



EXAMINING PASSIVE EMPLOYEES: PANACEA TO TECHNOLOGY, BRAINTEASER FOR EMPLOYERS AND ORGANISED LABOUR AND A MENACE TO THE ECONOMY

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Abstract:

The study's purpose is to explore the actions of passive employees on technology, the challenges faced by employers and organised labour in managing them, and their widespread behaviour in the economy. It used an in-depth literature review analysis to collect data to achieve its objective. Key findings encompass: passive employees contribute to being replaced by technology; an inactive workforce is a conundrum for organised labour and employers; and stagnant workers threaten the economy. The study provides a practical strategic tool to guide human resources (HR) change management specialists, policymakers, academic researchers, and all other interested parties in the field in dealing with passive employees.

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1. Introduction

According to Khajehnejad, García, and Meyer (2023), passive employees exhibit passive work behaviour and are often deemed shiftless workforce. Correspondingly, governments across the globe are facing challenges in terms of enhancing their performance and efficiency (Milukutu & Siachisa, 2023). As a result, there is a growing concern that some public sector employees demonstrate passive worker behaviour and are perceived as bureaucratic and unresponsive; meanwhile, some public agencies are viewed as massive, unproductive, and wasteful (Milukutu & Siachisa, 2023).

For this reason, Yadav *et al.* (2024) contend that a passive workforce in any workplace, including the private sector, is unproductive and can be detrimental to overall organisational productivity. In other words, the study's results indicate that such employees burden the organisation as they consume resources without adding any value, thus wasting time and money. Therefore, organisations must identify and address the factors leading to a passive workforce and take corrective measures to ensure their employees remain engaged, motivated, and productive.

This research study identifies passive workers as those employees physically present at their workstations but fail to contribute any output or productivity throughout the day. Essentially, they merely attend work to receive a salary without putting an effort toward earning it. This issue is particularly significant because passive employees cause undue pressure on their active counterparts, who are left to pick up the slack and complete their work and the work of passive employees. Following this affirmation, Quentin (2023) states that passive employees who are compensated for their work do not necessarily contribute to the overall value creation of a company. While this compensation may be linked to the profitability of the capitalist system, it does not necessarily result in increased productivity. In other words, simply paying employees without actively engaging and motivating them to contribute to their fullest potential may not be sufficient to create value for the company. Therefore, management needs to take a proactive approach to employee motivation and engagement to drive productivity and value creation in a company.

For this reason, Wang, Hu, and Dong (2022) found that the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolutionised the business world by replacing human employees in various sectors. AI's ability to automate tasks and processes that were once performed by humans is transforming business operations, raising questions about passive employee behaviour in the world of technology. This issue has significant implications for management, organised labour, and the economy as a whole.

The passive role of employees is becoming increasingly complex and counterproductive, making it imperative for businesses and policymakers to address this challenge and develop effective strategies to mitigate its potential negative consequences. Based on this premise, the current study identified a gap in previous research. Although relationships between different variables have been explored, prior studies failed to establish a link between passive workers and technology. This gap in the literature is

especially significant because it presents a better understanding of the effects of passive workers on employers, organised labour, and the economy. Therefore, this study strives to fill this gap and shed light on improving the productivity and effectiveness of the passive workforce. With this approach, this study makes a meaningful contribution to its field, which has critical implications for various stakeholders. Specifically, the study's findings may help employers better manage their inactive workforce and aid policymakers in designing more effective labour policies. In a nutshell, this study's implications are significant because they may potentially improve organisational performance and the economy's overall health.

1.1 Background and Motivation

The study highlights that passive employees who lack the motivation and drive to perform their job duties to their most significant potential are at risk of being replaced by technology. Additionally, the study posits that passive employees pose a significant challenge to organised labour and employers as they are unproductive and can inhibit organisational productivity. This phenomenon is a potential threat to the economy as the lack of productivity and efficiency can decrease profits, organisational performance, and overall economic growth.

1.2 Study Significance

This study is of great significance as it examines a concerning trend emerging in the passive workforce, potentially impacting active employees, organised labour, businesses, and the overall economy. The study aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of the root causes of passive employees and identify effective ways to mitigate their negative impact on the economy. Employers and policymakers can make more informed decisions and take appropriate measures to ensure that the economy continues to grow and prosper by analysing the underlying reasons behind this trend. This research could also shed light on the changing dynamics of the workforce and help organisations adapt to new trends and challenges.

2. Review of Literature

The literature review of this study is structured as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

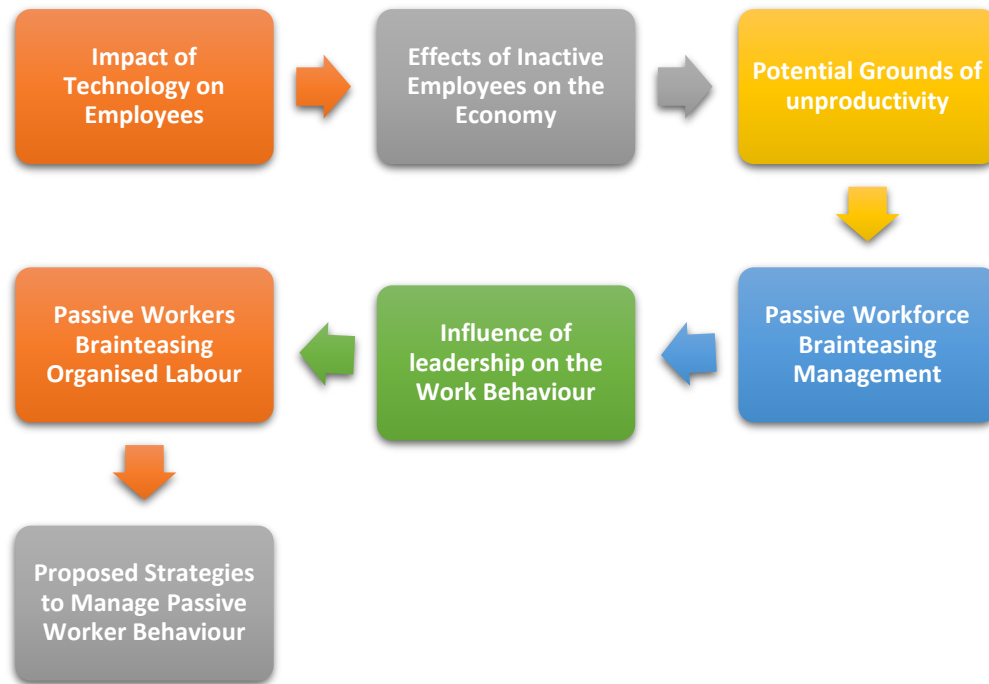


Figure 1: Literature Review Structure

2.1 Impact of Technology on Employees

The global public sector has faced a crisis in its performance, with public employees often labeled as inert and lacking motivation, while public agencies exhibit counter-productiveness (Milukutu & Siachisa, 2023). According to these scholars, there is a rising need for efficiency, leading to external service providers adapting Digital Transformation (DT) techniques. DT is regarded as a means to enhance efficiency, drive innovation, promote inclusivity, and cultivate sustainable growth (Milukutu & Siachisa, 2023). This assertion highlights the benefits of leveraging digital technologies. As such, public sector organisations can streamline their operations, reduce costs, improve service delivery, and enhance citizen engagement. Moreover, DT can help public sector organisations to harness the power of (AI) and other emerging technologies to make better decisions and drive positive outcomes. According to Xie *et al.* (2022), the challenge of machine substitution to the labour market in China is more significant than in other countries. This predicament is due to the massive number of manufacturing employees in China, which makes it more vulnerable to the impact of AI through the use of robots. The study's results suggest that implementing AI-powered machines in the manufacturing sector is poised to exert a substantial effect on the job market in China. With the rise of automation, there is a growing concern about the displacement of human workers and the need for reskilling and upskilling to adapt to the changing job market (Zirar *et al.*, 2023).

In another sense, Wang, Hu, and Dong (2022) stated that various industries such as agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, fishery, mining, manufacturing, and construction are susceptible and expected to adopt a high level of intelligence. Regardless, this adoption is a high-risk factor for occupational substitution, potentially leading to job displacement for workers in these industries. Furthermore, the research

also suggests that older and less educated workers are more exposed to this risk of substitution. This claim signals that this group of employees is highly likely to lose their jobs to automation and technology. These assertions correspond to a report by Zety, indicating that 43% of workers under age 25 surveyed reported job losses due to AI, as opposed to 27% of those aged between 26 and 40, and 19% of those aged over 41 (Brazier, 2024). These findings suggest that younger workers are more vulnerable to the impact of AI on employment. This highlights the necessity for organisations to develop strategies to address the challenges associated with the increasing adoption of AI in the workplace, particularly among younger employees. Moreover, these findings highlight that workers of all ages must protect their jobs by delivering and being efficient to reduce being replaced by machines and robots.

Contrarily, Woodward (2024) stated that the global job market experienced a net gain of 500,000 jobs as a direct result of AI in 2020. However, the report also predicts that AI-powered robots could replace more than 20 million jobs in the manufacturing industry globally by 2030, constituting approximately 8.5% of the global workforce. The impacted workers must acquire new skills or shift to other industries to find employment. However, academics have varying reviews on the impact of technology on job loss. While some experts argue that integrating AI in the workplace may lead to the displacement of human workers, others believe that it can enhance operational efficiency, expedite decision-making, and stimulate innovation in products and services (Zirar *et al.*, 2023).

According to these authors, workplace AI can positively affect workers by improving their abilities and creating a more productive work environment. Zirar *et al.* (2023), Ali, and Islam (2023) further identified four key themes crucial for understanding the relationship between workers and AI in the workplace. Firstly, workers may perceive AI as a potential threat to their employment, leading to distrust and resistance towards AI integration. Secondly, worker-AI interactions can be attractive as AI promises to improve worker abilities, leading to a better work experience. Thirdly, coexistence between AI and workers necessitates workers possessing technical, human, and conceptual skills. Finally, workers must continually learn new skills to contribute to a mutually beneficial relationship with workplace AI. The analysis reveals that while there are concerns about the impact of AI on job security, the study suggests that workers can benefit from workplace AI provided it is blended to enhance their abilities and create a productive work environment.

In the same line of thought, Veshne and Jamnani (2024) found that present-day AI and robotics technology can play a pivotal role in assisting Human Resources (HR) and the overall business in gaining a real-time understanding of the development of employees. However, these authors caution that HR and corporate leaders must carefully examine the potential benefits and drawbacks of using such technology and make informed decisions about whether or not to adopt it into their organisation's operations. These results signal that technology can help track and analyse employee performance, identify skill gaps, and provide training to enhance their skills. Similarly, Woodward (2024) stated that the demand for professionals in AI-related industries is expected to

reach 97 million by 2025. This includes various technical roles such as AI and machine learning specialists, process automation specialists, prominent data specialists, data scientists, data engineers, and analytics specialists. These positions require specialised knowledge and skills in areas such as programming, data analysis, and statistics. They are crucial for organisations leveraging AI technologies to drive innovation and growth.

In another argument, Zhang's (2023) study is two-fold. On the one hand, according to labour sociology and labour economics, technological advancements lead to job losses for workers. However, the historical evidence following the Industrial Revolution suggests that this did not result in widespread unemployment. This argument has been a classic topic of discussion in labour studies. On the other hand, Zhang (2023) argues that despite the objective impact of technological upgrading on job loss, the actual experience has shown that it does not lead to large-scale structural unemployment.

Based on the above contrary arguments, it is imperative to note that the focus of this study is not to assess the impact of technology on workers, either in terms of replacement or benefit. Nevertheless, this study emphasises the significance of workers taking an active role in their jobs to lessen being substituted by technology. While researchers continue to debate the impact of technology on the workforce, workers need to prioritise the best efforts in their roles. The rationale is that being passive in the workplace can increase the risk of becoming a technological victim. Unfortunately, passive workers fuel and accelerate being replaced by technological advancement. Instead, they should strive to be assets to their employers by excelling in their jobs. This endeavour will reduce the chances of being smoothly replaced by modern technological techniques during the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Therefore, this study accentuates the need for workers to be proactive and continuously improve their skills to remain invaluable and pertinent in their positions.

2.2 Effects of Inactive Employees on the Economy

In economic terms, unproductive labour refers to labour compensated for but does not contribute to creating value, as explained in the value-theoretical framework (Quentin, 2023). This author's argument is a critical distinction to make because although such labour, practiced by passive workers, may have a causal relationship with capitalist profitability, it does not add to the overall wealth of the economy. As such, Quentin (2023) claims that while it may still be compensated and rewarded, it does not contribute to the overall growth and development of the economy similarly to productive labour. Parallel to this view, research indicates a strong link between passive conduct and reduced workplace productivity (Yadav *et al.*, 2024). Hence, employees who tend to be inactive or disengaged during working hours contribute less towards general organisational success (Yadav *et al.*, 2024). However, these scholars assert that addressing this issue can result in significant economic benefits. Thus, management can boost productivity and drive organisational success by encouraging employees to be more involved and invested in their work. Similarly, Chowdhury, Dhar, and Gazi (2023) opine that extreme passive work behaviour exhibited in unproductive sectors can harm economic development.

Accordingly, a lack of productivity in all sectors of the economy can result in reduced growth and hinder progress. This assertion emphasises the significance of promoting active and productive work behaviour in all sectors of the economy to ensure sustainable and inclusive economic development.

In a similar vein, in the United Kingdom (UK), data shows that the proportion of unproductive wages in the economy rose sharply by 34.2% before 2009 but then fell, bringing the ratio back to 103.0 by 2020 (Papagiannaki *et al.*, 2023). According to this report, this trend of an increasing share of unproductive labour in the economy is alarming, as it indicates that the growth in unproductive labour leading up to the 2008 financial crisis has not yet been fully restored. Unproductive labour refers to jobs that do not contribute to the overall output or productivity of the economy. This trend is significant because it suggests that resources are being directed towards less productive activities, potentially reducing overall economic growth.

In 2020, the global economy faced unprecedented challenges due to the pandemic, leading to a worldwide lockdown and a recession (The Conference Board, 2023). However, according to this board, there was a silver lining as the measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus led to a significant increase in global labour productivity. The board further mentioned that this increase was particularly noticeable in the service sector, which had previously struggled to maintain productivity. As economies reopened in 2021 and 2022, productivity growth decreased and further stagnated. However, most of the global economic expansion in 2021 and 2022 was due to increased labour inputs (The Conference Board, 2023). The board also reported that while there are several reasons for this slow productivity growth, one of the main factors is the reopening of relatively low-productive and labour-intensive in-person service activities that were closed during the pandemic lockdowns. In essence, this illustration is a learning opportunity to improve systems and adapt to new circumstances, ensuring a more resilient and productive economy in the years to come.

The segment of this study involves an in-depth analysis of a series of studies regarding the relationship between unproductivity and the economy. These studies highlight the ramifications of non-productivity on the economy in various contexts, including organisations and external factors. Interestingly, the results of these studies were consistent in that unproductivity hurts the economy. These findings imply that the issue of passive employees, who fail to contribute to their organisation's productivity, must not be overlooked, and organisations must take corrective measures to address this matter. A failure to undertake this measure will severely impact their survival and further slow economic growth. Therefore, organisations must recognise the significance of productivity and take appropriate measures to enhance it.

2.3 Potential Grounds of Unproductivity

Management must identify the factors hindering employee performance and offer support to those struggling to cultivate a productive work environment. Rather than immediately resorting to disciplinary action, it is important to comprehend the

underlying causes of unproductivity and provide the necessary assistance to improve employee performance. As such, management can foster a more positive and efficient work environment for all by adopting this approach. Work stress and lack of motivation are two factors that can contribute to unproductivity among employees who possess high work potential; these employees may struggle to perform to the best of their abilities due to these issues (Simangunsong, 2024). Therefore, employers must prioritise the well-being and engagement of their workforce to ensure optimal performance and productivity. As such, organisations can create a positive and supportive work environment that fosters employee satisfaction and success by addressing these factors. There is an additional thread in the literature that supports this perspective. A significant concern may be low morale and a lack of motivation among employees for companies striving to enhance productivity (Kalaivani & Venkatachalam, 2024). In this respect, engaged employees are committed to organisational values, goals, and objectives (Kalaivani & Venkatachalam, 2024), and the reciprocal is also applicable. Meanwhile, numerous factors can significantly affect employee performance; among them, workload, self-efficacy, and self-esteem are crucial elements that play a significant role in the workplace (Raihan *et al.*, 2024). These authors further stated that when employees encounter a heavy workload, they may experience stress, anxiety, and burnout, impairing their performance. Conversely, a strong sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem can boost an employee's confidence, motivation, and resilience, leading to better outcomes (Raihan *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, these scholars advised that organisations should prioritise these factors when developing their work environment and employee development programmes to ensure employees can perform at their highest potential.

Further research has shown that stress, whether from domestic or occupational sources, can negatively impact an employee's productivity (Amadi, 2024). Consequently, effectively managing stress at home and on the job can help employees perform better, a crucial managerial goal (Amadi, 2024). In another sense, Yasami *et al.* (2024) found that job insecurity can significantly affect work engagement and lead to psychological withdrawal behaviour. As a result, management needs to acknowledge and address these effects to maintain a positive and secure work environment. In the realm of the health sector, Ebbers (2024) stated that approximately 100,000 nurses in the United States (US) resigned from their positions due to burnout and stress, and over 600,000 registered nurses are projected to follow suit by the year 2027. These alarming statistics indicate the magnitude of the problem that the nursing industry is currently facing and emphasise the need for immediate action to mitigate the effects of burnout and stress among healthcare professionals. Given nurses' critical role in delivering quality patient care, it is imperative that healthcare organisations prioritise the well-being of their nursing staff and take proactive steps to address the root causes of burnout and stress in the workplace. However, this finding may be extended and generalised to other sectors to alleviate stress and promote organisational wellness to maintain a healthy and productive workforce. This practice may potentially reduce passive worker behaviour in some cases.

The analysis in this section sheds light on several factors that could contribute to passive employee behaviour. Hence, this research guides management in conducting an in-depth examination and effectively dealing with such behavioural concerns. Hasty and misguided decisions should be avoided, as a careful analysis could reveal solutions that promote productivity and benefit everyone involved. For example, a wellness programme could help passive employees overcome their work challenges. Therefore, it is momentous to note that this study does not condone passive workforce behaviour but emphasises the importance of taking the appropriate measures to benefit all parties, with assistance from HR and organised labour, if necessary.

2.4 Passive Workforce Brainteasing Management

A passive workforce characterised by unproductive employees can pose a considerable threat to an organisation, as they can consume valuable resources and lead to demotivation, resulting in a financial burden that can be challenging to overcome (Grothaus, 2023). This practice opposes the primary goal of organisations to increase profits. For instance, EY-Parthenon conducted a study using data from the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, revealing that the (US) faces a unique challenge with five consecutive quarters of year-on-year declines in productivity (Grothaus, 2023). This author further stated that this is an unprecedented occurrence in recorded history that dates back to 1948. While many companies are currently experiencing obstacles, the true cost of these obstacles can often be underestimated (Grothaus, 2023).

For these reasons, the analysis of Lestari (2024) revealed that the productivity levels of employees in a company play a crucial role in determining the overall growth and success of the organisation. In this respect, when the workforce is actively engaged and productive, they can contribute significantly to the development and progress of the company; however, if a significant portion of the employees are unproductive, such as a passive workforce, it can create obstacles and hinder the company's ability to achieve its targets and objectives (Lestari, 2024). This challenge can present significant issues for management, necessitating it to motivate employees for organisational success. Nevertheless, this task requires a strategic approach by management to ensure that all employees contribute to the best of their abilities to promote organisational performance and avoid unproductivity costs. For instance, McKinsey's research findings indicated that employee disengagement and attrition could result in significant financial losses for a median-sized Standard and Poor (S&P) 500 company. The estimated amount ranges between \$228 million and \$355 million annually, translating to a minimum loss of \$1.1 billion over five years for each company (De Smet, Reich & Schaninger, 2023).

In another context, recent research on work productivity in the Croatian hotel industry revealed that multiple employees exhibited suboptimal productivity levels. Specifically, the study found that only 17.03% of employees reported high productivity levels, while a majority of 49.34% showed low productivity levels, and the remaining 33.63% considered their productivity moderate or normal (Pupavac, 2020). These findings indicate a pressing need for employers in the Croatian hotel industry and other

employers globally experiencing a similar challenge to address the underlying factors contributing to low productivity and develop strategies to improve employee performance. In light of these results, Hamzah *et al.* (2021) suggested that employees be categorised into different patterns or families based on their performance levels. The study distinguishes between two main groups: productive employees and unproductive or low-performing employees. Productive employees consistently meet or exceed performance standards, while unproductive employees fail to meet these standards (Hamzah *et al.*, 2021). This categorisation can be helpful for companies looking to identify areas for improvement and optimise their workforce.

Following the analysis in this study's segment, employers strive to achieve profitability by maximising productivity. However, employees who exhibit a passive attitude towards their work impede the employer's efforts to achieve this goal. This practice leads to a decrease in overall productivity and a decline in the quality of work produced. Employers often find it challenging to motivate passive employees and improve their performance, which can be a source of frustration. As a result, passive employees are a paradox to management. Therefore, employers must identify the root cause of employee passivity and develop strategies to encourage a more proactive work ethic.

2.5 Influence of Leadership on the Worker Behaviour

It appears that individual leadership attributes can significantly impact the behaviour of workers within an organisation. Specifically, these leadership traits are needed to influence positive worker behaviour and reduce passive work practices that impede organisational prosperity and survival. Thus, leaders can encourage workers to take an active role in their work and contribute to the organisational sensation, leading to increased productivity and higher employee satisfaction. Kamil (2024) posits that positive leadership traits, such as optimism, trust, tolerance, empathy, and virtuousness, can significantly reduce counterproductive behaviours within organisations. This discovery suggests that organisations should prioritise cultivating virtuous leadership qualities among their leaders to create a more productive work environment that can influence positive worker behaviour. Therefore, businesses must focus on developing these qualities in their leaders to foster a healthy work environment. This argument is supported by Raihan, Claudia, and Prihatiningrum (2024) in a different context. These scholars averred that employees with a strong sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem tend to exhibit heightened confidence, motivation, and resilience, resulting in improved performance outcomes. As such, organisational leaders must consider these crucial factors when crafting their workplace environment and employee development initiatives to enable their staff to perform at their highest potential (Raihan *et al.*, 2024).

According to Wang, Wang, and Wang (2024), supervisor developmental feedback can have a positive impact on reducing employee time theft. The effectiveness of the input, however, is greatly influenced by two key factors – employees' perceived insider status and their level of work passion (Wang *et al.*, 2024). These academics further claimed

that when employees feel valued and appreciated by their organisational leadership and are passionate about their work, they are less likely to commit time theft. Additionally, when leaders provide constructive feedback and support employees in developing their skills, it creates a positive work environment and reduces the likelihood of time theft (Wang *et al.*, 2024). In essence, these findings suggest that fostering a supportive and positive work culture can greatly reduce time theft in the workplace, impacting employees' attitudes.

In the same view, Kopp *et al.* (2023) uncovered that leaders who possess the ability to accurately anticipate their employees' perspective, also known as perspective-taking accuracy, have a positive impact on their employees' satisfaction with the implementation of the Automated-Guided Vehicles (AGV) system. This influence indicates that leaders who can understand and empathise with their employees' needs and viewpoints can effectively address any concerns or challenges that may arise during the implementation of the AGV system, leading to a smoother and more successful transition process.

Additionally, Saad and Abbas (2018) uncovered the intricate relationship between organisational culture and job performance. These academics discovered that leaders play a crucial role in shaping employee performance. This result signifies that the values and beliefs of leaders are absorbed by their subordinates, impacting how they perform their duties. Generally, the study emphasises the essence of a strong organisational culture nurtured by effective leadership to promote better job performance among employees. In this sense, leaders can influence passive employees' behaviour towards their work. Likewise, a study suggests that employees led by effective leaders are more likely to achieve the highest level of performance. The study shows that those with leaders who fulfil their job-related needs, represent them with higher authority, and meet organisational requirements have 2.09 times higher odds of reaching this level compared to those with ineffective leaders (Hundie & Habtewold, 2024). The confidence interval for this finding was between 1.20 and 3.63 (Hundie & Habtewold, 2024), indicating a high degree of statistical significance. These results highlight the crucial role of effective leadership in enhancing employee performance and promoting organisational success.

Through a detailed critique of this section in the context of this study, it is concluded that possessing effective organisational leadership skills can greatly influence the performance of passive workers. This analysis means that when leaders can properly motivate, guide, and inspire their employees, even those who may have previously been less engaged or productive can improve their output and contribution to the corporation. Therefore, leaders can help create a culture of positivity and productivity within the workplace by implementing strategies that encourage employee engagement and providing regular feedback and support.

2.6 Passive Workers Brainteasing Organised Labour

According to Loganathan, Sin and Ganesan (2022), labour unions are recognised for their significant contribution to fostering positive industrial relations in productive countries like Sweden and Denmark. However, there is a concern that their representation of passive workers may conflict with their efforts to promote productivity and boost the economy, given the differing philosophies and ideologies across various nations. This conflict of interest could potentially challenge the unions' position primarily representing passive workers. In another argument, organisations often face the challenge of balancing employee expectations and the need to allocate resources efficiently. One factor that can impact this balance is the bargaining power of employees, particularly those represented by unions. When employees have a strong bargaining position, they may resist internal reallocation efforts or push for higher compensation in exchange for their willingness to move within the organisation (Doucet, Requejo & Suárez-González, 2024). While this may benefit the employees in the short term, it can harm the organisation's internal labour market (ILM) in the long run. Efficient labour allocation and minimising unproductive work are critical components of an effective ILM. However, these goals can be hindered when employees demand greater compensation or resist reallocation efforts. Additionally, unions face a challenge balancing the need to protect their members' interests with the broader goal of ensuring organisational survival. It can be difficult for employers to justify paying higher salaries to employees who are not producing outputs that contribute to the organisation's success. As such, unions must carefully consider their negotiating positions and their impact on the organisation's ability to allocate resources effectively.

Notwithstanding, it is essential to acknowledge that unions and management should consider the potential influence of certain factors on passive behaviour in specific cases, as illustrated in the examples below. Therefore, each situation must be approached meticulously and evaluated based on its merits. It is crucial to understand that this issue has no universal solution.

Yasami *et al.* (2024) found that the perception of job insecurity can harm work engagement and may lead to psychological withdrawal. This is a significant challenge for unions that strive to safeguard employees' job security. Notably, passive employees who demonstrate counterproductive behaviour at work also add to the burden of organised labour in dealing with workplace issues. Therefore, unions need to find ways to engage passive employees and enhance their productivity to contribute to the organisation's overall success. This approach will benefit the organisation and protect employees who risk losing their jobs due to passive work behaviour. With this angle, unions can ensure that they are making a valuable contribution to the organisation and helping passive employees retain their jobs, playing a positive dual role in the workplace while contributing to the economy. Nonetheless, the issue of job insecurity should not be overlooked as part of the solution.

Correspondingly, Obalade and Akeke (2020) found that management views employee behaviours such as unproductivity or eccentricity in a negative light. This

negative perception can lead to punitive measures against passive employees, including disciplinary action or job termination (Obalade & Akeke, 2020). This issue can pose significant challenges for labour unions responsible for representing these employees, as they may lack the necessary resources to address and resolve these issues. As a result, unions may have to divert their resources from other matters to defend passive employees who could have avoided this unwarranted passive workplace behaviour.

However, labour unions and management must work together to ensure a peaceful and productive working environment. One of the key challenges they face in this regard is addressing passive workforce tendencies, which can lead to a lack of employee engagement and commitment. Unions and management must derive strategies that foster greater collaboration, communication, and trust between all parties involved to overcome this challenge. This practice can include everything from offering employees more training and development opportunities to creating more flexible work arrangements that allow for a better work-life balance. Ultimately, the success of any such initiative will depend on the willingness of all stakeholders to work together and find common ground, even in the face of differing opinions and priorities.

The analysis in this section highlights that unions strive to protect their current members and attract new ones by demonstrating their effectiveness. However, suppose they overlook the issue of passive workers in their operating sectors, and the associated companies within these industries collapse due to unproductivity. In that case, they will be left with no members to represent. This puzzle presents a significant and pressing challenge for organised labour, as passive workers pose a severe threat to their existence. Therefore, labour unions must develop effective strategies to engage these passive workers, change their attitude towards work, and ensure a win-win situation and sustainable solution for all interested parties. More significantly, it is imperative to give precedence to the requirements of passive employees despite the potential headaches for unions. Providing them with the requisite support and assistance is crucial, and addressing their behaviour respectfully and effectively is equally important. Furthermore, passive employees must acknowledge their need for help and join forces with HR, organised labour, and management to find a solution beneficial to all stakeholders involved.

2.7 Proposed Strategies to Manage Passive Worker Behaviour

Managerial sustainability refers to the practice of managing and minimising the negative effects of an organisation's activities (Atasever, 2023). According to this scholar, it involves efficiently managing resources, such as addressing issues related to employee disengagement to optimise organisational performance. As such, this study proposes strategies to manage passive worker behaviour. In this regard, Kazan and Kocamış (2023) suggest that organisations establish a robust control system to manage passive work behaviour effectively. The system in place must foster a competent organisational climate that acknowledges its responsibilities and authority boundaries (Kazan & Kocamış, 2023). It should encompass effective terms of reference and robust

HR policies and procedures to achieve this initiative. A successful control environment allows organisations to identify and address instances of passive work behaviour promptly and effectively. Organisations can create a work culture that enhances overall productivity and efficiency through an internal, tailored control system by prioritising accountability and responsibility. However, HR should spearhead this system and collaborate with management to ensure its success by gaining buy-in and approval from organised labour and all stakeholders. With this system, organisations can promptly detect and address poor performance accordingly while encouraging good performers who would not have to bear the burden of balancing passive workers' workloads.

Some scholars may argue that the issue of a passive workforce is solely a problem for the workers involved. However, a more viable and pragmatic approach would be to adopt a cooperation strategy, wherein all parties involved collaborate to find a solution that effectively addresses the concerns of each stakeholder (Cheng *et al.*, 2020; Imtiaz *et al.*, 2022). As such, all stakeholders, including passive workers, organised labour, HR, and management, must come together and actively participate in finding common ground and a resolution favourable to all parties involved in tackling the issue of a passive workforce. This process of collaboration and cooperation can help identify the root causes of the problem and develop strategies that can address the workers' concerns while also being beneficial for the organisation. Through a collaborative approach, it is possible to find mutually beneficial solutions for both the employees and the organisation. This practice can lead to a more engaged and productive workforce, positively impacting the organisational performance. Therefore, all stakeholders must work together towards finding an equitable, fair, and sustainable solution.

Another strategy for this issue involves achieving a sustainable agreement that benefits all parties. This approach aims to find a solution where no party gains or loses; instead, a mutually agreeable resolution is obtained by diverging the difference between the two positions, tabling concerns, or looking for a medium base (Igbinoba *et al.*, 2023). In this case, the parties involved include a passive workforce, HR, organised labour, and management. The rationale is that it becomes possible to create a more collaborative atmosphere that fosters open communication, transparency, and a willingness to work together towards a common goal by bringing together these key stakeholders. In this respect, when contentions arise, it is essential to seek out a sustainable agreement that addresses the underlying concerns of all parties involved rather than pursuing a solution that favours one particular group over another. Following this approach, it becomes feasible to create a more unbiased and constructive work climate that aids everyone implicated.

Meanwhile, Rehman *et al.* (2021) advised that the successful implementation of change in an organisation depends on shaping the resistive attitudes of its employees. The study emphasises the importance of addressing the attitudes of passive employees who may be hesitant or resistant to change because they are used to a traditional way of undertaking operations. As such, these employees may not actively oppose the transformations associated with productivity. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and

engage such employees by providing them with the necessary training and resources to help them understand the benefits of the change and overcome their resistance. This exercise can ultimately lead to a smoother and more successful change implementation process, enhancing organisational objectives.

Finally, other authors suggested that developing a motivational plan is crucial for organisational management (Saad & Abbas, 2018) led by HR. Regardless, it requires detailed consideration of various elements that can drive employees to perform at their best, both as individuals and as part of a team, pointing out that leaders significantly impact the effectiveness of their employees (Saad & Abbas, 2018). Hence, it is paramount to formulate motivational plans to stimulate and nurture them to be more productive and engaged in their work.

In the case of passive employees, leaders must design motivational plans that can inspire these employees to be more proactive and engaged in their work to address this challenge. These plans may include developing training programmes to enhance their skills, providing opportunities for growth and career advancement, or creating a positive work environment that fosters teamwork, inclusiveness, and creativity. Primarily, developing a motivational plan is a complex process that requires a thorough understanding of the needs and aspirations of employees. Leaders can improve the effectiveness of their employees and create a more productive and positive work environment by creating a plan that addresses these needs, subject to diverse organisational necessities and preferences.

After conducting a comprehensive analysis of this section, it is evident that organisations facing challenges with passive employees can prevail to handle this challenge. The study's examination outlines workable solutions available to address this problem. Nevertheless, organisations are responsible for taking the lead and improving upon the proposed strategies outlined in this study. This practice will enable them to guarantee that their workforce remains motivated, engaged, and productive instead of being passive and disengaged. Nevertheless, it is critical to note that this is not an event but a process requiring time to yield benefits. Therefore, stakeholders involved should not hasten the process but instead work diligently to achieve efficient and desirable results.

3. Research Methodology

For this study, an in-depth literature review was selected and employed to gather comprehensive data from various academic resources such as scholarly articles, academic journals, and other relevant literature. This methodology enabled the researchers to acquire a broad range of data on the subject matter, analyse and synthesise the findings, and draw meaningful conclusions based on the evidence presented. Using and selecting this approach, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic under investigation and to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

4. Findings

4.1 Passive Employees Significantly Contribute to Being Substituted by Technology

With the rapid advancement of technology in today's fast-paced world, the threat of automation replacing human employees has become a stark reality. On a negative note, passive employees who do not actively contribute to the company's growth and development are more susceptible to being replaced by technology. These workers do the bare minimum and do not show initiative or drive to contribute to the company's success. Thus, employees must showcase their relevance and existence by actively contributing to the company's growth and development to avoid being replaced by technology. In this regard, they can demonstrate their value to the company and build a strong case for why they are essential to the organisation.

4.2 An Inactive Workforce Is a Conundrum for Employers

Employers are confronted with the challenge of managing passive employees, which may harm the performance of highly motivated staff, reduce productivity, and ultimately lead to decreased revenue. Managing passive employees requires a strategic approach that addresses the underlying causes of passivity, such as lack of engagement, low morale, and poor motivation. Failure to take appropriate action to manage passive employees may result in increased turnover, unnecessary dismissals (where applicable), decreased morale, and a negative impact on the overall organisational culture.

4.3 Passive Workers Pose Challenges for Organised Labour

One of the biggest challenges for organised labour is dealing with passive workers who may not actively support their organisations. While unions play a critical role in supporting worker organisations and ensuring their economic contributions, they can be conflicted regarding protecting passive employees. This dilemma can limit the effectiveness of labour in the market. Therefore, organised labour must strike a balance between these competing interests to maximise efficiency.

4.4 Stagnant Workers Threaten the Economy

When employees fail to be productive and keep up with the latest developments in their field, their output and willingness to learn new skills tend to decline. This phenomenon of stagnation can have implications for businesses and the economy, leading to reduced competitiveness and growth. Therefore, it is critical for workers to continuously contemporise their knowledge and skills to remain relevant and productive in the current globalisation market.

4.5 Leadership Drives and Influences Workforce Behaviour

Effective leadership is a crucial factor that can significantly impact the behaviour and performance of a workforce. Leaders' communication, decision-making, and setting of expectations can gravely influence how employees behave, interact with one another, and

approach their work. Vigorous and competent leadership can inspire employees to work collaboratively, take ownership of their roles, and strive for excellence; meanwhile, poor leadership can lead to a lack of motivation, low morale, and reduced productivity. Therefore, organisations must invest in developing their leaders and cultivating a positive and empowering leadership culture that promotes a healthy and productive work environment.

5. Discussion

Xie *et al.* (2023) investigated the relationship between AI and skill demand in China. The study revealed an inverse proportion between AI and the workers in this country. Conversely, Veshne and Jamnani (2024) explored a relationship between AI and employee engagement. The study found a positive correlation between AI and the workforce. However, it is imperative to note that these studies failed to measure the relationship between passive employees and technology, highlighting a need for the present study. As such, the present study built on these studies and prior research to investigate passive employees and technology. The study's results suggest an inverse relationship between passive employees and technology. In this regard, technology can easily replace employees who do not actively engage in their work. Therefore, the current study argues that passive employees are a solution to the advancement of technology in the workplace.

Pupavac (2020) explored employee productivity levels in Croatia in the hospitality industry- specifically, hotels. This study discovered that many employees displayed poor productivity levels. Meanwhile, a report by De Smet, Reich, and Schaninger (2023) stated that McKinsey & Company's study revealed that disengaged employees yield negative financial consequences for organisations. These studies examined the relationship between organisations in different contexts. As such, the current study builds on their findings and previous research, bridging a gap in literature overlooked by these investigations. Similarly, the results of this study reveal a negative relationship between passive employees and management.

Obalade and Akeke (2020) conducted a study to investigate the connection between job characteristics and deviant behaviour among employees in Nigeria's private and public universities. The study found a negative correlation between management and employees. Similarly, Yasami *et al.* (2024) explored the relationship between job insecurity, psychological withdrawal behaviour, and work engagement. The study revealed a negative correlation between job insecurity and work engagement. These studies highlight the relationships in the work environment under different contexts and reveal the challenges employees could create for labour unions. However, they failed to consider the relationship between management and organised labour, a gap that the current study identified. The current study builds on these investigations and prior research by demonstrating that passive employees pose challenges for organised labour, leaving them conflicted in their roles, as previously mentioned.

Chowdhury, Dhar, and Gazi (2023) analysed the impact of remittance on economic progress in low-income Asian Frontier nations. The study reveals that inactive work behaviour can impede economic growth. This result corresponds to the critique of Quinton (2023), who explored unproductive labour and the smile curve. The study found that unproductive labour negatively impacts the economy. Interestingly, the results of the present study confirm the findings of prior research, highlighting from a different perspective that unengaged employees threaten overall economic development.

Kamil (2024) conducted a study on the impact of leadership virtuousness on reducing counterproductive work behaviours. The research involved gathering opinions from a sample of the Salah Al-Din General Directorate of Education employees. The study concluded that positive leadership characteristics can effectively reduce unproductive work behaviours. In a similar school of thought in this realm, Wang, Wang, and Wang (2024) explored the notion of reducing employees' time theft through a leader's developmental feedback while also considering the effects of perceived insider status and work passion. Their findings supported the idea that constructive feedback from leaders can create a positive work environment and influence worker behaviour beneficially. These studies build on one another, with the current research reinforcing the idea that leadership plays a significant role in shaping worker behaviour.

Nevertheless, the current study sheds light on how passive employees interact with technology, employers, organised labour, and the economy. Table 1 below displays a strategic framework developed by researchers to guide management in handling passive employees. The framework is designed to help organisations identify the root causes of employee passivity and provide actionable solutions that can be implemented to address the issue.

Table 1: Strategic framework for dealing with a passive workforce

Step 1:	Train management on dealing with passive employees and conduct awareness campaigns to sensitise employees about the consequences of passive behaviour at work.
Step 2:	Promote and enhance performance management.
Step 3:	Team with organised labour and HR to address undesirable behaviour of passive employees.
Step 4:	Comprehensively probe passive employee behaviour to diagnose the right symptoms and apply appropriate remedies.
Step 5:	Rationalise your conclusions and engage all relevant parties with your envisaged action.
Step 6:	Take appropriate action to deal with passive workers.
Step 7:	Continuously manage, monitor, and evaluate passive employee behaviour for the benefit of all stakeholders in the employment relationship.

The workplace can be a challenging environment to navigate, especially when dealing with passive employees. As such, organisations, through robust HR leadership, guidance, and support, must assist management in effectively addressing such behaviour. For this reason, this study developed a seven-step strategic framework to guide organisations to overcome this contemporary disorder in the workplace. The first step involves providing training to management on how to handle passive employees while conducting awareness campaigns to educate employees about the consequences of

passive behaviour at work. This measure will help to create a culture of accountability and encourage employees to take responsibility for their actions.

The second step is to promote and enhance performance management by setting clear expectations, providing constructive feedback, and recognising good performance. This action will create a sense of purpose and encourage employees to take ownership of their work. In the third step, collaboration with organised labour and HR is necessary to address passive employee behaviour. This initiative will help to create a consistent approach to dealing with passive behaviour and ensure that all employees are treated reasonably and equitably. The fourth step is to comprehensively investigate passive employee behaviour to identify the correct symptoms and apply appropriate remedies. This effort will help pinpoint the root cause of the behaviour and develop a plan to address it effectively.

After the findings' rationalisation process is completed, the fifth and crucial step is to engage all relevant parties to initiate the planned action. It is imperative to involve all pertinent stakeholders to ensure a comprehensive and effectual approach. In step six of dealing with passive employees, it is important to take suitable action that is not biased. It is essential to reward good performance and penalise poor performance while considering the merits of each case. Nevertheless, it is crucial to ensure that the actions taken are strictly related to the business, fair, unfavourable, and not personal. Finally, the seventh step is to continuously manage, monitor, and evaluate passive employee behaviour to benefit all stakeholders in the employment relationship. This endeavour will help to ensure that the approach remains effective and that the workplace continues to be a positive and productive environment.

6. Conclusion

This study examines the potential challenges posed by passive employees in the rapidly evolving technology landscape. It concludes that these employees become a viable substitute for technology and create a dilemma for employers and labour unions in ensuring healthy operations. The study further concludes that passive employees who fail to contribute to their organisation's growth threaten the economy, as their lack of productivity and initiative can lead to a stagnation of growth. This outcome can have significant implications for the economic well-being of the organisation and the nation.

Finally, the research study concludes that the literature review methodology adopted was suitable and effective in achieving its intended objective. It helped identify the principal and contemporary challenges associated with passive employees and provided cognition of existing research and literature in the field. Typically, the study offers practical strategies to cultivate an engaged and proactive workforce in today's technology-driven world.

6.1 Recommendations

The recommendations provided are highly practical and actionable. Depending on the organisational objectives, they can be categorised into short-term and long-term objectives. Organisations can incorporate long-term goals into their strategic plans, while short-term goals can be included in operational plans.

A. It is recommended that employees adopt a proactive approach to their work to remain competitive in today's job market

This measure entails taking the lead in acquiring new skills and expanding their knowledge base regularly. Additionally, exhibiting a positive can-do attitude and a willingness to go above and beyond their job requirements can further demonstrate an employee's value to their organisation and showcase their worth to employers.

B. Organisations must adopt a comprehensive approach regarding dealing with non-performing employees

This approach should involve supporting and assisting employees willing to improve and work collaboratively. At the same time, the organisation should recognise and reward good performers for their contribution toward achieving organisational goals. However, it is equally important to weed out non-performing employees who show no interest in improving their work performance despite management's efforts to assist them. Effectively, organisations can ensure a high-performance culture that aligns with the company's objectives and values by adopting a zero-tolerance philosophy towards non-performance.

C. Organised labour must ensure that the interests of both workers and employers are considered to strike a balance that maximises efficiency

This measure means that any decisions made by labour unions regarding passive employees should not exclusively benefit the workers but also consider the needs and goals of the companies they work for. At the same time, these decisions should not compromise the rights and well-being of the workers. Finding this balance can be challenging, but it is crucial for creating a sustainable and productive work environment that benefits both parties involved.

D. It is recommended to tackle the problem of stagnation among workers to maintain a healthy and growing economy

Addressing stagnation can involve promoting a thriving and dynamic work culture that encourages professional development, innovation, and continuous learning. Employers can equip their workforce with the skills and knowledge necessary to adapt to new challenges and stay competitive in their respective industries by investing in employee training and development programmes. At the same time, employees can take ownership of being productive and their career growth by seeking opportunities to learn new skills, network with peers, and take on new challenges. Management and employees can benefit

from a more engaged, motivated, and productive workforce by working together to promote a culture of growth and development, contributing to the economy.

E. It is recommended for organisations to make a strategic investment in developing their leaders

This practice involves identifying and nurturing individuals with strong leadership potential and providing the necessary training, guidance, and resources to build their skills and capabilities. However, it is not just about cultivating individual leaders. Organisations must also create a positive and empowering leadership culture permeating the entire organisation. This strategy involves setting clear expectations and values regarding effective leadership and providing the necessary support and resources to enable leaders at all levels to embody these qualities. When leaders are empowered and equipped to lead effectively, they can create a healthy and productive work environment that fosters collaboration, creativity, and innovation. This practice can result in increased employee engagement, improved morale, and improved business results. Therefore, investing in leadership development and cultivating a positive leadership culture is a strategic imperative for organisations striving to thrive and sustain themselves.

6.2 Practical Implications of the Study

The findings of this study offer organisations opportunities to improve their workforce engagement and productivity. By identifying the root causes of a passive workforce, organisations can proactively measure their efforts to create a more dynamic and engaged workforce. This tactic may yield benefits, including better employee engagement, increased productivity, and a more positive and inclusive workplace culture. The practical implications of this study significantly impact organisations operating in today's rapidly changing business environment.

They can implement strategies that encourage employee engagement and foster a more positive workplace, addressing the factors that lead to a passive workforce. This measure can translate into increased productivity, problem-solving abilities, and a more collaborative work environment. Accordingly, the practical implications of this study are numerous and highly valuable for businesses striving to create a more dynamic and engaged workforce. Organisations can position themselves for long-term success in today's competitive business landscape by taking proactive steps to address the underlying factors contributing to a passive workforce.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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