

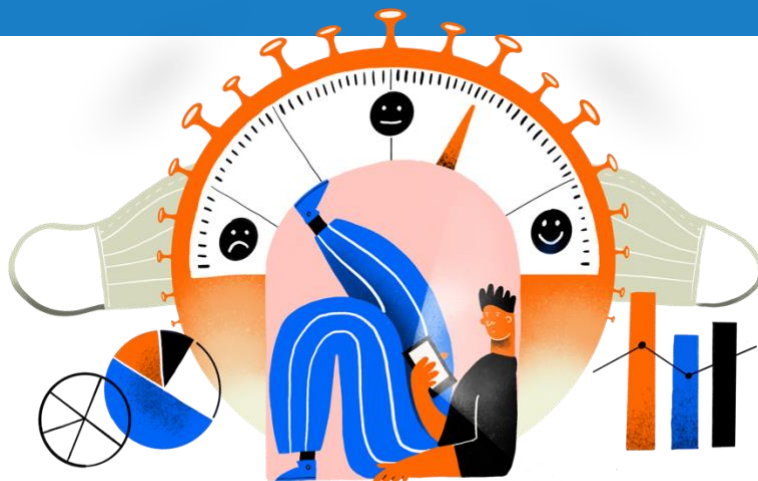
# REPORT 24

## How can we re-energize motivation?

### The Motivation Barometer

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Reference: Motivation Barometer (February 14, 2021). How can we re-energize motivation? Ghent, Belgium.



*In managing this crisis, there are many unpredictable factors, such as the mutations of the virus and the production and delivery of vaccines that are difficult for us to control. Yet we - the government and citizens - have our fate in our own hands. After all, we have control over the key factor to control the situation: our behavior.*

*But this may exactly be the problem. The latest results from the Motivation Barometer show that we are following the measures less and less (see Figure 1). This decline was to be expected based on the erosion of voluntary motivation at the end of January (see report #21). But there is more. The lack of consistent motivational and behavioral support policies may well ensure that the third wave, about which there has been concern for weeks, will actually occur. What factors might explain the continued decline in motivation and how can we turn the tide?*

## 1. Develop consistent goal-oriented policies

For many weeks, it was stated that relaxations were only possible if we reached thresholds (800 infections/75 hospitalizations). However, these critical thresholds were not taken into account last Friday. Suddenly, as of February 13, we could go back to the hairdresser. The thresholds were no longer referred to and no explanation was given why we could deviate from this tight plan. This makes it difficult to use these thresholds to put further relaxations "on hold" or to allow them without creating confusion or a perception of arbitrariness.

At the same time, the message is given that politics autonomously determines our freedom and that citizens are not supposed to think along. It is suggested that robust lobby groups can get things "fixed". The fact that voluntary motivation for the measures is decreasing under these circumstances is understandable. Since last weekend, for the first time, a sharp drop in motivation for various measures can be noticed (Figure 2).

### Recommendation

Link relaxations in a conceptual diagram to a set of achievable thresholds and stick to them consistently. Provide a clear explanation of why the initially set thresholds were not adhered to. Visualize this so people can easily follow along.

## 2. Support the belief in the effectiveness and necessity of the measures

At the beginning of the second lockdown, the curves dropped quite rapidly, which strengthened our belief in the effectiveness of the measures and our own ability to follow them. Because we had positive expectations for getting this crisis under control, we maintained the behavior even during the difficult holiday season of late December. However, this link between our behavior and the result was put to the test when the numbers began to stabilize, and gradually, a sense of discouragement and helplessness began to grow. With the decision to open the barbershops, discouragement and helplessness were further fueled. It appeared that the politicians no longer believed in their stated goals and the possibility of achieving them, and therefore abandoned them. As a result, the disconnect between our behavior - still our most crucial weapon - and the result was actually confirmed by government. The perception arises that we no longer have control over the situation. In this context, it is understandable that, since last weekend, the belief in the effectiveness of the measures (Figure 3a) and the feeling of being able to follow them has taken a big hit (Figure 3b). We find it harder to charge ourselves to continue to bring the requested efforts.

### Recommendation

Reaffirm the causal relationship between our behavior and the outcome and deliver a message of hope. Communicate through "if-then reasoning" in a graphic way that we have an effective B plan if a variant were to break out (see Figure 4). Indicate graphically how our persistent behavior causes us to reach the anticipated thresholds faster, while laxity causes delays in reaching the thresholds.

## 3. Really choose mental well-being

When the opening of barbershops, facials, and tattoo stores was announced last Friday, reference was made to their role in our mental health. Indeed, our mental health has long been under pressure (see report #21). Even today, we feel fatigued and sleep less well (see Figure 5), with adolescents, young adults, and singles experiencing relatively more mental health problems. A fresh haircut may be necessary and pleasurable, but its well-being effect is temporary, and the importance of a tattoo to our well-being can be questioned. Meanwhile, essential needs such as social relatedness, autonomy, and self-fulfillment remain unfulfilled. Although the crucial importance of these for our mental health is underscored by numerous studies. That the extremely limited space in our virological contact budget is spent on allowing close contacts that play a questionable role in our well-

being rather than on the essential needs of young people is therefore neither efficient nor defensible.

#### **Recommendation**

Within the limited virological leeway, employ a value framework to make choices for relaxations that actually support well-being. Evaluate the planning of relaxations in light of psychological processes that have been shown to be important to mental health. Frame the sequence of relaxations from this value framework.

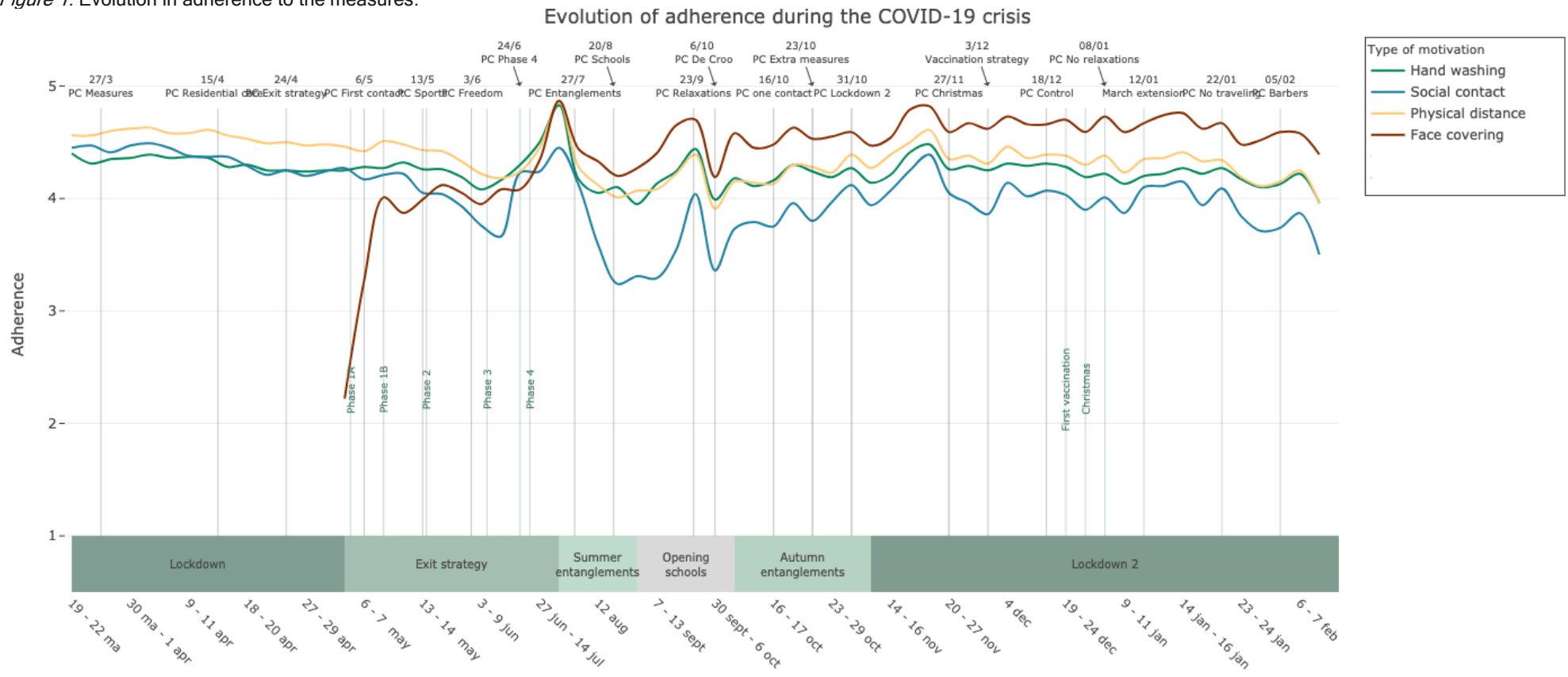
## **4. Maintain a realistic risk awareness**

In August, we felt curtailed because the strictness of the measures was not sufficiently matched to the perceived risk of contamination. Today our perceived risk is as low as it was in the summer (see Figure 6) and we feel our autonomy is equally restricted (see Figure 7). However, significantly more persons are hospitalized today than in summer. The underestimation of the real risks is understandable because the seriousness of the situation is not communicated in a systematic and didactic way to all layers of the population. When people are not able to think along sufficiently, autonomy frustration weighs more heavily and can lead to resistance. Maintaining risk awareness without fear induction as part of a motivational base within a coherent framework that supports mental well-being as much as possible, requires a well-balanced and sustained strategy that engages citizens as crucial co-players. We are still faced with an extremely difficult task that can only be succeed with the cooperation of thoughtful and motivated people.

#### **Recommendation**

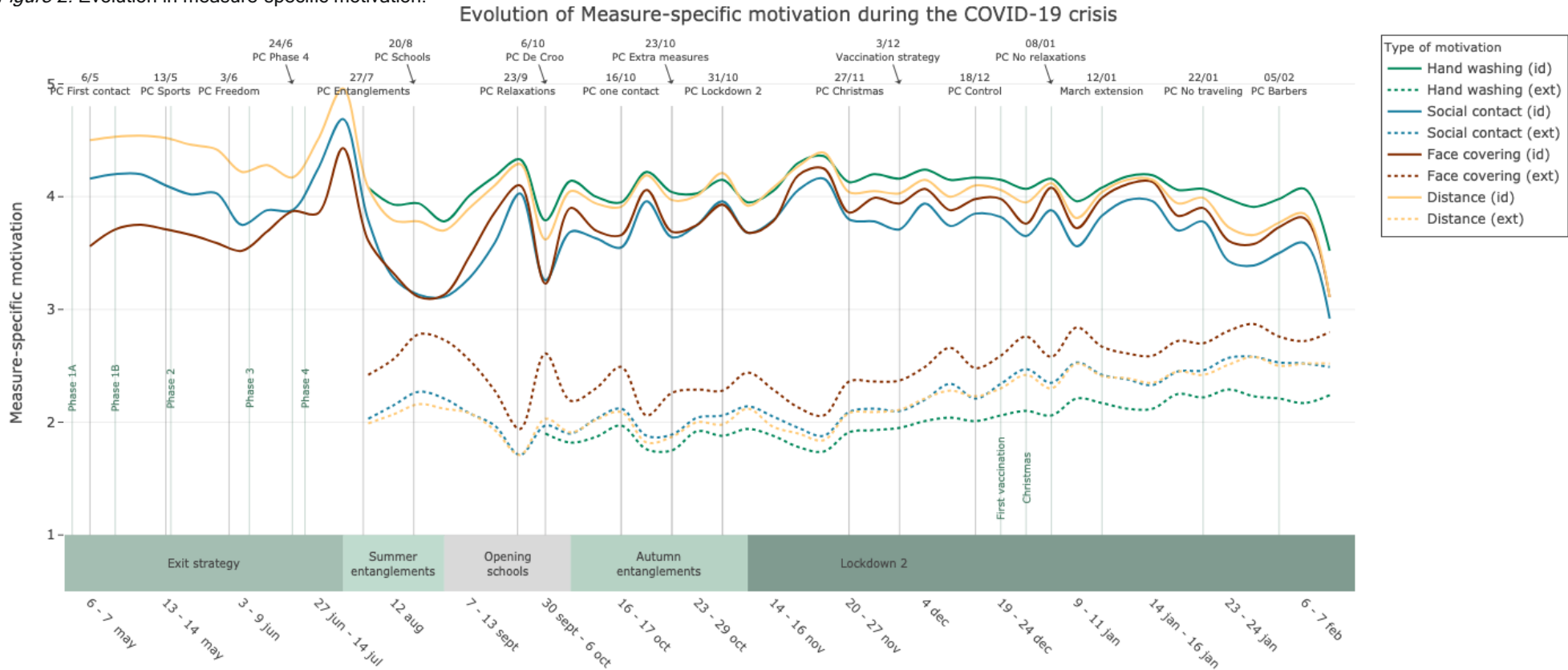
Invest in weekly communication moments where politicians, flanked by experts, provide an accessible overview of the situation, communicating transparently on progress and uncertainties. In this way, the population can further gain trust in politicians and experts (see report #23) to overcome this crisis together.

Figure 1. Evolution in adherence to the measures.



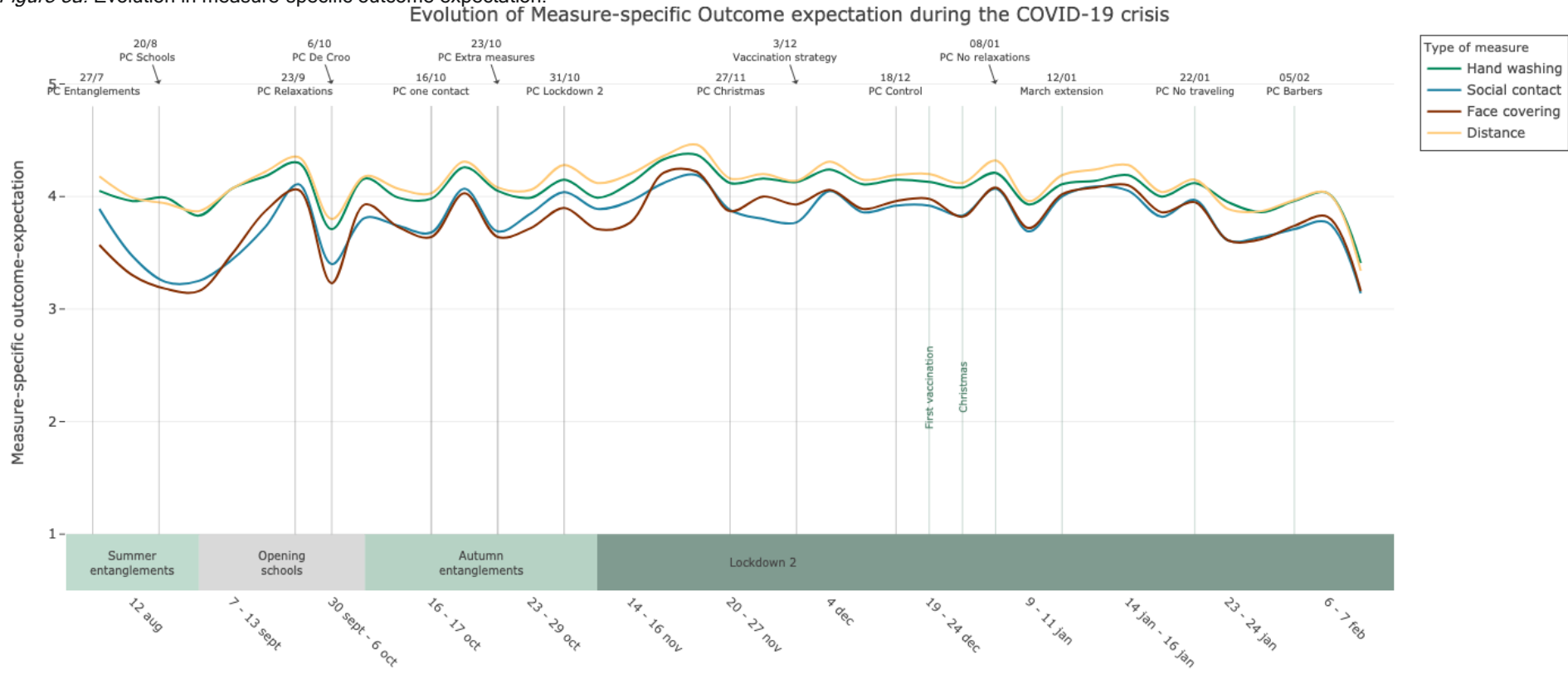
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Figure 2. Evolution in measure-specific motivation.



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Figure 3a. Evolution in measure-specific outcome expectation.



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Figure 3b. Evolution in measure-specific self-efficacy.

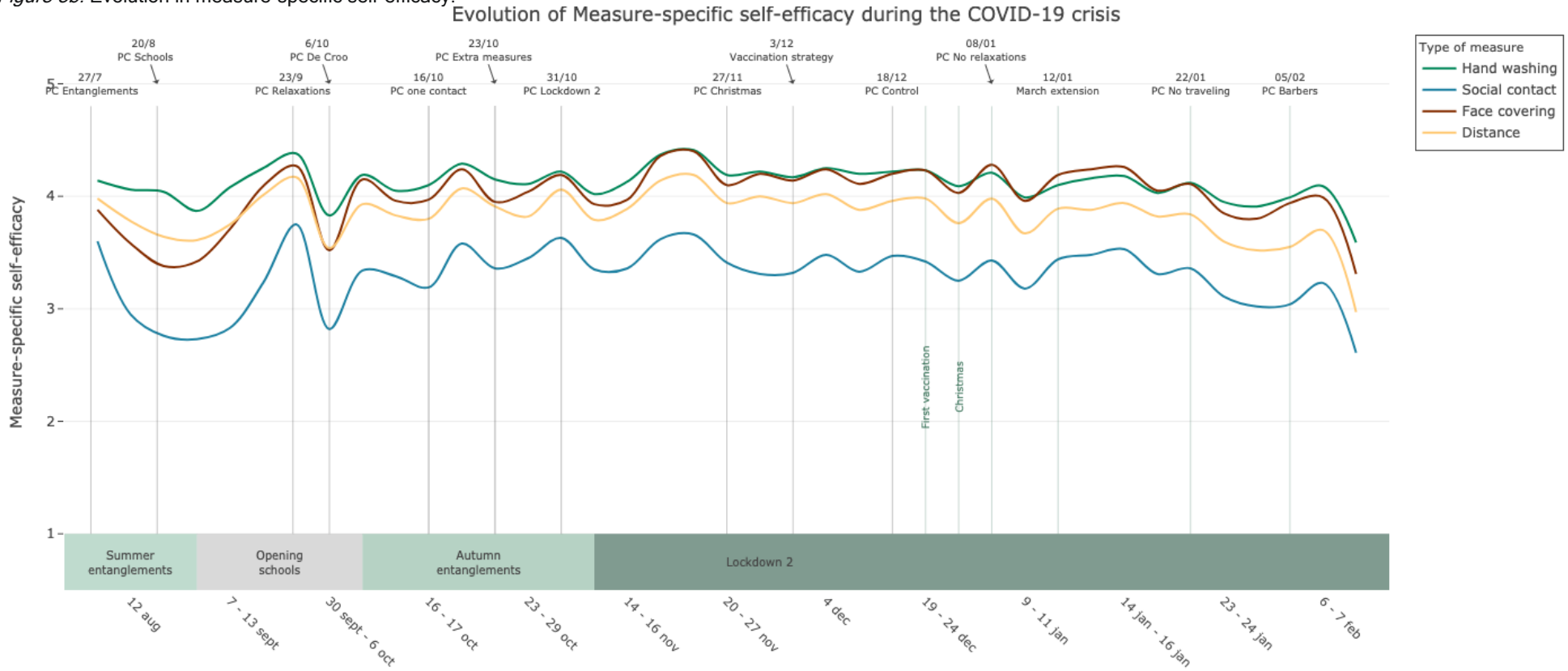
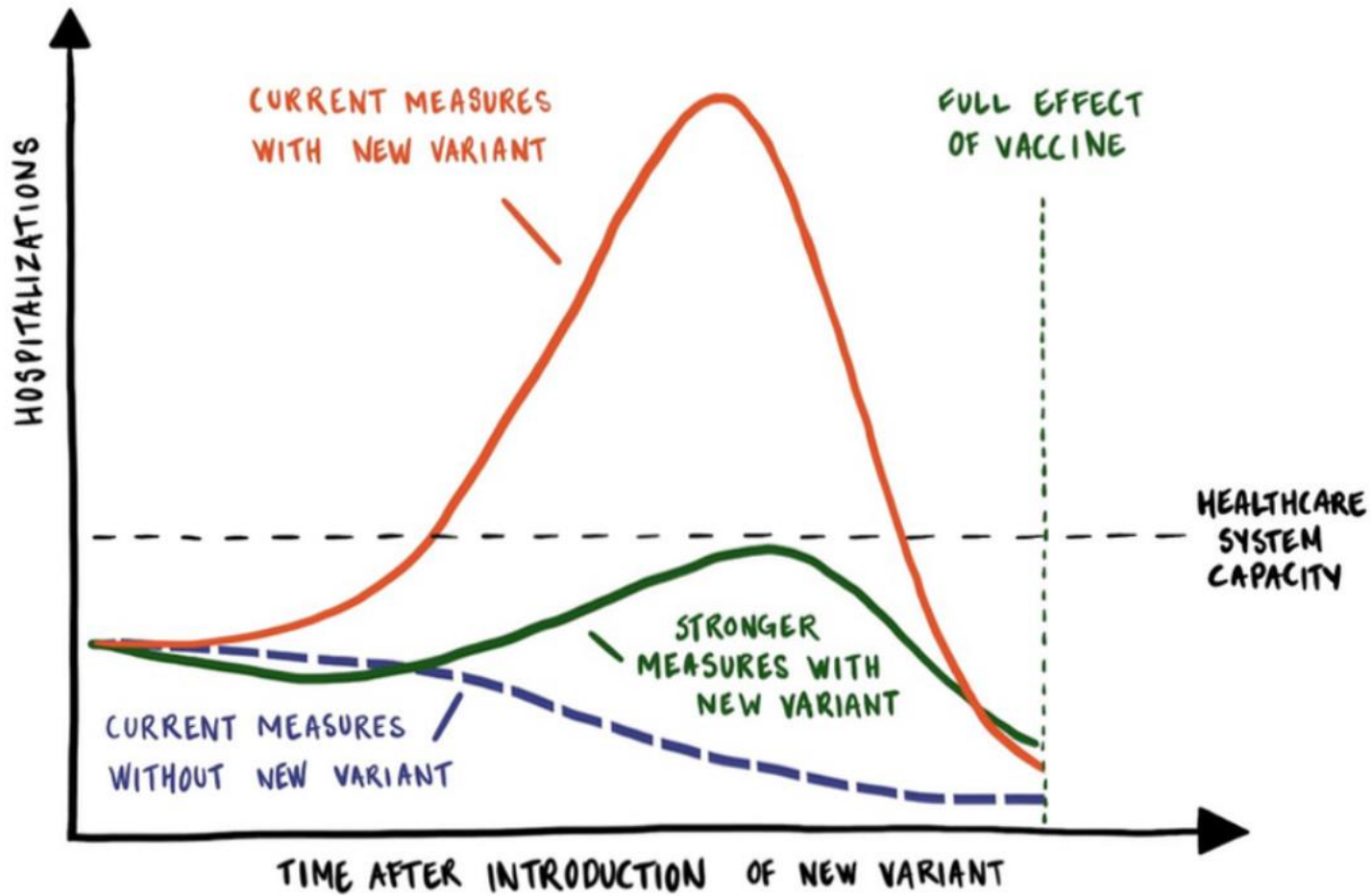




Figure 4. Example graphic illustration of communication (Petersen et al., 2021)



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Figure 5. Evolution in mental well-being.

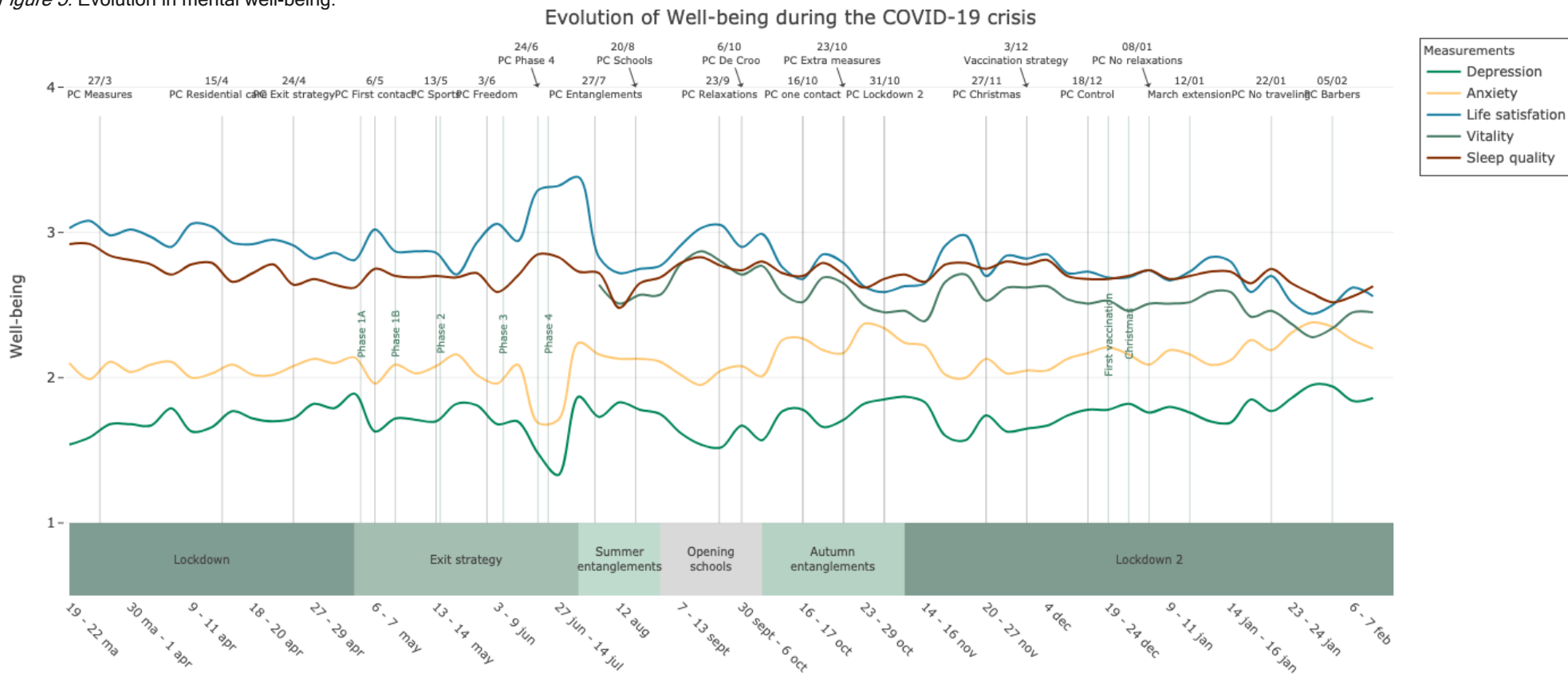
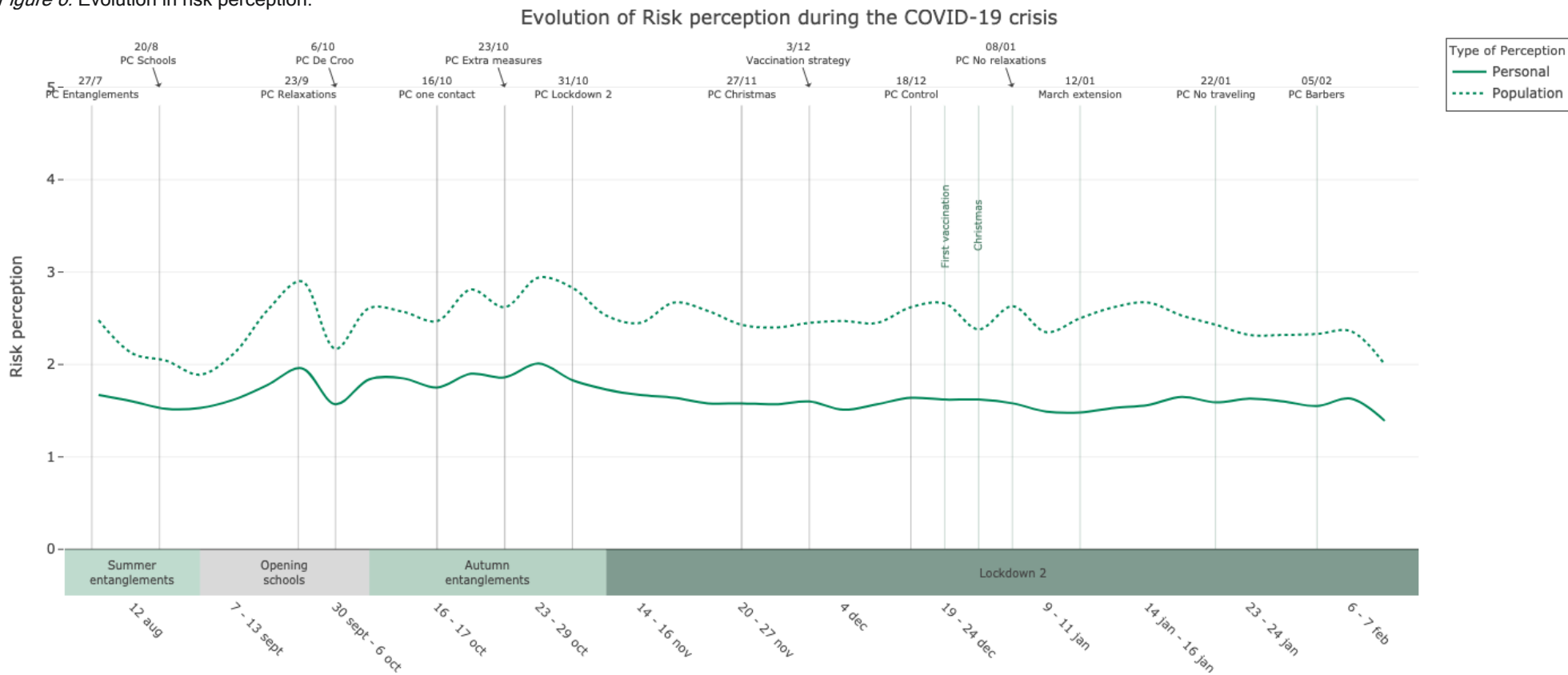
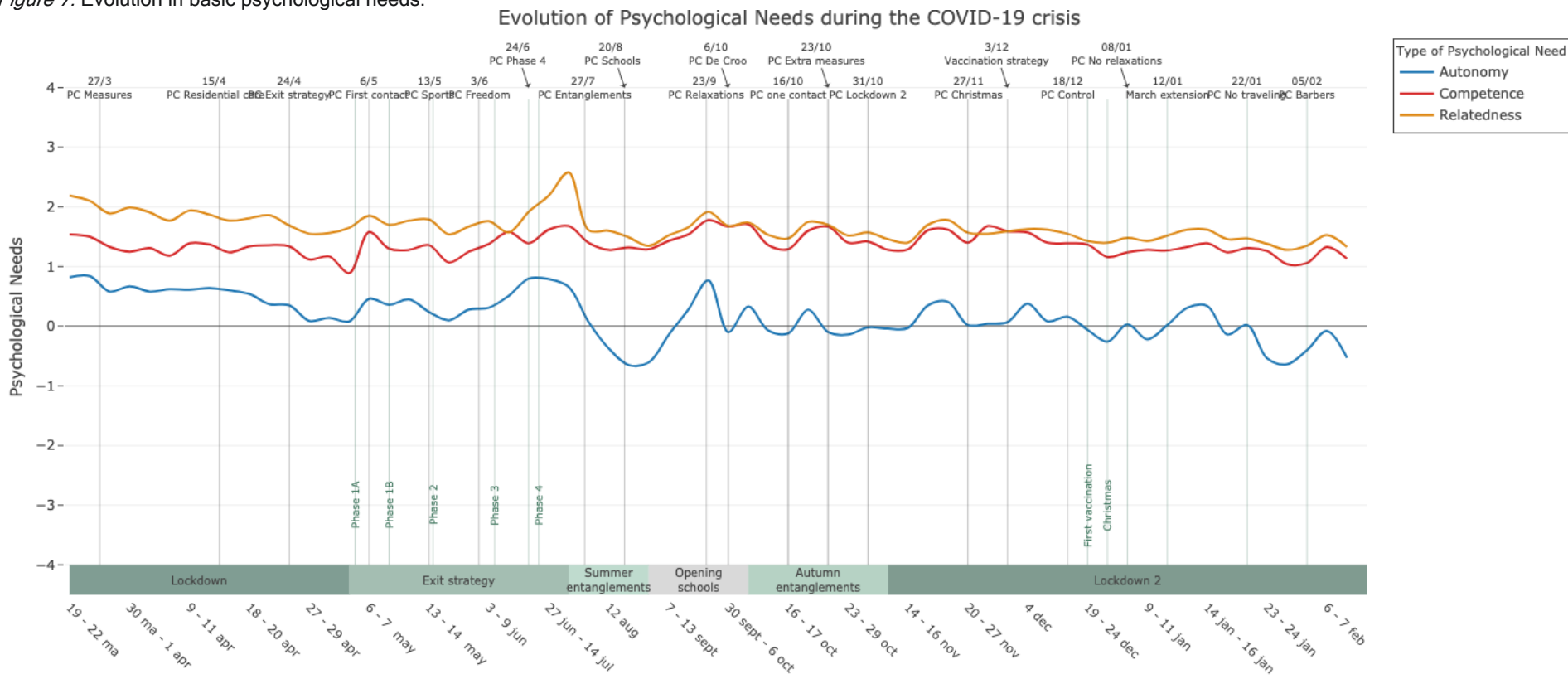


Figure 6. Evolution in risk perception.



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Figure 7. Evolution in basic psychological needs.



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