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**“THE GREAT RESIGNATION IN ITALY: A MIXED-METHODS
ANALYSIS OF WORK MOTIVATION AND VOLUNTARY
TURNOVER AMONG MILLENNIALS AND GEN Z”**

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Introduction

The Great Resignation, a term coined to describe the wave of mass resignation of workers in the United States in 2021, has profoundly altered the relationship between individuals and work. This phenomenon has challenged traditional structures and compelled millions of workers to rethink their professional and personal priorities.

Originating in the United States in 2021 and subsequently spreading globally, it has taken on specific characteristics in different national contexts, including Italy.

According to the Italian Ministry of Labor, in 2023, voluntary resignations accounted for a significant share of job terminations in Italy, consolidating a trend that continues to cause concern among companies and policymakers.

The impact of this phenomenon is particularly evident among Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born from 1997 onwards), who exhibit the highest resignation rates.

The motivations behind this trend can be classified into two main categories: **intrinsic factors**, such as the pursuit of greater work-life balance, personal growth and alignment with personal values, and **extrinsic factors**, including salary, job stability and career advancement opportunities.

Furthermore, the advent of the pandemic has accelerated an already-evolving cultural shift, prompting a re-evaluation of the concept of work by workers and resulting in an increased demand for flexibility and well-being.

In response to this transformation, many organizations have implemented targeted strategies, introducing more flexible working models, corporate welfare programmes and professional development paths.

However, challenges persist in Italy, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often operate with more limited resources, making it difficult to attract and retain talent.

This thesis aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role played by intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in the decision-making process of Millennials and Gen Z individuals who voluntarily resigned during the period of the Great Resignation.

The central research question guiding this thesis is as follows: *“What is the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in leading Millennials and Gen Z to voluntarily resign during the Great Resignation?”*.

To achieve this objective, a **mixed-methods approach** will be employed, integrating a quantitative analysis based on survey data collected across Italy and a qualitative analysis through in-depth interviews.

This methodological framework will facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the primary motivational drivers behind voluntary resignation of young workers.

Furthermore, it will enable an assessment of whether this phenomenon signifies a transient crisis within the labor market or a more profound and enduring transformation in the relationship between individuals and their professional pursuits.

In detail, the thesis is divided into five chapters. The first presents a comprehensive review of the extant literature on the subject, delineating the global and national characteristics of the Great Resignation phenomenon, with a particular focus on the Italian context. The values and expectations of Millennials and Generation Z in the world of work are examined, alongside the main motivational theories, including the Self-Determination Theory, the Job Characteristics Model and the Person-Organisation Fit concept. The chapter also analyses the responses activated by Italian organisations in the face of this change, identifying the main gaps in the academic literature.

The second chapter provides a detailed exposition of the research design and methodology employed. The present study employs a mixed-methods approach, structured according to an explanatory sequential design. The quantitative phase is illustrated by the construction of the questionnaire, definition of variables and measurement scales, followed by the qualitative phase, based on semi-structured interviews. The chapter proceeds to analyse the data from both phases, whilst also addressing the ethical considerations inherent in the research process.

The third chapter of this study presents the empirical results. The quantitative data set encompasses descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and a multiple linear regression model designed to identify predictors of job satisfaction among young workers. The thematic organisation of the qualitative results facilitates a more profound comprehension of the narratives, values and motivations that underpin the decision of Millennials and Gen Z to resign. Each theme is supported by significant excerpts from the interviews, and interpreted in light of the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 1.

The fourth chapter provides a critical discussion of the findings. The emerging evidence is interpreted in relation to the extant literature and the theoretical models outlined above. The chapter synthesises the quantitative and qualitative results to provide a comprehensive perspective on the phenomenon and assesses whether the Great Resignation should be conceptualised as a transient labour market crisis or as a profound and enduring generational transformation.

Consequently, the final chapter synthesises the key findings of the research and offers a comprehensive response to the central question. The thesis outlines its academic contribution, discusses its limitations, and proposes avenues for future inquiry. The chapter also offers a set of practical recommendations to support companies in developing retention strategies that reflect the values and expectations of younger generations. In doing so, the research contributes to the academic discourse on labour market transformation in the post-pandemic era, as well as delivering actionable insights for institutions. These insights help organizations to build more sustainable, motivating, and culturally aligned work environments.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1 The Great Resignation: a global prospective

"The Great Resignation", a term coined in May 2021 by Anthony Klotz, professor of management at Texas A&M University, describes the extraordinary wave of voluntary resignations that has reshaped the global labor market.

The phenomenon originated in the United States during the post-COVID-19 economic recovery between April and June 2021, culminating in a record-breaking 47 million resignations by the end of the year. This figure includes a peak of 4.3 million resignations in August 2021 alone (representing 2.9% of the US workforce), and includes not only low-wage and labor-intensive sectors, but also professional and technical fields (Shukla, Pandiya, Gupta, & Prashar, 2022; Suprayitno, 2024).

Monthly quits in the United States

January 2012 to January 2024

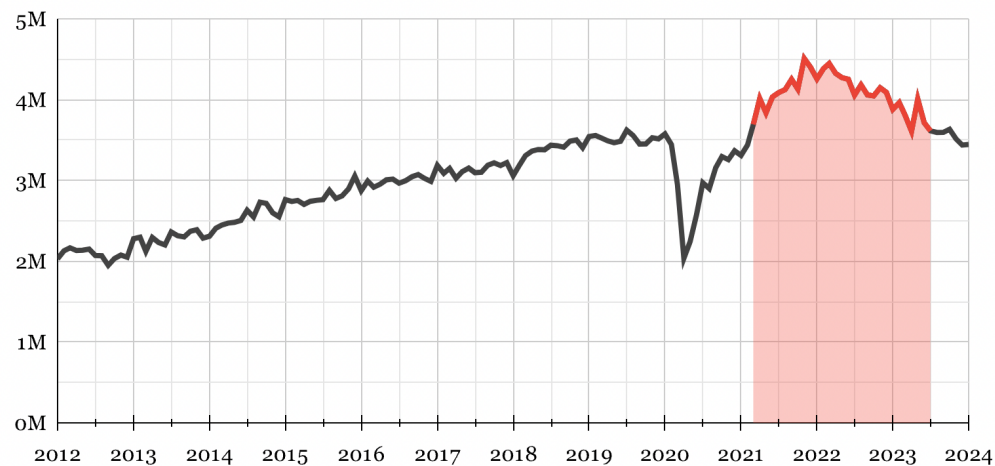


Figure 1 – Source: Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2024.

The graph shows how the Great Resignation peaked between 2021 and 2022, with a record number of voluntary resignations (4.3 million), in the US. This critical period was fueled by job dissatisfaction, the search for greater flexibility and difficulties associated with burnout, particularly in high-pressure sectors such as education and health (Burton, 2024).

Since 2023, however, the trend has shown signs of slowing, although it remains above pre-pandemic levels. This decline can be attributed to several economic and structural factors. In particular, rising inflation has reduced the propensity of workers to leave their jobs without a secure alternative, while the slowdown in hiring in several sectors has limited the career opportunities that were abundant in the previous two years (Walker, 2022). At the same time, companies have begun to adapt to the new expectations of workers by introducing more flexible working policies to improve retention.

By 2024, resignation rates have stabilized, indicating a new labor market equilibrium where employee expectations for well-being and work-life balance remain a key factor in job decisions (Burton, 2024).

According to Klotz, the Great Resignation has its roots in a "pandemic epiphany", an existential reflection that has led many people to reassess their personal and professional priorities. This phenomenon was driven by four primary factors:

1. Resignations accumulated during the pandemic;
2. Burnout related to the public health emergency;
3. Increased desire to work remotely;
4. Reflections on the meaning of work and quality of life (Furnham, 2024).

Unlike the Great Recession of 2008, when many people left their jobs because of the economic downturn and market contraction, the Great Resignation took place against a backdrop of economic recovery. It was not a lack of opportunity, but a conscious decision by workers to leave unsatisfactory positions in search of better conditions. It reflected a cultural shift, with an increase in workers' bargaining power and a greater awareness of available job alternatives (Costin, Roman, & Balica, 2023).

The phenomenon revealed specific demographic and sectoral trends. Most affected were younger workers belonging to Generation Z and the Millennials, who place a higher value on quality of life than previous generations. Unlike Baby Boomers and Generation X, who are less inclined to sacrifice their personal lives for work, the younger generations

reject rigid organizational models with little concern for well-being (Borrelli, Santoro, Gualano, Moscato, & Rossi, 2024).

From a sectoral perspective, the hardest hit sectors were hospitality, tourism and retail, which are characterized by low wages and precarious working conditions. However, professional and technical sectors also experienced a wave of resignations, highlighting the need to reform organizational models to attract and retain talent (Hidayat & Ihsan, 2024).

This phenomenon, which was initially interpreted as specific to the US labour market, has spread globally, revealing similar dynamics in Europe and Asia, where workers have begun to reassess their working conditions in search of greater personal and professional satisfaction (Borrelli et al., 2024).

1.1.1 The Phenomenon in Italy

In Italy, the 'Great Resignation' has developed with distinct characteristics, reflecting the country's socio-economic and cultural peculiarities. In contrast to the United States, where the phenomenon had an immediate impact following the pandemic, in Italy the process was more gradual and complex.

According to Figure 1, in 2023, voluntary resignations accounted for 18.5 % of all employment terminations, equivalent to approximately 2.26 million resignations. While this figure represents a slight decrease of 1.8% compared to 2022, it confirms an ongoing structural trend rather than a temporary fluctuation (Annual Report on Mandatory Communications of the Ministry of Labour, 2024).



Figure 2 – Source: Annual Report on Mandatory Communications of the Ministry of Labour, 2024.

A demographic analysis of resignation rates by age group reveals that:

- Under – 24 is 16.7%,
- 25–34-year-olds is 24.2%,
- 35–54-year-olds is 40.1%,
- 55+ years old is 19.1% (Priya & Christopher, 2024).



Figure 3 – Source: Priya, A. S., & Christopher, B. P. (2024). Teamwork self-efficacy and employee satisfaction: A sequential framework to build employee cohesion.

These data presented confirm that the primary agents of the Italian Great Resignation are the Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born from 1997 onwards).

The underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon are numerous. Chief among them are dissatisfaction with working conditions (38.9%), uncompetitive salaries (27.8%), and a perceived lack of flexibility and opportunities for professional growth (Borrelli et al., 2024).

Moreover, the traditional concept of job stability is gradually giving way to the search for more flexible career paths, including the gig economy. A further factor affecting turnover is the lack of involvement during the onboarding process, which leads to an increase in so-called 'silent resignations', a phenomenon that is particularly widespread among young workers.

An anomalous feature of the Italian labor market is its territorial segmentation.

In the northern regions, there is a shortage of qualified personnel in sectors such as manufacturing and professional services. In contrast, the southern regions are characterized by high unemployment rates, which drive many young people to seek employment elsewhere, thereby exacerbating the so-called 'brain drain' phenomenon. Despite the higher concentration of new hires in the North (43% in 2023, against 32% in the South), it is precisely in the northern regions that the highest rate of voluntary resignations is recorded.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the priorities of workers, leading to an increased desire for a better work-life balance. This has fueled the demand for more modern organizational models, but many Italian companies are still slow to adapt. The HR Trends Report (2024) shows that only 30% of companies have introduced structured policies for hybrid or remote work ("HR Trends 2024", 2024).

In order to address the challenges posed by the labor market, companies must undertake a comprehensive review of their strategies, with a focus on employee well-being,

professional growth, and the adoption of innovative organizational models. In particular, to attract and retain Millennials and Gen Z, it is essential to offer flexibility, concrete career opportunities and a working environment in line with their values. However, it is imperative to ascertain the precise conditions that would be conducive to meeting the needs of these emerging generations.

1.2 Millennials and Gen Z: values, motivations and job expectations

The present study explores the necessity for a redefinition of the working environment, as evidenced by the data. This assertion is supported by the findings of recent studies, yet further analysis is required to understand the underlying motivations behind these trends.

In the contemporary context, the pursuit of mental well-being has emerged as a non-negotiable imperative for Millennials and Gen Z, superseding the previously held notion of economic stability as the paramount concern. This paradigm shift is underscored by the significant proportion of young individuals who, as reported by Borrelli et al. (2024), opt to resign from their professional roles due to stress and unhealthy professional relationships, constituting 45% of the surveyed population. This growing awareness appears to be a key factor in the rejection of the traditional employment paradigm, where the individual and their work-life balance are not always prioritized.

The subsequent aspect to be considered is that of personal development. Millennials and Gen Z seek contexts that foster continuous learning and professional growth. However, many Italian companies fail to offer structured training and mentoring paths, thus creating a significant source of dissatisfaction and turnover (Amabile et al., 1994; Borrelli et al., 2024).

This dynamic fosters a growing sense of disillusionment within these individuals, particularly in contexts characterized by perceived stagnancy, rigid hierarchies, and a paucity of inclusivity. These environments, it has been demonstrated, impede the creative and innovative potential of young people, whilst also engendering a sense of alienation.

This, in turn, has been shown to result in a preference for organizations that espouse values of openness, sustainability and respect for the individual (Saks, Mudrack, & Ashforth, 2024).

Millennials and Gen Z don't feel inadequate for work simply because they want more flexibility. Instead, they are rooted in the search for a more human and stimulating system, one that can respond to their aspirations and their need for meaning. The previous generations, i.e. the so-called 'baby boomers' and 'Generation X', were characterized by a willingness to sacrifice their personal lives for their careers, a willingness that is no longer observed among Millennials and Gen Z. Instead, these generations place a higher value on quality of life and well-being (Leadership Management Magazine, 2025).

Contrary to certain stereotypes, these generations are not indifferent to their professional lives; rather, they are more selective in their career choices. Instead, they seek environments that align with their values and offer opportunities for personal growth and fulfilment. This paradigm shift necessitates a shift in the way companies manage human resources, promoting an inclusive culture and organizational models capable of meeting these expectations.

1.3 Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation behind Voluntary Resignation

The motivation that drives Millennials and Gen Z in their decision to resign during the Great Resignation phenomenon can be distinguished into intrinsic and extrinsic, fundamental concepts in the literature on work motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Gagné, 1984).

Intrinsic motivation refers to the desire to perform an activity for the pleasure or meaning it brings. According to Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2017), occupational well-being depends on the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Millennials and Generation Z place increasing importance on these aspects, preferring opportunities for learning, professional development and work-life balance. The lack of these conditions is a key factor in the rise of voluntary turnover (Hackman & Oldham, 1974).

A crucial aspect is the role of learning and competence development in determining retention in an organization (Gagné, 1984). The five learning categories model identifies how growth opportunities can influence retention:

1. Intellectual Skills – The ability to acquire and apply complex knowledge in the context of work. If a job does not provide intellectual challenges or opportunities to learn new skills, employees may lose interest and motivation.
2. Cognitive Strategies – The techniques for organizing and optimizing thinking and problem solving. If a work environment does not allow employees to develop and use these strategies, work may become repetitive and unsatisfactory.
3. Verbal Information – The ability to communicate and assimilate information in a work context. Lack of training and poor internal communication reduces growth and motivation.
4. Motor Skills – Essential for jobs requiring coordination and manual dexterity. Lack of practical training can lead to a sense of ineffectiveness and professional frustration.
5. Attitudes – Perception and emotional approach to work and organization. Gagné points out that an environment that encourages growth and development fosters positive attitudes and increased retention.

Extrinsic motivation is based on external incentives such as salary, company benefits, job security and career advancement (Herzberg, 1959). However, according to Motivation Hygiene Theory, these factors prevent dissatisfaction but are not sufficient to generate high levels of motivation. If economic conditions are crucial for initial job choice, they are not as crucial for retention, especially for young workers who also seek autonomy and meaning in their role (Miner, 2005).

According to Deci & Ryan (2000), a balanced combination of intrinsic and extrinsic incentives can have synergistic effects, increasing job satisfaction and motivation. If

external factors are perceived as recognizing competence, they may even enhance intrinsic commitment rather than undermine it.

The Great Resignation phenomenon has highlighted that traditional motivational levers are no longer sufficient to retain young talent. The classical model of employment, based on economic stability and hierarchical advancement, is giving way to a vision of work that is more focused on personal fulfilment and work-life balance (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

According to the Job Characteristics Model (Hackman & Oldham, 1974), an individual's satisfaction and motivation depend on five key factors: skill variety, task identity and meaningfulness, autonomy, and feedback. In the current context, many young workers leave their jobs due to a perceived lack of meaning and growth opportunities.

Recent studies confirm that Millennials and Generation Z, initially attracted by extrinsic incentives (e.g., competitive salaries, company benefits), tend to leave their jobs if they do not also offer intrinsic motivators such as personal development and alignment with company values (Deci & Ryan, 2017; Herzberg, 1959). The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this process, leading many workers to rethink their priorities and seek more flexible jobs that focus on psychological well-being.

According to the HR Trends 2024 report, 70% of young Italian workers consider a company's ethical and social impact a priority when choosing a job (HR Trends, 2024). This finding confirms that a sense of purpose and contribution to a wider mission are key factors in employee retention.

The key to meeting the challenges of the Great Resignation lies in companies' ability to integrate personal development pathways with competitive compensation policies. Offering financial incentives can attract talent, but without strategies to support intrinsic motivation, the risk of attrition remains high.

This cultural shift presents an opportunity to redefine organizational models and create a balance between material and psychological motivation. How can companies design work environments that align with the values of younger generations, ensuring both retention and long-term engagement?

1.4 Italian Organizations' Responses to the Great Resignation

The Great Resignation has prompted millions of workers around the world, including in Italy, to reassess their work and personal priorities. There has been a significant increase in voluntary resignations, especially among the younger generation. The prevailing factors contributing to this phenomenon include, but are not limited to, discontent with the prevailing corporate culture, an increasing demand for a more balanced work-life environment, and a growing need for greater flexibility. The pandemic has served to exacerbate pre-existing problems, including a lack of growth opportunities and burnout. In response to these challenges, many Italian companies have adopted innovative strategies to retain talent. Flexible and smart working policies have become one of the key strategies adopted. For instance, Siemens Italia has extended agile working to all its 3,200 employees following a trial that began in 2011, while Coca-Cola HBC Italia has eliminated the requirement to clock in and out, introducing hourly flexibility and the possibility to work remotely since years ago (Siemens Italia, 2017).

Concurrently, corporate welfare initiatives have expanded, with the objective of enhancing the psychological and physical well-being of employees. These programmes encompass psychological support, healthcare, and initiatives to promote work-life balance. For instance, Angelini Pharma has entered accords that incorporate diversity, inclusion, cross-functional mobility, and enhanced corporate welfare (ADAPT University Press, 2024).

Continuous training and upskilling represent another pillar of corporate strategies. Investments in the development of digital and technical skills have been shown to strengthen employee engagement and respond to market demands. In the technology sector, Johnson & Johnson launched the J&J Learn platform, which uses artificial intelligence to offer personalized training paths (Johnson & Johnson, 2023).

In addition, diversity and inclusion have become central priorities, with initiatives to create more welcoming work environments and reduce turnover. For instance, Enel has

initiated the 'People Care' programme, which fosters inclusivity and harmonizes personal and professional domains (Enel, 2021).

However, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which constitute a fundamental pillar of the Italian economy, have encountered significant challenges in adopting these strategies. The limited resources and traditional organizational structures characteristic of SMEs hinder their ability to compete with larger companies in talent retention. The paucity of targeted government support further hinders the transition to more sustainable working practices.

In conclusion, the strategies implemented by Italian companies demonstrate a growing commitment to employee welfare and the modernization of organizational models. Nevertheless, disparities between sectors and regions persist, with substantial challenges necessitating further action at both the company and policy levels.

1.4.1 Limits and Gaps

Despite considerable endeavours to comprehend and address the phenomenon of the Great Resignation, significant gaps persist within the extant literature. This study seeks to fill these ones. Most extant studies focus on macro analyses, neglecting a systematic investigation of the specific motivational factors that drive Millennials and Gen Z, the generations with the highest voluntary resignation rates, to leave their jobs. The present study seeks to address this lacuna by exploring whether these generations prioritize economic factors, such as salary and benefits, or elements related to personal well-being, such as work-life balance. Addressing this question is imperative for the development of effective retention strategies that align with the needs of these generations (Ochis, 2024). Another significant gap concerns small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which often struggle to cope with the Great Resignation phenomenon due to limited resources and less flexible organizational structures than large companies. While multinationals have successfully adopted innovative policies, such as smart working or corporate welfare programmes, many SMEs continue to operate under traditional models, lacking the flexibility needed to attract and retain young talent. This problem is further exacerbated

by the absence of targeted institutional support measures to encourage the adoption of contemporary personnel management policies by SMEs (Artar & Balcioglu, 2023).

Moreover, there is an absence of corporate and government tools to monitor and improve employee welfare. Despite the growing focus on corporate welfare, few companies adopt standardized platforms to gather continuous feedback or adapt policies to the evolving needs of the workforce. Even onboarding policies, which have the potential to strengthen the sense of belonging of new hires, are often generic and neglect the specific values and expectations of Millennials and Gen Z.

Furthermore, the extant literature does not adequately explore the need for integrated policies that combine work flexibility, lifelong learning and inclusive diversity. Although many companies offer flexible work programmes, they rarely complement them with structured career development pathways or initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion. This fragmentation of policies serves to reduce their overall effectiveness and engenders misalignment with the priorities of younger workers, who seek not only greater freedom, but also opportunities for professional development and membership in communities that respect their values.

Considering the shortcomings, the present research aims to explore the motivational drivers that propel Millennials and Gen Z towards voluntary resignation, focusing on the tension between economic incentives and personal well-being. Furthermore, the investigation will encompass the adoption of sustainable and innovative models by Italian SMEs to confront the challenges posed by the Great Resignation. This will entail the provision of both theoretical and practical tools for the monitoring of well-being and the customization of retention policies.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1 Research Design: Mixed-Methods Approach

The empirical analysis in this study is based on a mixed-methods research (MMR) approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing Millennials' and Gen Z's voluntary resignation during the Great Resignation.

This approach is particularly suited to the study of complex social phenomena, as it allows the integration of numerical data with subjective narratives, overcoming the limitations of individual methodologies (Brannen, 2005).

The use of a mixed-method is based on three main motivations:

- **Triangulation of data**, which strengthens the validity of results by combining heterogeneous sources of information (Harvard Catalyst, 2020);
- **Complementarity**, which allows to capture aspects that one method alone could not highlight, thus providing a broader and more detailed perspective (Stephens, 2022);
- **Extension**, which allows the findings from the quantitative analysis to be deepened with a more focused qualitative investigation (Schoonenboom, 2023).

In recent years, mixed-methods research has established itself as an effective approach for investigating the relationship between work phenomena and socio-cultural dynamics, allowing the examination of both general trends – through questionnaires – and individual experiences – through interviews (Lund, 2012).

In this study, this methodology proved fundamental in analyzing the weight of intrinsic (e.g. personal growth, alignment with organizational values) and extrinsic (e.g. economic security, benefits) motivations and identifying their role in the decision-making process that leads Millennials and Generation Z to voluntarily leave (Piccioli, 2019).

There are different types of mixed-methods approaches, each differing in the order, integration and priority given to the quantitative and qualitative components (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017):

1. Convergent design – Quantitative and qualitative phases are conducted in parallel, and the findings are integrated into a final interpretive phase. This design is useful when there is a desire to directly compare quantitative data with qualitative data to validate conclusions.
2. Explanatory sequential design – The research is developed in two phases: a first quantitative phase, followed by a second qualitative phase aimed at explaining and deepening the findings of the first phase. This approach is effective when the aim is to better understand the meaning of correlations and patterns that have emerged in numerical data.
3. Exploratory sequential design – In this case, the qualitative phase precedes the quantitative one. It is used when you want to explore a little-studied phenomenon and generate hypotheses to be tested by quantitative methods.
4. Embedded design – one method is embedded in the other (e.g. a qualitative analysis is embedded in a quantitative experiment to better understand the context of the results).
5. Multiphase design – This is used when the research involves multiple stages of data collection and an iterative integration of different methodological approaches to address complex research questions (Lund, 2012).

The methodological design adopted in this research follows an **explanatory sequential design** with two main phases:

1. **Quantitative phase** – The research begins with a survey aimed at collecting data on work preferences, perceptions of work-life balance, well-being and motivations behind the decision to leave a job. Statistical analysis of this data will allow the identification of significant trends and correlations between the variables considered (McLeod, 2024).
2. **Qualitative phase** – Based on the quantitative results, a series of targeted interviews will be conducted with a selected sample of Millennials and Gen Z. The aim of this phase is to deepen the phenomena emerging from the survey analysis by exploring personal experiences, cultural perceptions and career expectations (Brannen, 2005).

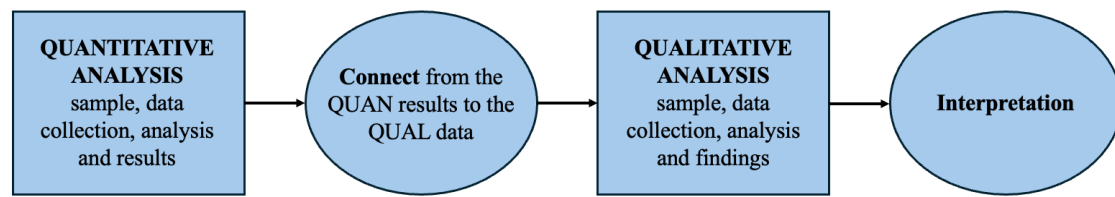


Figure 4 – Explanatory Sequential Design

Adapted from Piccoli, M. (2019). Educational research and Mixed-Methods: Research designs, application perspectives, and food for thought.

The integration of the two phases is a crucial aspect of the approach adopted: the qualitative phase is not designed independently, but evolves in response to the quantitative results, ensuring a direct link between the two moments of analysis (Harvard Catalyst, 2020). This iterative process makes it possible to validate the correlations identified in the survey and to enrich the interpretation of the data with deeper, contextualized insights (Schoonenboom, 2023).

The main advantage of this design is the possibility to combine the generalizability of quantitative data with the interpretive depth of qualitative evidence, overcoming the limitations of each method considered separately (Lund, 2012). Through this strategy, the study not only identifies the reasons why young workers leave, but also provides practical guidance to companies on how to adapt their retention strategies to the needs of the younger generation.

In the following sections, the two types of analysis are analyzed in detail.

2.2 Quantitative Analysis

2.2.1 Data Collection

The first phase of the research consists of the implementation of a structured survey designed to collect quantitative data through a stratified random approach, which guarantees the representativeness of the target population (Lund, 2012).

The survey was designed to analyze the Great Resignation phenomenon in Italy, with the aim of understanding the motivations that lead people to leave their jobs, their job

expectations and their perceptions of the labor market. The questionnaire consists of 66 questions divided into different thematic sections and takes about 15 minutes to complete.

As the survey was carried out nationwide, it was decided to offer it only in Italian to ensure that all participants were able to understand and answer the questions correctly.

The questionnaire, developed in collaboration with the University of Florence, the University of Bologna, and the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, is based on measurement scales validated in previous studies and was structured on Google Forms.

The survey questions are divided into several sections, including:

1. **Demographic data** – information on age (dropdown with year of birth), gender (male, female, prefer not to answer), nationality and region of residence to identify any territorial differences in the Great Resignation phenomenon.
2. **Current employment situation** – for those currently employed, information is collected on the type of employment (self-employed, employed in public/private sector, other), sector (e.g. consulting, health, IT, finance, trade), type of contract (fixed-term, permanent, freelance), size of the company (less than 50 employees, 51-100, 101-250, etc.), type of organization (profit or non-profit) and current and preferred working arrangements (office-based, remote, hybrid).
3. **Previous work experience** – For those with previous work experience, areas of employment, any coordinating or supervisory responsibilities, and length of previous experience are explored.
4. **Reasons for resigning** – for those who have changed jobs in the last three years, the reasons for voluntary turnover are explored (e.g. work-life balance, inadequate salary, misaligned corporate culture, lack of growth, change in life priorities post-pandemic) and whether the participant regrets the choice (options: new job is worse than expected, impulsive decision, need for higher salary).
5. **Future intentions and perceptions of the labor market** – the propensity to change job in the next year (Likert scale 1-7), the intention to change organization and the factors that might encourage a change (salary, career opportunities, flexibility).

6. **Job satisfaction and organizational commitment** – general satisfaction (Likert scale 1-7), commitment to the organization (e.g. 'I am proud to work here', 'I feel valued') and alignment between personal and organizational values are analyzed.
7. **Job security and uncertainty** – perceptions of job stability, fear of losing one's job in the next few months and concerns about the direction of the labor market are explored.
8. **Work preferences and priorities** – explores the preferred mode of working (office, remote, hybrid), the reasons for the choice (less commuting, increased productivity, mental wellbeing, work-life balance) and the impact of the pandemic on professional expectations.
9. **Turning down job offers** – participants will be asked if they have turned down a job offer in the last three years and for what reason (inadequate salary, too many hours, perceived lack of inclusiveness of the company culture, lack of professional development).

The questionnaire uses different types of questions to ensure complete and accurate data collection: closed questions (yes/no, multiple choice); Likert scale questions (1-7) to measure attitudes and perceptions in a standardized way (Harwell, 2023); multiple choice questions to allow participants to select multiple options; open-ended questions to gather personal details and insights.

The structure of the survey makes it possible to collect detailed quantitative data to analyze the main trends related to the phenomenon in Italy.

The use of standardized questions facilitates statistical analysis and makes it possible to identify significant patterns among key variables, such as job satisfaction, intention to change jobs and perception of job security, which are useful for the final objective of providing an analytical picture of today's labor market transformation that leads workers to leave or reject offers, and of workers' new expectations.

Participants were selected using a voluntary sampling approach, favoring targeted distribution through digital channels to maximize the diversity of the sample in terms of age, gender, employment sector and type of contract.

The survey was disseminated via: social platforms and professional networks (LinkedIn, thematic groups) to capture a wide audience of workers active in the labor market; academic mailing lists, involving students and professionals with heterogeneous backgrounds, to broaden the representativeness of the sample; sharing among colleagues and acquaintances, encouraging a knock-on effect to reach a larger number of respondents.

The absence of particularly strict exclusion criteria made it possible to include participants with heterogeneous professional experiences, thus providing a broad and articulated snapshot of the transformations taking place in the Italian labor market.

However, a qualitative approach is needed to further explore the motivations behind these phenomena and to capture the subjective nuances of individual experiences.

The results of the survey are, in fact, a starting point for the next stage of the research, which involves conducting semi-structured interviews.

Through direct discussion with participants, it will be possible to explore in more depth the dynamics that have emerged from the quantitative analysis, identifying recurring patterns, personal perceptions and strategies adopted by workers in the face of labor market changes. This combination of methods will allow for an integrated and more complete view of the phenomenon, providing useful insights from both an academic and practical point of view.

2.2.2 Variables

The research examined a number of variables relevant to understanding the factors influencing job satisfaction and propensity to resign among workers belonging to Generation Z and Millennials.

The primary dependent variable is general **job satisfaction (Q35)**, measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7.

The independent variables were selected on the basis of the extant literature and the hypothesis that motivations, subjective perceptions, and environmental factors influence

the intention to stay or leave an occupation.

The following were included:

- **Intrinsic motivation (Q18)**, referring to the drive for meaning, personal growth, curiosity, and autonomy.
- **Extrinsic motivation (Q19)**, associated with external incentives such as salary, status, recognition, and economic goals.
- **Values alignment (Q21; Q35)**, indicating the degree of coherence between an individual's personal values and those of the organization.
- **Perceived financial condition (Q58)**, capturing the respondent's subjective sense of economic stability.
- **Intention to change organization (Q20)**, measuring the willingness to leave one's current job position.

Furthermore, a number of control variables with a comparative function were included in the recode phase. These variables allow for the testing of the possible influence of sociodemographic and occupational characteristics on response patterns, facilitating a more refined and contextualised analysis of the results.

The control variables employed in this study encompass a range of demographic and socio-economic factors, including generation (i.e. Gen Z, Millennials, and Others), geographic area of residence (North, Central, South, and Islands), occupational sector (aggregated into functional clusters), organisation size (fewer or more than 50 employees), perceived financial stability (aggregate scale 1-7), alignment with organisation values (Likert scale), and intention to change organisation (Likert scale).

The aforementioned variables were entered into the statistical software programme SPSS in a paneled format, i.e. they were structured as segmentation indicator variables. The purpose of this was to facilitate systematic recalling during the analysis of each section of the questionnaire.

The panel configuration facilitated the comparison of subgroups on all primary dependent variables, thereby ensuring the systematic traceability of observed differences to specific reference categories.

2.2.3 Constructs and Measurement Scales

The following variables were identified as the key elements in the survey: the type of scale used, the theoretical or empirical source of reference, the number of items, and a representative example. The scales adopted are derived from validated instruments in the literature or were developed ad hoc according to the research objectives.

Construct	Measurement scale	Source	Number of items	Example items
Year of birth	Dropdown (ordinal categorical)	Ad hoc	1	“Please select your year of birth from the list.”
Region of main work experience	Dropdown (nominal categorical)	Ad hoc	1	“(If in Italy) In which Italian region have you mainly worked so far?”
Preferred work mode	Single choice	Vu et al. (2022). The role of perceived workplace safety practices and mindfulness in maintaining calm in employees during times of crisis. <i>Human Resource Management</i>	1	“About half of work being done at home.”
Reasons for preferred work mode	Multiple choice (max 3 options)	Vu et al. (2022). The role of perceived workplace safety	8	“I can/could spend more time with family.”

		practices and mindfulness in maintaining calm in employees during times of crisis. <i>Human Resource Management.</i>		
Organization size	Single choice (ordinal categorical)	Ad hoc	1	“Indicate the size of your current company.”
Intrinsic motivation	Likert scale 1–7: Never true – Always true	Amabile et al. (1994). The Work Preference Inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>	15	“Curiosity is the driving force behind much of what I do.”
Extrinsic motivation	Likert scale 1–7: Never true – Always true	Amabile et al. (1994). The Work Preference Inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. <i>Journal of Personality and Social Psychology</i>	15	“I am strongly motivated by the money I can earn.”

Intention to leave	Likert scale 1–7: Very unlikely – Very likely	Arnold & Feldman (1982). A multivariate analysis of the determinants of job turnover. <i>Journal of Applied Psychology</i> .	2	“Do you intend to change the organization with which you are now associated?”
Person-organization fit	Likert scale 1–7: Not at all – Completely	Cable & Judge (1996). Person–organization fit, job choice decisions, and organizational entry. <i>Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes</i> .	3	“To what degree do you feel your values “match” or fit your organization?”
Job quit in last 3 years	Dichotomous (Yes/No)	Ad hoc	1	“Have you quit a job over the last 3 years?”
Reasons for resignation	Multiple choice (max 5 options)	Ad hoc	7	“The job did not allow an adequate work-life balance.”
Perceived financial condition	Likert scale 1–7: Strongly disagree – Strongly agree	Munyon et al. (2020). All about the money? Exploring antecedents and consequences for a brief measure of perceived financial security. <i>Journal of Occupational Health Psychology</i> .	5	“I have enough savings for an emergency.”

Industry of main work experience	Dropdown (nominal categorical)	Ad hoc	1	“In which industry have you mainly worked so far?”
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Table 1 – Source: Quantitative research

2.2.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted through the use of SPSS, following a structured approach in three main steps: descriptive analysis, correlational analysis, and predictive modelling using regression.

Prior to analysis, raw data exported from Google Forms underwent a process of cleaning and recoding to ensure compatibility with SPSS format and to prepare variables for statistical processing.

A preliminary descriptive analysis was conducted to explore the distribution of responses and assess the composition of the sample in terms of sociodemographic variables (e.g. generation of membership, geographic area, employment sector, company size).

The main variables measured on a 7-point Likert scale were also recoded into three interpretative bands to facilitate analysis and comparison:

- **Bottom 3 (1–3)**, low presence of the construct or expression of disagreement;
- **Average (4–5)**, intermediate or neutral stance;
- **Top 2 (6–7)**, high presence of the construct or strong agreement.

This recording facilitated the visualisation and comparison of frequencies between subgroups, allowing divergent or convergent patterns to be identified along the main dimensions analysed.

Subsequently, a bivariate correlation analysis was performed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. This approach enabled the assessment of the strength and direction of the linear association between the primary dependent variable (general job satisfaction – Q33) and the theoretically relevant independent variables (e.g. intrinsic motivation,

extrinsic motivation, value alignment, extended satisfaction, perceived insecurity, intention to change, personal financial status).

Statistical significance was considered to be present when $p < 0.05$. The data was also presented in tabular form to emphasise the most significant coefficients ($r > 0.3$) and to support the construction of the subsequent regression model.

In order to identify the factors that predict overall job satisfaction, multiple linear regression was conducted using a stepwise method. This iterative approach enables the systematic incorporation of independent variables that contribute meaningfully to the explanation of variance in the dependent variable, while concomitantly eliminating those that are deemed to be insignificant.

The dependent variable under consideration was general job satisfaction (Q33), measured by a single item on a Likert scale.

Candidate independent variables were included in the model based on the results of the bivariate correlations and predefined theoretical assumptions. The primary variables analysed include intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, values alignment, extended job satisfaction, intention to change organisation, perceived job insecurity, and perceived financial condition.

The statistical assumptions of the model were then subjected to rigorous scrutiny, encompassing the evaluation of linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity ($VIF < 5$).

The interpretation of regression results was based on the following indicators:

- Standardised beta coefficients (β) to evaluate the relative contribution of each predictor;
- Significance levels (p-values) to test the null hypothesis;
- Coefficients of determination (R^2 and adjusted R^2) to assess the explanatory power of the model.

This analytical approach enabled the identification of the variables most strongly associated with job satisfaction, offering a robust quantitative foundation for the subsequent qualitative and theoretical reflections.

2.3 Qualitative Analysis

2.3.1 Data Collection

The present study's second phase is constituted by a qualitative analysis, the objective of which is to explore in depth the perceptions, experiences and subjective motivations of male and female workers involved in the Great Resignation phenomenon. This approach is predicated on the interpretation of textual data, such as interview responses, with the objective of producing contextualised and meaningful knowledge. In contradistinction to quantitative analysis, which relies on structured and generalisable data, qualitative research is predicated on a more profound and nuanced understanding of social behaviour and individual choices.

In the domain of the social sciences, qualitative research is frequently designated as naturalistic, as it involves the observation of social events and dynamics in their natural environment, with the objective of comprehending their significance from the perspective of the subjects involved. Qualitative interviewing, in particular, assumes a central role as an information-gathering tool and is also a methodological triangulation strategy, useful for enriching and validating results obtained through other instruments (Silverman, 2006).

The semi-structured interview format was selected for its ability to strike a balance between the structured and unstructured interview approaches. This approach provides a clear research framework while allowing adaptation based on the interpersonal context. The flexibility inherent in this format allows participants to express themselves freely, thereby fostering an authentic and reflective dialogue. In this perspective, the interview is not conceived as a mere tool for objective information gathering, but rather as a social and cognitive situation, in which meaning is constructed in a situated way, influenced by language, expectations and the relationship established between interviewer and interviewee (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Consequently, the interviewer assumes an active role in the direction of the conversation and the co-generation of content, while ensuring the maintenance of a frame of reference. Semi-structuring facilitates the exploration of complex issues, rendering it particularly suitable for studies that intend to delve into subjective dimensions and relational dynamics, such as in the case of ongoing transformations in the world of work (Leavy 2014).

The protocol is divided into six thematic sections, each of which is accompanied by non-binding prompts designed to stimulate personal narratives and facilitate in-depth study of value, organisational and motivational aspects.

For each question, the bibliographic source of reference was noted, along with optional probing questions to be used in case the participant required clarification or prompts to elaborate their answer. Furthermore, the nature of the information sought was predetermined for each inquiry, in accordance with the overarching research objective.

The administration of the interviews followed a uniform procedure designed to ensure clarity, transparency and communicative comfort. Prior to the commencement of the interview, participants were once again thanked for their availability and reminded of a few key points. First, they were informed that the purpose of the interview was to collect testimonies in support of an academic research project, without focusing on the specific research hypotheses. Second, it was clarified that the expected duration of the interview was approximately 20–30 minutes, with time distributed across thematic blocks. Third, participants were informed that the semi-structured format allowed for flexibility in the conversation while maintaining coherence with the interview guide. Finally, participants were asked to provide explicit consent to record the conversation, with a clear explanation that recordings would remain confidential and be used exclusively for academic purposes. All data were treated anonymously and in full compliance with privacy regulations.

Participants were recruited via LinkedIn, through an invitation message disseminated to workers and professionals active in various fields. The selection process was conducted on a voluntary, non-probabilistic basis, with the objective of assembling a diverse array of professional perspectives and backgrounds. Furthermore, a number of interviews were conducted through personal contacts.

All interviews were conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams, allowing for flexibility in scheduling and enabling participation from different geographic areas.

The interviews thus took on a function of methodological triangulation, allowing quantitative results to be verified and contextualized within real experiences.

2.3.2 Protocol Interview

The interview protocol comprises six core inquiries, each of which is oriented towards a pertinent subject area that has been identified through the survey analysis. A guiding theme was identified for each question, representing the theoretical or practical construct explored during the interview.

In order to stimulate more profound reflections and facilitate the expression of subjective experiences, each block was enriched with probing questions (probing questions), which were useful for clarifying, expanding or further exploring the content that emerged spontaneously in the discourse (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each theme was supported by statistical data, which motivated its inclusion in the protocol.

The following table presents, for each theme, the main question posed to the participant, associated probe questions, supporting quantitative data, a methodological justification for inclusion, and relevant theoretical sources of reference.

Specifically, the first question investigates individual perceptions of the voluntary resignation phenomenon, in relation to the widespread intention to change jobs. The second explores the organizational impact of this phenomenon and the responses that have been or should be adopted by companies. The third focuses on incentive tools and their connection to motivation and satisfaction. The fourth addresses the theme of preferred work arrangements and their influence on well-being and productivity. The fifth delves into the role of organizational culture and value alignment as either motivational drivers or sources of friction. Finally, the sixth question, which is open-ended and unguided, is designed to accommodate observations, experiences or reflections that may not have been expressed in the other categories.

Nº	1
Theme	Perception of the phenomenon
Main question	In recent years, there has been much discussion around the phenomenon known as the Great Resignation—a global wave of voluntary resignations that has profoundly reshaped people’s priorities and their relationship with work, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. In your opinion, what are the factors that triggered this phenomenon and continue to fuel it today?
Probe questions	• In your opinion, what has led so many people to voluntarily resign from their jobs? • Did it seem like a sudden break from the past, or a predictable consequence of the post-pandemic context?
Survey statistical data	• 33% of respondents expressed a high intention to leave their current organization, selecting values of 6 or 7 on a 7-point Likert scale. • This trend appears widespread across different generations and geographic areas.
Methodological justification	These figures indicate that the intention to voluntarily leave one’s job is both concrete and widespread, and should not be considered a marginal behavior. This question aims to explore participants’ perceived motivations, assessing whether the Great Resignation is seen as a temporary, post-pandemic disruption or as a

	deeper, systemic expression of changing expectations toward work.
Sources	Serenko, A. (2022). <i>The Great Resignation: the great knowledge exodus or the onset of the Great Knowledge Revolution?</i> Journal of Knowledge Management.
N°	2
Theme	Organizational impact and HR responses
Main question	Have you noticed whether—and how—the Great Resignation has had a concrete impact on your company or work environment? How is your organization responding to this phenomenon, or how do you think it should respond in the future? Alternatively, in your opinion, what should an organization do today to prevent people from resigning?
Probe questions	• Have you noticed an increase in turnover within your organization? • Which aspects do you believe should be addressed as a priority (e.g., employer branding, talent attraction, training programs)? • Can you provide concrete examples of what your organization has done — or what you would have liked to see?

Survey statistical data	• 33% of respondents expressed a high intention to leave their organization (values 6–7 on a 7-point Likert scale). • 32% of the sample falls in the Bottom 3 with regard to alignment with organizational values. • Positive and strong correlation between intention to leave and perceived job insecurity: $r = 0.452$ • Negative and significant correlation between intention to leave and general job satisfaction: $r = -0.181$ • Alignment with organizational values is among the strongest predictors in the regression model, significantly associated with: - General job satisfaction ($r = 0.670$) - Organizational identification ($r = 0.463$)
Methodological justification	The data suggest that the intention to leave is strongly linked to a combination of organizational and psychological factors, including perceived job insecurity, low satisfaction, and value misalignment. This question is designed to explore how participants perceive the impact of the Great Resignation on their work environment and whether their organization has already experienced signs of disengagement or turnover. It also allows for the collection of concrete bottom-up suggestions on how companies could respond, offering valuable insights for developing more tailored and effective retention strategies.
Sources	Borrelli, I., Santoro, P. E., Gualano, M. R., Moscato, U., & Rossi, M. F. (2024). <i>Assessing the Great</i>

	<i>Resignation phenomenon: Voluntary resignation of young Italian workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Annali di Igiene: Medicina Preventiva e di Comunità.</i>
N°	3
Theme	Incentives, benefits, and well-being
Main question	Are there any systems or tools in your organization aimed at increasing employee motivation? In your opinion, are they effective? If not, how would you improve them?
Probe questions	• What kinds of benefits or additional conditions do you consider truly important (e.g., welfare programs, training, mental health days, psychological support)? • Between a higher salary and high-quality benefits, which would you value more — and what would influence your decision?
Survey statistical data	• Correlation between intrinsic motivation and general job satisfaction: $r = 0.459$ • Correlation between extrinsic motivation and general job satisfaction: $r = 0.381$ • Motivation scores (on a 1–7 scale) are mainly concentrated in the middle range (4–5), suggesting moderate engagement.
Methodological justification	Both types of motivation are correlated with job satisfaction, but intrinsic motivation shows a stronger

	impact. This suggests that economic or material benefits (extrinsic motivation) alone are not sufficient: meaning, autonomy, and personal growth are more powerful drivers. The question is designed to investigate what truly activates people and which organizational tools (e.g., welfare programs, training, recognition) are perceived as most effective in stimulating engagement. It helps build a more personalized profile of the “ideal job,” useful for understanding employees’ expectations and priorities.
Sources	Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1976). <i>Motivation through the design of work: Test of a theory</i>. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance. Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). <i>Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior</i>. New York: Plenum Press.
N°	4
Theme	Flexibility, autonomy, and productivity
Main question	What is your ideal work arrangement? And how do you think it affects your productivity or well-being?
Probe questions	• What type of contract, working hours, and work arrangement would you ideally prefer (e.g., fully remote, flexible, hybrid)?

Survey statistical data	• 153 respondents prefer working in the office, while 140 favor a balance between home and office. • Only 2 respondents expressed a strong preference for full in-person work.
Methodological justification	The nearly even distribution of preferences shows that there is no one-size-fits-all model for the ideal work arrangement. This question explores individual preferences and the perceived link between work modality, productivity, and well-being.
Sources	Kniffin, K. M., & Narayanan, J., et al. (2020). <i>COVID-19 and the workplace: Implications, issues, and insights for future research and action</i> . <i>American Psychologist</i>
N°	5
Theme	Organizational culture, value alignment, and motivation
Main question	Have you ever felt that your company's values did not represent you, or that there was a mismatch between what you care about and what the organization promotes? To what extent do you believe organizational culture influences work motivation?

Probe questions	• Has anything in your company's culture ever demotivated you, even if you liked the job itself? • Have you ever felt a contradiction between your personal values (e.g., growth, autonomy, social impact) and those promoted by your organization?
Survey statistical data	• 32% of respondents fall in the Bottom 3 (1–3) on the organizational value alignment scale → 1 in 3 does not feel represented by their organization. • Correlation with intrinsic motivation: $r = 0.437$ • Correlation with extrinsic motivation: $r = 0.418$ • Correlation with organizational identification: $r = 0.463$ • Organizational values are among the strongest predictors in the regression model, also associated with: - General job satisfaction ($r = 0.670$) - Extended job satisfaction ($r = 0.670$).
Methodological justification	Cultural misalignment is a strong cause of demotivation. The strength of the correlations, together with the predictive role of values in the regression model, suggests that organizational culture can be either a powerful driver of retention or a source of disconnection. This question helps bring out experiences of value misalignment, and also reflections on what companies should do to be perceived as authentic and coherent.

Sources	Watermeyer, R., Bolden, R., Knight, C., & Crick, T. (2024). <i>Academic anomie: implications of the 'great resignation' for leadership in post-COVID higher education</i> . Higher Education.
N°	6
Theme	Personal experiences and open reflections
Main question	To conclude, is there anything you consider important to add, based on your personal experience, that could help us better understand this phenomenon?
Probe questions	<i>(No probes provided – intentionally left open for free expression)</i>
Survey statistical data	<i>(Ad hoc question – no survey statistical data referenced)</i>
Methodological justification	This open-ended closing question allows participants to freely express experiences, expectations, or frustrations that may not have emerged in the previous sections. It is useful for completing the overall picture with qualitative insights, anecdotes, or perspectives that enrich the thematic analysis and reveal additional dimensions of the phenomenon.
Sources	<i>(Ad hoc question – no specific source referenced)</i>

Table 2 – Source: Qualitative research

This configuration reflects the **integration of the two phases of mixed-methods design** and provides a robust foundation for qualitative analysis, ensuring consistency between objectives, tools and interpretive approach.

2.3.3 Interview Analysis

A qualitative analysis of the interviews was conducted in accordance with the thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2012; 2021). This methodology has been described as both flexible and rigorous, and is most appropriate for identifying, analysing and interpreting recurrent patterns of meaning within a text corpus.

In accordance with the authors' recommendations, the epistemological and strategic positioning of the analysis was initially made explicit: an inductive (data-driven) approach was adopted, with the objective of deriving themes directly from the data, without predefined theoretical constraints, and oriented primarily at the semantic level. However, in circumstances where there was significant implicit content, latent reading was also employed to capture deep meanings that were not immediately made explicit.

The analysis was situated within an experiential and contextualist perspective, assuming that participants actively construct the meaning of their work experience in relation to the socio-organisational context in which it accrued (Braun & Clarke, 2012). The data were not regarded as objective entities in themselves, but rather as situated narratives co-constructed between interviewee and researcher, and then reflexively interpreted.

The entire process was conducted manually using Microsoft Excel, a method that facilitated the construction of a traceable coding matrix. This matrix proved to be instrumental in ensuring transparency and methodological consistency.

The analytical process was divided into the six classic stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

1. **Familiarising yourself with the data** - Interviews were transcribed in their entirety and reread several times. Initial insights, recurring emotions, narrative

tones and internal contradictions were noted in this stage, developing an initial theoretical sensitivity to the data.

2. **Generating initial codes** - Relevant segments of the text were coded manually in a systematic way. The codes, constructed from the language of the interviewees, were also applied at multiple levels (multiple coding) in order not to miss complex nuances.
3. **Searching for themes** - Codes were aggregated into coherent conceptual sets, resulting in provisional themes that reflected recurrent patterns in respondents' experiences and representations.
4. **Reviewing of themes** - Themes that emerged were refined and checked against the entire text corpus, checking for internal and external consistency. Some were unified or restructured to improve their conceptual soundness.
5. **Defining and naming themes** - Each theme was clearly defined, highlighting its conceptual boundaries, interpretive core and theoretical implications. Where necessary, sub-themes were also identified to represent internal articulations.
6. **Producing the final report** - The analysis was presented through a structured narrative, supported by sample excerpts and an interpretive commentary connecting the data to the research questions and existing literature.

The analysis was conducted in a reflexive manner, with the active role of the researcher in interpreting the data and following the quality criteria outlined by Braun & Clarke (2021). These criteria include analytical depth, relevance of the themes to the research, internal consistency, and attention to the complexity of the narratives.

In accordance with the Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods design, the qualitative phase functioned to expand and enrich the interpretation of the quantitative results.

This facilitated not only triangulation of the data, but also the retrieval of voices and experiences that endowed the observed numerical trends with meaning and depth.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

This research took all necessary measures to ensure compliance with ethical principles in conducting the survey, both in the quantitative (survey) and qualitative (interviews) phases. The fundamental principles of informed consent, the confidentiality of data, and the anonymity of participants were adhered to, in accordance with the ethical guidelines for social research.

With regard to the survey, participants were presented with a clear and transparent introduction which explained the purpose of the research, the use of anonymously collected data and the voluntary nature of participation. No sensitive identification data were collected, and all responses were processed in aggregate form in order to protect the privacy of the individuals involved.

In the qualitative phase, the participants were explicitly requested to provide consent for recording. This request was made prior to the commencement of the interview, and it was emphasised that the data would be used exclusively for academic purposes and that confidentiality would be respected.

The anonymity of the participants was also ensured through the use of pseudonyms in the transcription and analysis of the data, thus avoiding any possible direct link between the identity of the interviewees and the information provided. This approach was instrumental in fostering a climate of trust and transparency, which are prerequisites for the efficacy of the qualitative survey.

In conclusion, the entire research process was guided by a constant focus on methodological transparency and ethical responsibility, in accordance with the principles of good practice in academic research. Adherence to these principles ensured the safeguarding of the dignity and autonomy of the participants, thus guaranteeing the quality and integrity of the work performed.

Chapter 3: Results

This chapter presents the results obtained through the analysis of the data collected during the research.

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, which included an initial quantitative phase, based on a questionnaire administered to a sample of 312 respondents, and a subsequent qualitative phase, consisting of semi-structured interviews, conducted with the aim of deepening and enriching the interpretation of the data, administered to 19 respondents.

The section commences with a descriptive analysis of the variables collected through surveys, which is followed by more in-depth investigations, such as correlations and regression models. These are useful for identifying significant relationships between work motivations (intrinsic and extrinsic), level of value alignment, perceived financial stability, preferences on work mode, and intention to change organisations. Finally, the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interviews is reported, thus enriching and complementing the interpretation of the data.

3.1 Results of Quantitative Analysis

3.1.1 Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics

The sample consists of 312 respondents. The distribution by year of birth indicates a preponderance of young workers: 26% of the sample belong to Generation Z (born between 1997 and 2005), while the largest share is represented by Millennials (born between 1981 and 1996), with 110 respondents, constituting 35% of the total. This is followed by Generation X workers (1965-1980), who constitute 33% of the sample. Finally, the demographic of the baby-boomer generation (born 1955-1964) represents a residual share of 5%. This distribution serves to confirm the research's primary focus on new generations, whilst also incorporating a comparison with more experienced workers.

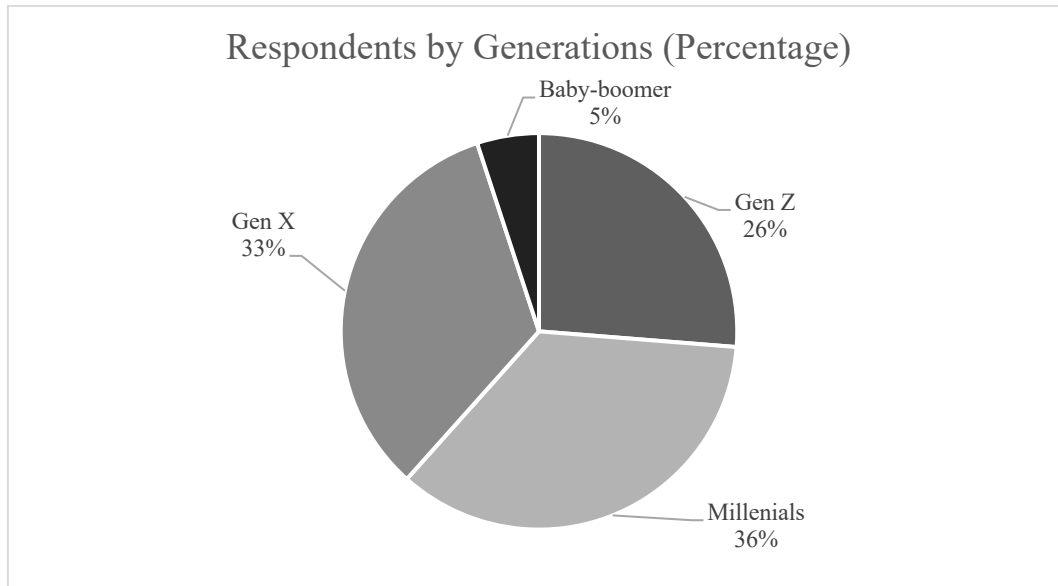


Figure 5 – Source: Quantitative Analysis

With regard to the size of the company, 43.8% of respondents are employed by companies with fewer than 50 employees, while 30% are employed by companies with over 500 employees. Medium-sized companies (with 51 to 500 employees) account for the remainder of the sample, with percentages ranging from 6% to 14%, outlining a significant presence of both agile and structured contexts.

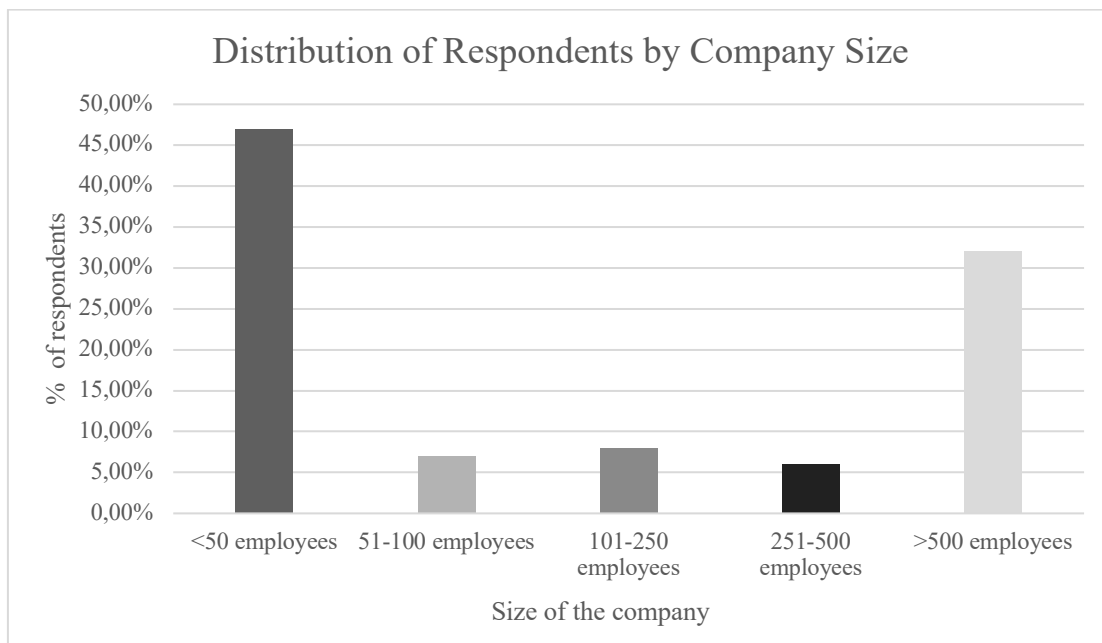


Figure 6 – Source: Quantitative Analysis

From a sectoral point of view, respondents operate mainly in the consulting services sector (16.9%), followed by health services (13.1%) and education (10.2%). The public sector constitutes approximately 4.8% of the sample.

The sectoral distribution of the population reflects a prevalence of tertiary and professional activities, consistent with the spread of the profiles interviewed.

With respect to geographical distribution, the Apulia region is notable for its high representation among respondents, with the region being identified as the primary place of work for approximately 37% of the surveyed population. This is followed, with more contained values, by Latium (11.8%), Lombardy (9.6%) and Piedmont (9.6%), which collectively demonstrate a substantial territorial coverage. This is a valuable asset for future reflections on the relationship between turnover phenomena and local rootedness.

Distribution of Respondents by Region



Figure 7 – Source: Quantitative Analysis

Upon analysis of the expressed preferences with regard to modes of work, it became evident that the majority of participants demonstrated a marked preference for hybrid forms. Furthermore, 26.2 % of respondents expressed a preference for predominantly home-based work, while an additional 24.4 % indicated a desire for a balanced distribution of their time between in-person and remote work. Conversely, 22.7% of respondents expressed a preference for working entirely in the office, while only a minority (8%) indicated a preference for working exclusively from home. This figure is of particular pertinence when considering the novel expectations pertaining to job flexibility.

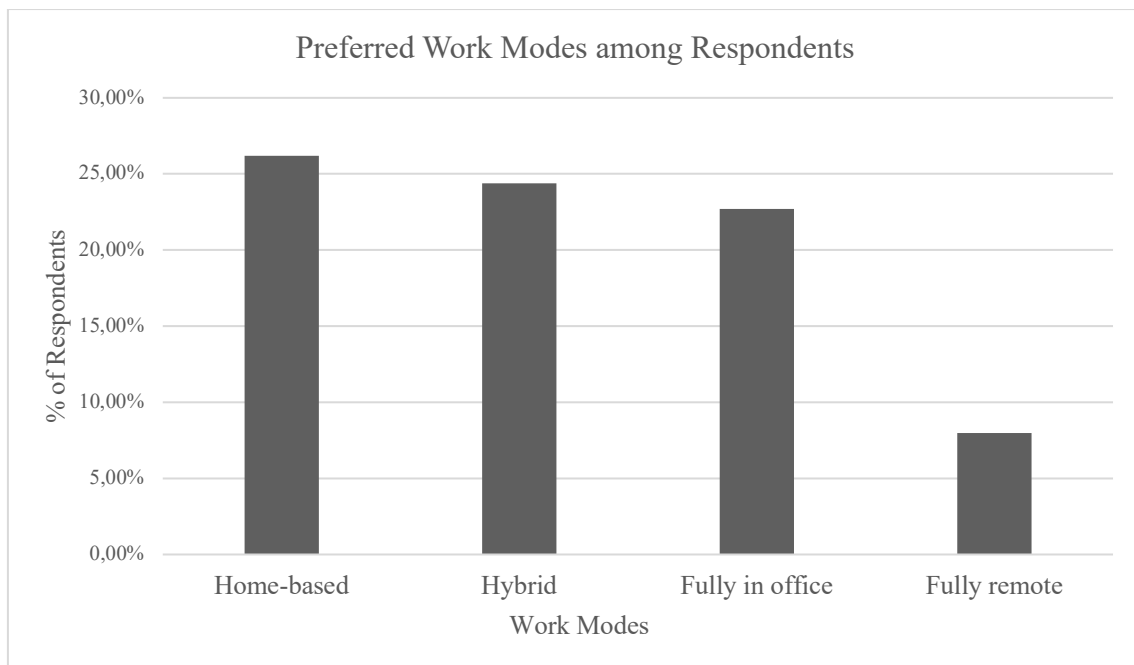


Figure 8 – Source: Quantitative Analysis

The variable relating to perceived financial stability demonstrates a moderate distribution: A total of 29% of the participants self-identified as being in the upper range of the Likert scale (values 6-7), indicating a state of relative stability. However, 40% of respondents self-identified as being in the lower values (1-3), indicating a level of economic insecurity that may have a negative impact on their sense of belonging and their propensity to remain in the company.

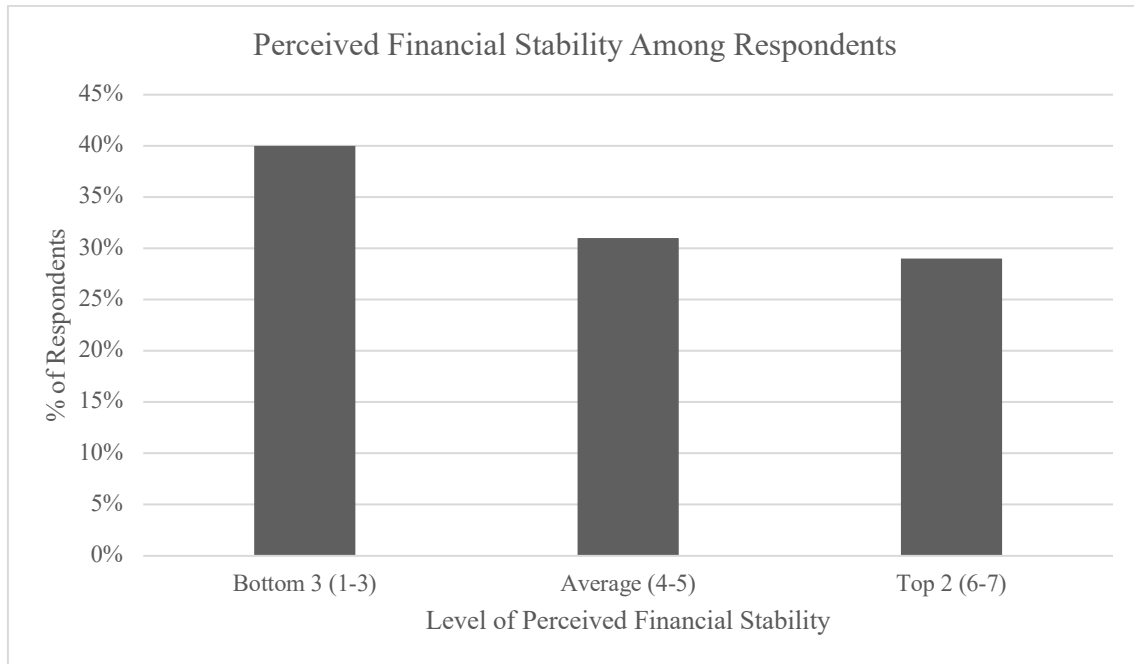


Figure 9 – Source: Quantitative Analysis

The issue of values alignment with the organisation highlights a certain dualism: while 19.8% of respondents state that they feel completely aligned with the company values (score 6-7), over 32% report a very low degree of alignment (scores 1-3). This finding aligns with the extant literature on the subject, which posits that value misalignment constitutes a primary catalyst for professional discontent, often engendering an aspiration for career transition.

Conversely, the proportion of respondents expressing a definitive intention to resign is minimal, at approximately 44%. These individuals assert a high degree of reluctance to depart from their current organisational affiliations. However, a significant proportion of 25% of respondents expressed a strong intention to seek alternative employment in the near future. This corroborates the existence of a cohort of workers who are 'at risk of resigning', whose continued employment is contingent upon companies' capacity to address fundamental needs, including the significance of work, the consistency of their values, and the opportunity for personal advancement.

3.1.2 Correlations

In order to explore the linear associations between overall job satisfaction (Q33) and a set of independent variables of motivational, values and organisational nature, a Pearson bivariate correlation analysis was conducted. The procedure identified variables that demonstrated a significant relationship with the level of job satisfaction perceived by respondents, thereby providing an initial interpretive map of factors associated with job well-being.

The findings indicate that the strongest correlations are observed with:

- The **alignment to organisational values (Q19)** exhibited a robust positive correlation with overall satisfaction ($r = 0.670$, $p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that a sense of representation within the organisation's culture and values serves as a significant predictor of job well-being.
- The findings of this study indicate a robust correlation between **extended job satisfaction (Q34)**, encompassing **relational, work-life balance** and **perceived meaning aspects**, and overall **satisfaction** ($r = 0.653$, $p < 0.001$).
- The **identification with the organisation (Q35)** demonstrates a substantial positive correlation ($r = 0.586$, $p < 0.001$), thereby substantiating the notion that a sense of belonging is closely associated with satisfaction.

The following motivational factors were identified:

- **Intrinsic Motivation (Q16)** exhibits a moderate positive correlation with Job Satisfaction ($r = 0.459$, $p < 0.001$). This finding serves to confirm the central role of elements such as personal growth, autonomy, and the meaning of work.
- The correlation between **extrinsic motivation (Q17)** and perceived well-being is statistically significant ($r = 0.381$, $p < 0.001$). However, the influence of external rewards, such as salary or public recognition, on perceived well-being is weaker ($r = 0.381$, $p < 0.001$).

Conversely, certain variables have been observed to demonstrate inverse associations.

- The present study sought to ascertain the correlation between the intention to **change organisations (Q18)** and **job satisfaction** ($r = -0.181$, $p < 0.01$). The findings indicated a negative relationship between the two variables, suggesting that lower levels of satisfaction are accompanied by a greater propensity to turnover.
- The present study sought to ascertain the relationship between **perceived job insecurity (Q20)** and **job well-being**. The results of the analysis indicated a negative correlation between the two variables ($r = -0.332$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that a perceived lack of stability in the job environment can have a detrimental effect on the well-being of employees.
- Finally, **perceived financial status (Q56)** demonstrated a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.287$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that greater economic security is associated with higher levels of satisfaction.

The analysis indicates that internal value and motivational factors exert a more significant influence than external incentives, thereby corroborating the hypothesis that the Great Resignation is propelled by an aspiration for consistency, meaning, and authentic recognition in professional pursuits.

	Intrinsic Motivation	Extrinsic Motivation	Turnover Intention	Value Alignment	Job Insecurity	General Job Satisfaction	Extended Satisfaction	Organizational Identification	Quiet Quitting	Financial Condition
Intrinsic Motivation	1.000***	0.565***	0.160**	0.437***	0.144*	0.459***	0.345***	0.407***	-0.022	0.298***
Extrinsic Motivation	0.565***	1.000***	0.159**	0.418***	0.173**	0.381***	0.341***	0.435***	0.117*	0.283***
Turnover Intention	0.160**	0.159**	1.000***	-0.088	0.452***	-0.181**	0.054	-0.146*	0.266***	-0.116*
Value Alignment	0.437***	0.418***	-0.088	1.000***	-0.064	0.670***	0.563***	0.570***	-0.012	0.299***
Job Insecurity	0.144*	0.173**	0.452***	-0.064	1.000***	-0.332***	-0.094***	-0.231***	0.335***	-0.044***
General Satisfaction	0.459***	0.381***	-0.181**	0.670***	-0.332***	1.000***	0.345***	0.407***	-0.022	0.298***
Extended Satisfaction	0.345***	0.341***	0.054	0.563***	-0.094***	0.345***	1.000***	0.572***	-0.020	0.388***
Organizational ID	0.407***	0.435***	-0.146*	0.570***	-0.231***	0.407***	0.572***	1.000***	0.120*	0.435***
Quiet Quitting	-0.022	0.117*	0.266***	-0.012	0.335***	-0.022	-0.020	0.120*	1.000***	0.128*
Financial Condition	0.298***	0.283***	-0.116*	0.299***	-0.044***	0.298***	0.388***	0.435***	0.128*	1.000***

Table 3 – Pearson Correlation Matrix Among Key Variables

Note:

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

All correlations are two-tailed Pearson's r .

3.1.3 Regression

In order to identify the main predictors of overall **job satisfaction (Q33)**, a multiple linear regression was conducted by stepwise method. This approach enabled the selection of independent variables that could explain a significant proportion of the variance of the dependent variable (R^2) to be progressively refined, ensuring a parsimonious and statistically robust model.

The candidate variables for entry into the model included: intrinsic motivation (Q16); extrinsic motivation (Q17); intention to change organization (Q18); Alignment with the values of the organization (Q19); perception of job insecurity (Q20); extended job satisfaction (Q34); identification with organizational values (Q35); personal financial condition (Q56).

Prior to analysis, a series of key statistical assumptions were meticulously examined, encompassing linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity, and the absence of multicollinearity. The investigation revealed no significant violations. The VIFs for all variables were found to be less than 2.5, indicating an absence of problematic collinearity. The final model demonstrated an overall explained variance of 60.5% ($R^2 = 0.605$), a satisfactory result within the scope of the research. It was determined that all automatic selection steps were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

The predictors included in the final model and their respective standardized coefficients (Beta) are as follows:

- **Question 19 – Alignment to organisational values** ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.001$) is the strongest predictor of job satisfaction. This finding underscores the pivotal role of congruence between individual and organisational values in fostering job well-being.
- **Question 34 – Extended Job Satisfaction** ($\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$)
This question represents aspects such as interpersonal relationships, sense of meaning, and work-life balance, thus confirming a holistic view of satisfaction.

- **Question 56 – Personal financial status of the subject** ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.001$)
This indicates that the personal financial status of the subject has a significant impact on satisfaction, although this impact is smaller than that of the other two predictors.

Following a thorough examination of the available data, it was determined that certain variables would be excluded from the final model. These variables included intrinsic motivation (Q16) and organisational identification (Q35). This decision was not driven by the assumption that these variables are of negligible importance; rather, it was recognised that their effects are already being addressed by other variables incorporated within the model. For instance, the influence of intrinsic motivation is partially reflected by Q19 and Q34, which are indicative of its value and relational aspects. From a technical standpoint, the Q16 does not offer a sufficient unique contribution to justify its retention in the model, despite demonstrating a substantial bivariate correlation ($r = 0.459$).

In conclusion, the model demonstrates that job satisfaction is predominantly influenced by the organisational context's value and relationship dimensions, rather than by individual motivation or financial incentives. In order to enhance employee well-being, organisations must prioritise the establishment of cultural consistency, the cultivation of robust relationships, and the provision of recognition that is both symbolic and personal, as opposed to solely financial in nature.

Independent variables	β coefficient	Significance
Alignment with organizational values	0.369	***
Extended job satisfaction	0.340	***
Personal financial condition	0.184	***
R²	0.605	—

Table 4 – Multiple Linear Regression: Predictors of Overall Job Satisfaction

Note: $p < 0.001$

3.2 Results of Quantitative Analysis: Key Narratives and Patterns

3.2.1 Profiles of Interviewees

The qualitative corpus consists of 19 interviews. The sample is characterised by heterogeneity in terms of age, gender, geographic area and professional role. This heterogeneity is conducive to the provision of a multifaceted and contextualised reading of the phenomenon.

From a generational perspective, the survey revealed that 11 respondents identified as Millennials, and 8 as Generation Z.

At the territorial level, the region of Southern Italy is predominant, with a total of 13 participants. This is followed by the Central region, which contributes 4 participants, and the Northern region, which contributes 2 participants.

From a professional standpoint, the sample encompasses a variety of roles and functions, including administrative clerks, counsellors, educators, social workers, teachers, logistics workers, IT developers, labourers, communication professionals and coordinators. The level of seniority exhibited a certain degree of variability, encompassing junior profiles in addition to intermediate and middle management positions.

All participants have undergone, or are undergoing, a process of critical reflection on their relationship with work. Some have already resigned, while others are in the process of doing so. There are also accounts of strong ambivalence and discomfort. The multiplicity of positions enables the exploration of the phenomenon not only in its final outcome, but also as a gradual and complex process in which personal motivations, relational factors, organisational constraints and identity aspirations are intertwined.

In the following paragraphs, the contents of the interviews will be analysed thematically in order to highlight recurring patterns, the most significant variables and implications for understanding the phenomenon of Great Resignation.

3.2.2 Thematic Analysis

In order to achieve a more profound understanding of the quantitative survey's results and to capture the experiential dimension of the phenomenon, a thematic analysis of the interviews was conducted in accordance with the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012).

The analysis was conducted predominantly at the semantic level, utilising an inductive and contextualist approach. However, the approach was open to latent readings where necessary. The analysis followed the six steps provided by the method, the results of which are depicted below.

1. Familiarising yourself with the data

The interviews (n = 19) were transcribed in full and analysed through an initial exploratory reading. In this study, a table of initial observations was compiled. This table included general annotations, narrative patterns observed, emotions expressed, and personal reflections for each interview.

The analysis revealed several recurring observations. A notable pattern was the perceived discrepancy between the organisation's professed values and its actual practices, which often contributed to feelings of disillusionment, distrust, and emotional detachment among employees. Participants also frequently highlighted a lack of active listening and transparency, particularly in public institutions or highly hierarchical environments. Emotional exhaustion and mental fatigue were commonly reported, often associated with a perceived lack of visibility and acknowledgment within the organisation. Furthermore, job flexibility emerged as a key factor in enhancing well-being, especially in the context of significant life events such as motherhood, illness, or the COVID-19 pandemic. Lastly, many narratives expressed a clear need for personal agency—namely, the desire for autonomy, self-determination, and meaningful influence over one's professional role and responsibilities.

A thorough analysis of the emotions and narrative tones revealed a diverse range, including strategic lucidity, resignation, anger, as well as awareness and a desire for emancipation. In numerous interviews, resignation was not characterised as an impulsive act, but rather as a reflective decision aimed at safeguarding one's mental health, integrity, or personal coherence. In certain instances, the lexicon employed (for example, "choking," "taking back," "feeling alive") served to reinforce the interpretation of resignation as a gesture of identity reaffirmation.

It was evident that a number of profiles were especially emblematic.

Female workers with children (int11, int12, int16) raised the issue of post-maternity well-being and the inadequacy of organisational models in relation to real-life circumstances. The environment was characterised by rigidity, impersonality and a perceived lack of responsiveness to needs, as described by civil servants (int10, int18).

The case of a blue-collar worker (int13) demonstrated the cross-generational and sectoral nature of the phenomenon, thereby refuting the hypothesis that the Great Resignation exclusively impacts highly skilled profiles.

A comprehensive analysis of the returned data yielded a comprehensive and detailed initial overview, characterised by elements of disappointment, criticism and a search for authenticity. These preliminary observations established a robust foundation for the subsequent phase of systematic coding and theme construction.

Observed category	Recurring pattern	Interview example
Value misalignment	Discrepancy between stated values and actual behaviors; perceived organizational incoherence	int01, int05, int13, int19
Lack of listening and transparency	Emotionally closed climate; low empathy; hierarchical and rigid systems	int04, int10, int18

Burnout and emotional fatigue	Psychological overload linked to lack of recognition or organizational care	int06, int11, int17
Need for agency and autonomy	Desire for self-determination and influence; rejection of excessive control	int03, int08, int14, int18
Flexibility and wellbeing	Flexibility as a driver of work-life balance and retention	int02, int10, int16
Identity-based coherence	Resignation as an act of personal integrity and value realignment	int12, int13, int15

Table 5 – Key patterns observed during the data familiarization phase

2. Generating initial codes

The second phase of thematic analysis entailed a systematic and inductive coding process of the interviews, which was carried out manually through line-by-line reading of the texts. As a result of the significant excerpts, initial codes were generated. These codes represent distinct semantic units, anchored in the data but already oriented towards future thematic organisation.

The initial coding process yielded a total of over 80 codes, which were then assigned labels based on the participants' verbal expressions. These codes were subsequently documented within an Excel matrix, meticulously structured with the following columns: interview, question number, text extract, code, level of coding (semantic or latent), and reflective notes. The coding encompassed both explicit and descriptive concepts (for example, "absence of listening," "flexibility as a productivity lever") and interpretive or symbolic elements (for example, "illusory agency," "psychological breakdown post life event").

The semantic level involves the use of codes anchored in overt meanings directly enunciated in the texts. In contrast, the latent level is used to designate deeper meanings, implicit or underlying the words expressed. The adoption of both levels made it possible to respect the multiplicity and richness of the data, avoiding reductionism and valuing both stated and interpreted experience.

The following codes were identified as being among the most recurrent in terms of frequency or conceptual relevance: *Value-Practice Misalignment*; *Authentic Acknowledgment*; *Flexibility as a Right*; *Pressure without Support*; *Priority to Work-Life Balance*; *Toxic Culture as a Primary Cause*; *Experience of Invisibility*.

The evaluation of these codes did not merely entail a quantitative analysis of their frequency, but also an assessment of their narrative relevance, expressive depth, and cross-distribution within the corpus. For instance, the concepts of "work self-determination" and "conscious choice of change" manifested in distinctly divergent profiles, distinguished by factors such as age, role, and sector, thereby underscoring their intergenerational pertinence.

The coding process was executed in a bottom-up manner, eschewing the utilisation of a predefined coding frame. This approach was consistent with the interpretive logic of inductive Thematic Analysis.

However, a continuous reflective register was maintained, noting the criteria for code choice, semantic ambivalence and early signs of conceptual aggregation, which proved useful in the subsequent stage of theme construction.

Initial Code	Example Quote	Level	Interview example
Value-practice misalignment	“I resigned because there was no longer consistency between what we did and what the company claimed.”	latent	int01, int05, int13, int19
Recognition and appreciation	“A sincere thank-you can be more motivating than a raise.”	semantic	int01, int03, int08, int11

Flexible work as empowerment	“Flexible work has changed the way I work, for the better.”	semantic	int02, int10, int16
Lack of care and emotional burnout	“Burnout doesn’t come from nowhere: it comes from not being listened to.”	latent	int06, int11, int17
Life reprioritization after crisis	“The pandemic made me realize that personal time is sacred.”	semantic	int12, int13, int15

Table 6 – Initial codes identified during the initial coding phase

3. Searching for themes

The third phase of thematic analysis entailed the consolidation of the preliminary codes into more extensive and unified conceptual structures. This consolidation was achieved through an iterative process of comparison and refinement.

The thematic framework was constructed inductively, with an initial focus on the semantic proximity between the codes. However, the cross-cutting recurrence, emotional intensity, and theoretical relevance of the narratives were also given due consideration.

A total of six provisional themes were identified, reflecting stable configurations of meaning present in multiple interviews.

The primary findings are outlined below:

- The concept of values misalignment encompasses a range of theoretical frameworks, including but not limited to: "values-practices misalignment," "cultural incongruence," and "wellness marketing." The overarching theme that emerged from the discourse was one of disappointment, expressed by participants, with organisations that were perceived to be inconsistent between their stated principles and their actual practices. The values gap has been identified as a

significant contributing factor to distrust and identity breakdown, a phenomenon that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

- The concept of emotional care and sustainability encompasses a range of issues, including, but not limited to, "missed emotional care," "pressure without support," "invisibility," and "burnout." The theme emphasises the dearth of attentive listening and relational care in professional environments, particularly within sectors characterised by relationship intensity, such as healthcare. The concept of emotional sustainability has emerged as an explicit necessity and condition for maintaining one's sense of belonging.
- The concept of recognition and belonging encompasses a range of factors, including "genuine recognition", "valuing contribution", and the significance of human feedback. The theme accentuates the pivotal function of recognition as a personal and relational experience, which has the capacity to engender motivation, a sense of belonging, and retention, extending beyond mere economic compensation.
- The concept of autonomy and agency encompasses a range of factors, including "work self-determination," "conscious choice," "creative agency," and "flexibility after life events." Autonomy is perceived as a catalyst for empowerment and motivation, particularly in response to prior experiences of rigidity, control, or exclusion from decision-making processes.
- The phenomenon of the Great Resignation has been identified as a key element in the current social and economic climate. This term, which has emerged as a result of the post-pandemic era, encompasses a series of concepts including "post-pandemic awareness," "redefinition of success," and "private life evaluation." The theme posits a values-based interpretation of resignation, eschewing the notion of it as a mere evasion. Instead, it is conceptualised as a reflective choice, one that is characterised by the pursuit of authenticity, equilibrium, and the renegotiation of the concept of work.
- The culture of control and absence of listening is characterised by a series of codes, including "obsessive control," "rigid system," "illusory agency," and "lack of authentic listening." This theme delineates organisational environments characterised by bureaucracy, distrust and oppression, where the absence of

avenues for expression engenders feelings of frustration, powerlessness and emotional disconnection.

The validity of the themes was confirmed by their cross-cutting recurrence among respondents who differed in age, sector and role. Despite their distinct nature, the themes appear to be interconnected, thus delineating a multifaceted and coherent interpretative picture of the motivations behind voluntary resignation.

4. Reviewing of themes

In the fourth phase of the thematic analysis, the themes that had emerged in the previous phase were critically reviewed to verify their internal coherence (between the included codes) and their external coherence (with respect to the other themes). This step enabled the thematic structure to be refined, certain themes to be renamed more accurately and the latent meaning of each interpretative category to be consolidated.

Verifying internal coherence involved checking the semantic compatibility of the codes included in each theme; external consistency, on the other hand, was assessed by comparing the themes with each other to guarantee their distinction and interpretative autonomy while recognising any connections between them.

Revised Theme	Internal Coherence	Distinction from other themes
Misalignment between stated values and actual practices	High: all codes express a clear gap between organizational discourse and everyday reality	High: clearly distinct; captures identity rupture and disillusionment
Organizational care as a source of wellbeing (or not)	High: codes focus on emotional neglect, invisible stress, and need for psychological support	Medium: complementary to recognition and autonomy; centered on emotional and relational infrastructure

Relational recognition and sense of belonging	High: all codes converge on the need to be seen, heard, and valued	Medium: distinct from autonomy and care; focuses on human dignity and acknowledgment rather than structural support
Autonomy as motivational driver and agency	Medium: revolves around self-determination, decision-making, and flexibility	High: clearly distinct from recognition; concerns freedom and initiative rather than external approval
The Great Resignation as value-based awakening	High: reflects value clarification, meaning-making, and priority realignment	High: interpretive and transversal; focuses on existential dimensions beyond other theme categories
Control culture and lack of listening	Medium: describes closed, rigid systems with lack of communication and participatory space	Medium: not overlapping with care; focused on structural absence of trust and dialog rather than unmet emotional needs

Table 7 – Revised themes after coherence review (internal and external)

5. Defining and naming themes

In the fifth phase, the themes that emerged underwent a process of definitive re-definition and naming through an interpretive process.

In instances where such distinctions were deemed pertinent, supplementary themes were identified to represent specific nuances or internal articulations, while maintaining the cohesion of the overarching structure. The nomenclature employed in this study is

characterised by its integration of value, emotional, and symbolic references, aligning with the contextualist framework underpinning the analysis.

Theme	Sub-theme
Value Misalignment and Identity Breakdown	Value disillusionment; untrustworthy corporate rhetoric
The (Un)Healing Workplace	Emotional overload; lack of support; invisibility of personal needs
Recognition and the Need for Belonging	Relational belonging; micro-recognition; personal creativity appreciation
Freedom to choose: Autonomy and Agency	Flexibility as choice; project-based agency; personal responsibility
Resignation as a Path to Personal Coherence	Self-discovery; post-pandemic self-empowerment; generational awareness
Control-Oriented Culture and the Silencing of Dialogue	Structural lack of listening; illusory agency

Table 8 – Final themes and related sub-themes (thematic structure after definition)

The themes thus defined constitute the interpretative structure of the qualitative analysis, which will be explored in detail in the following section through a thematic narrative enriched with textual quotations and theoretical references.

6. Producing the final report

The final phase of the thematic analysis entailed the structured and interpretative writing of the findings, following the model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012). Each theme is presented through an integrated narrative that combines a concise yet

conceptually rich description of the underlying meaning that emerged from the data, selected excerpts from the interviews that provide participants' direct voices and illustrate key meaning units, and a theoretical commentary that connects each theme to relevant academic literature, ensuring coherence between empirical insights and conceptual interpretation.

Rather than merely summarising the results, this phase offers a comprehensive and analytical reading of the Great Resignation phenomenon, with particular attention to the deep meanings attributed to it by the participants themselves.

6.1 Value Misalignment and Identity Breakdown

This theme conveys a sense of frustration and disillusionment, arising from the perception of a significant discrepancy between the values espoused by the organisations and the values practised on a daily basis. The collected narratives evince a pervasive sense of cultural incoherence, experienced as an 'identity rupture' with the capacity to profoundly erode feelings of belonging and work commitment. In instances where an organisation purports to promote an inclusive, empathic and welfare-oriented value image, yet its operations are governed by hierarchical, cold or performative logics, a sense of alienation is engendered that can serve as a catalyst for the decision to depart.

"I decided to resign because I just couldn't see any alignment between what the company claimed to stand for and what it actually did day to day." (int01)

"Companies love to talk about how much they care about their employees' well-being, but when people show signs of distress, they often look the other way." (int02)

"There's a lot of talk about company culture where I work, but it rarely addresses what we actually need on a practical level." (int19)"

The necessity for uniformity of values is a foundational aspect of psychological well-being, frequently experienced more acutely among younger employees. In instances where an organisation fails to uphold its implicit commitments or cultivates an unrealistic self-image, a disconnection mechanism is initiated that encompasses not only the professional domain but also the identity dimension.

The participants in this study discuss the decision to leave as an inevitable gesture; not so much to obtain better conditions, but rather to safeguard their integrity. The dissolution of the employment relationship is not merely a matter of professional termination; rather, it is indicative of a more profound sense of incoherence that devoid work of meaning and engenders disaffection. This theme has been observed to transcend roles, sectors and generations, thereby signifying an escalating intolerance towards organisational models that are deemed to lack credibility, coherence and authenticity in their identity.

6.2 The (Un)Healing Workplace

The centrality of the emotional and relational dimension of work is highlighted by this theme, and the direct impact of its presence or absence on people's well-being or malaise is emphasised. As the narratives reveal, work is not merely a productive or remunerated activity, but a space imbued with personal meaning. Within this space, relationships, psychological support, and active listening emerge as essential pillars of a healthy work life. When these elements are absent, a gradual process of emotional erosion often takes place—eventually leading to burnout, demotivation, and in many cases, resignation. Participants reported experiences of emotional invisibility, lack of genuine listening, and relational isolation.

“Burnout doesn’t just happen out of nowhere. It builds up when you feel ignored or like no one’s really listening to you.”(int17)

“I constantly felt invisible, under pressure all the time—as if I didn’t really exist in the eyes of the organisation.”(int07)

“After becoming a mother, I had the strong feeling that my needs no longer mattered at work. It was like I just disappeared.”(int16)

Many participants have attested to the fact that, during periods of extreme fatigue, what was absent was not tools or benefits, but a human presence: namely, a person who was truly attentive, who recognised signs of discomfort, and who showed sincere consideration. Conversely, those who recount positive experiences emphasise the pivotal

role of authentic relationships, minor gestures of care, genuine flexibility and continuous dialogue.

Care is defined as an inherent element of everyday life, the quality of relationships, and the organisation's capacity to demonstrate sensitivity towards people's needs. This concept cannot be improvised or imposed from above; rather, it is an integral component of the fabric of society. Conversely, its absence engenders an imperceptible yet uninterrupted attrition, thereby draining the work experience of its vitality and significance.

This theme is characterised by high emotional intensity and manifests itself across a range of sectors, with particular force in those with high relational exposure, such as education, health and personal services. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of a lack of caring has also been observed in corporate contexts, thus indicating that its presence is not solely contingent on the nature of the task undertaken, but is also influenced by the manner in which the organisation chooses to engage with its employees.

6.3 Recognition and the Need for Belonging

This theme articulates the profound need to feel recognised, valued and considered as people, even before that as workers. The participants' claims extend beyond material rewards or career advancement; they seek sincere attention, authentic feedback, and a relational space that fosters the expression of their identity. Recognition is described as a micro-relational, quotidian experience comprised of gestures, words and attitudes that engender a sense of belonging and motivation.

The presence of this recognition has been shown to engender feelings of involvement, stimulation and a desire to remain in the organisation. Conversely, its absence can engender a sense of invisibility and devaluation, which, over time, erodes the connection with the organisation.

“Honestly, a sincere ‘thank you’ can be more motivating than a bonus. Feeling appreciated means more than people think.”(int01)

“What really made me stay was the recognition I received for my creativity. It made me feel seen and valued.”(int11)

“When your contributions are ignored, you start to feel like you don’t matter—just a number with no real impact.”(int08)

The necessity to be noticed is not limited to grand gestures; it is also evident in quotidian life, manifesting in timely remarks, expressions of encouragement, and the appreciation of ideas. As is evidenced by the results of numerous interviews, this form of recognition is found to exert a greater influence on job satisfaction than financial reward.

In particular, younger participants, but not only, emphasise that feeling recognised in one's role, skills and professional identity is one of the main motivations for remaining in an organisation. In instances where this is lacking, work becomes devoid of meaning and is transformed into an impersonal performance.

This theme serves to underscore the notion that the formation of belonging is not solely predicated on contractual obligations or material benefits, but rather, it is deeply rooted in the cultivation of trust and mutual respect. The loss of recognition has been demonstrated to have a detrimental effect on the bond between employee and organisation, the extent of which can ultimately result in the complete dissolution of the relationship.

6.4 Freedom to choose: Autonomy and Agency

This theme encompasses experiences pertaining to the necessity for autonomy, managerial freedom and the potential for self-determination within professional settings. For a considerable number of participants, the capacity to determine the timing, manner and nature of their actions, in addition to the hierarchy of their tasks, constitutes a pivotal aspect of their well-being and motivation. Autonomy is perceived as both a tool for personal enhancement and a form of resistance to organisational models that are regarded as rigid and paternalistic.

The theme of agency is evident in the desire to exercise autonomy in the execution of work, as well as the demand for involvement in decision-making processes, the expression of preferences regarding project selection, and the perception of being active participants rather than mere executioners.

“Having more flexibility really helped me get my energy back. It gave me the motivation I needed to fully commit again.”(int15)

“The autonomy I had thanks to the project-based approach brought back my enthusiasm. I finally felt in control of my work.”(int11)

A significant proportion of participants have reported a shift in their relationship with autonomy in the aftermath of the pandemic. The advent of remote work has demonstrated the capacity to achieve productivity in the absence of constant oversight. In the aftermath of a return to normality, characterised by the imposition of rigid rules, a sense of regression emerged, prompting in several cases a quest for more flexible contexts.

Autonomy is understood not only as hourly flexibility, but also as the possibility to contribute to decisions, to propose solutions, to construct one's own role in a personalised manner. In circumstances where this possibility is denied or only simulcast, the work becomes devoid of meaning and a process of detachment is initiated.

This theme demonstrates that autonomy is not merely a 'privilege' that is bestowed; rather, it is a condition that is vehemently demanded by contemporary generations, and, with increasing frequency, by senior figures, as a fundamental basis for continued engagement within an organisational framework.

6.5 Resignation as a Path to Personal Coherence

This theme proposes a profound and value-based reading of the phenomenon of voluntary resignation. For many participants, the choice to leave a job is not an escape or an impulsive gesture, but an act of personal coherence and self-determination. The act of resignation is often portrayed as a means of safeguarding one's identity, mental well-being, and life priorities. This perspective frequently emerges or is reinforced during periods of significant upheaval, such as the ongoing global pandemic.

The testimonies collected illustrate a process of progressive disconnection, followed by a re-appropriation of living space and values.

“The pandemic made me realise that my time and health matter more than any career goal. That shift in priorities changed everything.”(int02)

“At some point, I understood that sacrificing myself without being respected just wasn’t worth it anymore.”(int13)

“I chose to start breathing again—that’s how it felt. Like I was finally reclaiming space for myself.”(int18)

The decision to resign is presented as an act of dignity and the reclaiming of personal power. In certain instances, it may be regarded as a form of self-defence. In others, it may be considered a process of maturation, whereby work ceases to be the focal point and is instead situated within a broader system of meanings encompassing health, time, family, creativity and freedom.

The decision to leave is not one that is taken lightly, but rather with great conviction. It is the consequence of an arduous and protracted inner journey that leads an individual to recognise their limits, needs and desires. In this sense, departure can be conceptualised as a means of maintaining personal authenticity, even when faced with the unknown.

This theme is evident in the interviews, and when examined in greater depth, provides a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of resignation. It is important to note that resignation is not merely a reaction to a state of malaise; rather, it is a stance adopted on the basis of an individual's identity and values. This stance involves a rejection of compromises that are deemed to be no longer sustainable.

6.6 Control-Oriented Culture and the Silencing of Dialogue

This theme underscores the manner in which organisational environments, characterised as rigid, bureaucratic and deficient in participatory processes, engender a pervasive sense of frustration, powerlessness and alienation among workers. Participants are invited to recount instances in which communication is only apparent, decision-making processes are centralised, and the opportunity to express oneself is limited or even non-existent. The phenomenon described is not merely an absence of individual listening, but rather a systemic deficiency in dialogue, manifesting as a form of institutionalised silencing.

“The system was so rigid that it felt like working in a cage.” (int18)

“You can offer all the resilience courses you want, but if nothing actually changes, it’s pointless. We need real transformation.”(int17)

“They talk a lot about giving people agency, but in the end it’s all just a facade. It’s always their decision that wins out.”(int19)

Control is perceived as a manifestation of distrust rather than as a source of support. In such organisations, even when formal channels are available for the articulation of their perspectives, participants often perceive that their contributions are of negligible influence. This dynamic often engenders a sense of powerlessness, which, over time, can evolve into emotional detachment, cynicism, or the decision to terminate the relationship. The theme of listening emerges strongly in this context; it is not merely a matter of receiving information, but of feeling an active part, legitimised to contribute. The absence of such discourse engenders an atmosphere of closure, wherein silence is not merely an option but a strategic imperative for survival. Individuals may cease to propose, expose themselves, and aspire for transformation, until they reach the decision to depart.

Furthermore, many participants recount experiences of false participation, whereby the illusion of being heard clashes with already predefined decision-making practices. This discrepancy has been known to foment a sense of mockery, thereby exacerbating the erosion of trust in the organisation.

The issue under discussion has been observed to manifest itself in a variety of professional settings, although it is most evident in contexts characterised by extensive bureaucracy or rigid hierarchical structures. In such environments, the distance between decision-makers and those who execute their policies can create a divide that is not only operational but also relational in nature. This can lead to a situation where motivation is diminished and the desire to leave the profession is strengthened.

The findings presented in this chapter underscore critical dynamics that will be further explored in the subsequent chapter. There, these dynamics will be discussed in the context of existing literature and interpreted to draw meaningful insights. The final chapter of this study proposes a series of practical strategies to address the identified issues and support long-term retention efforts.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is twofold: firstly, to provide an interpretation of the results obtained from the quantitative and qualitative analyses; and secondly, to integrate these results with the theoretical framework outlined in the preceding chapters.

In the ensuing paragraphs, the results will initially be discussed in an integrated manner, subsequently compared with the extant literature. The objective is to provide a theoretical and empirical contribution that can inform the design of more sustainable, inclusive and meaningful work contexts.

4.1 Integrated Discussion of the Results

The findings from the quantitative and qualitative analysis provide a coherent and nuanced picture, thereby confirming the initial hypothesis of the research: the Great Resignation cannot be interpreted as merely an economic emergency or a post-pandemic phenomenon; rather, it signifies a profound renegotiation of the relationship between the individual and work, particularly among Millennials and Gen Z.

Quantitative analysis, encompassing correlation and regression modelling, has demonstrated a robust correlation between job satisfaction and intrinsic factors, including organisational alignment, quality of interpersonal relationships, and perceived meaning in one's work. While extrinsic motivation exerts some influence, its predictive capacity is comparatively weak. The findings of this study indicate that younger generations appear to reevaluate their professional choices less in terms of financial compensation and more in terms of the congruence between their vocational identities and their personal identities, the extent to which their professional activities contribute to their personal development, and their general sense of well-being.

This finding is corroborated and further elaborated in the qualitative analysis, wherein the interviews yielded a rich and frequently emotionally poignant narrative of the

phenomenon. Resignation is defined as a deliberate, reflexive gesture that is driven by the need for authenticity, autonomy and recognition.

The sense of discontent that ultimately results in resignation does not originate from feelings of ennui or a rudimentary aspiration for transformation. Rather, it is precipitated by a disruption in identity, a gradual attrition, and a progressive recognition of systemic incoherence, which effectively devoid work of its inherent significance.

Intrinsic motivation is particularly evident in the collected narratives, manifesting as a demand for responsible, flexible, and dignified work practices. Autonomy, understood not as the absence of rules but as the possibility to manage one's own time, working methods and voice in decision-making, is a constant in the interviews. This phenomenon is evident not only among highly professionalised private sector workers, but also among blue-collar workers, civil servants and senior profiles, thus confirming the generational and sectorial transversality of the need for agency.

The necessity for acknowledgement has been identified as a pivotal factor in fostering engagement, frequently regarded as more impactful than direct compensation. This assertion is corroborated by the quantitative data, wherein Q34 (comprising satisfaction with relationships, balance, and meaning) and Q35 (value identification) exhibited robust correlations with overall satisfaction ($r = 0.653$ and $r = 0.586$, respectively, $p < 0.001$). In the qualitative data, participants articulated the notion of 'being seen', 'being listened to', and 'being valued' as a differentiating factor between staying or leaving. The crux of the matter extends beyond the mere provision of rewards and benefits; rather, it is the daily interactions that convey respect, legitimacy, and a sense of belonging.

The integration of the results provides a clear answer to the research question, confirming that the Great Resignation phenomenon should be interpreted as a profound transformation in the way people, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, conceive work. The issue at hand extends beyond the mere increase in turnover rates; it encompasses a fundamental renegotiation of identity, values, and the relationship between the individual and the organisation. Voluntary resignations are the conscious outcome of a growing process of misalignment. In such cases, the individual, no longer finding coherence,

listening or the possibility of self-determination in the work context, chooses to break the link in order to preserve their integrity.

Consequently, effective retention strategies must be based on more than external incentives, benefits or abstract promises. Instead, it is argued that such organisations must respond to more fundamental systemic needs, such as organisational authenticity, daily recognition, real agency and a culture of well-being. From this standpoint, work is no longer regarded as a mere means of generating income or attaining status, but rather as a milieu for deriving meaning, cultivating relationships, and achieving personal coherence. In order to retain talent, organisations must evolve from being places that 'employ' people to becoming contexts that welcome them, respect them and facilitate their growth.

4.2 Comparison with the Literature

The results obtained highlight intrinsic motivation, alignment between personal and organisational values, and relationship quality as the main determinants of job satisfaction. Notably, the prevalence of intrinsic over extrinsic factors in determining job well-being aligns with the notion that satisfaction stems from the fulfilment of fundamental psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and connectedness (Deci & Ryan, 2017).

The analysis revealed a strong emphasis on autonomy, evident in both the quantitative models and the collected narratives, manifesting as a desire for greater freedom in time and task management, participation in decision-making processes, and active involvement in organisational dynamics. Authentic relationships and daily recognition were found to be equally important in stimulating involvement and fostering permanence.

These elements can be further interpreted using the five-categories model of learning, which highlights the profound effect of development opportunities on motivation and retention (Gagné, 1984). Neglecting aspects such as the lack of cognitive stimuli (intellectual skills), repetitiveness hindering the use of thinking strategies (cognitive

strategies), absence of training and effective internal communication (verbal information), lack of attention to practical learning (motor skills), and difficulty in building a positive attitude towards work (attitudes) can generate disinterest, dissatisfaction, and progressive disengagement.

From a structural point of view, job satisfaction is associated with characteristics such as the variety of skills required, the meaningfulness of tasks, autonomy, and the possibility of receiving feedback (Hackman & Oldham, 1974). Without these elements, a sense of emptiness can result in a decline in motivation and a weakening of the bond with the organisation.

Evidence also confirms that factors such as pay, benefits and contractual stability are important. However, they are insufficient to guarantee involvement if they are not accompanied by meaning, respect and opportunities for expression (Herzberg, 1959).

The role of value alignment is particularly relevant. When an organisation's values do not reflect those of its employees, a fracture in identity is created that undermines job satisfaction and can lead to resignation (Cable & Judge, 1996). This misalignment often manifests as the perception that stated values are disregarded in practice and as a sense of lack of reciprocity, fairness or consideration (Rousseau, 1989).

The balance between demands and available resources is another central element in understanding occupational well-being. In environments where high pressure, workload and responsibility are not offset by adequate resources such as autonomy, support or constructive feedback, stress, attrition and burnout are likely to occur (Demerouti et al., 2001). Collected experiences clearly demonstrate that contexts perceived as demanding, yet showing little concern for well-being, generate emotional and functional estrangement.

Finally, the quality of the communication climate significantly impacts the understanding of the observed phenomena. The tendency to remain silent, i.e. avoiding expressing opinions or criticism for fear of repercussions or perceived futility, indicates widespread

distrust and a loss of confidence in the organisation (Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Similarly, a lack of perceived safety — where it is possible to express oneself, propose ideas, or voice dissent without fear of consequences — reduces participation, innovation, and a sense of belonging (Edmondson, 1999).

Overall, the emerging dynamics cannot be traced back to isolated incidents, but rather reflect patterns consistent with established theoretical models that connect motivation, value coherence, organisational conditions, and psychological well-being. Voluntary resignations are therefore a response to a mismatch between workers' expectations in terms of growth, meaning and being heard, and what organisations actually offer. From this perspective, it is necessary to transform these theoretical insights into operational strategies that redefine organisational models to be more sustainable, coherent and oriented towards the long term. The following chapter will elaborate on these practical implications.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The present thesis explored the phenomenon of the Great Resignation, with the specific aim of investigating the motivations that drive Millennials and Gen Z in Italy to voluntarily resign from their jobs, comparing intrinsic and extrinsic factors.

This phenomenon of departing from conventional employment arrangements, although it has seen a marked escalation in the post-pandemic era, can be traced back to profound shifts in cultural values and organisational structures. These transformations have influenced the manner in which younger generations perceive and evaluate work, impacting its perceived quality.

The survey was conducted using a mixed-methods research design, which enabled the integration of quantitative data, characterised by its broad scope and structured nature, with the depth and individualised nature of qualitative data.

A total of 312 responses were collected via the online questionnaire, while the 19 semi-structured interviews yielded a substantial and detailed set of data. This material was instrumental in comprehending the motivations behind the decision to resign, as well as the underlying emotional and identity-related factors.

The quantitative analysis indicated the pivotal role of intrinsic motivation in influencing job satisfaction and, consequently, the likelihood of remaining or departing from an organisation. In the context of the study, the alignment between personal values and corporate culture was identified as the strongest predictor of overall satisfaction ($R = 0.670$). This was followed by intrinsic motivation ($R = 0.459$), and extrinsic motivation ($R = 0.381$). Of particular significance is the figure concerning the intention to change jobs, with a quarter of the sample expressing a strong propensity to leave their current job in the short term, even in the presence of stable contractual conditions. This suggests that resignations are not the result of impulsiveness or economic dissatisfaction, but rather the expression of a more profound lack of meaning, consistency and recognition.

The subsequent qualitative phase served to both confirm and enrich this evidence, thereby highlighting recurrent narrative patterns. Participants described work environments that were perceived as inconsistent, rigid or distant, where authentic listening was absent and it was difficult to glimpse opportunities for growth. In this particular context, resignation was not perceived as a sign of personal failure; rather, it was regarded as a means of safeguarding one's principles and reaffirming one's values. Conversely, in contexts characterised by flexibility, dialogue, development pathways and a genuinely participatory culture, there was an enhancement in the sense of belonging and a stabilisation of intrinsic motivation.

5.1 Answer to the Research Question

The research question that provided the fundamental direction for the present thesis was as follows: *“What’s the role played by motivation drivers in leading Millennials and Gen Z to voluntarily resign during the Great Resignation?”*

The results that emerged from the study provide a clear and articulate answer: intrinsic motivations are at the heart of the phenomenon. In particular, five factors emerged as significantly influencing the decision to leave.

Firstly, values misalignment was identified as a key driver. When individuals perceive that an organisation's actions are not consistent with its stated values, this incongruence undermines the psychological bond between the individual and the organisation, thereby diminishing trust, commitment, and ultimately engagement.

Secondly, the loss of meaningfulness plays a crucial role; work that is experienced as disconnected from purpose or personal identity tends to provoke progressive disengagement from professional responsibilities.

A third factor is the absence of development opportunities, which fosters a sense of stagnation among younger workers. This stagnation is increasingly perceived as unsustainable.

Fourthly, inadequate organisational listening – where feedback is ignored or manipulated for instrumental purposes – generates a feeling of invisibility, discourages open communication, and weakens relational trust.

Finally, structural and operational rigidity, including limited autonomy, inflexible schedules, and geographical immobility, prevents individuals from balancing work and personal life, thus increasing dissatisfaction and the intention to resign.

Extrinsic motivations, such as salary and benefits, are pertinent in the initial phase of the employment relationship, but are insufficient to guarantee long-term retention. In certain instances, they function as buffering factors, capable of delaying but not preventing resignations.

The result of this study is a reading of the phenomenon as an expression of a **need for consistency, authenticity and self-determination**. Millennials and Gen Z do not inherently reject work; rather, they demonstrate a rejection of organisational models that are perceived as archaic, non-inclusive or meaningless. It is submitted that resignation can therefore be considered an act of individual agency, which frequently represents the sole means of re-establishing equilibrium between identity, values and context.

5.3 Practical Implications: Retention Strategies

In a context where voluntary resignations are increasingly influenced by the subjective perception of the organisational climate and culture, it becomes crucial for companies to adopt practices that make their values tangible, strengthen motivation and offer concrete development prospects. The proposed strategies are operational guidelines intended to improve engagement, prevent disaffection and retain talent, particularly from younger generations.

5.3.1 Monitoring perceived value coherence as a lever of trust and alignment

In light of the increasing importance of perceived value alignment in employee retention, organisations should adopt tools that can measure and monitor the consistency between stated values and the values actually experienced by employees.

Some organisations, such as Cooperative Credit Banks (BCCs), have introduced instruments like the *Coherence Report*, which evaluates the alignment of mission, practices and social impact from a cooperative-ethical standpoint. These examples demonstrate that value coherence is a strategic asset for long-term sustainability and internal trust, not merely a matter of image.

In line with this, a more agile approach is suggested: the introduction of a *Perceived Values Coherence (PVC) Key Performance Indicator (KPI)* derived from an annual employee engagement survey.

The KPI consists of three items evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale:

Dimension	Question (Likert scale 1-7)
DVC (Declared and Conscious Values)	<i>“I clearly understand the values promoted by the organization.”</i>
VOP (Values Observed in Practice)	<i>“I perceive consistency between what the organization says and what it actually does.”</i>
VRP (Relational and Personal Value Recognition)	<i>“I feel valued because my behaviors reflect the organization’s values.”</i>

Table 9 – Description of KPI’s dimension

$$\mathbf{PVC} = (\mathbf{DVC} + \mathbf{VOP} + \mathbf{VRP}) / 3 \quad \text{where } \mathbf{PVC} = \text{Perceived Values Consistency}$$

- A $\mathbf{PVC} \geq 5$ indicates strong perceived alignment and organisational credibility.
- A $\mathbf{PVC} < 4$ suggests potential misalignment, which could lead to demotivation or increased resignation risk.

This KPI enables continuous and objective monitoring of internal value alignment, supports the early identification of disengagement risks and informs HR decisions

relating to internal communication, reward systems and training plans. By making the alignment between identity, messaging, and actions — one of the most intangible yet critical elements of corporate culture — observable and measurable, this strategy fosters authenticity and strengthens alignment with the expectations of Millennials and Gen Z. This contributes to tangible retention outcomes.

5.3.2 Strengthening intrinsic motivation through symbolic rewards and personalised recognition

The prevailing trend among contemporary generations is to seek meaning, authenticity and recognition in their professional pursuits. In this scenario, symbolic and relational levers assume increasing importance. The provision of personalised recognition, not exclusively linked to performance or remuneration, has been demonstrated to enhance engagement through the dimension of human connection.

The following proposed initiatives have been outlined:

- *A peer-to-peer recognition system* supported by experiential rewards. Twice a year, employees can submit reports highlighting colleagues who have demonstrated collaboration, initiative or other positive behaviours. The nominated individuals then receive a symbolic prize, such as access to an exclusive event, a day off for training or cultural activities, or another non-monetary benefit. The process is characterised by an employee-driven appraisal system, which decentralises recognition and integrates it into the daily group dynamics. This initiative has the potential to enhance pro-social behaviour and soft skills, thereby strengthening group cohesion and promoting an organisational culture based on reciprocity, horizontal appreciation and active engagement from the entire company population.
- *A personalised birthday gift.*
In the event of a birthday, the employee is issued with a ticket to a cultural or sporting event of their choosing, with the event being selected based on the employee's interests. Examples of suitable events include, but are not limited to, theatre, concerts, and football or tennis matches. This gesture is not consistent

with the logic of the standard monetary reward; rather, it conveys genuine attention and personal enhancement.

It is evident that the initiatives in question have been proven to engender a sense of belonging, convey personal attention, and stimulate intrinsic motivation through a variety of mechanisms, including emotional, identity-related, and relational factors.

5.3.3 Promoting advanced work flexibility as a lever of engagement and retention

For younger generations, flexibility is not just an optional benefit, but a necessary condition for job satisfaction. The following initiatives have been proposed in order to address the need for autonomy, work-life balance and self-management:

- A “*Work from anywhere*” idea where the organisation has the capacity to grant employees permission to work from any location for a limited number of days per year (e.g. 60 days), including non-consecutive days, on the condition that they communicate in a timely manner the time and destination, and demonstrate respect for the team's time zones.

This initiative is a cost-effective policy, with a high return on investment and low financial outlay. It fosters a sense of trust and confidence in the organisation, positioning it as modern and people-oriented.

- A “*Self-managed flexi-week*” programme characterised by self-management and a high degree of flexibility, with the structure of the week being entirely self-determined.

Teams, in agreement with their respective managers, are at liberty to define their own weekly organisation in an independent manner. This includes the choice of customised entry and exit times, or the independent planning of alternating office and remote presence.

The team structure is characterised by its autonomy in determining its own organisational framework on a weekly basis, provided that certain criteria are met. These criteria include the attainment of objectives, the establishment of a

minimum common on-call time slot, and adherence to stipulated deadlines and internal coordination protocols.

The self-managed flexi-week represent a form of organisational empowerment, which in turn fosters empowerment, improves the climate and reduces stress related to organisational rigidity. Moreover, this practice conveys to external audiences an image of a contemporary, welfare-conscious company, which is a distinctive factor in the competition for talent.

- The utilisation of *flex tokens* to facilitates the management of individual time. Each employee is allotted a predetermined number of annual 'tokens', for instance, six, which can be exchanged for flexibility days to be allocated for training, wellness, or personal requirements, with no justification. The tokens are distinguished by their capacity for immediate utilisation, independent of formal substantiation, a characteristic that extends even to the absence of medical documentation or holiday requests, provided they align with the operational compatibility criteria stipulated by the company. These criteria may encompass restrictions on their usage during launch periods or critical deadlines.

The management of the tokens is conducted digitally via the HR portal. The employee has the ability to view the available balance and select the desired dates, provided that these are available within the predefined operational criteria.

The objective of this initiative is twofold: firstly, to offer additional time off, and secondly, to recognise the employee's full autonomy in managing their own time. This is intended to restore control, trust and responsibility in a non-paternalistic but adult-to-adult perspective.

5.3.4 Enhance continuous professional development to offer perspective and growth

A primary motivation for Millennials and Gen Z to depart from an organisation is the perception of professional stagnation. Indeed, the paucity of opportunities for learning, growth, or career advancement is among the principal factors contributing to a state of disaffection and voluntary resignation.

In order to address this risk, it is imperative to provide unambiguous, personalised and supported development pathways that offer employees an evolutionary perspective on their role.

The following initiatives may be implemented for these purposes:

- *An individual annual learning budget*, a financial allocation that is designated for the purpose of enhancing the knowledge and skills of the individual.

Each employee is granted a fixed economic credit, to be administered independently for training activities that align with their personal interests and professional goals. These activities may include online courses on accredited platforms such as Coursera, Udemy, and Future Learn; thematic workshops, seminars, and sector conferences; books, training podcasts, and external certified courses in areas such as Project Management, Data Analysis, and advanced soft skills.

The present initiative has been developed for the purpose of facilitating worker agency, that is to say, the option of determining the manner in which to invest in one's own career development. It is also intended to enable the culture of growth to be actualised and to attract high-potential profiles who also evaluate companies on the basis of the learning opportunities they offer.

- *A personalised development plans with internal mentorship*, during the onboarding process or annual appraisal each employee has the opportunity to collaboratively design a three-year professional development plan. This plan is to be devised in conjunction with an internal mentor, who may be an experienced manager. The plan should include training objectives, such as the acquisition of a certification or the development of soft skills. In addition, intermediate milestones and moments of transversal opportunities, such as job rotation, should be included.

The mentor's function is to provide guidance and support, rather than to act as an evaluator. The mentor's role is to facilitate a genuine evolution that is not solely confined to hierarchical advancement.

This initiative is oriented towards the identity dimension of the job. Its effects include the strengthening of the sense of direction, the enhancement of individual potential and the fostering of a lasting and dynamic link with the organisation.

In conclusion, the strategies illustrated represent concrete and complementary responses to four key needs that have emerged from the Great Resignation phenomenon: **value coherence, authentic recognition, operational flexibility and professional development**. The implementation of these strategies does not necessitate significant financial investments; rather, it requires the establishment of an organisational culture that can place the individual at the centre and progressively enhance their contributions.

It is particularly noteworthy that the initial two strategies – namely, *monitoring of perceived value coherence* and *symbolic and personalised recognition* – are also highly implementable in SMEs, which represent the majority of the Italian entrepreneurial fabric. Despite possessing comparatively restricted economic resources in comparison to large companies, SMEs exhibit superior decision-making agility, operational flexibility and the capacity to establish direct and authentic relationships with their collaborators. Conversely, strategies pertaining to flexibility and professional development necessitate a more pronounced degree of structuring.

It is therefore proposed that the implications be configured as an operational basis for future organisational applications, and that they represent a possible starting point for further scientific investigation.

5.4 Limitations of the Study and Insight for Future Research

As with any empirical survey, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study so that the results can be correctly interpreted and possible directions for future in-depth studies identified.

The primary limitation pertains to the composition of the quantitative sample. Despite its substantial size and heterogeneity with respect to age, sector and organisational size, the sample exhibits a notable geographical concentration in the Apulia region. Whilst this

territorial specificity is indicative of a strong point from the perspective of a contextual reading of the phenomenon, it may conversely result in a reduction of the generalisability of the results on a national scale.

With regard to the qualitative analysis, the 19 interviews conducted enabled an exploration of the experiential, value and emotional dimensions that influence discharge decisions. The utilisation of Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis facilitated the identification of salient themes. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge the limitations of the study, namely the coding and interpretation of the data being conducted by a single researcher, without the involvement of a second coder or triangulation with external parties. Notwithstanding the fact that this does not compromise the quality of the analysis, especially in the context of a single thesis, the presence of multiple analysts could have strengthened the interpretive reliability and reduced the risk of subjective bias in the construction of the themes.

Taking the aforementioned factors into consideration, future research endeavours may focus on several areas.

Firstly, adopting a longitudinal approach would enable changes in resignation intentions, perceived value alignment and motivational conditions among workers to be observed over time, thereby deepening our understanding of causal dynamics.

Secondly, extending the model to include international samples could help to explore how cultural and organisational factors influence employment decisions and retention, thereby increasing the generalisability of the findings to diverse contexts.

Thirdly, experimental studies in real organisational settings are recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed strategies. These applied investigations would validate the impact of the interventions on employee engagement, organisational well-being and turnover rates.

Lastly, given that over 43% of the current sample is employed in companies with fewer than 50 employees and recognising the pivotal role of SMEs in the Italian economy, it would be beneficial to focus future research on developing agile, accessible and scalable tools. These tools should combine the relational authenticity typical of SMEs with innovative, low-cost solutions designed to boost motivation and retention.

In conclusion, this work establishes a theoretical foundation for a comprehensive, empirical and practical understanding of voluntary resignation. It provides valuable insights into designing more sustainable and coherent work environments — contexts that can generate meaning, value and forward-looking opportunities for new generations of workers. It is imperative to comprehend the significance of motivation in the context of the Great Resignation. This necessitates an interpretation of a structural transformation in the conception of work, which is no longer regarded as merely a source of income, but rather as a milieu of identity, significance and potential.

It is anticipated that those organisations demonstrating the capacity to respond effectively to this transformation will be best positioned to attract, retain and enhance the new generations in the long term.

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