier and more balanced workforce (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021).

3.6.3. Incentives and Their Impact on Work-Life Balance

Incentives, both monetary and non-monetary, can significantly shape the behaviours and choices of employees, ultimately affecting their work-life balance.

1. **Financial Incentives:** Performance-based bonuses, profit-sharing plans, and financial rewards can motivate employees to invest additional time and effort into their work. However, when these incentives are tied solely to increased productivity without commensurate attention to work-life balance, they may exacerbate work-related stress (Rudolph et al., 2021).
2. **Recognition and Appreciation:** Non-monetary incentives, such as recognition and appreciation programs, can enhance job satisfaction and motivation, contributing positively to work-life balance (Moen et al., 2013).
3. **Career Advancement Opportunities:** The promise of career advancement can be a powerful incentive. However, organisations must ensure that employees perceive advancement as attainable without sacrificing personal time and well-being (Bloom et al., 2015).

3.7. Long-Term Implications for Work-Life Balance in a Post-Great Resignation Work Environment

The Great Resignation, characterised by a significant surge in voluntary job resignations, has introduced a seismic shift in the world of work. Traditionally construed as the equilibrium between professional and personal life, work-life balance has evolved in response to societal, technological, and cultural shifts. The Great Resignation, catalysed by the COVID-19 pandemic and other socio-economic factors, has further accelerated this evolution.

1. **Changing Employee Expectations:** The literature indicates that employees now prioritise flexibility, autonomy, and a sense of purpose more than ever (Fry, 2016). This shift in expectations may reshape how work-life balance is defined and pursued.
2. **Emphasis on Well-being:** The pandemic underscored the importance of physical and mental well-being. Consequently, work-life balance is increasingly intertwined with employee well-being, as suggested by research on the psychological effects of remote work (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009).
3. **Hybrid Work Models:** Literature suggests that hybrid work models, combining remote and in-office work, are likely to persist post-pandemic (Bloom et al., 2015). It may necessitate the reevaluation of traditional work-hour norms and blurring boundaries between work and personal life.

3.7.1. Long-Term Implications for Work-Life Balance

1. **Increased Emphasis on Flexibility:** Organisations may need to foster a culture of flexibility, enabling employees to adapt their work schedules to accommodate personal needs and commitments. It could manifest as flexible hours, compressed workweeks, or results-oriented work environments (Kossek et al., 2012).
2. **Continued Remote Work:** Remote work, found effective during the pandemic, may persist as a viable option. However, this may necessitate strategies for managing remote work-related stressors and ensuring that remote employees feel connected and engaged (PWC, 2021).
3. **Redefined Boundaries:** In a post-Great Resignation work environment, delineating between work and personal life may become increasingly porous. Organisations may need to assist employees in setting clear boundaries and managing their digital presence (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

3.7.2. Impact on Organisational Cultures and Structures

The potential implications for work-life balance are intimately linked to organisational cultures and structures.

1. **Cultural Transformation:** Organisations may need cultural transformation to prioritise employee well-being and work-life balance. It may entail a shift from a culture of overwork and presenteeism toward one that values productivity, outcomes, and individual well-being (Shockley et al., 2017).
2. **Innovations in Management:** The literature suggests that management practices must evolve to accommodate the changing dynamics of work-life balance. It includes outcome-based performance evaluations, ongoing feedback mechanisms, and greater autonomy for employees (Allen et al., 2013).
3. **Adaptive Structures:** Organisational structures may need to become more adaptive and fluid to respond to changing work arrangements. Hierarchical models may give way to more networked, team-based structures that facilitate collaborative flexibility (Bloom et al., 2015).

3.8. Evolution of Employee Expectations and Demands in Work-Life Balance Benefits and Perks during the Great Resignation

3.8.1. Evolution of Employee Expectations

1. **Flexibility:** A conspicuous evolution observed in the literature is the heightened demand for flexibility (Fry, 2016). In light of the Great Resignation, employees increasingly prioritise the flexibility to adapt work schedules and locations to better harmonise with personal commitments (Kosseck et al., 2012).
2. **Well-being Focus:** Employee expectations have shifted toward a greater emphasis on well-being. Literature indicates a growing demand for benefits and perks that cater to physical and mental health, including access to mental health services, wellness programs, and stress management resources (Shockley et al., 2017).
3. **Purposeful Work:** Employees increasingly seek a sense of purpose in their work (Moen et al., 2013). Beyond traditional compensation, they value opportunities to engage in meaningful, fulfilling, and purpose-driven tasks.

3.8.2. Changing Demands Regarding Benefits and Perks

1. **Childcare Support:** Research suggests that during the Great Resignation, there was an elevated demand for childcare support (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009). Employees facing challenges related to remote work and family responsibilities seek benefits such as subsidies, on-site childcare facilities, or flexible childcare arrangements.
2. **Mental Health Services:** The literature highlights a surge in the demand for mental health services as employees grapple with the psychological effects of the pandemic and changing work dynamics (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). It includes access to counselling, therapy, and resources to alleviate stress and burnout.
3. **Wellness Programs:** The pandemic has underscored the importance of physical well-being, leading to an increased demand for wellness programs (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021). Employees seek benefits such as fitness initiatives, health screenings, and healthy lifestyle resources.

3.8.3. Organisational Responses

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Organisations, as discussed in the literature, have recognised the importance of flexibility and have responded by formalising flexible work arrangements (PWC, 2021). It includes offering options for remote work, flextime, and compressed workweeks to accommodate changing employee preferences.
2. **Mental Health Initiatives:** Many organisations have initiated mental health initiatives, including providing benefits and resources (Allen et al., 2013). It includes telehealth counselling services, stress management workshops, and mental health days.
3. **Wellness Programs:** In response to the demand for wellness programs, organisations have introduced comprehensive wellness programs aimed at improving employees' physical and mental well-being (Rudolph et al., 2021). These programs often encompass fitness challenges, wellness seminars, and access to gym facilities.
4. **Childcare Support:** Some organisations have recognised the need for childcare support and have implemented benefits such as subsidies or on-site childcare facilities (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). These initiatives aim to alleviate employees' challenges in balancing work and caregiving responsibilities.

3.9. Emerging Trends and Predictions for the Future of Work-Life Balance in Light of the Great Resignation

The Great Resignation, characterised by a notable surge in voluntary job resignations, has spurred substantial discourse surrounding the future of work and work-life balance.

3.9.1. Hybrid Work Models: A New Normal

1. **Hybrid Work Models:** Literature suggests that the future of work-life balance will be significantly influenced by the widespread adoption of hybrid work models (Bloom et al., 2015). Organisations are increasingly inclined to offer employees the flexibility to work remotely and from a physical

office. This trend is anticipated to persist beyond the pandemic, enabling employees to tailor their work arrangements to their needs and preferences.

2. **Digital Transformation:** As organisations invest in digital infrastructure and tools to support remote work, the literature indicates that technological advancements will shape work-life balance (PWC, 2021). The seamless integration of digital platforms and virtual collaboration tools is expected to continue, allowing for enhanced remote work experiences.

3.9.2. Work-Life Integration and Boundaries

1. **Work-Life Integration:** The literature suggests a shift towards work-life integration rather than strict separation (Kossek et al., 2012). Future work environments are expected to acknowledge the interconnectivity of work and personal life, emphasising the importance of managing these aspects harmoniously. The concept of "integration" recognises that personal life may occasionally intersect with work responsibilities and vice versa.
2. **Boundary Management:** Future work-life balance trends may necessitate a reevaluation of boundaries (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Employees are expected to employ innovative strategies for managing the boundaries between work and personal life, with organisations actively supporting these efforts through training and policies.

3.9.3. Employee Well-being and Mental Health

1. **Prioritising Employee Well-being:** Literature underscores the growing importance of employee well-being in the future of work-life balance (Gröpel & Kuhl, 2009). Organisations are predicted to prioritise initiatives promoting physical and mental health, recognising that a healthy workforce is pivotal for employee satisfaction and productivity.
2. **Mental Health Support:** Mental health support is anticipated to be a focal point, with organisations offering comprehensive resources and benefits to alleviate stress, anxiety, and burnout (Shockley et al., 2017). Tele health counseling, mindfulness programs, and mental health days may become commonplace.

3.9.4. Flexibility and Autonomy

1. **Flexibility and Autonomy:** Literature suggests that employees increasingly value autonomy and flexibility in managing their work and personal lives (Fry, 2016). Future workplace policies are expected to grant employees greater control over their schedules, enabling them to adapt work hours to suit their needs.
2. **Results-Oriented Work Environments:** Organisations may transition toward results-oriented work environments (Allen et al., 2013). Rather than tracking hours worked, the emphasis may shift to evaluating employees based on outcomes, thus affording them more autonomy in determining how and when tasks are completed.

3.10. Understanding the Relationship Between the Great Resignation and Work-Life Balance Across Demographic Groups

3.10.1. Gender Disparities

1. **Gender and Caregiving:** Extant literature underscores that gender disparities persist in the context of work-life balance, with women often shouldering a disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities (Rudolph et al., 2021). While prompting both men and women to reevaluate their work-life priorities, the Great Resignation has not erased these disparities. Women, especially those in dual-earner households, struggle to balance their careers with caregiving obligations.
2. **Representation in Leadership:** Gender disparities in leadership roles persist (Fry, 2016). Despite their growing presence in the workforce, women remain underrepresented in top managerial and executive positions—the implications of the Great Resignation on women's career trajectories and opportunities for advancement warrant further investigation.

3.10.2. Age-Related Dynamics

1. **Generational Differences:** Literature highlights the influence of generational differences on work-life balance preferences (Moen et al., 2013). Millennials and Generation Z, for instance, are

often characterised by their inclination toward career mobility and the pursuit of work that aligns with their values. The Great Resignation may be partially attributed to these generational preferences.

2. **Age and Remote Work:** Remote work, a hallmark of the pandemic era and the Great Resignation, has varied implications based on age (Bloom et al., 2015). Younger employees may find remote work more appealing and are often more accustomed to digital communication tools, while older workers may encounter challenges adapting to remote work technologies.

3.10.3. Occupational Roles

1. **Job Roles and Industry:** Existing literature suggests that the relationship between the Great Resignation and work-life balance can vary significantly based on job roles and industry (Kossek et al., 2012). Employees in high-demand, high-stress professions like healthcare and technology may experience distinct work-life balance challenges. Conversely, those in roles traditionally prioritising work-life balance, such as academia or the nonprofit sector, may be less affected.
2. **Remote Work Accessibility:** The extent to which remote work is feasible varies by job role. Frontline workers, for instance, often have limited opportunities for remote work, which can influence their work-life balance experiences (PWC, 2021).

3.10.4. Commonalities and Disparities

While disparities across demographic groups are evident in the literature, commonalities also emerge. The Great Resignation has prompted individuals across gender, age, and job roles to reconsider their work-life priorities, with a growing emphasis on flexibility, autonomy, and well-being (Ajayi & Mmutle, 2021). Moreover, while posing unique challenges, remote work has become a shared experience for many, impacting work-life balance regardless of demographic distinctions.

4. Conclusion

Great resignation has ushered in a transformative era in the world of work, redefining the contours of work-life balance for employees across diverse demographic groups. As employees reassess their priorities and seek greater flexibility, autonomy, and well-being, organisations and policymakers must adapt to meet these evolving needs. This seismic shift has underscored the critical importance of work-life balance as a central tenet of the modern workforce, transcending traditional boundaries and challenging long-standing norms. In the wake of the Great Resignation, it has become evident that work-life balance is not a one-size-fits-all concept. Gender, age, job roles, and many other factors intersect to shape individual experiences. Gender disparities persist, generational differences influence preferences, and occupational roles play pivotal roles in determining the impact of the Great Resignation. However, there are also commonalities, as individuals from all walks of life seek a more harmonious blend of work and personal life, emphasising the importance of well-being, autonomy, and flexibility. As we conclude this exploration, it is abundantly clear that the Great Resignation has catalysed a broader conversation about the future of work and the imperative of work-life balance. The world has witnessed a monumental reshaping of workplace dynamics, with profound implications for employees, organisations, and society. In closing, we are left with the resounding understanding that work-life balance is not merely a policy or practice—it is a fundamental aspect of human well-being and a linchpin of a thriving workforce. The lessons learned from the Great Resignation must guide us toward more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable work environments. Work-life balance, in its evolving form, stands as a testament to our capacity for adaptation and our commitment to ensuring that the world of work remains aligned with the aspirations and needs of the individuals who comprise it. In the wake of the Great Resignation, the clarion call is clear: Work-life balance is not a luxury; it is a fundamental right, a strategic imperative, and a cornerstone of a resilient and thriving workforce.

5. Policy Recommendations

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements Legislation:** Encourage the enactment of legislation that promotes and safeguards flexible work arrangements. It includes formalising the right to request flexible schedules, telecommuting options, and compressed workweeks. Such policies can benefit employees across demographic groups and support work-life balance.

2. **Caregiver Support Initiatives:** Develop comprehensive caregiver support programs, including subsidies for childcare and eldercare and tax incentives for employers who provide family-friendly benefits. These initiatives can help alleviate the disproportionate burden on women and support working parents and caregivers.
3. **Mental Health and Wellness Mandates:** Mandate that organisations provide mental health and wellness benefits as part of their employee compensation packages. These benefits should include access to mental health services, wellness programs, and stress management resources to address the psychological effects of work and life challenges.
4. **Remote Work Guidelines:** Establish clear guidelines and regulations for remote work, ensuring that all employees, regardless of age or job role, have equitable access to remote work opportunities. It should include guidelines for remote work technology and data security.
5. **Promote Age-Inclusive Practices:** Encourage organisations to adopt age-inclusive practices, recognising the diversity of age-related work-life balance needs. It could involve offering age-appropriate training and support for adapting to remote work technologies.
6. **Leadership Diversity Initiatives:** Implement initiatives to increase diversity in leadership roles, focusing on gender representation. Encourage organisations to set targets and track progress in achieving gender balance in managerial and executive positions.
7. **Workplace Flexibility Certification:** Introduce a certification system that recognises organisations committed to flexible work policies and equitable work-life balance practices. This certification can serve as a competitive advantage for attracting and retaining talent.
8. **Regular Work-Life Balance Audits:** Organisations must conduct regular audits and assessments of their work-life balance policies and practices. It ensures ongoing accountability and adjustment to meet the evolving needs of employees.
9. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of work-life balance and the available resources and benefits. These campaigns can educate employees and employers about the significance of well-being and work-life equilibrium.
10. **Data Collection and Reporting:** Mandate data collection and reporting on work-life balance metrics, including disparities among demographic groups. Such data will enable policymakers to make informed decisions and track the effectiveness of implemented policies.

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, S.K. and C.M.; methodology, S.K.; software, S.K. and C.M.; validation, C.M., B.T., K.O., B.S., T.K. and K.K.; formal analysis, S.K. and C.M.; investigation, S.K. and C.M.; resources, S.K.; data curation, C.M., B.T., K.O., B.S., T.K. and K.K.; writing—original draft preparation, S.K. and C.M.; writing—review and editing, S.K., C.M., B.T., K.O., B.S., T.K. and K.K.; visualisation, S.K.; supervision, C.M., B.T., K.O., B.S., T.K. and K.K.; project administration, S.K.; funding acquisition, S.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The Authors would especially like to acknowledge the Covenant University Centre for Research and Discovery (CUCRID) and the Business Management Department of Covenant University for the support and funding of this publication. We also thank the reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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