

**Coming to Terms with Commuting: How Daily Morning and Evening Commute  
Recovery Experiences Ignite Resource Gain Spirals Across the Commute-, Work-, and  
Home Domain**

Extended Abstract for consideration at the

*Human Relations* 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference in 2023

Preferred Theme: Work/non-work relationships and Corporate Social Responsibility

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Word count: 720

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## BOUNDARY CREATION BEHAVIORS & RECOVERY

Commuting—traveling from home to work and back—is an activity at the interface between the home and work domain that most employees across the globe engage in and that can consume a considerable amount of employees’ time on workdays (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021; Eurostat, 2020). Most research on commuting has focused on spillover (i.e., experiences being transferred between domains such as the home and the work domain; Edwards and Rothbard, 2000) from commute to work, outlining the detrimental impact of aversive or long commutes on a range of outcomes (e.g., Gerpott et al., 2022; Zhou et al., 2017). In comparison, fewer studies focus on the work-to-commute spillover (Calderwood and Mitropoulos, 2021). Furthermore, although extant research has provided important insights on the costs of aversive commutes, they do not consider that commuting is not inevitably a negative activity. Recent research illustrates that employees can use their commutes for role transitions such as preparing for work during the morning commute (Jachimowicz et al., 2021) or disconnecting from their job during the evening commute (van Hooff, 2015). While this research offers a starting point for shifting the conversation toward the more positive sides of commuting, the aforementioned studies are still based on the assumption that commuting is a negative experience that is detrimental to employees. Accordingly, it remains poorly understood what may constitute a positive experience during the daily commute and how this daily activity may facilitate employees’ work and home-related functioning over the day.

To provide a more balanced picture, the present research focuses on the benefits of commuting by drawing on the notion of resource gain spirals from the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR; Doane et al., 2012; Hakanen et al., 2011; Hobfoll, 2002) to explore the idea that resource-generating experiences during the commute can facilitate daily resource gain spirals. Specifically, we consider employees’ daily commute recovery experiences, defined as the degree to which an employee experiences relaxation (i.e., a state

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of low activation and increased positive affect), mastery (i.e., challenging experiences and learning opportunities in non-work domains), and detachment (i.e., mental disengagement from work; Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). These experiences have been established as relevant predictors of employees' energetic resources, which manifest as states of high subjective vitality (i.e., a state of energy and aliveness; Ryan and Frederick, 1997) in the work- and home domain (e.g., Sonnentag and Fritz, 2007). We go beyond conceptualizing a simple spillover process by drawing from the Work-Home Resources Model (ten Brummelhuis and Bakker, 2012) and argue that resource gains can kickstart daily resource enrichment (i.e., a process of cross-domain resource accumulation). Specifically, we propose that commute recovery experiences during the home-to-work commute in the morning facilitate employees' subjective vitality when arriving at work, which fuels motivating resource-generating states as reflected by work engagement during the workday and subjective vitality at the end of the workday. This in turn positively impacts employees' work-to-home commute recovery experiences in the evening and their subjective vitality back in the home domain on that day. Furthermore, we also shed light on the proposed daily cross-domain resource enrichment process by exploring the role of commute time as a boundary condition.

Drawing on the proposed theoretical integration, we conducted a daily diary study with a sample of 90 employees and 719 daily measurement points to explore the beneficial effects of commute recovery experiences for daily gain spirals. Our results largely support our theoretical propositions. More specifically, our research suggests that relaxation and detachment but not mastery during the work commute in the morning can kickstart daily gain spirals to promote subjective vitality at work. Furthermore, our data suggest that relaxation and mastery during the home commute can bring the gain spiral back home as these recovery experiences link subjective vitality in the work domain to subjective vitality in the home domain. Finally, whereas we do not find evidence for a direct or moderating effect of commute time during the

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morning commute, our study lends preliminary support for the positive utility view of commute time during the evening commute as daily commute time strengthens the relations between commute relaxation and mastery during the evening commute and subjective vitality when arriving at home.

To conclude, by concurrently examining morning and evening commute experiences the present research expands our understanding of the differential effects of recovery experiences for the morning and evening commutes.