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## **Role of Energizing Relationships in Creating Subjective Vitality and Goal Commitment in UK Academics**

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The importance of positive and high quality relationships has been established in literature, particularly in recent positivity debates. There are many dimensions of positive relationships, one of which is their ability to create energy in the participants. Energy created through such interaction enhances the available resources of an individual. In this study, we propose that energizing connections positively affects goal commitment, which is an important work attitude and essential for successful performance, particularly in a performance-based rewards system. We examine this relationship in academics working in UK universities, where performance is significantly related to setting clear goals and meeting them effectively. We also propose that energizing connections enhance an individual's level of energy and vitality which in turn affect their motivation towards goals and targets. Therefore, we also explore the mediating effect of subjective vitality on the relationship between energizing connections and goal commitment. All the scales were tested for their construct validity through Confirmatory Factor Analysis and reliability statistics. A total of 365 academics completed a questionnaire from fourteen top ranking UK universities. Hierarchical multiple regression was performed to test the direct and mediation effects on the dependent variable. Results confirm that energizing connections significantly contribute towards goal commitment directly ( $R^2 = .216$ ,  $F = 9.110$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and through the mediating effect created by subjective vitality ( $R^2 = .255$ ,  $R^2 = .038$ ,  $F = 10.112$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Implications for administrators in higher education institutions and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Energizing relationships, Subjective Vitality, Commitment, UK Universities, Higher Education, Mediation

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### **Introduction**

In a recent study about the quality of work life of UK managers, it was found that after the 2007 recession, managers have perceived a reduced quality of work-life, where they have felt dissatisfied and their levels of well-being and health have declined (Worrall & Cooper, 2014). This calls for an exploration of factors which may contribute towards enhancing vitality and well-being in this changing context. We propose that the positivity literature initiated as Positive Organizational Scholarship by Cameron, Dutton and Quinn (2003) may provide innovative ideas about enhancing the quality of work-life and therefore, be able to enhance organizational outcomes. For this, we have turned to recent works on the quality of social relationships. It is an established fact that social interaction is one of the most important activities in organizations. Top-level managers spend a significant amount of time

interacting and socializing with others, a considerable number of them being outside their immediate work unit. Connecting, interacting and networking are therefore an important and useful work activity. Efficacy of social networks (Gersick, Bartunek, & Dutton, 2000), the rewards of quality relationships and the effects of workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002) have widely been established in literature. It has been found that positive relationships can have an energizing effect on individuals (Dutton, 2003), boost up morale at workplace (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), and facilitate organizational learning and growth (Dutton & Ragin, 2006). Of specific interest to this study is the concept of Energizing Connections, which is an extension of High Quality Connections proposed by Dutton (2003). Energizing connections are defined as those high-quality

connections in which participants enable each other and experience a heightened feeling of energy and aliveness. We have therefore set out to investigate if such energy created in high quality relationships translates into an enhanced feeling of vitality and well-being. We have also aimed to explore if such vitality turns into an actual organizational outcome, i.e. an enhanced sense of commitment towards one's goals. We have placed this investigation in the UK higher education sector, as there is some preliminary evidence from an exploratory study that relationships have a significant effect on professorate's work-life. In a qualitative study, Gersick, Bartunek and Dutton (2000) have found that professional relationships carry more importance in the life of academics than in other careers, as being included in networks of acclaimed scholars and academic associations is considered not only a means to success but as an end in itself. Hence, Energizing Connections are expected to be significant determinants of creating vitality at workplace, which in turn leads to higher motivation. This motivation can be uncovered through a number of positive work attitudes, one of which is goal commitment. The efficacy of Locke's Goal Setting theory has been widely established which posits that challenging and difficult goals rather than "do your best" significantly affect employee's motivation and drive towards work and result in higher performance (Latham & Yukl, 1975; Locke, 1968). A review of a number of laboratory and field studies show that in 90% of the studies difficult goals led to superior performance than in the absence of any goals (Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981). In fact, the goal setting theory is considered to be one of the most useful and authentic theories of organizational science. However, just the presence of challenging goals will not result in motivation unless there is an acceptance of such goals by those who have to work towards them (Locke, Latham, & Erez, 1988). There are several sources of motivation, but whatever the source, motivation is bound to result in a high level of goal commitment.

### **Energizing Connections**

Of particular interest to this study is the concept of 'High Quality Connections', which are defined as relationships of "positive mutual regard, trust and active engagement on both sides" (Dutton, 2003, p. 3) involves treating others with dignity, acting with regard to others' feelings, and preserving

the social norms for mutual respect (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000) and includes such behaviours that are undertaken with the intent to develop positive interpersonal connections (Duffy, et al., 2002). The concept of Energizing Connections has been derived from the idea of High Quality Connections proposed by Dutton (2003). She argues that high-quality connections create energy and vitality in individuals and organizations. "*Energy is defined as the sense of being eager to act and capable of action. Positive energy is experienced as a form of positive affect, making it a reinforcing experience that people enjoy and seek*" (Dutton, 2003, p. 6). It is this energizing effect of such high quality connections that is an integral dimension of the concept of Energizing Connections. In a high quality connection, people feel more engaged, more open, more competent. They feel more alive (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) Moreover, a high quality connection does not have to be a very intimate relationship. A high quality connection is marked by everyday interactions of positivity and the energizing effect can even be triggered through a cheerful greeting or a supportive email.

"One conversation, one e-mail exchange, one moment of connecting in a meeting can infuse both participants with a greater sense of vitality, giving them a bounce in their steps and a greater capacity to act" (Dutton, 2003, p. 2).

The concept of energizing connections is also related to the capabilities literature (Sen, 1993). The capabilities approach is presented as an alternative against the highly capitalistic approach to society. According to Sen (1993), capabilities are defined as alternative possible vectors of functioning open to an individual (p.38). The capabilities approach is opposite to the utilitarian view of the society in which human capacity or capability is only seen as a commodity. It does not take into account the moral or humanistic energy which is essential for learning and creativity. Just as human capabilities are important determinants of the functioning of the larger society, similar capabilities form the culture and environment of an organization. This moral and humanistic capability is transferred from one individual to the other during a positive interaction. Positive spirals are built up when energy

is generated and transferred on a regular and frequent basis. As already noted, these positive interactions are marked by feelings of mutual regards; thereby they enhance human dignity (Davis, 2006), an important capability essential for creation of meaningful work

### **Subjective Vitality**

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2009) defines vitality as “the power giving continuance of life, present in all living things.” An individual possessing vitality feels a sense of liveliness and enthusiasm towards life. Vitality is considered to be the central source of life in a living organism, thus the four primary signs of life are termed as “vital signs”. Several definitions exist in literature, for example, vitality has been described as “those essential yet intangible positive qualities of individuals and institutions that enable purposeful production” (Clark, Boyer, & Concoran, 1985, p. 3). It has been defined as a feeling of being enthusiastic and energetic towards anticipated life events both physiologically and mentally, rather than being aloof, indifferent and detached from them (Kark & Carmelli, 2009). It is posited as a subjective affect of possessing energy and vigour (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Individuals demonstrating vitality possess the qualities of enthusiasm, compassion, dedication, vigor, creativity, and regeneration (Baldwin, 1990). Ryan and Bernstein (2004, p. 274) define vitality as “a dynamic phenomenon, pertinent to both mental and physical aspects of functioning and thus refers to a person who is vital as energetic, feeling alive, and fully functioning”.

Vitality is defined as a state of heightened arousal, but it is not just limited to mere arousal. It is marked by a sense of energy which must be experienced positively and is available to self for positive productivity (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999). Negative affect experienced through increased arousal resulting in anxiety, jittering, nervousness and anger is also energy but not necessarily vitality. Negative heightened arousal has been found to relate negatively with subjective vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). Moreover, vitality is a positive emotional state. However, it is particularly characterized by a heightened level of activation and energy and is therefore different from the non-activated or inactivated positive emotions, such as happiness and pleasure. Therefore, “it is a

positive affect emotion, which is characterized by a high level of arousal and is distinct from other emotions of positive affect with lower arousal levels (relaxed, pleased, serene, at ease, and satisfied) (Kark & Carmelli, 2009, p. 789).

This feeling of being alive, charged and energetic is an essential and integral dimension of vitality (Nix, et al., 1999). Subjective vitality has been defined as a feeling of having energy, feeling alive and fully functioning, and a feeling of heightened arousal. It is characterized by leading a life of enthusiasm, adventure, zest and vigour, rather than doing things without any passion and involvement. Physically it means that an individual feels healthy, strong, alert and full of energy. On the other hand, psychological vitality refers to an individual’s sense of confidence, control and purpose in life. The following excerpt emphasizes the importance of this subjective vitality;

“People regularly speak of being particularly alive or invigorated in certain circumstances or following certain events, whereas in other contexts they can feel “dead” or drained. This positive sense of aliveness and energy refers to more than merely being active, aroused, or even having stored caloric reserves. Rather, we believe it concerns a specific psychological experience of possessing enthusiasm and spirit that we refer to as vitality. Individuals vary in their experience of vitality as a function not only of physical influences (e.g., states of illness and fatigue), but also psychological factors (e.g., being in love, having a mission, being effective). Because of its phenomenological centrality and its seeming covariance with both physical and psychological circumstances, the subjective feeling of aliveness and vitality potentially represents a significant indicator of personal well-being” (Ryan & Frederick, 1997, p. 530).

### **Goal Commitment**

Hollenbeck et al. (1989) note that goal commitment is not just an end in itself; it is a means to an end, i.e. performance. They propose that in the presence of difficult goals, goal commitment is the factor that significantly influences performance. It is noted that in presence of easy goals, goal commitment may not be a significant contributor to

performance, but the influence of goal commitment increases with the increase in difficulty of goals. They also found a significant relationship of goal commitment with performance in three separate studies. They also found that goal commitment is related to work involvement, implicating that individuals with higher level of commitment with their goals are also expected to identify strongly with the work that they are performing.

### Hypotheses

A substantial amount of evidence about the energizing effects of high-quality connections is available in literature. For example, (Fredrickson, 2002) has discussed positive emotions and how positive interactions can create “positive spirals”. The energy that is infused is infectious and spreads among organizational members. The creation of positive spirals is described in the following passage;

“People who have high-quality connections experience more energy and more positive emotions such as joy, interest, and love. This state of being increases their capacity to think and act in the moment. In turn, this change builds more capacity and desire to effectively interact with others, generating more opportunities for energy to spread”. (Dutton, 2003, p.7)

A similar build-up of energy is described in the work of Rob Cross and his colleagues where they find that energy can be created and spread when people interact in a positive way. It can lead to a heightened sense of engagement, and people are able to think faster and create better quality ideas (Cross & Parker, 2004)

The benefits of high-quality connections are diverse and widespread, both for the individuals and the organizations. For individuals, high-quality connections have bi-directional benefits. On one hand, they enhance an individual’s physical and psychological health and on the other, they infuse workplace attitudes that improve performance. Reiss, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, and Ryan (2000) have found that people who experience a greater number of positive interactions in a day report a higher sense of well-being manifested through increased positive emotions and experienced vitality.

Literature shows substantive evidence that high-quality connections facilitate people to engage at work and deploy more of their time and energy to work activities. They are also better able to learn and create because in high-quality connections they have access to more information and learning activities. Williams and Dutton (1999) shows that people in high-quality connections are more capable of engaging themselves in their job-related activities. Lewin and Regine argue that in a high quality connection “one person provides safe emotional space for another, allowing for the expression of natural feelings of confusion, uncertainty, anxiety, and frustration. Expressing such feelings is often essential to letting oneself get fully connected to mastering a task or activity” (2000, p. 294). From the research on networks, it is found that high-quality connections provide individual with two kinds of resources, i.e. emotional resources such as excitement or support and instrumental resources such as information, and both these resources facilitate their engagement at work (Baker, 2000). Finally, the work of Fredrickson (1998) argues that being in high-quality connections allows people to learn more easily. Her build-and-broaden theory explains that such connections generate emotional resources of joy, excitement and interest. These resources become the basis of creation of other psychological and cognitive resources and enhance abilities to think, focus, create and learn.

On the opposite end, the negative effects of corrosive connections are discussed. Corrosive connections, like high-quality connections can also be common, everyday interactions. When people encounter low-quality interactions, they are forced to spend a lot of emotional energy trying to figure out why they were treated in an unfair manner. This in turn leads to a depletion of their overall energy available to act. Low quality connections can be enervating for the organizational members. They can deplete energy in a single moment, reduce self-esteem, activate distrust, and create disrespect among parties to a low quality connection.

“When low quality connections are pervasive in an organization, they eat away at people’s ability to learn, to show initiative, and to take risks. They corrode motivation, loyalty and commitment” (Dutton, 2003, p. 2).

The effects of corrosive connections are found in the work carried out on incivility at workplace. Uncivil behaviors are acts of being rude and discourteous, and displaying a lack of regard for other. These behaviors are exactly opposite to high-quality interactions. (Pearson, et al., 2000) have found that people who encounter acts of uncivil behavior spend a great deal of time thinking about the negative interaction. They also exert an extra effort in trying to avoid the person who instigated the uncivil behavior in future. Such victims subsequently refuse to contribute anything more to the organization other than what is described strictly in their job descriptions.

Another study by Rook (1984) found that negative interactions at workplace can induce stress and decreased psychological well-being. When people encounter negative behaviors, it reduces their sense of self-worth. This decline in self-esteem creates a strain on their emotional and psychological capabilities and reduces their ability to direct positive energy into action. When people are treated with disrespect, it creates confusion about their own sense of worth and they are unable to gain confidence in their abilities. This reduces their ability to take initiative and they shirk away from challenging and creative activities. This results in a downward spiral of reduced performance and effectiveness.

In the above discussion, we have shown that energizing connections are important contributors to multi-faceted dimensions of individual functioning. They infuse energy and vigor in a person and create important psychological resources. It has been shown from literature that positive interactions contribute to an individual's physical and psychological well-being. They also create a psychological climate that facilitates concentration, creativity and initiative. They support communication and transfer of information. In such an environment, learning flourishes easily, on one hand because individuals have more freedom and security to engage in learning activities and on the other because information and knowledge are mobilized more efficiently. Therefore, the first two hypothesis of the study are;

***H1: Energizing connections are positively associated with subjective vitality.***

***H2: Energizing connections are positively associated with goal commitment.***

Ryan and Fredrick (1997) have conducted a series of studies investigating the relationship between “subjective vitality” and several facets of individual well-being including psychological well-being and physical/somatic factors. They have found that subjective vitality was significantly correlated with positive indexes of well-being regarding physical health. They also found that it was negatively related with indexes of ill-being. For example, subjective vitality was negatively related with anxiety, depression, internal locus of control and internalization. Furthermore, it was found that subjective vitality positively correlated with self-esteem, self-actualization and self-efficacy. The results were also validated for their stability by taking observations at two different points in time, and it results confirmed that subjective vitality was positively correlated with a stronger mental health and lesser indicators of physical dysfunctions. Also, subjective vitality correlated positively with positive affect and negatively with negative affect (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). By positive and negative affect, it is meant to define a propensity of a person in approaching life and its events in either a positive or negative manner. Those who have a propensity for negative affect cannot experience enthusiasm or happiness, and tend to look at the world through a pessimistic lens, whereas those who have tendency to experience positive affect can approach life with enthusiasm, energy and optimism. Therefore, it is expected that such positive state of enthusiasm and motivation will contribute towards a heightened level of commitment with goals and targets. Therefore, we hypothesize;

***H3: Subjective Vitality is positively associated with goal commitment***

In another study, it has been found that goal commitment increases the level of subjective well-being. The study examined three dimensions of goals i.e. commitment, attainability and progress as predictors of changes in subjective well-being in a longitudinal study of student over one semester. It was found that goal commitment was a strong predictor of progress; students with high level of commitment with their goals showed a better level of performance. It was also found that goal commitment predicted an increase in subjective

well-being given favorable situations. However, the subjective well-being of students with high level of goal commitment diminished in case of unfavorable circumstances (Brunstein, 1993). This finding has a strong implication for our study. It means that goal commitment can lead to higher levels of well-being in the presence of positive environment. The work on high quality connections implies that positive interactions and connection at workplace trigger a positive and supportive environment and improve learning and knowledge sharing. These aspects are very important in progress over difficult goals. Therefore, it is much expected that energizing connections will create a supportive and energizing environment which will contribute towards enhanced vitality which in turn will enhance goal commitment. Hence, we propose;

***H4: Subjective vitality mediates the relationship between energizing connections and goal commitment.***

## **Method**

### **Sampling Method and Sample Generation**

Data were to be collected from academics working in top UK universities. A multi-stage cluster sampling method was employed. The following steps were undertaken for sample generation.

First, a list of top UK universities had to be developed. University rankings were used to draw this list. However, rather than relying on only one ranking, universities were selected that met top university criteria on four different university rankings which were Times Higher Education University rankings 2009, Guardian University Guide 2010, Complete University Guide 2010 and Russell Group of Universities 2010. Eighteen universities that came in the top ranking of all three league tables and were also a member of the Russell Group were screened through this analysis.

The next step was to select a set of subjects/disciplines in each university as the next step of cluster sampling. Therefore, academics in the social sciences disciplines of Business/Management, Law and Education were approached. The reason for

choosing these disciplines was that these disciplines were the most commonly taught disciplines in the 18 universities that were selected. Out of the 18 universities, 16 had business school, 15 had law schools and 13 had education schools. All other disciplines of Social Sciences, e.g. Economics, Political Science, Sociology and History, etc, appeared less frequently in these 18 universities. Secondly, these three disciplines had larger institutions with large number of faculty members, so there was a higher probability of the prospective respondents belonging to the same cluster.

In the final step, the entire population of all the academics employed in the three subject areas was selected.

## **Measures**

Questionnaire items were adopted from previously developed measures. All items were in a statement format with a 7-point Likert scale response format. Demographic information was requested at the end of questionnaire including age, gender, faculty, university, number of years in current position, number of years in academic career and type of employment (permanent/visiting).

This paper has been extracted from a larger study in which the questionnaire was employed to measure a number of concepts. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the entire questionnaire.

The measures employed for Goal Commitment, Subjective Vitality and Energizing Connections are discussed below. The scales were first tested for their internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha values are given in Table 1). All measures were considered adequate on this criteria as all values of internal consistency were above 0.80. The reliability was also ensured through individual item statistics including item-to-item correlation and item-total correlation. All values satisfied the adequate criteria. Finally, each scale was tested for its construct validity through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The results of each measurement theory are presented with each scale.

Table 1  
Internal consistency reliability of individual measures

Construct	No of items.	Cronbach's Alpha
Energizing Connections	8	0.839
Subjective Vitality	8	0.859
Goal Commitment	4	0.734

**Goal Commitment.** A 4-item scale developed by Hollenbeck et al. (1989) has been used to measure Goal Commitment. Table 1 shows that the scale demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.734). CFA results demonstrate that the scale was able to achieve

adequate good-of-fit with  $\chi^2 = 26.701$ ,  $df = 2$ , CFI = 0.966, TLI = 0.899, NFI = 0.962, RMSEA = 0.147. All standardized regression estimates were greater than 0.50 (see Table 2) and AVE was 0.51 which was also adequate according to prescribed standards.

Table 2  
Standardized regression estimates for Goal Commitment

Item Code	Estimate
GC1	.744
GC2	.761
GC3	.762
GC4	.584

**Subjective Vitality.** The 4-item scale developed by Ryan and Fredrick (1997) has been employed to measure Subjective Vitality. This scale also demonstrated adequate reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.859). To confirm the construct validity, CFA was carried out and the 4-item model achieved

satisfactory goodness-of-fit with  $\chi^2 = 6.545$ ,  $df = 2$ , CFI = 0.993, TLI = 0.980, NFI = 0.991, RMSEA = 0.079. All standardized regression estimates were greater than 0.50 (see Table 3) and AVE was 0.62 which was also satisfactory.

Table 3  
Standardized regression estimates for Subjective Vitality

Item Code	Estimate
SV1	.888
SV2	.800
SV3	.762
SV4	.690

**Energizing Connections.** This construct has been operationalized by building up on literature on High Quality Connections. Energizing connections are defined as those high-quality connections in which participants enable each other and experience a heightened feeling of energy and aliveness (Dutton, 2003b). An eight item scale with two factors termed as Task Enabling and Energizing Interactions developed by Malik, MacIntosh, and McMaster (2013) has been employed to measure this construct.

The two factor model was tested for its measurement accuracy through CFA. Five items (EC1-EC5) measured Task Enabling and three items (EC6-EC8) measured Energizing Interactions (See Appendix-A). Cronbach's Alpha was satisfactory (0.839). The overall model achieved satisfactory goodness-of-fit with  $\chi^2 = 55.13$ ,  $df = 19$ , CFI = 0.976, TLI = 0.965, NFI = 0.965, RMSEA = 0.072. All standardized regression estimates were greater than 0.50. Finally, AVE was 0.59; also satisfactory.



Table 4  
Standardized regression estimates for Energizing Connections

Item Code	Estimate
Task Enabling	.886
Energizing Interactions	.632
EC1	.759
EC2	.774
EC3	.674
EC4	.706
EC5	.812
EC6	.852
EC7	.952
EC8	.722

**Data Collection**

A total of 3336 emails were sent, with one subsequent reminder in two phases. The pilot study had resulted in a response rate of 16%. Initially, emails were sent to 2079 academics in 7 universities randomly selected from the 13 universities that had all three of the selected disciplines, i.e. Business, Law and Education. However, later it was realized it would be more useful to generate more responses since Factor Analysis requires larger samples. Therefore, a second wave of emails was sent to 1257 more academics in 7 more universities, 6 of which had all three of the disciplines and 1 university that housed only two of the disciplines.

**Response Rate**

A total of 419 surveys were filled by respondents. There were approximately 950 out of office and mail delivery failure replies. After deducting this number from the mailing list, the response rate is 17.68%. However, there is no way of knowing the number of emails actually read.

It has been stated that response rate tends to be lower in email surveys as compared to the traditional mail surveys (Vicente & Reis, 2010).

However, response representativeness is more significant rather than response rate (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000). It is contested that the population targeted by email is the one that has access to internet facility. This may not be a true representation of the population. However, this was not an issue in this study, since all the academics had their official university email addresses, and internet is available to all the faculty members at these institutions. Therefore, the sample did not omit any possible subjects.

**Data Analysis**

**Initial Screening**

First of all, data was cleaned for extensive missing values i.e., cases with large number of missing values were deleted. A total of 54 such cases were deleted from the data set leaving a dataset of 365 responses. The rest of the cases were tested for missing value analysis, and the missing values were found to be Missing Completely at Random (MCAR).

**Descriptive statistics**

Table 5 gives the descriptive statistics for the independent, dependent and mediating variable.

Table 5  
Descriptive statistics

Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	r		
					1	2	3
1. Energizing Connections	365	1.53	7.00	4.515	1	.418**	.385**
2. Goal Commitment	365	2.00	7.00	4.827		1	.351**
3. Subjective Vitality	365	1.75	7.00	4.943			1

\*\* Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (two-tailed)

**Correlation Analysis**

An initial correlation analysis was run to analyze the strength and direction of relationship between the independent, dependent and mediating variable. Table 5 shows the values of Pearson correlation between energizing connections, subjective vitality and goal commitment. The results show that all the three variables are related with each other positively. Energizing connections has a moderate positive relationship with goal commitment (r = 0.418). Energizing connections also has a moderate positive relationship with subjective vitality (r = .385). Also, subjective vitality has a moderate positive relationship with goal commitment (r = .351). All correlations are statistically as well as practically significant.

**Hierarchical Multiple Regression**

The hypothesis between independent, dependent and mediating variables were tested through hierarchical multiple regression. Control variable which were age, gender, faculty, university, length of service in current position, length of service in academic profession and type of employment were entered in the first. Then, the independent variable (Energizing connections) was entered and finally, Subjective Vitality which is the mediating variable was entered in the last step.

Table 6 shows the results of the hierarchical multiple regression. The results show that after

entering control variables in the first step, the addition of Energizing Interactions in the second step explains significant variation in the dependent variable, i.e. goal commitment ( R<sup>2</sup> = 0.172, B = .426, p < .05). Then, in the last step, Subjective Vitality is entered and results show that it also contributes significantly towards goal commitment ( R<sup>2</sup> = .038, B = 0.221, p < .05) along with Energizing Connections (B = 0.332, p < .05). Also, from the results of correlation analysis, we have seen that Energizing Connections and Subjective Vitality have a significant positive relationship with each other. Therefore, the first three hypotheses are supported. In addition, this satisfies the preliminary requirements of a mediation model as suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986).

In order to confirm the mediation model, further statistics are explored. It is shown in Table 4 that in the absence of mediating variable, the direct (partial) effect of Energizing Connections (B = .426) on Goal Commitment is more than the direct (partial) effect of Energizing Connections (B = .332) when controlled for Subjective Vitality. Also, R<sup>2</sup> value (= .255) of the model which included Subjective Vitality is more than the R<sup>2</sup> value (= .216) of model otherwise. Furthermore, Sobel test also confirms the mediation effect. Therefore, the hypothesis that Subjective Vitality mediates the relationship between Energizing Connections and Goal Commitment is supported.

Table 6  
Results of hierarchical multiple regression

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Sig	Beta (Sig)	
						EC	SV
1	.210	.044	.044	1.725	.092		
2	.465	.216	.172	9.110	.000	.426 (.000)	---
3	.505	.255	.038	10.112	.000	.332 (.000)	.221 (.000)

- 
- CV: Control Variables, EI: Energizing Connections, SV: Subjective Vitality
  - Model 1: CV (Gender, age, position, faculty, university, years in current position, years in academic profession, type of employment)
  - Model 2: CV, EI
  - Model 3: CV, EI, SV
  - Values in parentheses are p-values for beta coefficients
- 

## Discussion

The work on high quality relationships has shown that positive interactions and relationships at the workplace significantly contribute to the effectiveness of individuals (Carmeli, 2009). Cameron, et al., (2003) highlight that there is a considerable need for research in the discipline of Positive Organizational Scholarship since most of the extant literature is found to be of prescriptive nature. Findings demonstrate that Energizing Connections have a significant positive relationship with goal commitment. This relationship has never been explored in literature and therefore, this contributes to knowledge by demonstrating the relationship. It augments our understanding about the effects of positive connections, as in previous literature these have been related with many positive outcomes such a greater engagement, enhanced emotional and psychological resources, psychological safety, and increased capabilities (Dutton, 2003). The study also shows that energizing connections are positively associated with subjective vitality. This relationship has also been explored in literature for the first time, although previous studies suggest a strong rationale of this relationship (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Duffy, et al., 2002; Dutton & Ragin, 2006). Also, the study demonstrates that subjective vitality is positively related with goal commitment. The work of Kark and Carmelli (2009) shows that subjective vitality is associated with creative work involvement. This study contributes to literature by showing that subjective vitality is also related to another positive outcome, i.e. goal commitment. Finally, the study explores the mediating effect of subjective vitality on the relationship between energizing connections and goal commitment. This means that in presence of energizing connections, individuals perceive themselves to be carrying higher levels of energy and vitality, which in turn creates an increased commitment to goals and targets. This study explores and demonstrates these relationships in the unique sector of higher education institutions of United Kingdom and therefore generates interesting

insights about the dynamics of work psychology in this setting.

## Limitation and Future Research

There are a few limitation of this study, as there are in every research inquiry. Firstly, the sample is cross-sectional and therefore, causation cannot be established. Therefore, a longitudinal study in future would be useful to evaluate the real effects of energizing connection on subjective vitality and goal commitment of an individual. Secondly, the research has been restricted to only one sector of society, i.e academicians working in higher education institutions of United Kingdom top performing universities, and therefore results should be generalized with caution. In future, similar relationships should be tested in different types of educational institutions, other sectors of society, and institutions and universities in different geographical locations. Finally, this study employs a survey method and quantitative techniques for data analysis, which allow for enhanced generalization but at the same time, lack an in depth analysis of a given situation. Future studies can focus on a situational analysis about the dynamics of relationships and networks and how they develop a sense of vitality in participant individuals.

## Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that energizing connections carry an important value in creating a sense of vitality directly and also indirectly by enhancing the level of goal commitment in academic staff at higher education institutions. Previous research has already shown that high quality connections contribute significantly to positive attitudes and outcomes in various organizational settings, and that they carry an added importance in academia. This study has augmented previous research and confirmed new relationships in this domain of research. The findings are important for institutional managers in the higher education industry, as well as the general work-life. Research networks and clusters are already a key feature of

higher education institutions. With these findings, their importance has magnified and therefore, positive and healthy interactions, connections and collaborations should be emphasized in institutions to facilitate a vibrant and productive environment. By cultivating a socially energizing culture, managers may be able to counter the effects of an increasingly demanding work place. This research has demonstrated that the effect of energizing connections is twofold; on one hand they enhance individual health by increasing subjective vitality, and on the other hand, they affect organizational health by improving goal commitment; thereby, bridging the age-old gap between individual and organizational health and confirming that individual and organizational health co-exist.

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## Appendix-A: Questionnaire

### **Energizing Connections (EC)**

- EC1 If I feel stuck about a work-related issue, I am likely to get some guidance from my peers.
- EC2 My boss has advocated my competence and abilities in crucial situations, e.g. for promotion/sanctions/project approvals etc
- EC3 Whenever I have experienced political pressure, someone from my workplace has been there to guide me and protect my interests
- EC4 My boss acknowledges my domestic responsibilities and tries to accommodate them where possible.
- EC5 When I tell my boss about an issue which is affecting my performance, he/she genuinely acknowledges my problem.
- EC6 While interacting with certain people at my workplace, I feel charged and energized
- EC7 Interaction with certain people at my workplace enhances my motivation.
- EC8 Talking to certain people at my workplace can make my problems look smaller.

### **Goal Commitment (GC)**

- GC1 It's hard to take my goals at work seriously. (R)
- GC2 It's unrealistic for me to expect to reach the goals presented to me by my organization. (R)
- GC3 It is quite likely that the goals presented to me may need to be revised, depending on how things go. (R)
- GC4 Quite frankly, I don't care if I achieve these goals or not. (R)

### **Subjective Vitality (SV)**

- SV1 I feel alive and vital.
- SV2 I don't feel very energetic. (R)
- SV3 I look forward to each new day.
- SV4 I nearly always feel alert and awake.

*\*Reverse coded*