

REPORT 5

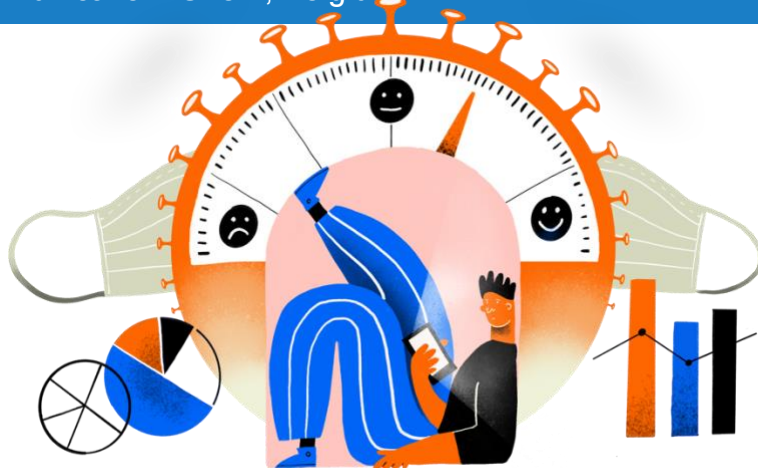
Fatigue during the collective
marathon strikes.

Evolutions in motivation,
mental health and
(de)motivating governmental
communication

The Motivation Barometer

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Last Friday night, the National Security Council proposed a series of relaxations with regard to the measures. It offers perspective to the population, yet, their implementation is conditional and hard choices had to be made. By necessity, our social contacts will remain minimal for a longer period of time. More than ever, persevering during this "collective marathon" is required. A government that motivates, inspires and connects the population is crucial in this regard. Without sufficient and qualitative motivation, the population will start to neglect the measures. Without a connecting narrative, the population's well-being will be declining. However, the Motivation Barometer of Ghent University, which has been measuring the motivation and well-being of citizens on a daily basis, shows that fatigue is setting in. In a first part we give an overview of these results, while in a second part we go deeper into the (de)motivating communication style of the government.



Illustration "We run the marathon together." by Mathias Waterschoot

Collective Marathon

The seventh week of this collective marathon has started. Just as the sustained effort is exhausting for regular marathon runners, so is the joint effort of the population during this collective marathon. The end goal is clear: to defuse the corona crisis. However, the erratic nature of the virus makes its timing unpredictable. Even ordinary marathon runners do not always accurately estimate when they will reach the finish line. Unlike a regular marathon, the trajectory of this collective marathon is unknown, and its finish line is unclear. But the government and scientists, in their role of sports coach, can guide the population towards the finish line through stimulating and engaging communication. Motivational leadership is needed more than ever because the impact of this collective marathon is much greater than that of an ordinary marathon. Not only for physical health, but also on a mental, social and economic level the consequences are unprecedented.

PART I. RESULTS FROM THE MOTIVATION BAROMETER.

Motivation trends: how motivated do we stay?

It seems understandable that the drastic and prolonged lockdown measures are becoming demanding for the population. Some have already suffered from a breakdown, others fear one. This is also visible in the evolution of the voluntary motivation with regard to the measures. Since March 19, 2020, a total number of 23 845 participants took part in the Motivation Barometer study of Ghent University. Two types of motivation are measured on a daily basis: whether participants *want to* follow the measures because they strongly support them (voluntary motivation) or whether they *have to* adhere to the measures, for example to avoid criticism or a fine ('must'-ivation). Mapping the shift in voluntary motivation (Figure 1) and 'must'-ivation (Figure 2) is important because it predicts whether the population will strictly adhere to the measures or will begin to show nonchalance. The evolution of both types of motivation is particularly interesting. Significant events are noted in the figures, such as communications from the Crisis Center and Security Councils on April 15 and April 24. Three findings stand out.

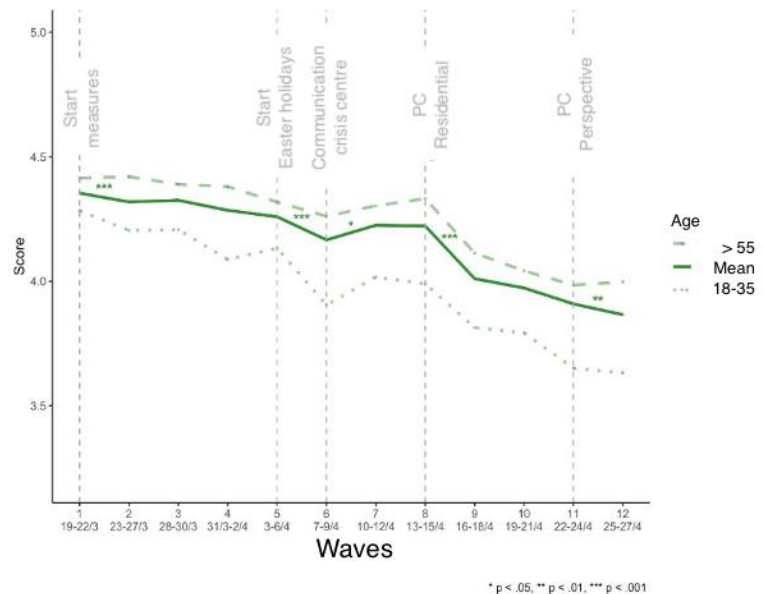
First, **voluntary motivation gradually declines** (the solid line in Figure 1). Expressed as a percentage (not shown in the graph), 80.7 percent of the participants at the beginning of the lockdown (March 19-22) still supported the measures. In the last three days (April 25-27), this was 55.4 percent. The decline in voluntary motivation is fairly gradual, with some notable accelerations in the decline. For example,

there appears to be a sharper decline at the beginning of the Easter holidays and in the aftermath of both Security Councils of April 15 and April 24 (see stars in the figure). At the same time, there was an increase after April 7, the day the Crisis Center refined certain measures, such as allowing the elderly to rest on a park bench.

Second, 'must'-ivation shows a more **fluctuating pattern** (the solid line in Figure 2), being lower than voluntary motivation at any point in time. This is excellent news because voluntary motivation is a stronger predictor of strict adherence. As for the evolution in 'must'-ivation, it was slightly elevated at the beginning of the lockdown. The measures were very invasive and were a strong intrusion into our lifestyle. After an adjustment period, 'must'-ivation decreased, while voluntary motivation remained high. From the beginning of April, 'must'-ivation gradually increased, especially at the beginning of the Easter holidays, and then decreased slightly after April 8, the day the Crisis Center refined certain measures. As a steeper rise followed after the Security Council took decisions on the residential care centers, this drop appeared to be temporary.

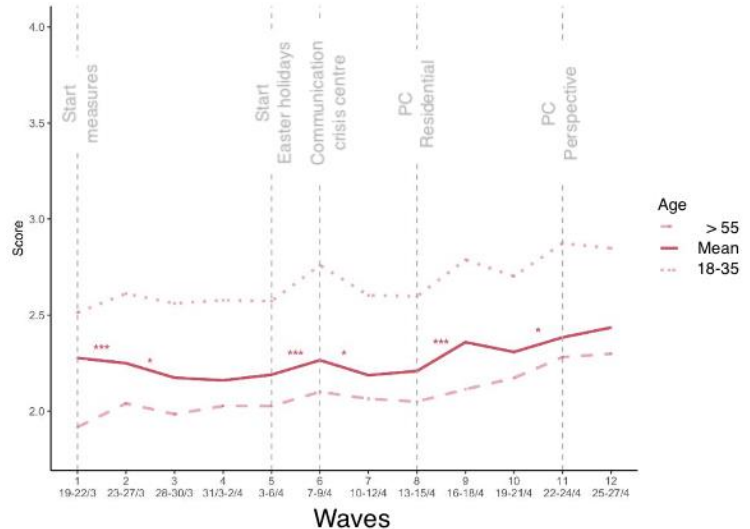
Finally, age **effects** (see also Report #1 and Report #2) are visible. Although the motivational trends are parallel in different age groups, older people (see dashed lines in Figures 1 and 2) are more convinced of the necessity and importance of the measures and experience them less like an obligation. Older people can more easily identify with the social importance of the measures. They more easily connect the measures with important values such as solidarity, and this motivates them to follow the measures faithfully.

Figure 1. Shift in voluntary motivation.



* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 2. Shift in external motivation.



* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

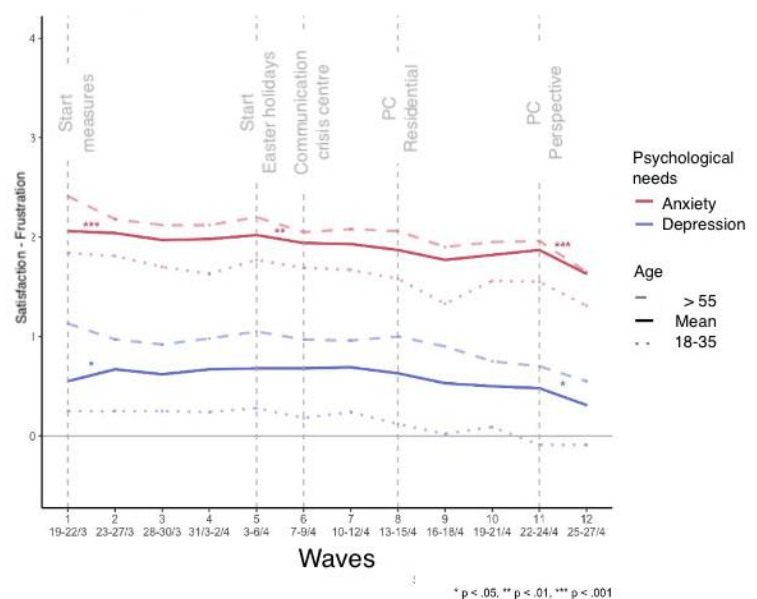
Our mental health: How are we doing?

The Motivation Barometer also charts well-being on a daily basis, as well as its fuel. In fact, humans not only have basic physical needs (e.g., hunger, thirst), they experience basic psychological needs as well. These psychological needs can be easily remembered using the acronym ABC: A of Autonomy, B of Belongingness, and C of competence. Sufficient food and water are crucial to our physical well-being, likewise, our well-being and resilience are fueled by the satisfaction of these basic psychological needs. They act as vitamins for personal growth. As these needs are more satisfied, our energy reservoirs are more recharged, and we experience more satisfaction with life. Similarly, we stay more motivated to adhere to the measures. Sustainable behavior change requires energy, as provided by the basic needs. When these basic needs are frustrated, we feel exhausted and despondent.

In the Motivation Barometer, we daily assess the degree to which the need for autonomy and relatedness are satisfied. When the need for autonomy is satisfied, we experience a sense of choice and freedom in our actions, thinking, and feeling. In the case of autonomy frustration, we feel inhibited and curtailed. If the need for belonging is satisfied, then we have warm, close relationships with loved ones, for whom we enjoy caring. In the case of frustration, we feel lonely and isolated. The evolution in the satisfaction of the basic needs for autonomy and relatedness, depressive and anxiety symptoms can be found in Figures 3 and 4. We highlight three findings.

First, it appears that our basic needs are more satisfied as opposed to frustrated. The scores are above the zero line in the figure. Comparing the two needs, it seems that we experience significantly more relatedness than autonomy. Thus, despite the measures of avoiding contact and maintaining distance, we find digital alternatives to fulfill this need. Here, 'supporting the health sector' actions may also enhance

Figure 3. Shifts in basic psychological needs autonomy and relatedness.



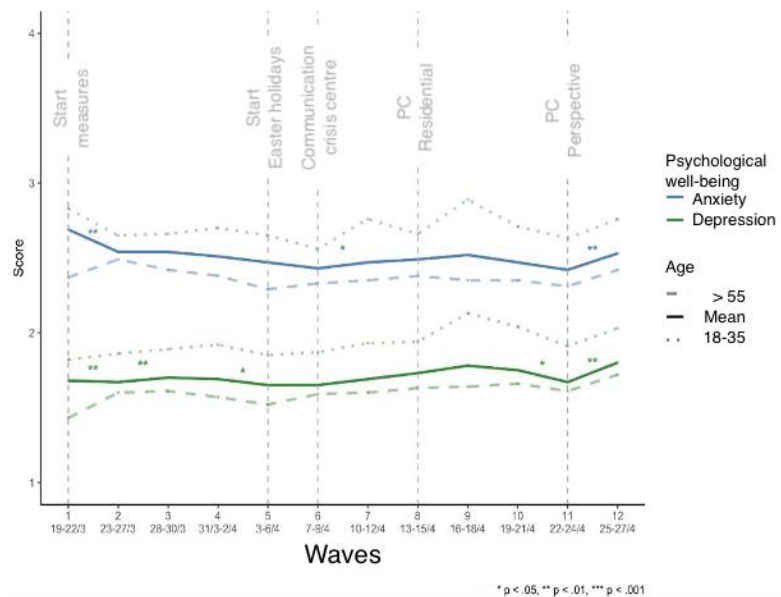
relatedness with neighbors. But, of course, the lockdown greatly restricts our freedom of choice, so many people experience little autonomy.

Second, the evolution in these basic needs shows that their satisfaction is decreasing, especially in the last days after the last meeting of the Security Council. The satisfaction of both needs stagnated for a long time, with the exception of a slight decrease in the beginning of the Easter holidays. Many

may have had vacation plans with family or friends that they were forced to put on hold. Despite the announcement of a number of relaxations during the most recent Security Council, participants appear to have experienced significantly less autonomy and relatedness over the past weekend. The government may have offered some prospect of an exit, but the measures were conditional. Last weekend, the population probably came to the conclusion that the corona crisis and its accompanying strict measures could last an extremely long time. As, in the short term, we will not be allowed to meet family members - even so a previously leaked memo mentioned this - our sense of belonging was given an immediate 'knock'. Our autonomy also suffered: we feel more caged than ever.

Third, there is a parallel evolution in participants' anxiety and depressive symptoms. Since last weekend, a significant increase in anxiety and depressive symptoms is visible. This could be explained by the reduced autonomy and relatedness satisfaction. Regarding the evolution in anxiety, there was a first peak at the beginning of the lockdown, perhaps prompted by the ambiguity of the situation at that time. Clear communication about the measures to be taken at the beginning of the lockdown reduced this fear, which then stabilized until last weekend. Since the last Security Council, both anxiety and depressive symptoms increased significantly.

Figure 4. Shifts in depressive and anxiety symptoms.

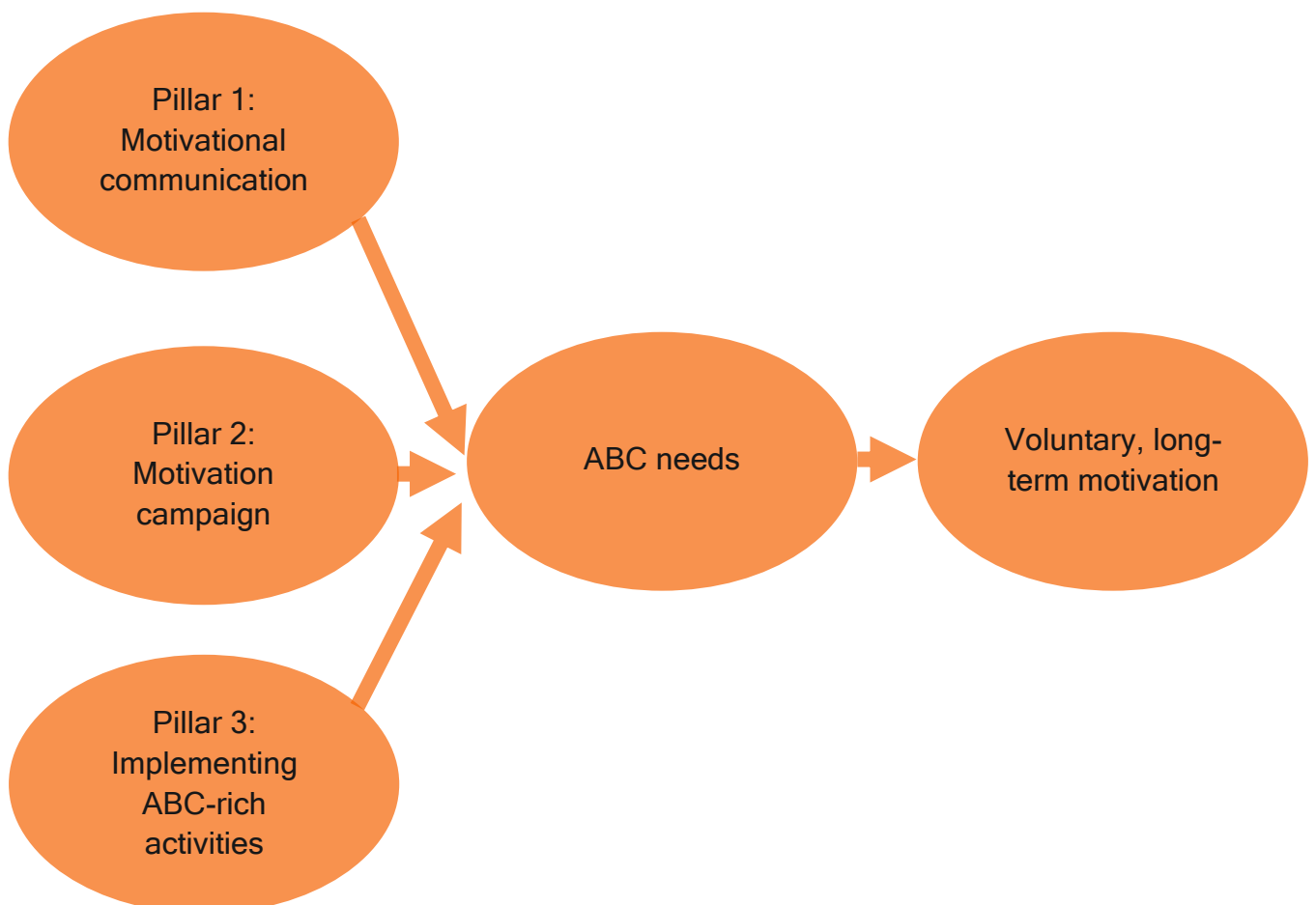


* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

PART II. GOVERNMENT: HOW MOTIVATING AND INSPIRING IS ITS APPROACH?

To prevent a decline in motivation and an increase in autonomy and relatedness frustration, both the government and its population can help. Figure 5 indicates three crucial pillars. Through the use of motivational and inspirational communication (Pillar 1), the government can respond to the basic needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence in order to strengthen the motivation of the population. At the same time, more than ever, we are in need of a motivational campaign (Pillar 2). However, the population could play a part in this as well, for example, by looking for activities that maximally meet their basic needs for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Pillar 3). We gave concrete guidelines for this in report #3.

Figure 5. Corona model

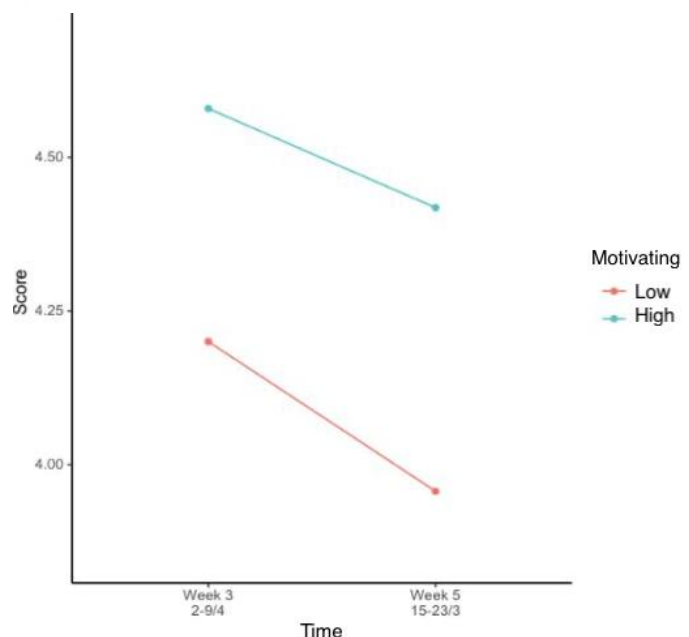


Motivational communication works!

In daily interviews with the written and spoken press, the government may communicate more or less motivationally. The press conferences after the Security Council meeting appear to be psychologically important moments. These moments are particularly useful to inspire and connect. It is notable that in the aftermath of the two most recent Security Councils, significant changes in motivation and mental health occurred. In the days followed by both Security Councils, voluntary motivation declined, also, in the days after the Security Council regarding the exit strategy, need satisfaction declined as well and depressive and anxiety symptoms increased. Unfortunately, this could be indicative for longer-term shifts in motivation and adherence to the measures. Simultaneously, this proves that motivational communication during these psychologically important moments is highly needed.

If the government succeeds in motivational communication, it might buffer against our declining motivation. The participants from the first week of the Motivation Barometer are re-invited weekly to participate in the Motivation Barometer study. This follow-up over time makes it possible to check whether the decline in voluntary motivation can be slowed down if citizens experience the communication as motivating. This appears to be the case! Figure 6 shows that communicating in a motivating way increases voluntary motivation (the blue line is above the red line). Moreover, citizens who felt like the government provided a meaningful explanation for the measures, showed appreciation and understanding for their efforts, and were relatively less susceptible to a decline in voluntary motivation (the blue line drops less steeply than the red line).

Figure 6. Shift in voluntary motivation as a function of the degree of motivational government communication



How motivating is the government perceived to be?

Since April 23, within the Motivation Barometer, the (de)motivating communication style of the government is also mapped. Meanwhile, 2742 participants (73.4% female; average age = 52.49 years) completed this questionnaire. In this regard, the leadership model in Figure 7 with different motivational and demotivational

styles is used as inspiration. Comparing the motivating style with the demotivating style shows that, on average, the population experiences the governmental communication slightly more demotivating than motivating. Figure 8 also shows this in a radar diagram. It almost looks like a full circle, indicating that the motivating and demotivating styles occur at the same rate. Figure 9 provides a breakdown of percentages of how prevalent the different styles are. This percentage shows the individuals that assigns a maximum score to a particular communication style. These results indicate that there is still much room for a more motivating and stimulating government communication style. Maximum scores are most frequently given to the 'wait-and-see' approach by the government. The population is asking for motivating action. This is very crucial because the (de)motivating style of the government appears to be a powerful predictor of the population's voluntary motivation, must-ivation and despondency. In Table 1 you will find an overview of the different do's and don'ts in communication, illustrated with concrete examples.

At the same time, of course, demotivated citizens also look at government communication from a certain lens. If you personally already feel resistance to adhere to the measures, you are more likely to experience government communication, even if well-intentioned, as inadequate and insufficiently convincing. Any demand for an extra effort, even when well-framed, might well provoke further resistance and must-ivation. Motivated citizens view things from a brighter perspective and experience communication as more motivating.

Figure 7. Motivating and demotivating styles of the leadership compass

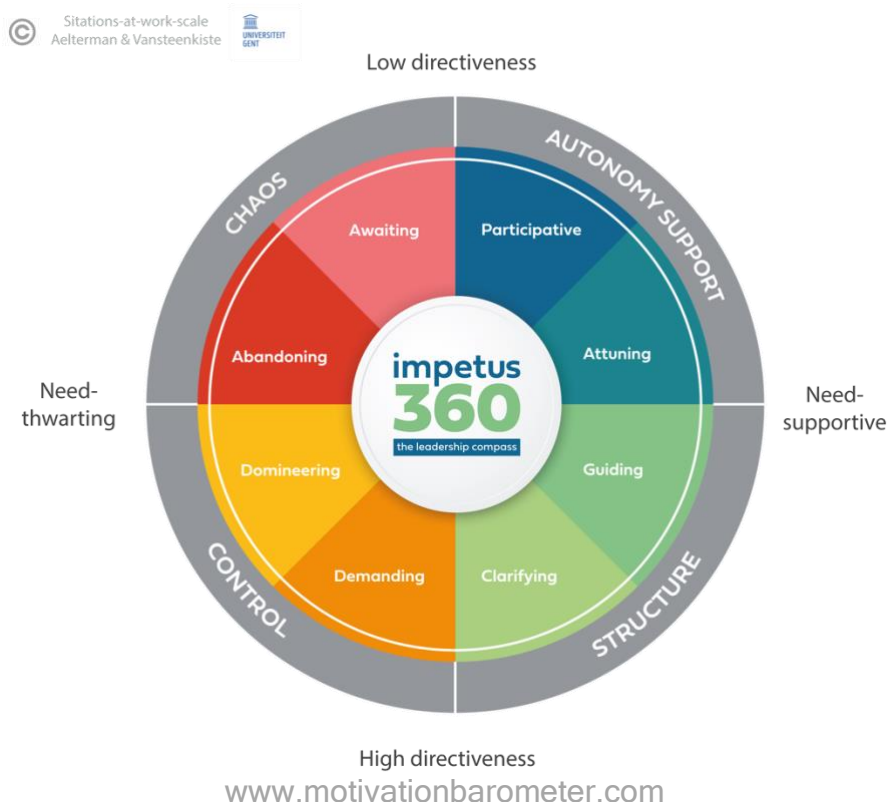


Figure 8. Results of perceptions of (de)motivating government communication.

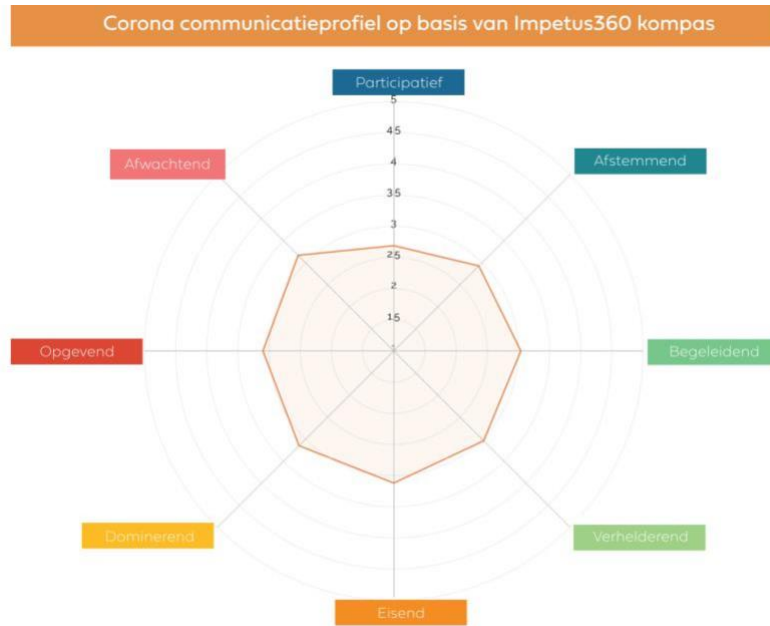
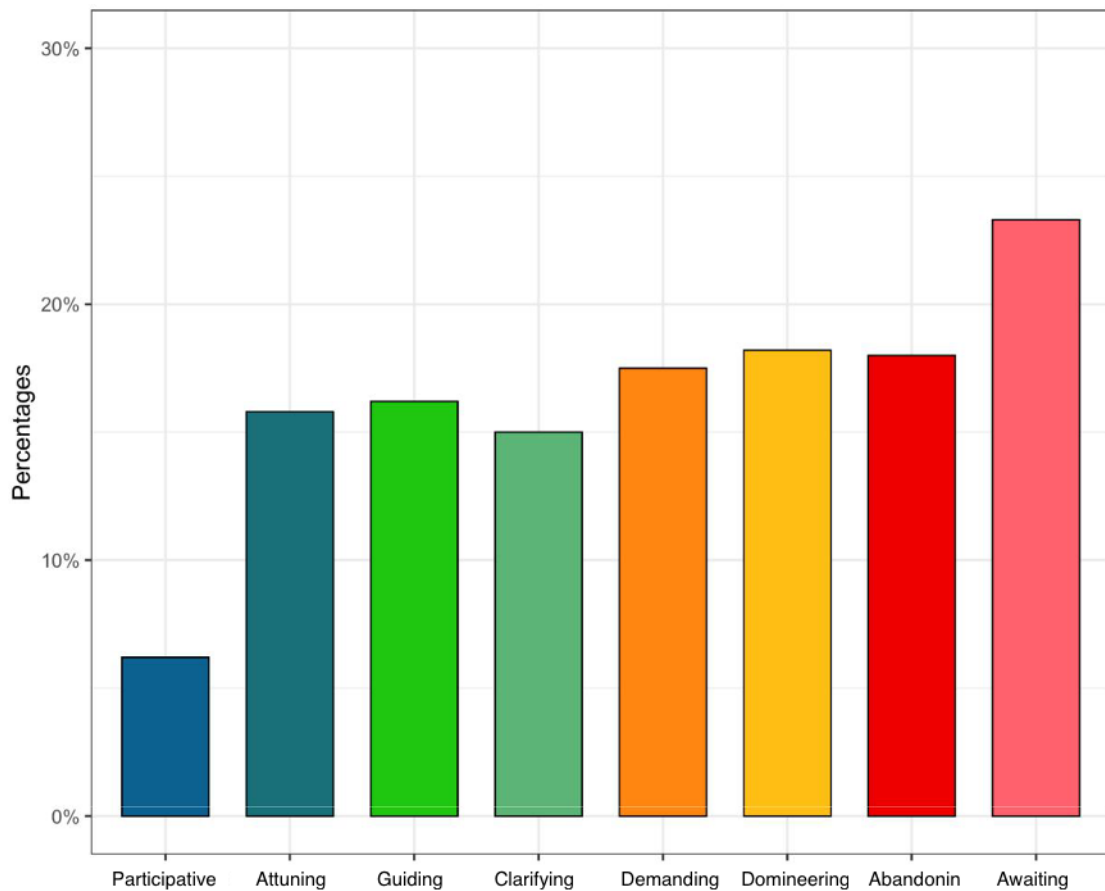


Figure 9. Top percentage scores for (de)motivating communication style.



Bron: Coronastudie, Universiteit Gent

A temporary dip or a downward trend?

The results of Motivation Barometer show that we are at a difficult moment in the marathon. The miles are demanding and the finish line suddenly seems far away. The question of how painful the next few kilometers will be, evokes fear and uncertainty and makes us doubtful whether we will make it to the finish line. Whether this is just a temporary dip or a downward trend is not clear. What is clear is that we are at a psychological important moment in the marathon and that the population benefits from a motivating and inspiring government: a government with a clear vision, clear principles that everyone can support, and a unifying story that shows its people the way.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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www.motivationbarometer.com



Table 1. Do's and don'ts of motivating and demotivating communication

Zone	Checklist	Explanation and example	%
Participative	Do you properly test willingness for a measure?	Measures will only be complied with if there is willingness. For example, the possibility of visiting elderly in residential care centers was not sufficiently discussed with the sector, so the measure had to be reversed.	53.6%
	Do you pick up and listen to signals from various sectors?	Various sectors (e.g. garden centers, tennis federations) are pushing for a relaxation of the measures and are creating their own inventive solutions while respecting the measures. Listening to their voice is crucial.	/
Attuning	Do you provide a meaningful and logical explanation for introducing, maintaining, or (partially) relaxing a measure?	The more the population understands why a measure must be introduced (cf. discussion about the park benches) or maintained, the greater the willingness to comply (cf. speech by Angela Merkel). Do not underestimate the population. If relaxing different measures will be done at different tempos, a logical explanation for those who remain imposed to adhere is much needed.	41.2%
	Do you show understanding for the people's efforts?	Try to be grateful for the burden the people are carrying today. Recognize that much is being asked of people and that times are tough. By explicitly showing your gratitude for the efforts, you are acting empathetically. In this way, the population feels more understood and remains more willing to keep up the requested efforts.	47.2%
	Do you work connectively by pointing out solidarity and the collective interest?	Helping others, doing something for society, caring for each other are important values that almost everyone concerns. Emphasize that perseverance is an act of altruism.	/

	Do you use recognizable imagery ?	A picture often says more than words. If a metaphor is used, the population feels understood. The image of the collective marathon is recognizable, with similarities and differences helping to inform the population.	/
Guiding	Do you provide concrete and clear guidelines ?	Formulate very concrete expectations when introducing new measures or formulating recommendations. The more clearly formulated (e.g. via a step-by-step plan), the greater the chance that the population will adhere. If there is no clarity yet about the modalities, wait to communicate (cf. mouth masks) .	28.6%
	Do you validate the effort of the population?	Positive feedback has a motivating effect. The confidence of the population grows that we can handle this crisis together. Make a direct link between the population's efforts and concrete results and visualize this. Just as healthy eating and exercise only lead to weight maintenance, it may seem that our current efforts do not produce visible results.	/
	Do you foresee intermediate steps ?	Each marathon runner formulates specific intermediate goals and motivates him- or herself to work toward the next intermediate goal. This gives courage because an intermediate goal is attainable. When people achieve an intermediate goal, it provides a motivational boost. The belief to run the lockdown marathon grows. An intermediate goal is a specific, crucial indicator of progress, such as the number of hospitalizations.	/

Clarifying	Do you communicate at set times ?	The population is becoming impatient. The uncertainty of whether or not the measures will be relaxed is becoming demanding. Providing a fixed, weekly communication moment about the lockdown measures gives the population a straw to clutch at. For example, journalists will no longer daily ask if and when the lockdown measures will be relaxed.	/
	Do you point out the consequences of adhering or not adhering?	It is crucial to inform the population about the consequences of adhering and not adhering to the measures. The best way to do this is to provide information so that the population's understanding increases. You ensure transparency and communicate honestly. A good example are graphics showing how hospitalizations number would evolve if the measures were completely abandoned.	81.5%
	Do you communicate in unison ?	Unity makes strong. By communicating in a unified way as a government, the population can emulate this. A lack of unanimity creates confusion (cf. measure concerning residential care centers).	17.8%
	Are you putting too much pressure on the population?	The current measures require a great deal of effort from the population, especially from single people and younger groups. Try to be reasonable in the demands you continue to make. If the population gets geared up, they will go into resistance and there is little chance that they will persevere.	/

Demanding	Do you communicate in a compelling way ?	Try to pay attention to your language. Words such as “must” or “require” evoke ‘must’-ivation (e.g., “you must persevere”). Replace these with more inviting but non-committal language, such as ‘ask’ or ‘want’ (e.g., ‘we are asking everyone to persevere’).	13.8%
Domineering	Are you capitalizing on fear in the population?	Fear is not a good advisor. Referring to a worst-case scenario and inducing fear may incite momentary action, but comes with <i>collateral damage</i> . The population becomes more insecure and more prone to anxiety and depression. A message of hope works much more stimulating.	48.5%
	Are you talking the population into guilt ?	Encouraging the population does not mean that we have to hold them accountable by loading them with guilt. If you instill a sense of guilt in the population, this may work temporarily, but it does not constitute a sustainable solution. By communicating in a motivational way, responsibility and citizenship preferably arise spontaneously, as opposed to directly pointing citizens to their duties.	35.1%
Abandoning	Are you sending out negative signals yourself?	Although difficult, it is crucial that scientists and the government continue to lead by example. Any signal of desperation has a contagious effect on the population. At the same time, this does not mean that we should lie to the population. People would see through this.	/

Awaiting

Do you take a wait-and-see attitude or do you communicate **proactively**?

A marathon runner knows that the finish line is at 42km. Although it is a matter of conjecture how long this corona crisis will last and you yourself want to wait and see how the situation evolves, this wait-and-see attitude can provoke exasperation and uncertainty. Some perspective can presumably be offered, for example, by bringing forward priorities in relaxing the measures or by communicating the phases in the broader strategy. This will give groups of people a better idea of the next steps and when it is their "turn".