

# Psychological Reattachment to Work Buffered the Effect of Role Ambiguity on Work Engagement

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## Abstract

This study investigated the interaction between role ambiguity and psychological reattachment to work in explaining work engagement. Based on a Korean sample of 333 workers, we found that psychological reattachment buffered the effect of role ambiguity on vigor even after recovery experiences were controlled, but not on dedication and absorption.

## Theoretical Background

This study applied psychological reattachment to work, a relatively new concept, to Korean workplaces. Psychological reattachment to work captures the mental process of reconnecting to work after detached from work (Sonnentag & Kühnel, 2016). Reattachment helps the preparation before starting one's work by mobilizing one's energy, directing one's attention back to work, and allocating resources. It has originated from the research of recovery experiences (psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery, and control), and developed as a counterpart of psychological detachment. We purported to investigate (1) the empirical distinction between reattachment to work and related constructs, (2) its predictors, particularly the relative importance of four recovery experiences, and (3) its effects.

**Hypothesis 1:** Psychological reattachment to work will be distinguished from recovery experiences (psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery, and control during leisure time).

**Hypothesis 2:** Psychological reattachment to work will be distinguished from work engagement (vigor, dedication, and absorption).

**Hypothesis 3:** Recovery experiences (psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery, and control during leisure time) will predict psychological reattachment to work.

**Hypothesis 4:** Psychological reattachment to work will moderate the relationship between role ambiguity and work engagement (vigor, dedication, absorption) such that the relationship will be weaker when psychological reattachment is high.

## Methodology

Participants were 333 full-time employees recruited from an online panel in South Korea. The English scale was translated to Korean, and then the Korean scale was back-translated to English. One bilingual psychologist compared the meaning of both scales, and the scale was finalized after one minor correction. Self-report questionnaires were used to measure role ambiguity, psychological reattachment to work, recovery experiences, and work engagement. The participants consisted of 117 males (53.2%) and 156 females (46.8%). The mean age was 45.15 years ( $SD = 11.95$ ), and the mean organizational tenure was 8.66 year ( $SD = 8.42$ ). The factor structures of psychological reattachment to work were tested using LISREL 9.30 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2017) for **Hypotheses 1 and 2**. Multiple regression was carried out using SPSS to test **Hypotheses 3 and 4**. A simple slope difference test was conducted following the recommendation by Aiken and West (1991).

Table 1

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics of Measured Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Role ambiguity	(.90)								
2. Psychological detachment from work	-.09	(.88)							
3. Relaxation	-.21***	.64***	(.92)						
4. Mastery	.04	.07	.30***	(.91)					
5. Control during leisure time	-.19**	.42***	.68***	.34***	(.92)				
6. Psychological reattachment to work	-.22***	.10	.25***	.23***	.36***	(.84)			
7. Vigor	-.29***	.02	.16**	.38***	.11*	.31***	(.86)		
8. Dedication	-.38***	.07	.27***	.32***	.22***	.42***	.73***	(.84)	
9. Absorption	-.30***	.03	.20***	.28***	.17**	.43***	.67***	.79***	(.85)
<i>M</i>	2.68	3.35	3.63	2.50	3.69	3.61	2.74	3.27	3.24
<i>SD</i>	0.78	0.92	0.83	0.91	0.82	0.61	0.82	0.77	0.79

Note.  $N = 333$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; numbers in parentheses represent alphas

Table 2

Results of Regression Predicting Psychological Reattachment to Work

Predictors	$R^2$	$\beta$
1. Psychological detachment from work		-.07
2. Relaxation	.14***	.05
3. Mastery		.11
4. Control during leisure time		.32***

Note.  $N = 333$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$

## Results

Confirmatory factor analyses demonstrated that psychological reattachment was distinct from each of four recovery experiences,  $\chi^2(179, N = 333) = 894.58, p < .001$ , RMSEA = .11, CFI = .90, SRMR = .06. Also, reattachment was different from each of work engagement facets, namely, vigor, dedication, and absorption,  $\chi^2(71, N = 333) = 488.93, p < .001$ , RMSEA = .13, CFI = .90, SRMR = .07. Thus, **Hypotheses 1 and 2** were supported. As to its predictors, relaxation, mastery, and control experiences showed a significant positive correlation with psychological reattachment (Table 1). When entered together into the regression model, however, only control experience significantly explained psychological reattachment (Table 2). Therefore, **Hypothesis 3** was partially supported. Finally, the moderating effects of reattachment on the relationships between role ambiguity and work engagement facets were examined, after four recovery experiences were controlled (Table 3). Reattachment buffered the effect of role ambiguity on vigor (Figure 1), but not the other two facets. Hence, **Hypothesis 4** was partially supported.

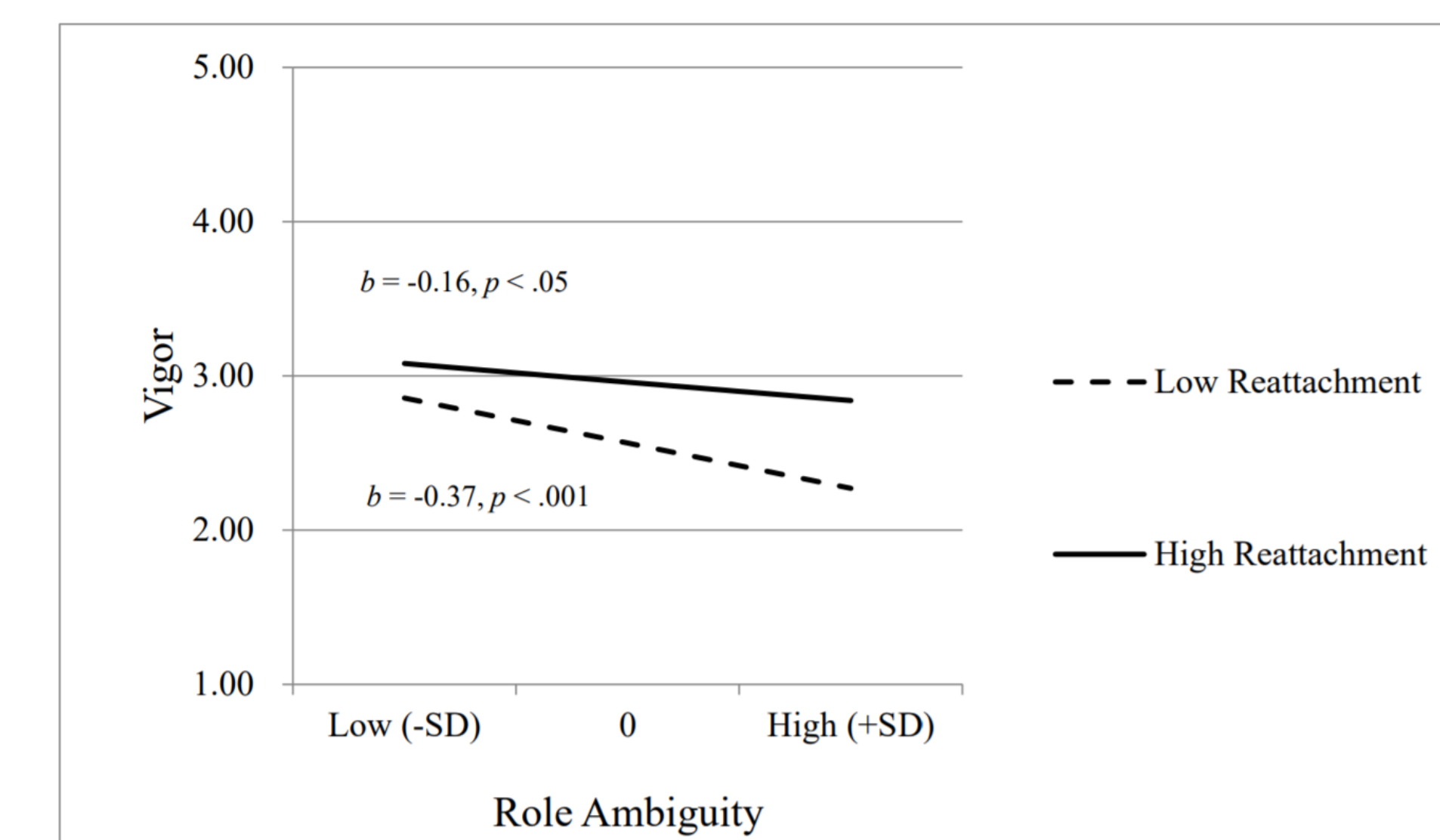


Figure 1. The Moderating Effect of Psychological Reattachment

Table 3

Moderating Effects of Psychological Reattachment to Work on the Relationship between Role Ambiguity and Work Engagement

Step	Predictors	Work Engagement								
		Vigor		Dedication		Absorption				
		$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
1	1. Psychological detachment			-.03			.06			-.06
	2. Relaxation	.15***		.09	.14***		.17*	.10***		.12
	3. Mastery			.38***			.25***			.23***
	4. Control during leisure time			-.18**			-.12			-.14*
2	5. Role ambiguity	.28***	.13***	-.29***	.34***	.21***	-.32***	.28***	.19***	-.23***
	6. Psychological reattachment			.19***			.30***			.35***
3	7. Role ambiguity * Psychological reattachment	.29***	.01*	.10*	.35***	.00	.06	.29***	.00	-.03

Note.  $N = 333$ . \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ;  $\beta$  = Standardized regression coefficient in the full model.

## Discussion

Our study found that psychological reattachment to work was distinguishable from recovery experiences and work engagement in a sample of Korean employees. Among four components of recovery experiences, control experience significantly explained psychological reattachment even after the other facets were controlled. Also, psychological reattachment buffered the effect of role ambiguity on vigor. This result reiterates the previous findings that showed the negative effect of role ambiguity on work engagement (Lee, Shin, & Baek, 2017; Mañas et al., 2018) and further suggests that psychological reattachment to work can act as an independent and active agent in the work engagement mechanism. These results imply that reattachment may have a beneficial effect on one's occupational life. Also, it was found that reattachment could be enhanced by recovery experiences. Overall, our study may be applied to the workplace in order to improve workers' rights in Korea. We expect that this new measurement tool will expand the research on recovery from job stress in Korea and ultimately help the promotion of occupational health among Koreans.