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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Passionate and psychologically-undetached: A moderated-mediated investigation of psychological distress among engaged employees

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Abstract

Guided by the effort-recovery model and the dualistic model of passion, we tested a conditional process model that examined the relationships between work engagement, workplace passion, psychological detachment, and psychological distress among Japanese professionals. We conducted an online panel survey across two time points, six weeks apart ($N = 202$ matched responses) where we measured all the variables at both instances. Findings show that engaged employees become susceptible to psychological distress due to decreased levels of psychological detachment. The moderating role of work passion was partially supported: being obsessively passionate towards work exacerbates this relationship further while contrary to expectations, the moderating role of harmonious passion was not significant. Findings suggest the possibility that engaged employees are less likely to switch off, which predisposes them to ill-being at work, and this becomes apparent among employees with less volitional opportunities in the workplace.

KEYWORDS

psychological detachment, psychological distress, work engagement, work passion

1 | INTRODUCTION

Engaged employees, particularly those meaningfully connected to their strategic direction of the organization, can often act as the fuel of successful organizational performance and thus, are highly attractive to organizations across countries, industries, and teams (Gallup, 2020). Such quality of participation seems to take a turn for the worst as work practices that impact employee well-being continue to persist. For instance, pressing issues of excessive work hours and overtime possibly leading to *karoshi*, or 'death by over-work', persists in the Japanese work context (Ono, 2018). Indeed,

nurturing engaged employees' well-being remains important to drive organizational performance.

Schaufeli et al. (2002) defined work engagement as 'a positive, fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication and absorption' (p. 74). Engaged employees experience more positive emotions and increased self-efficacy enabling them to perceive work demands in constructive ways, and subsequently optimizing performance (Christian et al., 2011). Recent investigations, however, show that highly engaged workers may be susceptible to psychological ill-being (Junker et al., 2021; Moeller et al., 2018; Salmela-Aro et al., 2019). Emerging literature further

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signals the potential risks of over-engagement that predisposes employees to psychological distress (Imamura et al., 2016; Moeller et al., 2018), an emotional disturbance in response to stressors that curtails day-to-day functioning (Drapeau et al., 2012).

These studies predominantly describe the relationship between work engagement and employee ill-being but the mechanisms that explain why such a relationship occurs remains largely unexplored. For instance, earlier accounts showed that engaged employees experience less psychological distress (Shimazu et al., 2012), but subsequent findings revealed that high levels of engagement leaves employees susceptible to it (Shimazu et al., 2018). These suggest an upper limit until work engagement is beneficial and may eventually become a detriment due to increased levels of psychological activation and investment of energy (Shimazu et al., 2018). Indeed, one's inability to take opportunities to recover from energy activation can impede one's well-being (Bennet et al., 2018). Drawing from the effort-recovery model (ERM; Meijman & Mulder, 1998), we highlight how foregoing to psychologically detach, or cognitively disengaging from work and its related concerns (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007) explains why engaged employees experience psychological distress.

Apart from specific traits and affective states (Langelaan et al., 2006), individual characteristics that predispose engaged employees to regulate and take opportunities to recover remain sparse. We argue that one's passion for work serves as a moderating mechanism that determines when engaged employees attempt to psychologically detach from work. Engaged employees regard their work as comprising of tasks and activities to which they are cognitively absorbed in, and complete with zeal and vigour (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). Passionate employees, on the other hand, recognize their work as part of their identity and have a strong inclination, high valuation, and resource investment towards it (Vallerand et al., 2003). The dualistic model of passion (DMP; Vallerand et al., 2003) typifies between *harmonious passion* (HP), a self-determined and autonomous drive for work, and *obsessive passion* (OP), a less volitional and ego-contingent motive towards work. HP and OP can respectively mitigate and exacerbate the impact of work engagement on psychological detachment and its relationship to employee psychological distress.

Our study makes two important contributions. First, we contribute to the work engagement literature by providing a broader understanding for its potential to pose as a risk to employee well-being. By examining psychological distress as an outcome, we contribute to the growing body of literature that operationalizes the potential dark side of work engagement (Sonnentag, 2011). Specifically, we draw from ERM (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) to examine the counterintuitive relationship of work engagement with psychological distress via decreased psychological detachment. ERM situates energy as a key resource that enables engagement to work-related processes by utilizing resources for optimum employee performance (Bennet et al., 2018). Indeed, work engagement also reflects an investment of personal resources where individuals mobilize physical and psychological energies to attend job tasks (Christian et al., 2011), and as such, do so at the risk of resource depletion. Thus, in using ERM, we provide an alternative lens in explaining how work

engagement, through resource energy activation, potentially impairs the capacity to psychologically detach, leading to psychological distress.

Second, we complement ERM with DMP (Vallerand et al., 2003) in explaining when engaged employees can regulate and direct their energies, thus enabling or deterring them from experiencing psychological detachment from work. ERM explains how employees spend and recover their energy resources at work, but it does not account for individual characteristics that may influence regulatory work behaviours. DMP posits that individuals with HP and OP have internalized their work in their identities, at varying degrees, making them more (or less) volitional and regulated towards their work, thus, determining whether they will continuously participate or withdraw from their work tasks. By incorporating DMP with ERM, we can identify the two motivational pathways that determine engaged employees' experience of psychological detachment and psychological distress. Specifically, we cast a spotlight on work passion as a motivational boundary condition that demonstrates regulatory capabilities (or lack thereof) that determines when work engagement may be a detriment to employee well-being. Doing so, we respond to Christian et al.'s (2011) recommendation of further exploring how other motivational theories shape one's experience of work engagement. We also build on the recommendation of Sonnentag (2011) to examine the conditions that perpetuate the negative outcomes of work engagement.

Guided by the effort-recovery model (ERM; Meijman & Mulder, 1998) and dualistic model of passion (DMP; Vallerand et al., 2003), we explore how work engagement may be detrimental to one's well-being through mobilizing excessive energy towards work and overlook the utility of recovery. By employing a time-lagged, online panel survey among Japanese professionals, we investigate the indirect effect of work engagement on psychological distress via psychological detachment. We also examine HP and OP for work as boundary conditions that prompt engaged employees to utilize or under-utilize psychological detachment, consequently leading to psychological distress.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES

2.1 | Indirect effects of work engagement on psychological distress via psychological detachment

Schaufeli et al. (2002) describe work engagement as a state where employees are vigorous, dedicated and absorbed in their jobs, which optimizes work functioning. *Vigour* reflects an energetic willingness to be effortful at work, and to be persistent, and resilient during times of adversity. *Dedication* reflects high involvement and enthusiasm at work, while *absorption* is characterized by an individual's full concentration and engrossment at work. Engaged employees cope with the challenges and potential stressors of the job due to their ability to appraise these obstacles in a more positive light (Salanova et al., 2010). Recent investigations, however, show that highly engaged employees

may be susceptible to negative well-being outcomes, such as psychological distress (Oshio et al., 2018; Shimazu et al., 2016).

We propose that highly engaged employees are vulnerable to psychological distress due to the decreased likelihood to disengage themselves from their work, consequently draining their energy. ERM (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) posits that individuals mobilize resources, such as energy, which manifests as individuals' energetic activations (Quinn et al., 2012). Energetic activations depict the extent to which individuals feel energized and are typically displayed through feelings of vitality or vigour, as well as forms of positive affect, such as enthusiasm and excitement (Bennet et al., 2018; Quinn et al., 2012). When individuals experience energetic activation—and continue to do so—they invest more effort in engagement by increasing its level, duration, or intensity making recovery through psychological detachment less likely to occur.

Psychological detachment, or the process of mentally disengaging oneself from work and other job-related concerns, is an important recovery experience that aids one's functional systems to return to pre-stressor state (Meijman & Mulder, 1998; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007). We argue that work engagement consumes energetic resources because being engaged requires continued display of effort investment and personal energy (Quinn et al., 2012). The sustained immersion reinforces reduced temporal distance from the work context, making engaged employees less likely to psychologically detach and consequently depleting their energy (Bakker & de Vries, 2021). Indeed, highly engaged employees are naturally pulled towards their work, are heavily involved by working excessively hard and extremely absorbed that detaching oneself from work becomes difficult (De Carlo et al., 2014). Engaged employees are also more likely to undertake continuous and uninterrupted pursuit of goals and initiate taking charge of managing demands and resources in their jobs (Bakker & Oerlemans, 2019). Therefore, adopting the ERM lens, we propose that:

Hypothesis 1 Work engagement is negatively related to psychological detachment.

ERM prescribes that prolonged energy expenditure without recovery depletes resources and leads to ill-being outcomes, such as psychological distress (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Psychological distress comprises of somatic symptoms and affective disturbance, such as feelings of unhappiness, anxiety, and depression that impairs one's daily social functioning (Drapeau et al., 2012). For instance, employees typically experience psychological distress because of excessively clocking in frequent and lengthy overtime hours (Ishida et al., 2020). ERM further posits that continuous exertion of effort to manage workload disturbs an individual's psychobiological equilibrium and the absence of recovery leads to strain, fatigue, and sub-par work performance (Meijman & Mulder, 1998).

Inability to recover—to psychologically detach, specifically—becomes detrimental among those heavily invested in their work because they exert more time and energy for their respective tasks and in dealing with work-related stressors (Sonnentag, 2018).

For instance, employees that are required to accomplish various work tasks and simultaneously undertake various professional responsibilities find themselves completely immersed in their work and further reduces the chances for recovery (Sawhney & Michel, 2022). Lack of opportunities to psychologically detach from work prevents employees from experiencing lower levels of work fatigue, improved sleep quality and improved performance outcomes (Halbesleben et al., 2013). Ishida et al. (2020) also suggest that apart from excessive immersion at work due to overtime work, being in working environments with implicit expectations and demands exposes employees to emotional triggers, such as shame and fear that contributes to psychological distress.

Psychological detachment from work, therefore, is advantageous because it reduces the demand placed upon one's functional systems that are usually consumed during work (Bennet et al., 2018). However, the inability to appropriately remove oneself physically and mentally from work becomes a detriment in achieving psychological well-being at work. Therefore, we propose:

Hypothesis 2 Psychological detachment is negatively related to psychological distress.

Building on the previous hypotheses, we argue that psychological detachment mediates the relationship between work engagement and psychological distress. ERM posits that extended periods of energy activation without recovery depletes resources (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). This elicits negative physical or psychological symptoms, such as agitation or fatigue, when an individual's energy reserves deviate from its optimal state (Georgivski & Hobfoll, 2008; Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Following this line of reasoning, employees' inherent desire to engage in their work contributes to their inability to take advantage of opportunities to unwind and 'switch off' from work. This sustained energy investment consequently leads to psychological distress. Therefore, we propose that:

Hypothesis 3 Psychological detachment mediates the relationship between work engagement and psychological distress, such that, highly engaged individuals are less likely to detach from their work, which in turn, predisposes them to psychological distress.

2.2 | The moderating role of harmonious and obsessive passion

Passionate employees have a profound liking towards their work, identify with it, and consider it valuable, and worthy of investing time and effort (Vallerand et al., 2003). Passion for work and work engagement are both motivational in nature. For instance, passionate and engaged employees typically are highly engrossed and persistent at work such that time passes by quickly (Schaufeli et al., 2002; Vallerand et al., 2003). Engaged employees have the tendency to spend extended time at work and apply substantial quality in their work (Sawhney & Michel, 2022), much like passionate employees

who spend significant amount of time and effort in their jobs (Vallerand et al., 2019). However, both constructs are also distinct conceptually, theoretically, and empirically. Birkeland and Buch (2015) argue that work engagement indicates an intensity of one's experience during work, while passion for work indicates one's relationship with work. Employees may experience fluctuating levels of engagement throughout a workday, while work passion—as built in one's identity—is relatively stable and less likely to fluctuate daily. Empirical differences between work engagement, and harmonious and obsessive passion have also been demonstrated in recent literature (Lajom et al., 2018).

Theoretically, work engagement draws from the broadening and building hypothesis that highlights positive emotional experiences and organized thoughts and actions from consuming work tasks in the job environment (Leiter & Bakker, 2010). Engaged employees physically and psychologically focus on the tasks at hand and the work that needs to be done, but their work does not necessarily define them. In contrast, passion for work is anchored from the prescriptions of self-determination that highlights intra-individual processes, such as internalizing one's work as part of one's identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Apart from liking and valuing work, passionate employees identify with their work using labels associated with the jobs such as 'teacher' or 'surgeon'.

ERM emphasizes the importance of reducing or eliminating the source of energy drain due to continuous consumption of energy resources (Meijman & Mulder, 1998). Managing one's resources is a critical personal initiative—whether by choosing to further expend energy in attending to work-related tasks or ceasing to do so—which highlights the individual's capacity to control their engagement or disengagement in work tasks (Zijlstra et al., 2014). Being engaged and passionate towards work is likely to lead to deficits in energy due to inability to switch off, consequently leading to dire consequences to well-being (Sonnentag, 2011; Vallerand et al., 2019). Guided by the prescriptions of DMP, however, we argue that depending on the type of passion that engaged employees have, threats towards employee well-being may be mitigated or exacerbated.

The Dualistic Model of Passion (DMP; Vallerand et al., 2003) classify individuals into being *harmoniously* or *obsessively* passionate based on how the passionate activity has been internalized—whether autonomous or controlled—into their identities. Harmonious passion (HP) represents an autonomous internalization towards one's work that reflects employees' volitional drive to learn, improve, and enjoy in their jobs (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2019). As a self-determined drive, employees with HP are not reinforced by external contingencies, such as recognition and praise that could dictate the extent to which they engage at work. HP also affords employees a flexible approach in participating and disengaging from work which makes managing one's resources more efficient.

Prior studies on work passion describes individuals with HP as those with high levels of recovery, lower levels of work/non-work conflict and interference and an increased levels of psychological well-being and lower levels of burnout (Forest et al., 2011; Lavigne

et al., 2014; Vallerand et al., 2019). With the volitional drive from HP, engaged employees can regulate the extent of their engagement and psychologically switch off from work-related tasks as they do not rely on the constant experience of working to fulfil any self-serving contingencies. We therefore hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4a Passion for work will moderate the relationship between work engagement and psychological detachment, such that, the negative relationship will be weaker for employees who are harmoniously passionate towards work.

DMP also proposes that employees with obsessive passion (OP) are characterized by a controlled internalization towards one's work (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2019) where the prospect of working fulfils ego-invested contingencies, such as recognition or sense of self-worth, which drives the continuous engagement with work. Consequently, this reflects a rigid persistence such that the obsessively passionate employee cannot help but engage in the passionate activity and are less in-tune in attending to non-work-related tasks. Indeed, obsessively passionate individuals experience more conflict between the passionate activity and other life activities in both leisure and work contexts (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2019). They are also more prone to emotional exhaustion and burnout, as well as experience less optimum mental health (Forest et al., 2011; Lavigne et al., 2014).

When employees are highly engaged and obsessively passionate with work, they remain cognitively and vigorously preoccupied with completing their job tasks because this experience also addressed their self-worth contingencies. Extending their engagement in their jobs gives them the opportunity to display their enthusiasm and capabilities and be reciprocated with accolades or approval from others. As a result, this impedes regulatory attempts to let go of doing work-related activities, which eventually compromises their psychological well-being. We therefore propose:

Hypothesis 4b Passion for work will moderate the relationship between work engagement and psychological detachment, such that the negative relationship will be stronger for employees who are obsessively passionate towards work.

Grounded from ERM and DMP, we argue that engaged employees are inherently drawn towards their work by virtue of energetic activation, which facilitates in their persistent grip towards participating in work-related activities. This may contribute to diminished opportunities to psychologically detach, which impedes energy recovery, and consequently leading to psychological distress. We also argue that such relationship is conditional on the capacity to regulate and manage one's resources characterized by the type of work passion they possess. Specifically, engaged and harmoniously passionate employees are more likely to psychologically detach, as opposed to engaged and obsessively passionate employees, which leads to varied experience of psychological distress. We therefore propose:

Hypothesis 5 The indirect effect of psychological detachment on the relationship between work engagement and psychological distress is conditional on work passion.

3 | METHOD

3.1 | Participants and procedures

We commissioned a research company, *Qualtrics*, to recruit our participants using an online panel. Online panel surveys provide survey data for the purposes of academic research as they deliver psychometrically sound data that encompass the general work force and assures the anonymity of participants (Walter et al., 2019). Data were collected at two time-points over a six-week interval. Participants responded to questions relating to demographic variables, work engagement, and work passion at Time 1, and psychological detachment and psychological distress at Time 2. We had an initial sample of 525 and 235 responses for Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. After accounting for invalid responses ahead of matching, we had 521 and 231 valid responses for Time 1 and Time 2, respectively. Our final sample comprised of 202 matched responses. Respondents were predominantly male (61.3% compared to females = 38.7%), with an average age of 47.4 years and have been in their respective professions for an average of 14.8 years. Participants worked in local Japanese firms (\bar{x} tenure = 12.6 years; SD = 11.5) in various fields, such as, general management (21.78%), accounting and finance (4.46%), manufacturing and production (17.82%), customer service (10.4%), education (10.4%), human resources (2.48%), marketing (1.49%), legal services (0.99%), sales (4.95%), medical and health services (3.96%), civil service (1.98%), and others (19.31%), such as agriculture, transportation, design, and logistics.

3.2 | Measures

Unless otherwise specified, participants rated all measurement items on the extent to which each item applied to them on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*); survey questions were written in Japanese. We employed strategies prescribed by Brislin (1970) to establish validity and item equivalence: (1) items were translated from English to Japanese and back-translated to English, and (2) two academics, who are proficient in Japanese and English, evaluated original and translated versions of the survey. Corrections and refinements were implemented upon the experts' recommendations.

3.2.1 | Work engagement

Work engagement ($\alpha = 0.92$) was measured using nine items from the Utrecht Work Engagement Short-Form Scale (UWES-9) (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Example items include 'When I get up in the morning, I feel like going to work' (vigour), 'I find the work that I do full of

meaning and purpose' (dedication) and 'When I am working, I forget everything else around me' (absorption).

3.2.2 | Work passion

Work passion was measured using the 12-item Passion Scale (Vallelrand et al., 2003) with *harmonious* and *obsessive* passion measured by six items each. An example of *harmonious* passion ($\alpha = 0.84$) is 'My work allows me to live a variety of experiences.' Two items were removed due to low factor loading ($\alpha = 0.83$). An example of *obsessive* passion is 'I have difficulty imagining my life without my work'.

3.2.3 | Psychological detachment

Psychological detachment was measured using the 4-item subscale derived from the Recovery Experiences Questionnaire (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2007). One item was removed due to poor loading. An example item is, 'During non-work/leisure time, I forget about work' ($\alpha = 0.83$).

3.2.4 | Psychological distress

Psychological distress was measured using Kessler et al.'s (2002) 10-item Psychological Distress Scale, using a frequency response anchor (*Never to Always*). This scale has been used in the literature to measure psychological stress in the context of work and stress (e.g., Oshio et al., 2018). An example item is, 'How often did you feel that everything was an effort?' ($\alpha = 0.93$).

3.2.5 | Control variables

We controlled for age, gender, and tenure as these variables are found to be related to psychological well-being (Drapeau et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2007). For instance, women are more likely experience psychological distress than men, which can be attributable to gender-related traits and social roles (e.g., as a parent or carer). The extent to which psychological distress is prevalent also decreases across the lifespan because of the potentially adaptive responses to risk factors over time. We also controlled for the type of profession (e.g., accounting, marketing) as they impact psychological stress at work (e.g., Fushimi et al., 2012). For example, women, particularly in service-oriented jobs, and men in professional or technical jobs, experience higher prevalence of psychological distress.

3.3 | Common method variance (CMV) and discriminant analysis

Procedural (Chang et al., 2010) and statistical remedies were implemented to minimize potential common method variance (CMV; Podsakoff et al., 2003). These remedies included random

ordering of variables in the survey, having two data collection time points with 6-week interval in-between, and incorporating a marker variable (social desirability) into the model to check for CMV. With regards to statistical remedy, we conducted a bias specific test (see Gaskin & Lim, 2017) by incorporating a common latent factor (CLF) into the measurement model. The result shows that the model with CLF had less fit to the data. In summary, together with the use of temporal separation of the survey, the CLF test provided confidence that CMV was not a potential issue in this study.

4 | RESULTS

4.1 | Preliminary analyses

Following Anderson and Gerbing (1992), we conducted a two-step model by undertaking a confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model. The result showed that the model had a good fit with the data (CMIN: 702.243, DF: 407, CMIN/DF: 1.725, CFI: 0.936, TLI: 0.927, RMSEA: 0.060), as indicated by the minimum cut-off for

goodness of fit indices (Hu & Bentler, 1999). We then conducted a Chi-sq test on several alternate models to determine the appropriateness of our hypothesized five factor model. Table 1 shows that the 5-factor model had the best fit.

We also conducted a test for multicollinearity with Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) using IBM SPSS v27. All variables were within the acceptable range of less than 3.33 except for work engagement (5.383) and HP (5.602), but both of which still fall within reasonable range as ascribed by Hair et al. (1995). We also conducted a Chi-sq test for both types of passion and work engagement to ascertain if these were acceptable to be treated as distinct constructs. Analysis showed the model with three factor model (OP, HP, and engagement; CMIN: 235.137, df: 124, CFI: 0.959, TLI: 0.949, RMSEA: 0.067) had better fit than the alternate two factor model (OP and HP + work engagement; CMIN: 276.781, df: 125, CFI: 0.944, TLI: 0.931, RMSEA: 0.078). Descriptive statistics and variable intercorrelations are presented in Table 2. All measures showed sufficient internal consistency, and all zero-order correlations were in the hypothesized directions. We also note that we arrived at similar findings with and without control variables, suggesting that the current findings stand despite the inclusion of controls.

TABLE 1 Confirmatory factor analysis for alternative model testing.

Model	Factors	CMIN	df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Baseline model	Five factors: WE, PD, HP, OP, PS	702.243	407	0.936	0.927	0.060	0.087
Model 1	Four factors: OP, HP, WE, combining PD and PS	874.023	411	0.900	0.887	0.075	0.100
Model 2	Four factors: OP, HP combining WE, PD, PS	760.156	410	0.925	0.914	0.065	0.091
Model 3	Four factors: HP, OP combining WE, PD, PS	860.714	411	0.903	0.809	0.074	0.098
Model 4	Three factors: OP, HP, and combining WE, PD and PS	1151.457	414	0.841	0.821	0.094	0.117
Model 5	Two factors: HP, and combining OP, WE, PD and PS	1532.348	415	0.759	0.730	0.116	0.207
Model 6	One factor: All variables combined	1923.562	416	0.675	0.637	0.134	0.247

Abbreviations: HP, Harmonious Passion; OP, Obsessive Passion; PD, Psychological Detachment; PS, Psychological Distress; WE, Work Engagement.

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics, zero-order correlations, and reliability coefficients.

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. T1 gender	1.36	0.48	1.00									
2. T1 age	48.99	12.84	-0.13	1.00								
3. T1 tenure in profession	17.14	12.82	-0.26***	0.53***	1.00							
4. T1 tenure in organization	16.33	12.79	-0.18**	0.38***	0.60***	1.00						
5. T1 profession	6.10	2.62	-0.11	0.18***	0.21***	0.01	1.00					
6. T1 work engagement	3.93	1.28	-0.13	0.32***	0.21**	0.21**	0.23***	1.00				
7. T2 psychological detachment	2.37	0.81	0.03	0.12	0.03	-0.00	-0.11	0.12	1.00			
8. T2 psychological distress	1.20	0.60	0.02	-0.33***	-0.17*	-0.15*	-0.05	-0.25***	-0.40***	1.00		
9. T1 obsessive passion	2.42	0.96	-0.09	0.26***	0.17*	0.15*	0.13	0.56***	-0.15*	0.05	1.00	
10. T1 harmonious passion	3.96	0.87	-0.13	0.23**	0.13*	0.19**	0.13	0.87***	0.34***	-0.20**	0.47***	1.00

N = 202; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.2 | Hypotheses testing

To test the hypothesized mediation model (see Figure 1), we conducted the analysis using model 4 of Hayes' (2016) Process Macro in IBM AMOS v28 (mediation analysis with 5000 bootstrap resamples). The structural model had good fit to the data (CMIN: 5.842, df: 5, CFI: 0.998, TLI: 0.995, RMSEA: 0.029, SRMR: 0.032). The analysis showed there was a negative association between work engagement and psychological detachment ($B = -0.33$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. There was also a negative association between psychological detachment and psychological distress ($B = -0.27$, $p < 0.001$), supporting Hypothesis 2. As expected, we also observed the hypothesized effect of work engagement on psychological distress ($B = -0.09$, $p < 0.01$) through psychological detachment. There was support for a partial mediation model (*indirect effect* = -0.09 , $SE = 0.03$, 95% CIs [-0.15 , -0.03]). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported.

To test the moderated-mediation model (see Table 3), we used Hayes (2016) Process Macro model 9. HP and OP are introduced as moderators of the relationship between work engagement and psychological detachment, and subsequently, psychological distress. Contrary to our assumptions, the interaction between work engagement and HP did not significantly relate with psychological

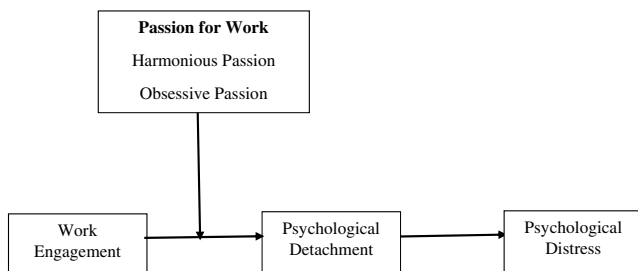


FIGURE 1 The proposed theoretical model.

TABLE 3 Results of moderated-mediation analyses: Obsessive passion as moderator.

Direct effect of work engagement on psychological stress					
Effect	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
-2.554	0.0611	-4.1778	0.0000	-0.3759	-0.1348
Indirect effect of work engagement on psychological distress via psychological detachment					
Obsessive passion	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LL CI	Boot UL CI	
	-0.9807	0.1342	0.033	0.0754	0.2035
0	0.1099	0.03	0.0551	0.1722	
	0.9807	0.0856	0.0319	0.0237	0.1504
Index of moderated-mediation (obsessive passion)					
Index	Boot SE	Boot LL CI	Boot UL CI		
	-0.0248	0.0126	-0.0517	-0.0031	

detachment ($B = -0.06$, n.s.), thus Hypothesis 4a was not supported. The interaction term between work engagement and OP was significantly associated with psychological detachment ($B = 0.11$, $p < 0.05$), supporting Hypothesis 4b.

On further investigation of the moderated-mediation model, we noted that only one of the moderated-mediation effects was not statistically significant and that was for obsessive passion (+1 SD above mean) in moderating the indirect effect of psychological detachment on work engagement to psychological distress (*indirect effect*: 0.0462, $SE = 0.0318$, 95% CIs [-0.0217 , 0.108]). Figure 2 shows a simple slope moderation graph used to illustrate interaction effects for obsessive passion. The simple plot shows that, irrespective of their level of work engagement, individuals who have a high level of obsessive passion will have lower level of psychological detachment compared to those with lower level of obsessive passion.

Finally, results of the conditional indirect effects (Hypothesis 5) showed the non-significant result for HP as the 95% confidence interval went through zero (*indirect effect* = 0.02, $SE = 0.02$, 95% CIs [-0.01 , 0.05]). On the other hand, OP significantly moderates the relationship between work engagement and psychological detachment as the 95% confidence interval did not go through zero (*indirect effect* = -0.03 , $SE = 0.02$, 95% CIs [-0.067 , -0.004]). Therefore, the conditional indirect effect of work engagement on psychological distress through psychological detachment and OP was significant, partially supporting Hypothesis 5.

5 | DISCUSSION

While engaged employees are found to experience various favourable outcomes, recent studies are gradually alluding to its potential drawbacks. Guided by the ERM (Meijman & Mulder, 1998) and DMP (Vallerand et al., 2003) frameworks, we investigated how work engagement relates to psychological distress among Japanese employees through mediating and moderating mechanisms, such as psychological detachment and work passion, respectively. Our findings predominantly support our hypotheses: highly engaged employees are less likely to psychologically detach themselves from work, consequently leading to experiences of psychological distress; and this relationship is more evident among obsessively passionate employees.

Our study contributes to work engagement literature by increasing our understanding of the potential 'dark side' of work engagement (Sonnentag, 2011). Using ERM, we offer a theoretical lens that explains emerging profiles of employees who are both engaged and exhausted (Moeller et al., 2018; Salmela-Aro et al., 2019) by demonstrating how energy activation can reinforce continued immersion at work. High energy activation among engaged employees leads to sustained investment of effort, intensity, and duration towards work tasks and refrain from psychologically detaching from work, thus foregoing recovery opportunities (Halbesleben et al., 2009). Even when engaged employees appraise their job experiences to draw more resources, such appraisal processes

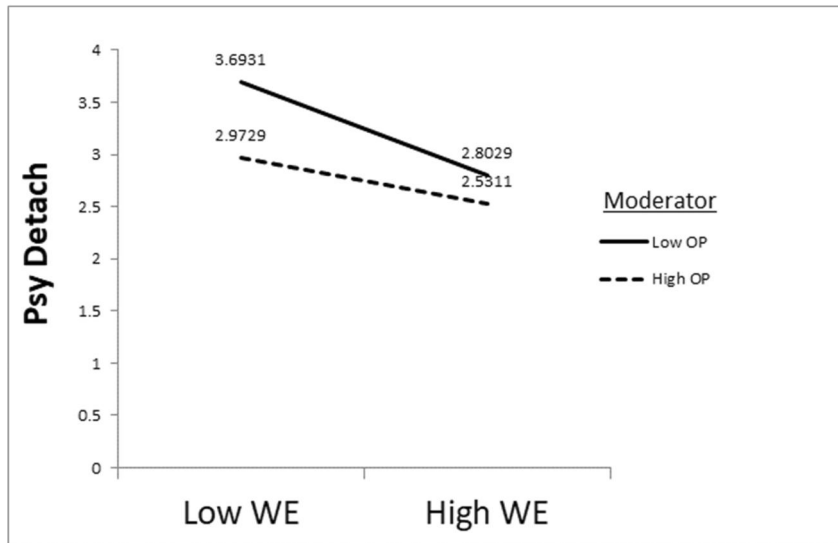


FIGURE 2 Interactive relationship between work engagement and obsessive passion with Psychological Detachment. OP, Obsessive Passion; Psy Detach, Psychological Detachment; WE, Work Engagement.

require adequate energy, and having limited reserves leaves employees susceptible to negative perceptions about their work experience (Junker et al., 2021; Salanova et al., 2010). Consequently, this promotes ill-being by preventing them from acquiring other resource-enriching opportunities (Bennet et al., 2018).

By examining work passion as a moderator, we heed the call of Christian et al. (2011) to address how work engagement fits with other motivational frameworks. Concurring with work passion research (Vallerand et al., 2019), we also found that obsessive passion for work may incessantly drive engaged employees to work more. As obsessively passionate employees are less volitional and rely on external pressures to sustain their sense of self at work, being highly engaged at work may be compounded by taking on additional workload or not refusing excessive job tasks assigned by supervisor (Sonnentag, 2011). Engaged and passionate employees are already driven individuals who love their jobs but being reliant on ego-invested contingencies reduces their capacity to regulate their involvement at work. Obsessive passion, thus, is a maladaptive motivational pathway that contributes to further energy drain among engaged employees. This leads to diminished recovery opportunities, and increased likelihood of psychological distress that further foreshadows the potential dark side of work engagement.

Our result for HP as a moderating mechanism was not supported. The literature regarding the relationship between work engagement and autonomy-driven constructs (e.g., job autonomy, autonomous motivation) largely states that exercising agentic drives and actions at work further enhances work engagement, which leads to optimal performance and well-being outcomes (Deci et al., 2017). However, we speculate that employees are unable to effectively harness the regulatory capacities of HP because their energetic resources have already been reduced significantly from sustained work engagement. As a result, attempts to regulate behaviour are curtailed, which further discourages psychological detachment from work. This echoes recent studies about work engagement that unpacked alternative findings and highlighted the important role of resources in the experience of

autonomy. Specifically, inherent agentic and regulatory efforts may not be utilized efficiently when individuals have diminished resources as a result of sustained engagement at work (Seppälä et al., 2020; Van Veldhoven et al., 2020).

We further speculate that work conditions that do not reinforce an autonomous environment, stifles the benefits of volitional drive among harmoniously passionate employees. The Japanese work environment is normative, with extreme group awareness, and a strict observation of hierarchical rules in social relationships (Ono, 2018). Japanese people are expected to put an equal or greater amount of effort in their work than any of their superiors or senior colleagues. Japanese employees also worry about the atmosphere in the workplace even after finishing their work or are reluctant to go home because their boss is still in the office, which contributes to being at work beyond regular work hours (Kuroda, 2010; Ono, 2018). We draw from Van Veldhoven et al.'s (2020) assertion of the crucial role of context in enabling the optimal use of resources to achieve employee outcomes. Specifically, the extent to which the work environment supports or complements one's passionate orientation may also inform the current findings for HP. Such is the case among harmoniously passionate athletes competing in more relaxed rather than competitive leagues—to which their counterparts thrive in; or schoolteachers whose volitional drive is curtailed due to pressures from conforming to colleagues' teaching methods or curriculum design (Vallerand et al., 2019). More research on this area is encouraged to better understand the role of context in shaping how employees can be engaged and harmoniously passion at work without compromising their well-being.

5.1 | Practical implications

Managers play a crucial role in regulating employee engagement as they are primarily responsible for creating an environment that optimizes employee performance and well-being (Gallup, 2020). Our

findings can serve as rationale towards developing managers that can initiate empathetic and psychologically-safe conversations with their employees about the impact of work on their recovery and general well-being at work (ter Hoeven et al., 2017). Specifically, managers can initiate candid conversations with their employees regarding attitudes and attributions towards the time spent for work. By being cognizant of their employees' work engagement practices, managers can promote the value of distancing oneself from work, as well as emulate and reinforce actions towards taking advantage of opportunities for respite, as well as work-life policies in place in the organization. Our findings can also inform organizational leaders and managers regarding how roles and expectations may be redefined towards healthy engagement alongside effective evaluation of one's contributions.

In tandem, organizations may also implement restorative-driven interventions that temper work engagement and temporarily allow employees to disengage in order to cope with their preoccupations at work. Contemplative interventions, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) and other forms of meditative practices, have been efficacious in relieving some psychological distress among increasingly stressed and overcommitted employees as they focus on producing sustained alterations in basic cognitive and affective processing, and thus, may have a subsequent restorative impact (Slemp et al., 2019). Such interventions also reduce negative cognitions and emotions, which helps individuals to regulate negative attitudes about work and provides opportunities for self-congruent reflections and volitional actions (Ryan et al., 2021). Indeed, the effectiveness of such contemplative interventions have been examined among Japanese health employees and extending it to employees in other professions can be beneficial.

5.2 | Limitations and future directions

The current study is not without its limitations. First, our study employed a cross-sectional design, and our results may be susceptible to common method bias. While similar quantitative designs have been done previously in the literature, we sought to further minimize its potential effects by employing a time-lag of 6 weeks in measuring our variables and employed statistical remedies, such as common latent factor analysis (Chang et al., 2010; Podsakoff et al., 2003). Second, while we have undertaken several checks for the discriminant validity of all of the scales in this study, we do acknowledge the potential limitation with work engagement and harmonious passion scales. We should interpret our findings with some reservation as our finding could be affected by multicollinearity despite conducting several discriminant validity checks (Rönkkö & Cho, 2022). While we have established discriminant validity of these two scales, future studies should conduct further test of these scales in Japan.

Third, reverse causality cannot be fully ruled out. While it may be plausible that psychologically distressed employees have lower levels of work engagement, we ascribed to theoretically grounded

explanations, such that reverse causality cannot fully explain the overall pattern of relationships. Nevertheless, we recommend that future studies can employ a longitudinal cohort design or a mixed methods approach. Doing so can fully establish causal effects of work engagement and passion on the changes to employee psychological distress over time, as well as utilize qualitative accounts that support the relationships from the quantitative findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003; Shimazu et al., 2018).

Finally, our study is grounded from the experiences of work engagement, passion, and psychological distress among Japanese employees in Japan. While our findings extend similarly contextualized studies about work engagement and psychological distress (Shimazu et al., 2012, 2018), we also recommend collecting data from different national contexts to further tease out the effect of cultural context on work and well-being. This may also be relevant in a post-COVID-19 world, where leaders need to be more cognizant of how the shift to hybrid work arrangements influences an individual's ability to physically detach from their work.

6 | CONCLUSION

Anchored from the effort recovery model and the dualistic model of passion, this study proposed and tested a conditional process model that investigated the indirect effect of work engagement on psychological distress among Japanese employees, as a function of the inability to psychologically detach from work. We also examined whether being harmonious- and obsessively passionate at work accentuate or attenuate engaged employees' capacity to psychologically detach. Our findings forebode the potential dark side of work engagement by showing that engaged employees may disregard opportunities to switch-off from work; this is further amplified by being obsessively passionate at work, and not mitigated by harmonious passion. By exploring these relationships, we highlight the important processes and outcomes of continuous utility of energy resources at work and how regulatory capacities determines one's state of well- or ill-being in the workplace.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors report no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used to support the research findings are available upon request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions.

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