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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE UTILIZATION IN ADMINISTRATIVE WORK AMONG SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES IN SURAKARTA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Yasmin
UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta
email: yasmin@uni-suka.ac.id

Abstrak

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly accessible to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including through generative AI applications that can support routine administrative activities. However, the organizational value of AI depends not only on access to the technology but also on how employees use it, verify its outputs, and integrate it into existing work practices. This study aims to explore how AI is utilized in administrative work among SMEs in Surakarta, the perceived benefits and challenges of its use, and the managerial practices that support responsible and effective utilization. A qualitative descriptive design will be employed. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with purposively selected SME owners, managers, and administrative employees who have direct experience using AI in their work. Data will be analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns in participants' experiences and interpretations. The study is expected to contribute a contextual understanding of human–AI collaboration in SME administrative work, particularly in relation to task efficiency, work quality, employee learning, data and output verification, and organizational readiness. The findings may provide practical insights for SME managers seeking to adopt AI without eliminating necessary human judgment and accountability.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, administrative work, SMEs, human–AI collaboration, Surakarta.

I. INTRODUCTION

Work is commonly understood through formal responsibilities, performance targets, and job descriptions. In everyday organizational life, however, employees often contribute beyond these formal requirements. They may help coworkers, propose improvements, solve emerging problems, volunteer for additional responsibilities, remain available during demanding periods, or provide support that is not explicitly included in their job descriptions. These contributions are often associated with employee engagement, organizational citizenship, proactive behavior, and positive work relationships. At the same time, employees may decide that they no longer want to provide such additional effort while continuing to perform their formal duties. This emerging pattern has become widely discussed through the term "quiet quitting."

Recent research suggests that quiet quitting requires conceptual clarity because it can easily be confused with disengagement, burnout, turnover intention, or ordinary work-life boundary-setting. Gray et al. [3], based partly on a qualitative study, define quiet quitting as intentionally performing to the minimum requirements of the job and distinguish the phenomenon from its antecedents and outcomes. Their findings indicate that employees may deliberately calculate the level of effort they provide rather than simply become generally unmotivated. Magrizos et al. [7] similarly emphasize definitional challenges and the need to distinguish quiet quitting from related constructs. This distinction is important because an employee who declines repeated unpaid overtime may still be responsible and engaged during formal working hours, while an employee who stops sharing ideas because of perceived unfairness may be experiencing a different form of withdrawal.

The issue is particularly relevant to young employees who are entering workplaces characterized by digital communication, changing career expectations, flexible work arrangements, and increasing attention to work-life boundaries. Recent qualitative research among Gen Z and Millennial employees identified withdrawal, minimal-effort performance, career transition preparation, value misalignment, inadequate recognition, limited growth opportunities, workplace culture, well-being, and communication as relevant dimensions of quiet quitting [5]. Research among Gen Z employees in technology startups also suggests that quiet quitting can be shaped by unmet expectations, emotional labor, organizational informality, and cultural constraints [8].

Quiet quitting is also increasingly examined as a process rather than a fixed employee condition. A phenomenological study of hospitality employees identified an early stage

involving reduced effort and emotional detachment, followed by possible trajectories of recalibration or departure [10]. Harris [4], using a qualitative longitudinal design, likewise demonstrates the value of examining how employees interpret and adjust their effort over time. These studies indicate that the decision to stop going the extra mile may develop through accumulated experiences rather than a single event.

Psychological contract is another important dimension. Employees form beliefs about reciprocal obligations between themselves and their organizations, including expectations concerning recognition, fairness, growth, support, and working conditions. Gray et al. [3] found that psychological contract fulfillment was associated with lower quiet quitting, whereas breach was associated with greater quiet quitting. Recent research also suggests that illegitimate tasks may encourage employees to reduce discretionary effort because employees experience such demands as outside reasonable role expectations (Frontiers in Psychology, 2026). Thus, discretionary effort may be influenced not only by how much work employees have, but also by whether they perceive additional demands as legitimate and reciprocally supported.

Yogyakarta provides an interesting context for this study because young employees work across diverse sectors, including services, education, creative industries, technology, hospitality, retail, and professional services. The present study does not assume that all young employees share identical attitudes toward work or that reduced extra effort necessarily represents a generational characteristic. Instead, it seeks to understand how individual employees describe their own decisions to contribute more, maintain ordinary effort, or limit their contributions to formal job requirements.

Accordingly, this study asks: (1) How do young employees in Yogyakarta define “going the extra mile” at work? (2) What experiences lead employees to increase, maintain, or reduce discretionary effort? (3) How do recognition, fairness, workload, psychological contract, and supervisor relationships influence these decisions? (4) How do employees distinguish legitimate work-life boundaries from disengagement? and (5) What workplace conditions may encourage employees to contribute beyond formal job requirements again?

The objective of this study is to explore the experiences and interpretations of young employees in Yogyakarta regarding discretionary effort. The study is expected to contribute contextual qualitative evidence to the emerging literature on quiet quitting by examining the decision process behind reduced extra-role contribution rather than treating quiet quitting as a simple measure of employee motivation.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Discretionary Effort and Extra-Role Contribution

Discretionary effort refers to contributions employees can choose to provide beyond the minimum formal requirements of their roles. These contributions may include helping coworkers, taking initiative, proposing ideas, solving problems without being asked, supporting customers beyond standard procedures, or temporarily extending effort when organizational needs arise. The concept overlaps with organizational citizenship behavior and proactive behavior, but this study uses discretionary effort as a broad sensitizing concept so that participants can define what "extra" means within their own work settings.

Discretionary contribution is not necessarily stable across time. Employees may increase or reduce their additional effort according to workplace relationships, perceived fairness, available resources, and the meaning they attach to work. This makes discretionary effort particularly suitable for qualitative inquiry because the same behavior may carry different meanings for different employees.

2.2 Quiet Quitting and Minimum-Role Performance

Quiet quitting has become an increasingly discussed concept in contemporary management research. Gray et al. [3] define it as intentionally performing to the minimum requirements of the job and emphasize that the concept should be separated from its antecedents and consequences. Their qualitative evidence shows that employees may deliberately calculate their contribution rather than simply experience generalized disengagement.

Recent qualitative research further demonstrates that quiet quitting can take different forms. Joe and Dhanpat [5] identified withdrawal, minimal-effort performance, career transition preparation, generational work attitudes, and digital distraction among Gen Z and Millennial employees. Wang et al. (2026) found that quiet quitting among hospitality employees may develop through early symptoms before employees either recalibrate their effort or move toward departure. These findings support examining discretionary effort as a dynamic process.

2.3 Psychological Contract, Fairness, and Reciprocity

Psychological contract theory provides a useful perspective for understanding why employees change the amount of effort they are willing to provide. Employees develop beliefs about what organizations have promised and what they should receive in return for their contributions. These expectations may involve compensation, recognition, career growth, flexibility, respectful treatment, or managerial support.

When employees perceive that important obligations have not been fulfilled, they may reconsider discretionary contributions. Gray et al. [3] found that psychological contract fulfillment was associated with lower quiet quitting through job satisfaction, while psychological contract breach was associated with higher quiet quitting. This perspective suggests that employees' decisions about extra effort are partly relational: the question is not only "How much am I expected to do?" but also "Why should I contribute more under these conditions?"

2.4 Leadership, Communication, and Workplace Relationships

Supervisors and coworkers can influence whether discretionary effort is perceived as meaningful or exploitative. Employees may be more willing to contribute beyond formal duties when supervisors provide recognition, listen to concerns, explain decisions, and respond constructively to mistakes. Conversely, repeated experiences of being ignored, criticized, or taken for granted may encourage employees to limit voluntary contributions.

Recent research on re-engaging quiet quitters indicates that dialogic communication, workplace community, and resilience can help mitigate quiet quitting [9]. This suggests that discretionary effort is not solely an individual motivational issue. Everyday communication and social relationships can shape whether employees believe that additional contributions are visible, valued, and reciprocated.

2.5 Workload, Boundary-Setting, and Employee Well-Being

Reduced discretionary effort may also represent deliberate boundary-setting. Employees may stop answering messages outside working hours, decline unpaid additional tasks, or refuse responsibilities that they perceive as outside their role. Such actions should not automatically be interpreted as disengagement. Recent research indicates that employees may understand quiet quitting behaviors positively when they are used to establish work-life boundaries and protect well-being.

This distinction is particularly relevant for young employees working in digitally connected environments. The ability to remain continuously available can make formal working hours less meaningful. The present study therefore examines whether employees perceive their reduction in extra effort as withdrawal from work, protection of personal resources, or a strategy for maintaining sustainable performance.

2.6 Re-Engagement and Sustainable Discretionary Contribution

The final literature focus concerns the conditions that may encourage employees to contribute beyond formal requirements again. Recent research identifies recognition, growth opportunities,

supportive culture, voice, well-being, and work-life balance as relevant organizational areas for addressing quiet quitting [5], [9]. However, qualitative inquiry can identify which forms of organizational response employees actually perceive as credible and meaningful.

Based on the literature, this study uses five sensitizing concepts: (1) discretionary effort, (2) psychological contract and reciprocity, (3) supervisor and workplace relationships, (4) boundary-setting and workload, and (5) re-engagement conditions. These concepts guide the interviews but remain open to new themes emerging from participants' narratives.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how young employees in Yogyakarta experience and interpret changes in discretionary effort. A qualitative design is appropriate because the study focuses on meanings, workplace experiences, decisions, and interpretations rather than measuring the prevalence of quiet quitting.

Research Setting and Participants. The study will be conducted in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Participants will be young employees aged approximately 20–30 years working in different sectors, including services, education, creative industries, technology, retail, hospitality, and professional services. Purposive sampling will be used to recruit approximately 10–15 participants. Participants should be active employees and have at least six months of work experience in their current organization. Variation in job roles, organizational size, and working arrangements will be sought where possible.

Data Collection. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 30–45 minutes. Questions will explore participants' definitions of going the extra mile, examples of discretionary effort, experiences that changed their level of effort, recognition, workload, supervisor relationships, fairness, work-life boundaries, and conditions that might encourage renewed discretionary contribution. With informed consent, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes will document contextual observations.

Data Analysis. Interview data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The process will involve familiarization with transcripts, initial coding, grouping related codes, developing candidate themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and interpreting the findings. Sensitizing concepts from the literature will be combined with inductive themes emerging from participants' narratives. Particular attention will be given to differences between boundary-setting and broader disengagement.

Trustworthiness and Ethics. Credibility will be supported through repeated transcript review, comparison across participants with different work contexts, careful documentation of coding decisions, and use of participant quotations after anonymization. Participants will receive information about the study and provide voluntary informed consent. Personal identities, employer names, and identifiable organizational details will be anonymized. Data will be used only for academic purposes.

Table 1. Proposed Semi-Structured Interview Guide

No.	Core Interview Question
1	How do you personally define "going the extra mile" at work?
2	Can you describe a time when you voluntarily did more than your formal job responsibilities?
3	What usually makes you willing to contribute extra effort?
4	Have you ever reduced the amount of extra effort you give at work? What happened?
5	What workplace experiences make you feel that extra effort is no longer worth giving?
6	How do recognition, compensation, or career opportunities influence your willingness to contribute more?
7	How does your supervisor influence your decision to go beyond your formal responsibilities?
8	Do you feel comfortable setting boundaries when requests go beyond your role or working hours? Why or why not?
9	How do you distinguish between doing only what your job requires and being disengaged from your work?
10	What changes at work would make you willing to contribute extra effort again?

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Note: This section is intentionally structured as an analytical framework and must be completed using actual interview data. Participant findings, quotations, and thematic frequencies should not be fabricated.

4.1 How Young Employees Define "Going the Extra Mile"

This theme should present participants' own definitions of discretionary effort. Analysis should identify whether employees associate going the extra mile with additional time, initiative,

helping coworkers, problem solving, emotional labor, availability, or contribution of ideas. Differences between participants should be retained rather than forced into a single definition.

The analysis should also examine whether extra effort is genuinely perceived as voluntary or has gradually become an informal expectation. This distinction is important because an activity may begin as discretionary but later become perceived as a normal requirement without corresponding changes in formal job expectations.

4.2 The Experiences That Trigger Effort Recalibration

This section should examine what happens before participants reduce discretionary effort. Relevant experiences may include repeated overtime, workload accumulation, lack of recognition, perceived unfairness, broken promises, poor communication, limited growth opportunities, or experiences of being taken for granted. Recent qualitative research suggests that quiet quitting can develop through stages involving reduced effort and emotional detachment before employees recalibrate or depart [10].

The analysis should therefore reconstruct sequences rather than simply list reasons. A participant may initially volunteer frequently, later experience repeated last-minute requests, and eventually decide to perform only formal duties. Another participant may reduce after-hours availability while remaining highly engaged during working hours. These trajectories should be interpreted differently.

4.3 Recognition, Reciprocity, and Psychological Contract

This theme should explore how participants interpret the exchange between what they contribute and what they receive. Participants may discuss recognition, compensation, promotion, learning opportunities, flexibility, trust, or respectful treatment. The analysis should identify whether employees use an explicit reciprocal logic when deciding how much additional effort to provide.

The discussion can be connected with Gray et al. [3], who found that psychological contract fulfillment was associated with lower quiet quitting. The qualitative data should further show what “fulfillment” means in the everyday experiences of young employees and whether expectations differ across sectors or career stages.

4.4 Supervisor Relationships and Workplace Communication

This theme should examine how supervisors and coworkers shape employees’ willingness to contribute beyond formal requirements. Participants may describe managers who recognize

additional contributions, provide feedback, listen to concerns, or create opportunities for voice. These experiences may support continued discretionary effort.

Conversely, repeated experiences of criticism, indifference, inconsistent communication, or unequal treatment may encourage employees to reduce voluntary contributions. Research on dialogic communication and workplace community suggests that relational communication can play a role in mitigating quiet quitting [9].

4.5 Boundary-Setting Versus Disengagement

This theme should distinguish deliberate boundary-setting from broader withdrawal. Participants may stop answering work messages after working hours, decline unpaid additional tasks, or refuse responsibilities outside their role. Such behavior may represent an attempt to protect personal time rather than a decline in responsibility.

The analysis should examine what remains stable after employees reduce extra effort. If employees continue to meet core responsibilities while limiting voluntary overtime, the pattern may represent boundary-setting. If they also describe declining task quality, emotional detachment, avoidance, or reduced care, the pattern may indicate broader disengagement. The final interpretation should be based on participants' narratives rather than imposed in advance.

4.6 What Could Make Employees Go the Extra Mile Again?

This section should identify organizational conditions that participants perceive as capable of restoring discretionary effort. Potential areas include meaningful recognition, clearer role expectations, realistic workload, career development, supportive supervision, communication, autonomy, and opportunities for voice. Recent research among Gen Z and Millennial employees identifies recognition, growth, workplace culture, well-being, and work-life balance as relevant organizational responses [5].

The analysis should distinguish between interventions that employees consider meaningful and those they perceive as symbolic. For example, participants may value clear career opportunities more than generic motivational messages, or predictable working hours more than nominal flexibility. These distinctions can provide practical value for management.

4.7 An Integrated Model of Discretionary Effort

The final theme should connect employees' definitions of extra effort, workplace experiences, psychological contract, supervisor relationships, workload, boundaries, and re-engagement conditions into an integrated account. The model should explain how young

employees move from willingness to contribute beyond formal requirements toward effort recalibration, and under what conditions the process may be reversed.

The model should remain grounded in empirical data. It should not assume that all young employees follow the same trajectory or that reduced discretionary effort necessarily leads to turnover. Recent qualitative research indicates that quiet quitting can lead to recalibration or departure depending on individual and workplace resources [10].

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study is designed to explore discretionary effort as an everyday workplace experience among young employees in Yogyakarta. The emerging literature suggests that quiet quitting involves intentional limitation of effort to minimum job requirements, but that this phenomenon should be distinguished from broader disengagement, burnout, and legitimate boundary-setting. Discretionary effort may change in response to psychological contract fulfillment, recognition, fairness, workload, supervisor relationships, and employees' need to protect personal resources.

The final conclusion should be based exclusively on interview findings. It should identify how participants define going the extra mile, what experiences lead them to recalibrate their effort, how they distinguish boundary-setting from disengagement, and what organizational conditions may encourage renewed discretionary contribution.

Recommendations should be directly derived from the empirical themes and may include clearer role expectations, realistic workload allocation, meaningful recognition, supportive supervision, opportunities for career development, two-way communication, and respect for reasonable work-life boundaries. Organizations should avoid interpreting every reduction in extra effort as a performance problem before understanding its underlying meaning.

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