A Comprehensive Programmatic Investigation of the Antecedents and Consequences Related With the Great Resignation of Individuals and Organizations – A COVID-19 Strategic Review and Research Agenda

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"The Great Resignation" has caused an impact across every industry in the U.S. (Thompson, 2021b). Since it began with record-high resignation rates in April 2021, there has been much speculation on why workers are resigning as organizations struggle to deal with these impacts (Iacurci, 2022). This study reviews emergent research into the causes of "The Great Resignation" to determine if recent research and preliminary studies support popular theory/ opinions and aim to link the emergent causes with more developed studies in employee retention to provide actionable strategies for organizations. This review finds that wages, childcare issues, and workplace culture are all leading causes of resignations (Fuller & Kerr, 2022; Slater, 2022). Other popular theories on resignation causes such as government aid, preference for remote work, burnout, and employer requirements were also considered. Because this study provides an initial review of emergent research and seeks to add further contributions, future research is needed to provide additional insights to fully understand and determine the causes and impacts of "The Great Resignation" in the U.S.

Keywords: Great Resignation, employer, employee, retention, engagement, workforce, toxic culture, workplace flexibility, employee arrangement

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

The term "Great Resignation," was contrived by Anthony Klotz, a professor at Texas A&M University (Thompson, 2021b). This term is being used to describe the current phenomena of breaking levels of resignations (Fuller & Kerr, 2022; Slater, 2022) in conjunction with employers' struggling to fill vacant positions all while unemployment levels are significantly below pre-pandemic levels (Krugman, 2021). "The Great Resignation" began in the spring of 2021 as the U.S. economy started to open after over a year of pandemic restrictions. In April 2021, a record number of workers resigned from their jobs. The following months continued to see a rise in resignations and record-high resignation rates (Slater, 2022; Thompson, 2021a, 2021b). Along with record-breaking resignations, employers are struggling to find workers. The impact of the labor shortage is easily seen across the U.S. Many businesses have restricted their business hours or changed the way they are operating (Fuller & Kerr, 2022) to address the vacancies.

So, fundamentally, who is setting the stage for the great resignation? Why are workers leaving their jobs in record numbers? Is employment no longer lucrative for employees given the unemployment benefits provided? These are very interestingly pressing yet challenging questions. There are several different claims as to why workers are resigning. The most common ideas include compensation, return to the office, and the work environment itself. Note that these are common claims to the cause of “The Great Resignation” frequently seen in media. Compensation is frequently blamed for the high rate of resignations (Choi, 2019; Claus, 2019) and ranges from frustrations with stagnant wages to pandemic benefits luring workers from the workforce. While some point to workers’ frustration with stagnant wages resigning to find higher-paying work, others blame additional unemployment benefits, stimulus checks, and child tax credits, as providing a financial incentive to remain unemployed. Another frequent claimed cause of the resignations is the return to the office from over a year of remote work postures. Many theorize that workers prefer a remote work posture or fear a return to working in person and are resigning rather than being forced back into the office. Lastly, the work environment is theorized to be a factor in the resignations. Many indicate that they feel a toxic work environment where employees are treated poorly is a cause of “The Great Resignation,” while others point to workplace mandates, such as masking or vaccine requirements, as the reason workers are resigning.

Given the broad set of theorized causes of “The Great Resignation,” it can be challenging for employers to take strategic action to retain workers and reduce resignations (Jhamb & Carlson, 2020; Nelson & Jhamb, 2020). As “The Great Resignation” is both a novel and relatively young phenomenon, research into the causes of the mass resignation is not widely available. Therefore, the current study provides tremendous contributions into the strategic management discussions of this phenomenon and aims to provide researchers with fundamental tools and techniques to conduct future programmatic research.

With this in mind, we aim to answer two fundamental questions. First, does the initial research into the causes and understandings of “The Great Resignation” support the popular theory of why workers are resigning? Second, what strategic actions can organizations take to lower turnover and retain employees (Nelson & Jhamb, 2022; Jhamb & Carlson, 2020; Nelson & Jhamb, 2020)? To answer these questions, this study reviews public popular opinions on “The Great Resignation” causes, currently available research on the causes of “The Great Resignation,” and preliminary and prior research on employee retention and turnover. This study will help link the emergent causes of “The Great Resignation” with extensively more developed studies in employee retention to provide actionable strategies that organizations can implement to address employee resignations during the unprecedented phenomenon of the “Great Resignation.”

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews current literature on “The Great Resignation” starting with a review of popular public opinions on the claimed causes of the record-breaking resignation rates in the U.S. from April 2021 to the current date. This is followed by a review of currently available research into the causes of resignation during “The Great Resignation” in the U.S. and ending with a review of literature on employee retention strategies.

Popular Public Opinions on the Causes of the “The Great Resignation”

Since the beginning of "The Great Resignation" in April 2021, there has been a lot of speculation about the causes of the record resignation rates. The media and popular opinion tend to point towards three categories of ideas as the causes: compensation, such as wages or government aid; reluctance to return to the office; or work environment-related issues.

A frequently claimed cause of “The Great Resignation” is employee compensation. Employee dissatisfaction with stagnant wages (Hall, 2022; Sull et al., 2022) or attempting to leverage resignation for a raise (Rosalsky, 2021) is noted as a potential cause. Pandemic-related government aid is also a commonly claimed cause of employers’ recruitment challenges during “The Great Resignation.” There is a narrative that the enhanced unemployment benefits create an incentive for people to not work, which continues even after the benefits have ended (Hall, 2022; Krugman, 2021). As a continuation of this narrative, other government-provided aid, such as child rebates, stimulus payments, rent moratoriums, and student-loan forgiveness, is speculated to create “pickier” workers who can be more selective about their employment (Krugman, 2021; Rosalsky, 2021; Thompson, 2021a).

The push by employers for employees to return to the office after a year or more of remote work is cited as a cause of “The Great Resignation.” It has been speculated that employees presently generally prefer remote work or fear returning to in-person work. Challenges around childcare are also noted as a potential cause of the big resignation force (Hall, 2022; Rosalsky, 2021). Employees required to return to the office who are still facing challenges finding affordable, reliable childcare may be resigning if they are unable to balance childcare and in-person work. In addition, for workers who took advantage of prolonged remote work and moved to more affordable cities, the return to work may be causing resignations as workers are reluctant or unable to commute to the office (Rosalsky, 2021).

The last category of claimed causes is summarized as the work environment. This category captures several different causes such as burnout, workplace culture and treatment of employees, and workplace mandates. Resignations of knowledge workers, such as workers in business and technology industries, are blamed on burnout (Sull et al., 2022) or increased work-related stress (Hall, 2022). Toxic workplace culture, such as failure to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, feeling of disrespect, or perceived unethical behavior, is another claimed cause of resignations (Sull et al., 2022). Workplace mandates, such as mask mandates for in-person work or vaccine requirements are also cited as a speculated cause of resignations (Hall, 2022).

Emergent and Preliminary Research on the Causes of “The Great Resignation”

As the review moves to the emergent studies on “The Great Resignation,” we’ll first review research on what exactly is going on in the world of workforce management before moving to causes for resignation.

“The Great Resignation” began in April 2021 when a record number of workers resigned from the U.S. workforce (Thompson, 2021a, 2021b). Since then, the resignation rate has continued to break records, with November 2021 achieving a 20-year high (Parker & Horowitz, 2022) with 4.5 million resignations compared to 3.5 million in February 2020 just before the start of the pandemic (Maurer, 2022). The record resignation rates coupled with a record high in reported job openings and organizations struggling to fill vacancies has created the unique phenomenon being called “The Great Resignation.”

“The Great Resignation” is still ongoing, with the rate of resignation remaining at just below peak levels in the first quarter of 2022. Job openings are also near record highs with 11.3 mil job openings in February 2022. The unemployment rate is at the lowest it’s been since the start of the pandemic at 3.8% in February 2022. High demand, i.e., job openings, coupled with low supply, i.e., unemployment rate, has created a labor market that is favorable to the workers as indicated by the unprecedented resignation rates. (Iacurci, 2022)

Studies on resignation data paint an interesting picture, with in-person or low-paying industries seeing a bigger impact and resignations being more likely among younger workers. Resignations vary across industry and geography, with resignations concentrated in industries with in-person or low-paying work (Maurer, 2022). The highest rate of resignations is found in the accommodation and foodservice industries, which has a resignation rate of near 7% (Maurer, 2022; Thompson, 2021a) which is a staggering 1 in 14 workers resigning (Thompson, 2021a). Other industries with a higher resignation rate include leisure and hospitality, professional and business services, retail, and healthcare (Hall, 2022; Maurer, 2022). Industries that are more likely to support remote work or have higher wages tend to have a relatively stable resignation rate when compared to pre-pandemic levels (Maurer, 2022). Initial research indicates that resignations are higher in younger workers. In an analysis of the February 2022 Pew Research American Trends Panel (ATP), Parker and Horowitz (2022) note that those who resigned were more likely to be younger adults between the ages of 19 and 30 or be in a lower income bracket.

Several experts call the term “The Great Resignation” a misnomer, focusing on the use of the word “resignation” (Birinci & Amburgey, 2022; Hall, 2022; Koc, 2022). Instead, they point to the phenomenon as being more of a “reallocation” or an “adaptation.” Hall (2022) cites that most resignations can be attributed to people job swapping, or leaving one position for another, while also changing industry or career completely. In the current labor market, where demand exceeds supply, workers have the upper hand and can be more selective in their jobs and seek out positions with improved working environments and compensation (Koc, 2022).

The growing number of workers quitting jobs are not necessarily leaving the labor market, but rather switching jobs (Birinci & Amburgey, 2022). Workers may switch jobs within their industry or move to another industry completely. The job switching rate is a measure of the “rate at which employed workers change jobs” and is an indicator of job mobility (Birinci & Amburgey, 2021). This is further supported by U.S. Department of Labor data, which shows that the number of workers hired exceeded resignations by 2.3 million people indicating that workers are job switching rather than leaving the workforce (Iacurci, 2022). Like resignation rates, job switching varies per industry. The leisure and hospitality industries have the highest rate of job switching at 29.4%, with professional and business services (25.4%) and trade, transportation, and utilities (24.1%) as the second and third highest (ADP, 2022). Clear evidence from the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) and Current Population Survey (CPS) data further support that the resignations in the leisure and hospitality industry are related to job switching as the resignation rate and the job-to-job transition rate are relatively the same while workers are experiencing wage growth. Other industries, such as the construction industry, are instead seeing a resignation rate that exceeds the job-to-job transition rate along with a decrease in average wages. This indicates that workers are resigning due to unemployment or leaving the workforce completely, creating a labor shortage (Birinci & Amburgey, 2022). This initial research shows that some industries are seeing workers job-switch within the industry, while others have workers leaving the industry or even the workforce entirely.

According to the February 2022 Pew Research ATP, 53% of workers who resigned and are now employed report that they changed their industry or occupation during that transition (Parker & Horowitz, 2022) further supporting the idea that workers are not leaving the workforce, but rather seeking other employment opportunities. Resignations due to job-switching are linked to stimulating wage growth (ADP, 2022; Birinci & Amburgey, 2022; Maurer, 2022). There is a positive and statistically significant association between job-switching rates and the growth of wages. As the job-switching rate increases, it can indicate a future increase in wage growth (Birinci & Amburgey, 2021). Along with record-level resignation rates, the U.S. is also seeing a record-setting wage growth for workers who switch jobs. The continued increase in U.S. wage growth (ADP, 2022) has led to a theory that job-switching in “The Great Resignation” is, in part, responsible for the current increase in wage growth (Slater, 2022). Recent wage growth rates in the U.S. are approximately 5%, with low-wage workers seeing the most wage increase (Slater, 2022).

So, essentially, what is leading to the record resignation rates of the past year? There is no singular answer as to why the U.S. is seeing a record number of people resign from their jobs (Hall, 2022). To a certain extent, some preliminary research shows several factors reasonably contributing to the cause of “The Great Resignation.” Maurer (2022) provides a summary of several reasons for the resignations including opportunities for advancement and compensation, career switching, concerns about safety related to the pandemic, lack of access to childcare as childcare capacity has not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels, desire for remote work or flexible jobs, vaccine mandates for employees, and early retirement for older workers.

The Pew Research ATP is a regularly occurring survey of randomly selected U.S. adults. The most recent ATP in February 2022, which surveyed 9.3 thousand U.S. adults, included questions on employment and resignations which were analyzed by Parker and Horowitz (2022). In this study, 63% of workers who quit their job cited low pay and a lack of opportunity for advancement, while 57% cited feelings of disrespect within the workplace as impacting their decision to resign. 48% of workers with underage children at home cited childcare issues as a reason for quitting (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). This coupled with another study by Igielik (2022) which has just over 50% of working parents with young reporting a significant increase in the challenges of managing childcare responsibilities indicates that childcare responsibilities have become more of a challenge for working parents. When asked about employment-related vaccine requirements, only 18% cited their place of employment requiring a COVID-19 vaccination as a reason for resignation. The ATP survey also reported that those who resigned were more likely to be younger adults between the ages of 19 and 30 or be in a lower income bracket (Parker & Horowitz, 2022).

Of those who resigned and did not retire, 78% are currently employed, with 94% reporting that it was either somewhat or very easy for them to find another job. Most workers who resigned and are now employed elsewhere had a high rate of reporting that their current position has higher pay, opportunities for advancement, and more work-life balance (Parker & Horowitz, 2022).

A separate study by Sull, Sull, and Zweig (2022) analyzed data of U.S. workers who resigned between April and September 2021. This study used data derived from 34 million online employee profiles and provided an estimate of turnover rates for a sample of large, for-profit companies which together account for 25% of the U.S. private sector workforce. This study identified the five top predictors of employee turnover during "The Great Resignation."

Toxic organizational culture, which includes elements such as failure to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion; workers feeling disrespected; and unethical behaviors, was the strongest predictor of resignation. Toxic culture was ten times more important than compensation in predicting turnover in this study. Organizations known for their healthy workplace cultures experienced a lower turnover than average. Job insecurity and reorganization were also related to higher rates of turnover, along with companies with high levels of innovation. The researchers speculated that high levels of innovation are potentially related to long work hours and work-related stress leading to higher turnover. Lack of performance recognition of high-performing employees was linked to increases in turnover, along with organizational response to the pandemic with a higher likelihood of resignation related to a negative perception of employers' response to the pandemic (Sull et al., 2022).

Employee Retention and Workplace Engagement

Employee retention is a long-studied field. There has been much research into increasing employee retention for several decades. Due to the breadth and vastness of this field of study, this literature will focus on a brief review of more recent theories on employee retention impacts and strategies.

Modern theories on employee retention point to talent management and employee engagement and satisfaction as leading causes of employee retention. According to McDonnel, Collings, Mellahi, and Schuler (2017, p.15) (as cited in Narayanan, Rajithakumar & Menon, 2018, p.11), talent management includes the broad set of "activities and processes that involve the systematic identification of key positions which differentially contribute to the organization's sustainable competitive advantage, the development of a talent pool of high potential and high performing incumbents to fill these roles, and the development of a differentiated human resource architecture to facilitate filling these positions with competent incumbents and to ensure their continued commitment to the organization [sic]." Current research in talent management has an emerging model that begins with a focus on identifying how different positions contribute to the organization and identifying key roles. The organization strategically focuses on developing a talent pool, both internally and externally, to fill key roles and continue to nurture employee engagement and commitment (Nelson & Jhamb, 2022). Talent management has an impact on employee retention, although outcomes are dependent on how the strategy is implemented and employee perception of talent status and organizational justice (Narayanan et al., 2018).

Employee engagement is defined as "a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, or co-workers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work" (Gibbons, 2006, as cited in Richman, et al., 2008, p.07). Richman et al. (2008) noted that employee engagement is reliant on the principle of exchange meaning that employees have increased engagement when they perceive that the organization is committed to the employees. But what impacts employee engagement on the overall (Jhamb & Carlson, 2020; Nelson & Jhamb, 2022)? Employee characteristics were found to be a weak predictor of employee engagement while perceived flexibility and work-life policies are strong predictors of engagement and retention. Employees' perception of work flexibility and supportive work-life policies have a significant impact even when the level of flexibility is small. Flexible work arrangements increase employee satisfaction, mental health, resilience, productivity, and effectiveness while lowering stress. This study is limited to participants in large U.S. companies and may not scale to a small business or be generalized to the greater workforce (Richman et al., 2008).

During the unprecedented experience of "The Great Resignation", what can organizations do to retain employees? According to Cappelli (2000), organizations can make their workplace attractive to employees, but cannot fully negate market forces, as also supported by Jhamb and Carlson (2020). In reviewing literature on retention strategies, we will start with strategic planning, before reviewing strategies around compensation, workplace flexibility and work-life balance, and loyalty and engagement.

If organizations cannot fully avoid and control resignations, what can they do? Cappelli (2000) notes that by making informed strategic management decisions, organizations can influence when or where employee turnover happens. This can be done by determining how long the organization would like certain employees to stay, and tailoring retention tactics to the employee's or role's value (Cappelli, 2000). Retention tactics start from the ground up with the job design. Specific roles can be customized to meet the organization's priorities or to fit the individual employee.

Customizing the job for organizational priorities may focus on retaining critical skills or controlling when resignations happen. For employees with critical skills, ensuring the job tasks fit their skills and removing tasks that increase employee dissatisfaction can influence the turnover rate (McDonnell, Collings, Mellahi, & Schuler, 2017; Nelson & Jhamb, 2022). For example, UPS drivers have interpersonal and customer service skills critical to the success of the company. Those skills along with seasoned drivers' advanced knowledge of their routes made replacement and training of new drivers time-consuming and costly. UPS analyzed the reasons why drivers would quit and identified that turnover was linked to the job task of loading packages into trucks. Drivers found this task exhausting, and the task itself did not require the other critical skills used by drivers. UPS reassigned the truck loading task to a new low-skill position, cutting the driver turnover rate significantly. While the new loader position has a staggeringly high turnover rate, the position is easy and inexpensive to recruit and train. UPS focused its retention efforts on the critical skills it needs to retain, rather than addressing the retention rate of employees overall. Another option is to define a position to influence when employees leave the organization to address issues of erratic and unplanned turnover (Cappelli, 2000). An example of this would be seasonal jobs or internships.

An organization could also customize the job to fit the individual employee’s needs. An employer may support employees in identifying their own interests, values, skills, and goals, and cater to their position, within the context of the organization, to align with the individual. Individualized job customization often leads to questions about fairness (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Careful analysis and consideration of impacts on company morale, culture, and potential legal implications are essential for the consideration and implementation of creative job customization programs (Cappelli, 2000).

Compensation is a broad category that includes not only wages, but benefits, and investment options or other deferred compensations. There are several options organizations can take when leveraging compensation as a retention tactic, such as increasing wages, providing investment options, retention bonuses, etc. (Cappelli, 2000). While public opinion frequently identifies compensation as a cause for turnover, compensation has not historically been a predictor of turnover (Sull et al., 2022).

Workplace flexibility and work-life balance are other areas that public opinion likes to point out as a cause of turnover. In this case, research has shown that there is a positive correlation between workplace flexibility and employee engagement and retention with even a small level of perceived flexibility creating higher job satisfaction (Richman et al., 2008; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020). Formal arrangements such as flextime or remote work have the greatest impact on employee engagement. It has also been discussed that informal or occasional use of flexible arrangements also can have a positive impact on engagement and retention. Even some level of flexibility can have significant positive impacts, as studied by some scholars. Flexible work arrangements have been linked to an increase in employee satisfaction, mental health, resilience, productivity, effectiveness, and lower stress (Richman et al., 2008; Weideman & Hofmeyr, 2020).

Using data from the US Office of Personnel Management (OPM) on Executive Branch telework offerings, a study by Choi (2019) concluded that there is a link between making remote work available to employees and employee retention. Organizations with a higher number of remote workers recognized a lower turnover rate. This study is limited in span with only three years of data from 2011-2013 and focused on federal agencies. The impact of remote work on turnover was small, although not statistically insignificant (Choi, 2019). In their separate study which used data from April to September 2021, Sule et al. (2022) also noted that while remote work opportunities are positively linked to retention, the impact on retention is modest.

The last strategic tool reviewed relates to creating loyalty and engagement among employees. Creating opportunities for development and strengthening of social ties with coworkers is linked to decreases in turnover among high-demand employees. Resigning from the company means leaving a social circle, which creates an incentive to stay (Cappelli, 2000). Organization-sponsored social events were also a strong predictor in the study by Sule et al. (2022), further supporting this idea. Creating a social community can be done organization-wide or at a team level and can include sports teams or leagues, investing clubs, synergy groups, and other company-sponsored social activities. A risk of building a strong social network across an organization means that a significant change within the organization, such as a reorganization, restructure, or mass layoff can create a long-lasting, organization-wide trauma. Focusing on creating social ties within teams, rather than across the organization, can mitigate potential negative impacts caused by major changes (Cappelli, 2000).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

There is a lot of unfounded information on what is causing “The Great Resignation” and why workers are resigning in record numbers. This is a relatively new phenomenon, with research on the topic not being widely available currently. Organizations, from for-profit businesses to non-profits and public operations, across every industry are all having challenges with retention and recruitment. This has created a gap where knowledge about the causes of “The Great Resignation” is needed so organizations can strategize to stem the resignation rate. Current research on the causes of “The Great Resignation” being linked to real solutions for employee retention may help organizations adapt and retain critical and high-performing employees.

This study uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodology focused on secondary data. When searching for pertinent literature, we focused on U.S.-based research to not only for the focus of this study but to also avoid cultural differences in business practices. Data collected varied by topic, with all topics being sourced out of scholarly databases. The first search topic, “The Great Resignation,” looked for news articles for commentary on varying opinions from major or reputable news organizations or published scholarly articles in the past three years. The second search topic, “employee retention,” focused on primary and secondary research from the past 10 to 20 years. More recent publications were more valued, with older publications providing foundational context (Claus, 2019; Choi, 2019; Collings & Mellahi, 2009). Research into employee retention publications focused on talent management and what practices impact retention or turnover.

After gathering a list of potential literature, the abstract was reviewed for pertinence and primary research was confirmed to have U.S.-based data. Articles that did not meet qualifications for more thorough review had the resource sections reviewed for additional interesting, pertinent sources.

These methods were chosen as they fit well with the two questions posed and the availability of research. As “The Great Resignation” phenomenon has only been occurring for a year and is still underway, there is limited research into the causes. Experts and researchers are still striving to understand what is happening. There is limited peer-reviewed research available, and available studies are frequently limited in scope. As more research is done into the causes and impacts of “The Great Resignation,” further studies will need to be done.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In this section, we will start by comparing popular opinions with the emergent research on the causes of “The Great Resignation,” followed by an analysis of retention strategies.

Popular Opinions Versus Emergent Research

Popular opinion within media tends to blame three areas as the cause for "The Great Resignation" compensation, return to the office, or work environment. While compensation is not historically linked to turnover and is a weak predictor of resignation (Sull et al., 2022), low pay was noted by 63% of workers who resigned in the February 2022 Pew Research ATP as a reason they resigned (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). None of the literature reviewed included government-provided aid in their studies, leaving an area in need of further research. Though it is worthwhile to note that at the time of this study, the enhanced unemployment benefits ended some time ago, resignation rates continue to remain high. This likely may lead to an initial hypothesis that enhanced unemployment benefits may not be a direct significant cause of "The Great Resignation."

In the studies reviewed, a return to the office had some support as a cause of resignation. Remote work opportunities are frequently brought up as a cause for "The Great Resignation." The research reviewed in this study did provide some insights, and causal ambiguity, into if a return to in-person work from the previous remote work posture may be leading to resignations. Broader research into employee retention indicates that work flexibility is positively related to employee engagement and retention although the impact is small (Choi, 2019; Sull et al. 2022). The Pew research ATP analysis indicates that 48% of workers with young children at home resigned in part due to childcare issues (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). With childcare capacity struggling to return to pre-pandemic levels, parents are reporting a significant increase in the challenges of finding childcare (Igielik, 2022).

Work environment is the last category of claimed causes of resignations for this study and includes burnout, workplace culture, and workplace mandates as causes of resignation. There is speculation that burnout of knowledge workers with wage dissatisfaction has created a high turnover for these workers. While the data supports this simplistic narrative with indirect evidence, direct indicators of burnout are not one of the top predictors of resignation during "The Great Resignation." Contrastingly, toxic workplace culture is the top predictor of resignation, with organizations with healthy cultures experiencing a lower resignation rate (Sull et al., 2022). Lastly, workplace mandates on vaccines were unlikely to lead to resignation with only 18% of workers who resigned indicating that they resigned due to their employer requiring a COVID-19 vaccine (Parker & Horowitz, 2022). The studies reviewed did not provide relevant data on other workplace mandates such as requiring or banning masks.

While current research available does not fully support all speculation on the causes of "The Great Resignation," some ideas are emerging as more valid contenders. Wages, issues with childcare, and workplace culture have some support from the initial research into the reasons workers are resigning. While compensation has not historically been linked to employee resignation (Sull et al., 2022), wages in the U.S. have remained stagnant for decades. In addition, the pandemic has increased the challenges working parents face related to childcare (Igielik, 2022; Parker & Horowitz, 2022) which may have caused some working parents to resign due to lack of childcare. Workplace culture has support as a cause of resignation with toxic culture being cited as the leading predictor of resignation during "The Great Resignation" (Sull et al., 2022).

A few claimed causes had mixed results in the reviewed studies. Burnout causing increased resignation appears to be supported at the surface level, but direct indicators of burnout did not support this as a cause of resignations (Sull et al., 2022). Employer-required COVID-19 vaccines did appear in the Pew Research ATP survey, but only a small portion of workers who resigned noted this as a reason for resignation in comparison to other reasons (Parker & Horowitz, 2022).

The remaining claimed causes of government aid, remote work preference, and workplace mandates on masks were not included in the reviewed research as causes of "The Great Resignation." While historical studies on remote work show that remote work opportunities can increase retention, the impact is small (Choi, 2019; Sull et al, 2022) and not linked as a cause of "The Great Resignation." Additional research into these areas related to "The Great Resignation" causes is needed.

Concluding Remarks

Emergent research into why workers are resigning indicates that wages, childcare issues, and workplace culture are leading causes of resignation. Organizations can implement strategic planning to retain employees during this time of high resignation rates and job vacancies. For any organization, strategic planning should be a careful process that analyzes and considers the priorities of the organization and its unique situation. Organizations may choose to redesign roles to fit organizational or employee needs, create opportunities for formal or informal remote work or other flexible work arrangements, or develop employee loyalty and engagement by developing social ties.

As "The Great Resignation" is a relatively recent phenomenon and is currently ongoing, research into the reasons workers are resigning is emergent and further research is needed to fully understand its causes and impacts. In addition, this study briefly touches on many topics and further in-depth analysis would be beneficial. Lastly, while this study focuses on retention strategy it does not that retention is not avoidable. Further research into recruitment strategies to address more directly recruitment during “The Great Resignation” is needed.

This preliminary review of emergent research on the causes of “The Great Resignation” shows that the reason workers are resigning cannot be simply summarized in a few sentences. Stagnant wages, childcare issues, and workplace environments are appearing as leading causes, although research is sparse and additional research into other causes is needed. “The Great Resignation” is not only a relatively young phenomenon but is currently ongoing, and much is still unknown and yet to be researched. Anthony Klotz, the Texas A&M University Psychologist who originated the term “The Great Resignation,” now credits “pandemic epiphanies” with causing a critical shift in the way workers view their lives, creating motivation for workers to seek out better opportunities (Rosalsky, 2021). While research is ongoing, it is apparent that the causes of “The Great Resignation” are more nuanced and multifaceted than portrayed in media and popular opinion.

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