

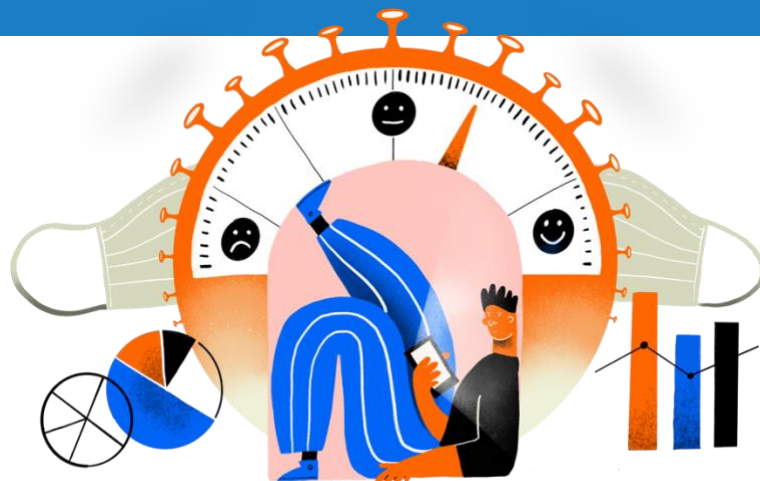
# REPORT 26

## Is there motivational willingness for stricter measures?

### The Motivation Barometer

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Reference: Motivation Barometer (March 24, 2021). Is there motivational willingness for stricter measures? Ghent University & UCLouvain, Belgium.



*With the corona numbers rising again and the call for stricter measures, the question arises whether there is sufficient motivational willingness for this. In the past, we have found that relaxations do not necessarily motivate and that stricter measures are not necessarily demotivating (see report #15 and #16). Everything depends on the framing and timing of the measures taken in light of the severity of the pandemic.*

## What about our motivation?

*Is there any willingness left?*

Voluntary motivation is now lower than in November and much lower than in March of last year. We see a similar evolution for adherence to the measures (see Figure 1). Risk awareness is also lower today than in mid-October when hospitalization rates were equally high (see Figure 2). This suggests that we may care less, or that habituation or fatigue has occurred. In any case, the motivation for adherence is rather moderate.

*Several indicators do point to growing motivational willingness.*

At the same time, Figure 1 shows that there has been improvement since reaching a low point in voluntary motivation in February, after the opening of the hairdressers (only in August was motivation even lower). Although the monthly evolution of the motivation numbers (Figure 1) indicates that the motivational willingness gradually declined since the beginning of the second semi-lockdown, there has been an improvement again since the beginning of March. The population is again more convinced of the need for measures, feels more capable of making the necessary efforts and again considers the measures more effective.

*How does this happen?*

Rising corona numbers may explain this increasing motivation and better adherence today. They are a source of greater engagement because they fuel risk awareness (see report #25).

*Is voluntary motivation well encouraged and supported?*

After each press conference, the communication style of the government team was surveyed. The communication of Friday, March 19 (N = 2711; 69% women) was perceived by participants to be more of a wait-and-see than a demanding style. A similar communication pattern was observed in late October, a week before the second lockdown was declared.

In summary, the rising hospitalization rates today leave no choice but to shift gears: additional measures are pressing in. This is not because the measures have become less effective, but because at least part of the population is adhering less in an insufficient

motivating climate and with the rise of a more contagious variant. The perception among the population is that there was too much wait-and-see action on Friday, March 19. This, together with other indicators, points to increasing willingness, although risk awareness seems a bit behind.

## How to strengthen willingness?

### *Increase risk awareness*

Point out the increasing health risks people face and the increased pressure on the health care system. Show with concrete examples how quite a few people are surprised to become infected. Such examples are much more telling than the verbal description of 50% more infectiousness of the British variant. This creates a more realistic sense of risk as we seem to underestimate the fragility of the situation.

### *Point out long-term benefits*

Outline how taking risk reducing measures is crucial, not only from a medical but also from a psychological perspective. In exchange for stricter measures, we not only gain safety, but our mental health also comes under less pressure in the long run. Thanks to this framing, the measures are perceived as necessary rather than illegitimate and/or disproportionate.

### *Make focused, well-reasoned choices*

After one year of corona crisis, the population does not accept any kind of reinforcement. It has developed, together with the experts, a critical attitude as to which measures are effective and which have only a limited virological benefit and a large psychological impact.

- Intervene in a targeted way and choose interventions with a signaling function. Just as opening the barbershops fostered the perception of safety and demotivation (see report #24), closing the barbershops can indicate the seriousness of the situation. Providing a cooling-off week in education can also be a powerful signal. In November, motivational support rose to its peak during the second lockdown.
- Provide an internally coherent set of measures. Apply some basic virological principles (e.g., outside, outside, outside) consistently. For example, if an outside group of 10 is allowed, it is better to maintain this principle for adults and children.

### *Confirm confidence in the people and in the measures*

Give a socially connecting message that highlights a common goal that we can achieve together. Include a coaching role through fixed communication moments in which the (Prime) Minister together with experts describe the state of affairs, the direction we are going, the adjustments that are needed, what the effects are if we do or don't do this (through didactic charts). In addition, let citizens speak with their questions, difficulties, good examples and stories of socially connecting actions.

*Offer a goal-based rather than time-based perspective*

Avoid making time-bound promises about the duration of stricter measures that then cannot be enforced later. Opt for a goal-based perspective where an estimated timeline is given. Indicate intermediate steps if the final goal-based perspective covers too long a period. In doing so, point out the importance of our behavior as a key factor in achieving this goal. Provide if-then graphs that show how different degrees of adherence to the measures will cause us to achieve this goal faster or slower.

Figure 1. Evolution in motivational support.

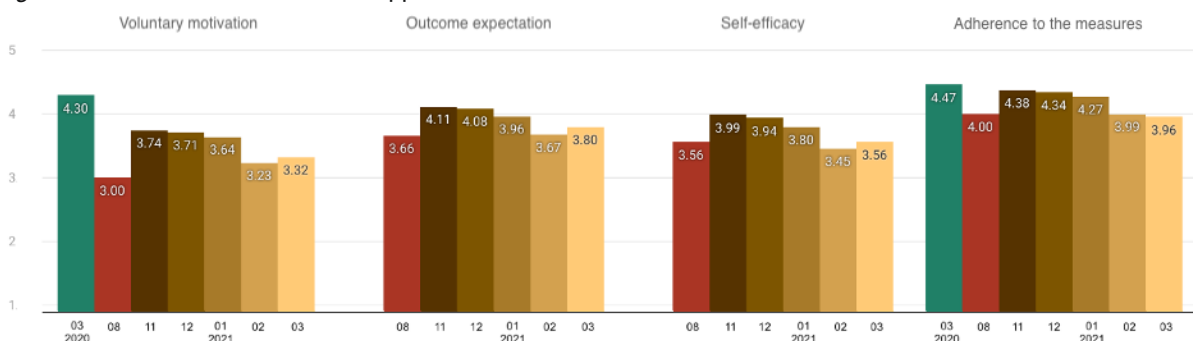
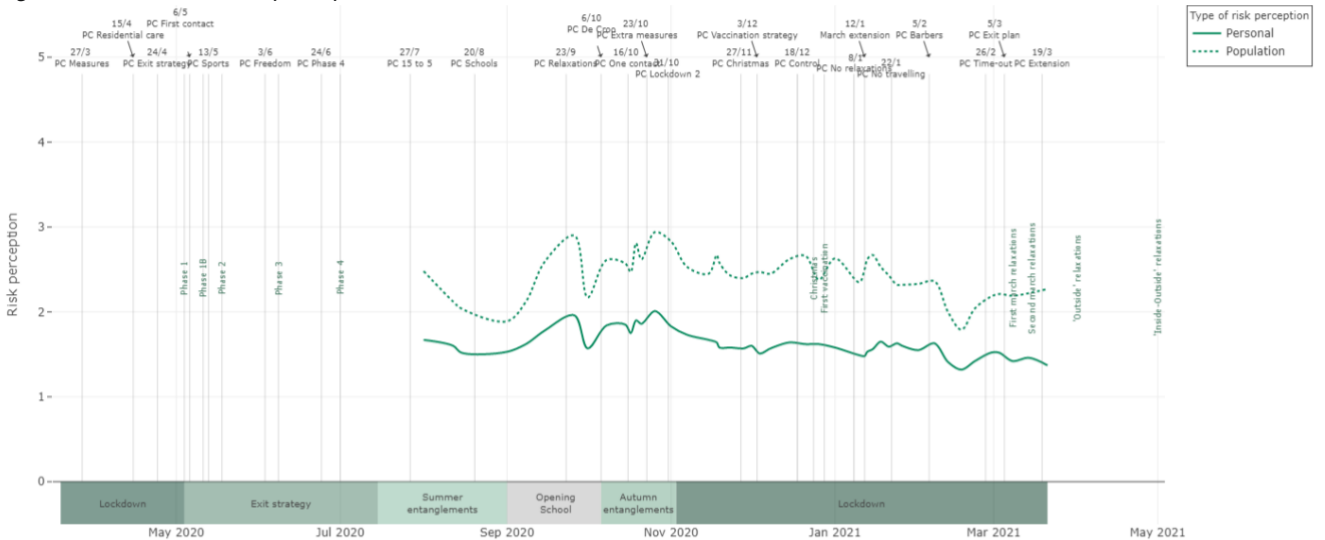


Figure 2. Evolution in risk perception.



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