

REPORT 12

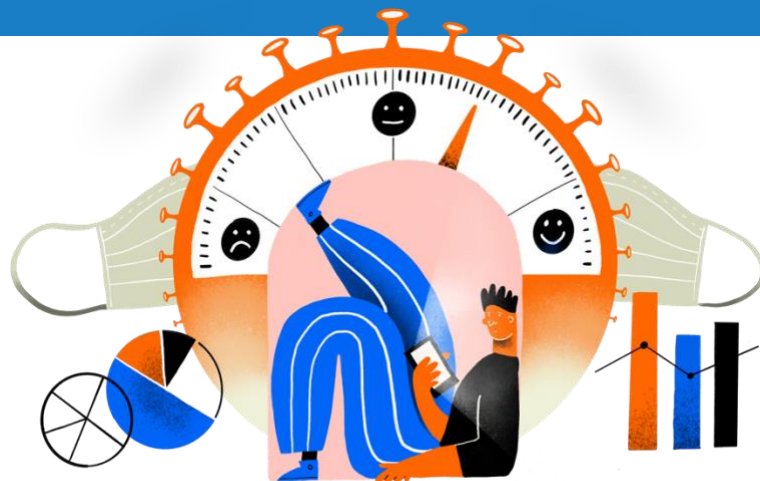
The population is no longer motivated.

How can we create a motivating framework?

The Motivation Barometer

Authors (in alphabetical order): Sofie Morbée, Omer Van den Bergh, Maarten Vansteenkiste, Joachim Waterschoot

Reference: Motivation Barometer (August 19, 2020). The population is no longer motivated. How can we create a motivational framework?. Ghent, Belgium.

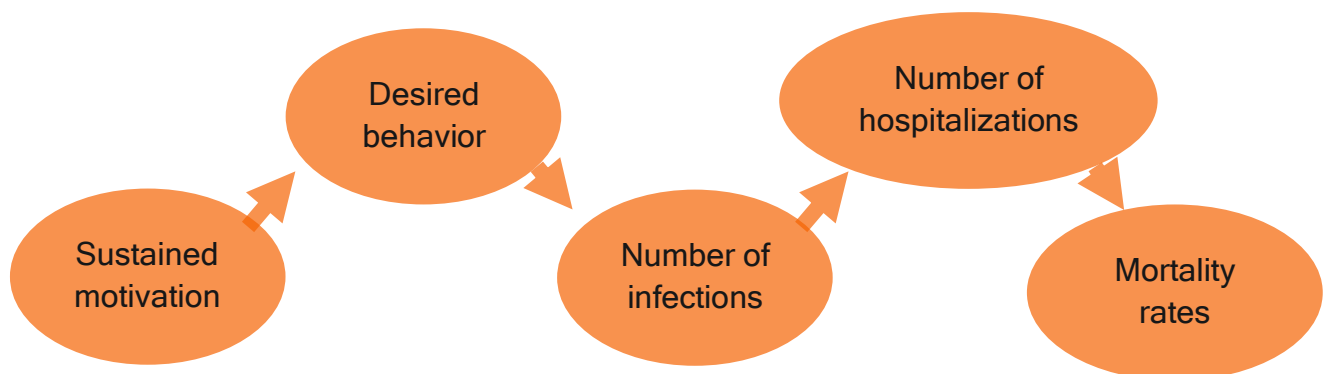


A new wave of infections has adverse effect on motivation. Many citizens start to feel corona fatigue. While we yearned for an energizing summer vacation, we were taken by the virus at speed. The motivation of the population has been assessed in the Motivation Barometer survey since the beginning of the lockdown in March. To date, 51,167 people participated in this study, including 5,192 people since the recent intensification of measures in late July. The results of this survey show that our motivation for following the measures is shrinking fast. This is due not only to the long duration of the corona crisis so far, but also to insufficient scientifically based commitment to behavioral determinants to manage the crisis. Additional efforts are urgently needed. In this report, we summarize the main results of recent surveys, advocate an interdisciplinary approach, and offer a set of recommendations (do's and don'ts) for motivational communication and policy.

Part I: Motivation for measures at lowest point

Whether or not people adhere to the behavioral measures is driven by our motivation: the population's current motivation predicts its future behavior. More and better motivated citizens adhere more strictly to the measures (Morbée et al., 2021), thereby limiting the number of infections and thus the number of hospitalizations and deaths. By focusing on the motivation of the population, we can therefore intervene early in the 'corona chain' (see Figure 1). It is therefore crucial to monitor the motivational functioning of the population. This is precisely the objective of the Motivation Barometer. We highlight four recent findings that point to a worrying downward trend.

Figure 1. Corona chain

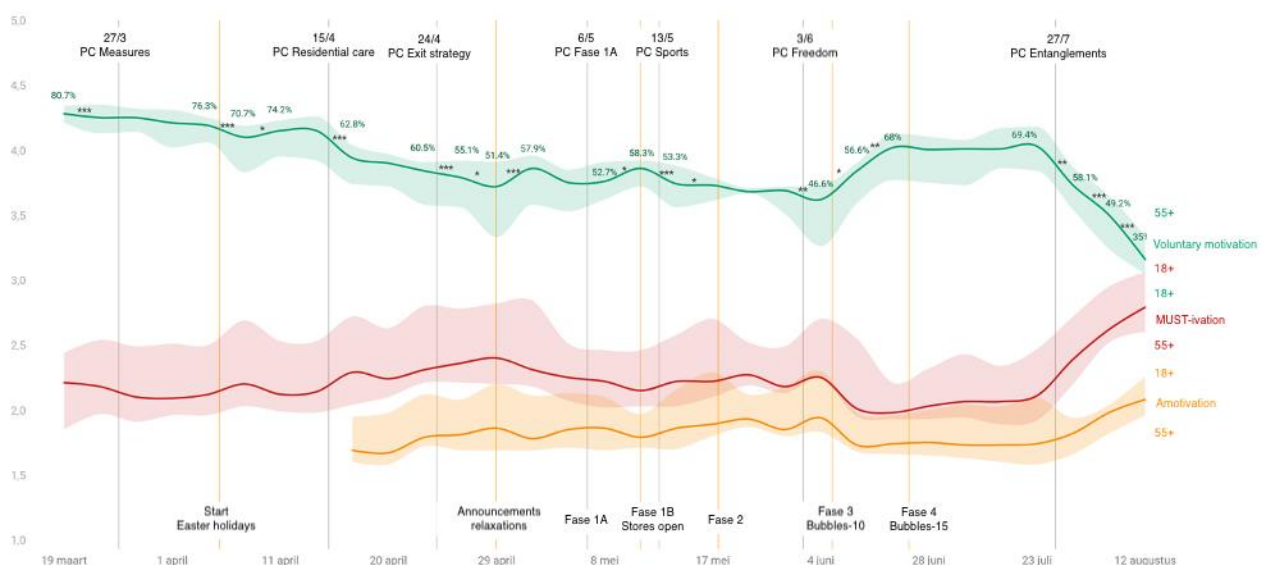


Since the beginning of the measurements, participants have indicated whether they agree with the measures because they find them meaningful and necessary (voluntary motivation) or whether they feel obliged to comply with them, for example to avoid criticism from others or a fine ('must'-ivation). The distinction between the two types of motivation is crucial because only voluntary motivation predicts whether citizens will sustainably comply with the measures. 'Must'-ivated citizens more easily give in to temptations (e.g., an invitation to a BBQ with 12 people they more easily accept), and they are even inclined to resist the measures (Morbée et al., 2021), especially when they are becoming stricter. In addition to these two forms of motivation, the demotivation of citizens is also measured. Demotivated citizens show a helplessness reaction: they seem to have lost their energy to consistently adhere to the measures and doubt their usefulness.

Observation 1: Voluntary motivation drops sharply, while must-ivation and demotivation rise.

Figure 2 shows that voluntary motivation has declined sharply. At the beginning of the corona crisis (mid-March), 81% of those surveyed fully supported the measures. This voluntary motivation went through ups and downs throughout the semi-lockdown because of the granted relaxations and the (de)motivating communication of the government, with a low of 47% at the end of May. After the granted relaxations in early June by the National Security Council, motivation rose again to 69% willingness in mid-July. However, since the tightening in early August, voluntary motivation seems to be declining rapidly: from 69% to 35% during the week of August 12. At the same time, 'must'-ivation experienced a significant increase: both lines almost intersect. Parallel to the increase in 'must'-ivation, an increase in demotivation is noticeable. A lot of research shows that a cocktail of 'must'-ivation and demotivation - both were never so high - is associated with the most

Figure 2. Evolution in motivation during the corona crisis.

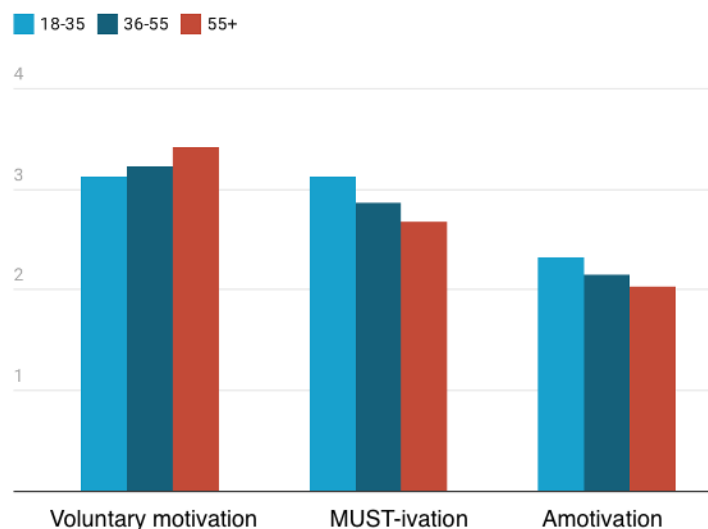


www.motivationbarometer.com

undesirable behavioral and welfare effects (e.g. Haerens et al., 2010). Citizens are more likely to give up: they no longer count their social contacts, they wear their face masks less careful, and they are more inclined to show resistance in which measures are completely disregarded.

Although these motivational trends occur in all age groups, they are more pronounced among young adults (ages 18-35). Figure 3 shows that young adults are less voluntarily motivated and more 'must'-ivated for the measures than other age groups. In their case, the 'must'-ivation tipping point was reached: voluntary motivation and 'must'-ivation appear to be balanced among them (see light blue bars in Figure 3). Note that female and older participants are more strongly represented in this sample. Because these groups are generally better motivated, the present results most likely underestimate declining motivational trends.

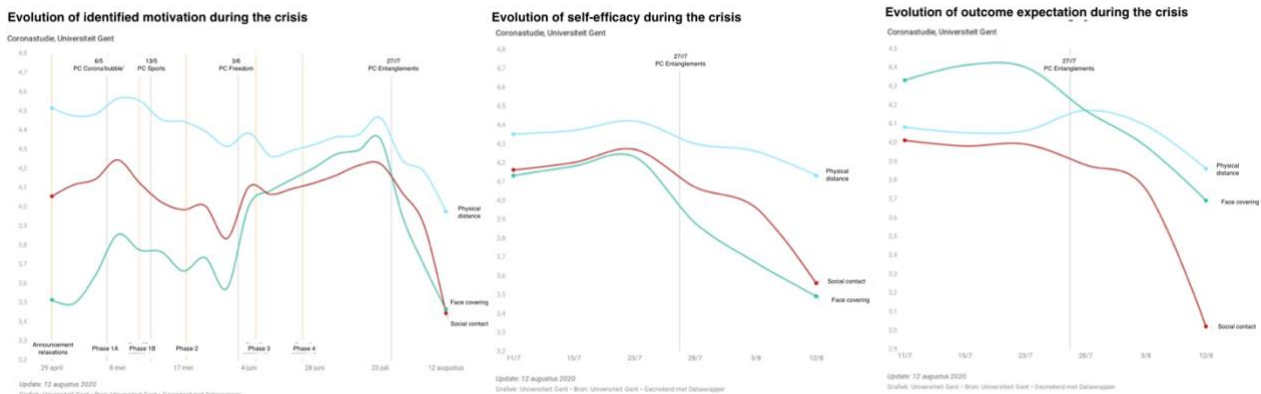
Figure 3. Average motivations by age group



Finding 2: These trends toward demotivation appear particularly for the face mask requirement and restricting social contacts.

Figure 4a, 4b and 4c show the motivational trends for three separate measures: keeping distance, limiting social contacts and wearing face masks. Three findings stand out. First, voluntary motivation for each of these measures has been declining since the intensification of the measures, although this decline is more pronounced for wearing face masks and limiting social contacts (see Figure 4a). Participants indicate that they still support maintaining physical distance the most. In parallel, the perceived ability to adhere to these three measures is declining (see Figure 4b): participants feel that they have a decreasing ability to adhere.

Figure 4a, 4b, 4c. Evolution in measure-specific motivational processes.

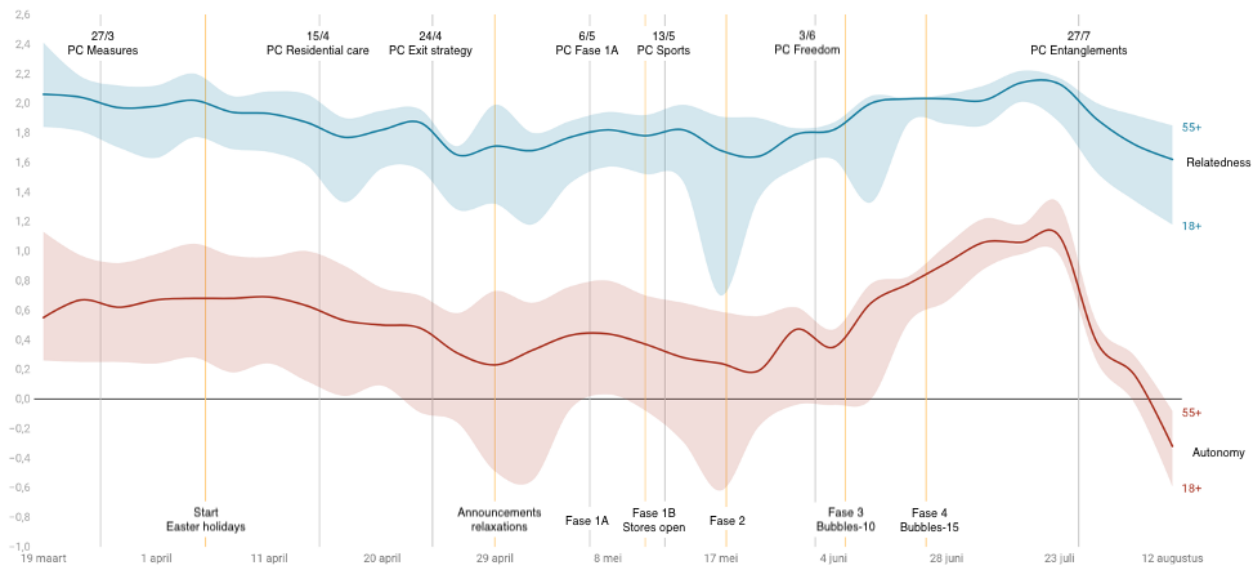


This appears especially true for face masks and limiting social contact. Finally, people are increasingly questioning whether successful adherence will effectively control the virus? They doubt this more strongly since the intensification of the measures, particularly for limiting our social contacts (see Figure 4c). In short, the results for the different measures point to similar declining motivational trends, although these are less pronounced for maintaining physical distance.

Observation 3: Only a minority really adheres to the bubble of 5.

If participants are asked whether they follow the 'bubble of 5' rule, 46.2% report following it rigorously, 43.4% follow it fairly, and 10.4% do not follow it. However, not all individuals who report adhering to the measure conscientiously do so. This becomes evident when questions were asked about the reciprocity of their social contacts. About half (47.6%) of the participants who say they faithfully adhere to the social measure maintain reciprocal social contacts. In other words, citizens do not necessarily choose each other, so larger social networks interact. In practice, this means that only 45% of the population adheres to the 'bubble of 5' rule. A majority of individuals who claim to faithfully follow the 'bubble of 5' rule find this quite (very) difficult (67%). At the same time, a majority (of those who claim to follow the 'bubble of 5' rule) are determined to adhere to the prescribed social restriction as long as the government prescribes it (69%). Individuals who are fairly or not adhering to the measure indicate that they have met about 9 people on average since its introduction and report that a bubble of 12 would be an achievable bubble size for their family.

Figure 4. Evolutions in basic psychological needs during the corona crisis.



Finding 4: The needs for belonging and autonomy are compromised, particularly among young adults.

Our basic psychological needs are also being less and less satisfied. Psychologists distinguish a limited number of basic psychological needs. Satisfying them increases our energy level, promotes our resilience and provides motivational oxygen to persevere. In the case of need frustration, we become gloomy or anxious, our sleep quality suffers, and we become demotivated. Figure 5 shows the evolution in the satisfaction of two basic needs: the need for autonomy and for relatedness. When the autonomy need is satisfied, we experience choice in our actions, thinking and feeling and can be ourselves. When this need is frustrated, we feel curtailed and pressured. Satisfaction of relatedness comes from a warm and close relationship with others. In the case of frustration, we feel lonely and isolated.

When the intensifications of the measures were introduced, we suggested that our basic psychological needs were threatened and suggested ways of coping with them (see "Intensified measures are hard on us: how to deal with this?"). The results today show that our basic psychological needs are increasingly frustrated, even more than during the semi-lockdown when even more stringent measures were in force (e.g., no contacts with people outside our bubble; closed borders). In fact, the frustration of the need for autonomy outweighs the satisfaction (the middle line indicates a balance between the two). This adverse trend is particularly prevalent among young adults. These worse scores are systematically observed among younger target groups. The corona crisis is hitting them harder than older generations. Young adults feel forced into a straitjacket, their 'traditional'

(summer) activities (e.g., attending festivals, going out in groups) are more strongly thwarted and they therefore pay a higher price for the corona crisis than older generations.

Part II: Plea for interdisciplinarity

From the beginning of the corona crisis, experts emphasized that our behavior is the most important weapon in combating the spread of the virus. This applies not only to following behavioral measures to prevent infections, but also to key measures, such as testing, 'tracing' and quarantine, to prevent infections from spreading further. The targeted and science-based use of behavioral expertise to manage the pandemic can therefore be considered an investment with the greatest 'return-on-investment', both for public health and the economy (Kazak, 2020). Behavioral experts therefore consider it a display of short-sightedness, and even negligence, on the part of the government that they did not formally deploy behavioral expertise at decision levels that could impact behavioral variables. Because population behavior precedes the virological state of the population by one to two weeks, it is incomprehensible that a behavioral epidemiological survey of crucial motivational processes and actual behavior has not been established in any way. This is essential in developing a preventive policy. Any restriction of economic activity quickly costs many times as much as an investment in crucial expertise to prevent them.

Finding 5: The lack of formal involvement of behavioral experts at the policy level is incomprehensible.

For these reasons, committed academics and professionals soon established an ad hoc working group on 'psychology and corona'. It consists of a core group of 8 academic psychologists and members of professional organizations, assisted by a bunch of experts from different subdisciplines of psychology. Through opinion pieces, press releases, and reports with empirical data on motivation and behavior, messages were repeatedly disseminated with advice and policy proposals to manage the crisis in terms of population behavior. These messages led to interest and openness to behavioral expertise from key advisory and policy committees, but not to systematic implementation of relevant proposals launched by this group. As a result, decisions with far-reaching consequences for the population were made primarily on the basis of medical and legal arguments, and in second order were inspired only by policy makers' psychological intuition and gut feeling about processes that determine behavior.

This is insufficient. Does this mean that all advice so far has been wrong? No. And does it mean that behavioral experts have magic powers to steer the population's behavior in the desired direction? Again, no. Behavioral experts are not magicians, but they can support policy in a scientific and evidence-based manner. In the eyes of the 'psychology and

corona' working group, therefore, many opportunities have been missed today to manage the epidemic, with more attention to the needs and requirements of the population. There is a need both for a more unifying and supportive framework and for more inspiring and motivating communication. The results from the Motivation Barometer, which were repeatedly made public, show that the communication and measures introduced have repeatedly undermined the motivation of the population. These elements contributed - partly due to the long duration of the epidemic - to the fact that the motivation of the population is at a low point today. In the eyes of the study group, time is running out when it comes to motivation and the question is whether the missed opportunities can still be made up. It is more than ever all hands on deck. Long winter evenings are approaching, which we normally brighten up with cultural events and family parties. Colds and flu will make their reappearance. It is therefore more important than ever to get the population on board.

Finding 6: More than ever, there is a need for a unifying, supportive framework and motivating, inspiring communication to encourage the population to engage in desired behaviors.

The 'psychology and corona' working group views behavior as embedded in a complex system of individuals who form groups and communities in diverse physical and social environments. Behavior needs to be understood and influenced in a scientifically based manner with respect and participation from the public. We therefore advocate for a broader interdisciplinary advisory group with a substantial behavioral science component to directly advise key bodies with policy authority in taking action. In this paper, we aim to briefly describe some of the key advice in terms of concrete "do's and don'ts", drawing heavily from the various opinion pieces and press releases that have already been circulated.

Part III: Behavioral measures: some do's & don'ts from a behavioral science perspective

Because of the central role of the population's behavior in controlling the pandemic, a coherent framework of motivational messages and other measures is needed that stimulates the population's sense of responsibility and ownership, makes leadership visible and acceptable, and takes into account the needs and capacities of different population groups. Without such a comprehensive framework, relaxations of the measures might become a free pass for the population to do its own thing (see opinion article). If, however, it is well designed and implemented, the possibility arises for preventive intervention and adjustment to reduce or avoid risks of contamination and subsequent economic and health damage.

Recommendation 1: Make the strategy to handle the crisis as predictable and controllable as possible.

Events that are experienced as unpredictable and uncontrollable are particularly aversive and stressful. This undermines mental resilience, and (thus) motivation and commitment to persist with behavioral rules. It is a basic need for people to be able to plan, at least in the short term. Making the strategy predictable and providing clear feedback on the results of the efforts strengthens the sense of controllability and autonomy, thus also the motivation and willingness to adhere. This can be done in the following ways:

- Establish a flashing light or color code system that allows for easy clarification of the (color)phase we are in, in which direction we are moving, where exactly we want to go (<50 infections per day? A certain R-value?), what the criteria are for moving from one color code to another.
- Offer a self-assessment tool that allows people to evaluate their own corona-relevant behavior (personal corona footprint).
- Offer tools that allow people to simulate "what-if" scenarios (e.g., effects of bubble size, effects of keeping a distance, wearing a face mask, worst-case and best-case scenarios, etc..).

- Determine, in consultation with the experts, the threshold values for the flashing light or color code system. Communicate clearly in advance which measures/principles will come into effect when a threshold is exceeded. Conversely, it is then immediately clear when it can be relaxed again. This threshold value must be determined in such a way that the population actually gets the chance to avoid the next threshold value through its behavior. This 'social contract' strengthens autonomy and the feeling of predictability and controllability.
- Do not only show graphs indicating where we will be thanks to our efforts (forecast), but also graphs indicating where we would be without making the requested efforts. The difference in the forecast figures between the two points directly to the gains to be made thanks to our efforts.

Recommendation 2: Define simple, clear principles of behavior within a logical framework.

Move away from a 'rule' policy, but try to invest as much as possible in behavioral principles. These behavioral principles should best meet the following conditions:

- Make sure they are generally perceived as meaningful. Simplicity and uniformity are secondary to meaningfulness in this regard: a rule that is perceived as illogical but is simple and clear remains illogical. The greater the understanding of the measure, the greater the likelihood of sustained motivation.
- Communicate a ranking of the degree of effectiveness to prevent virus infection. This allows the public to participate and make appropriate choices.
- Make sure these behavioral principles are everywhere and repeated (media, etc..) with appealing design (visuals, etc..) (See also opinion article).

- Draw on communication science insights to translate these messages (Brossard et al., 2020). This includes both avoiding negative elements (e.g., showing undesirable behavior, fatalism, loss framing, misinformation) and stimulating desirable outcomes (e.g., appeal to the public interest, use trusting individuals, use gain instead of loss framing (i.e., emphasize what you can gain instead of what you can lose by doing something), appeal to the identity of the population, cfr ‘people like us’, etc.).
- The bubble concept is well established, but the bubble size assigned is rigid, not well applied and not verifiable. Moreover, the bubble concept is used superficially in practice and not in a mathematically correct way. Because the firmness of the bubble is more important than the size, a number is better directional with certain limits (e.g. between 5 and 10) giving people a bit of autonomy according to their personal situation. This stimulates motivation.
- Facilitate the continued application of these rules of conduct through principles of ‘nudging’ :
 - a. Elicit hand washing by frequent alcohol gels
 - b. Locate distance keeping through lineation and layout of the physical environment
 - c. Encourage use of face masks by making them available in critical areas as much as possible
 - d. Elicit the restriction of frequent contacts through easy regulation of working from home, online cultural performances, etc.

Recommendation 3: Commit to a broadly socially based project with a common goal to be pursued (keeping virus under control and life as livable as possible).

Humans are social beings who seek out relatedness in difficulties (see, e.g., the spontaneous applause moments for caregivers, making face masks in group, etc.). This works very motivationally supportive. Experiencing social support is also important for mental resilience and health.

- Deploy social models through various channels (influencers through social media, well-known Flemings from sports and entertainment, etc.) in which they demonstrate their commitment their difficulties in keeping it up, their way of living in corona times, etc.
- Create a regular column, e.g. corona quarterly after the TV news, in which all kinds of relevant topics are discussed in a playful way (new corona etiquette in handling, contest to come up with new slogan, interviews with ordinary people who explain how they struggle with the problems but keep going, creative solutions for new problems ("wisdom of the crowd"), etc. An amusing and connective program can be an important counterbalance to the lack of freedom and the doom and gloom.
- Mobilize the cultural sector that is uniquely suited to think through and implement creative socially-connected initiatives through (online) media (e.g., through submitting competitive proposals to a corona fund that provides the funding).
- Mobilize the events sector to make cultural projects "corona proof".

Recommendation 4: Support on principles of motivational communication.

Principles of motivational communication allow the population to identify with the behavioral rules in order to remain sustainably motivated (see opinion article and report for more information). Sustainable motivation requires continuous:

- Participation: e.g. the population can help choose a new slogan; test support among sectors or target groups for adjustment of measures.
- Good alignment: e.g., give a meaningful interpretation for a measure, tailored to the situation and target group; choose wording adapted to the target group.
- An accompanying attitude: e.g., emphasize the ever-growing commitment of fellow citizens to meet the goal; provide good examples that citizens can mirror if they are tempted to violate the measures (cfr. coping script).
- Ongoing clarification: e.g., communicate new measures clearly and in unison; clearly state what goal we are aiming for in the numbers and what the intermediate goals are.

Recommendation 5: Provide flexibility by geographic locations and groups.

The preceding recommendations should be tailored as much as possible and used according to the situation in a specific geographical area (central cities, provinces, ...). Similar for well-defined subgroups as far as virologically justifiable.

- Young people at school
- Singles
- Elderly
-

Recommendation 6: Systematically monitor behavioral determinants and behaviors of the population using representative polls

Just as it is important to monitor the spread of the virus in a sufficiently fine-grained manner, it is important to measure the nature and degree of motivation and corona-relevant behavior in a representative sample of the population with sufficient attention to specific target groups. Behavior precedes the spread of infections by 1 to 2 weeks and thus provides an excellent basis for management and adjustment. These data also clarify the (implicit) cost-benefit balance made by the population: are the personal psychological and economic costs of the behavioral mitigation measures proportional to the expected increase in safety and health associated with them? The repeated mapping of motivational processes and corona-relevant behavior thus allows the identification of 'psychological turning points' that indicate when the perceived benefits no longer justify the costs incurred for the population.

Conclusion: invest in our human behavioral capital

The COVID-19 crisis is a crisis of long duration. It is a 'marathon' that we are running. It therefore requires a sustained and long-term effort on the part of the population to adjust its behavior. Today we find that the population's motivation to adapt its behavior is at an all-time low. It is particularly curious that the government has so far not involved behavioral experts in the development of its policies in contrast to other European countries (the Dutch National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM) has a complete behavioral unit). Psychologists and other behavioral scientists can make an important contribution to the development of a motivational and socially binding framework. The expert group 'psychology & corona' therefore calls (once again) for urgent work on this.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- **Principal Investigator:**
Prof. Dr. Maarten Vansteenkiste (Maarten.Vansteenkiste@ugent.be)
- **Co-investigator:**
Prof. Dr. Omer Van den Bergh (omer.vandenbergh@kuleuven.be)
- **Conservation and dissemination questionnaire:**
Dra. Sofie Morbee (Sofie.Morbee@ugent.be)
- **Data and Analytics:**
Drs. Joachim Waterschoot (Joachim.Waterschoot@ugent.be)

www.motivationbarometer.com

