

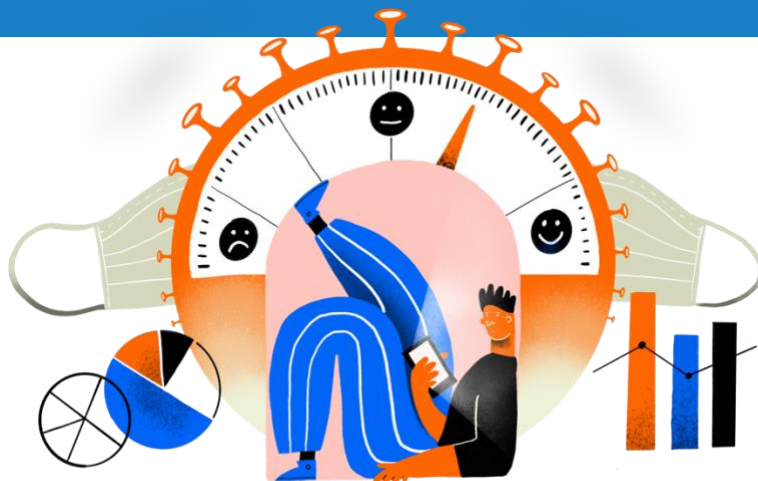
REPORT 6

Motivation rises slightly.
Government, continue the
positive momentum of
motivational communication!

The Motivation Barometer

Authors (in alphabetical order): Sofie Morbée, Bart Soenens, Maarten Vansteenkiste, Branko Vermote, Joachim Waterschoot

Reference: Motivation Barometer (May 5, 2020). Motivation rises slightly. Government continue the positive momentum of motivational communication! Ghent, Belgium.



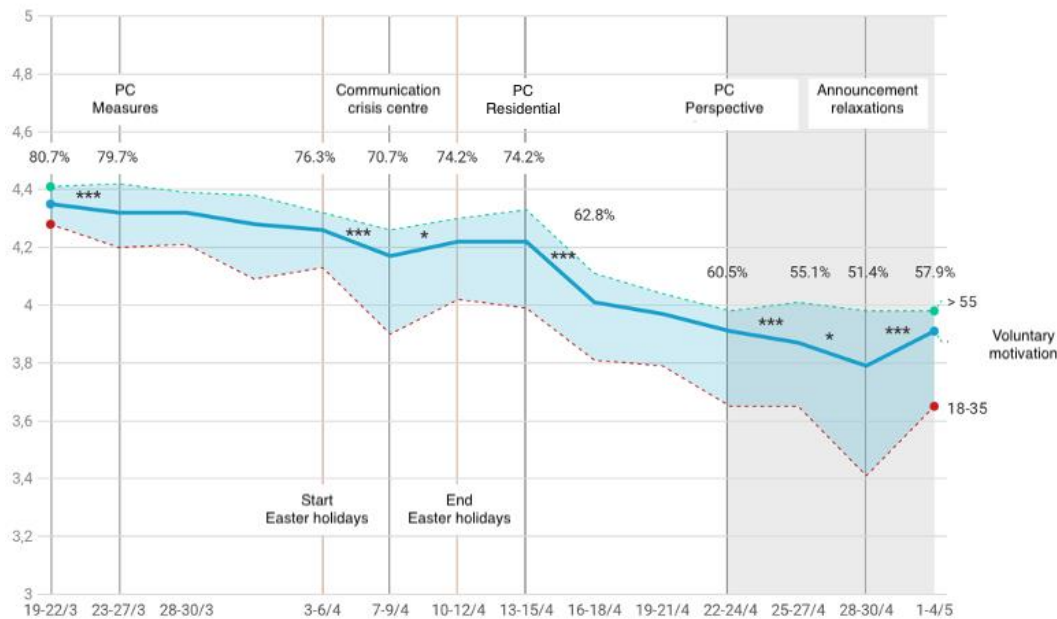
Voluntary motivation for adherence to the corona measures during this 'collective marathon' gradually decreased in the past weeks, from 81% at the start of the lockdown to 51% at the end of April. The Motivation Barometer of Ghent University cautiously provides some good news: voluntary motivation has increased slightly since May 1. After the first day of Phase 1 of the exit strategy, 58% of the population fully supports the measures. This effect is probably explained by the more motivating communication in recent days, together with the announcement of a number of relaxations regarding the measures. Tomorrow the National Security Council will meet again. In the past, the communication from the National Security Council has always proved to be a motivational determining moment. We formulate concrete advice for the government to inform the population in a motivating way and to encourage them to keep up this 'collective marathon'. At the same time, we encourage the population to reflect critically on their own motivation and to deeply embed behavioral changes into a new lifestyle. Not only SARS-CoV-2 is a contagious virus, so is the motivation of the population.

From short-term behavior change to sustainable habit

The introduction of Phase 1a of the exit plan provided relaxations for a number of strict measures. At the same time, wearing a face mask in public transport became mandatory. Wearing face masks and keeping social distance are becoming our 'new normal'. These behaviors should become a full part of our new lifestyle. Just like stopping at a red traffic light is an integrated habit, these new behaviors have to become embedded in our daily routine. For such behavioral changes to become a habit, voluntary motivation is much needed. If the population understands and experiences the necessity and added value of these measures, the likelihood that they will embed these behaviors deeply and consistently adhere increases.

Since March 19, 2020, a total number of 28678 participants participated in the Motivation Barometer study of Ghent University. The Motivation Barometer provides an interesting view of the evolutions in the motivation of the population. We use this Motivation Barometer to carefully keep an eye on the motivational situation. Two types of motivation are measured daily: whether participants *want to* follow the measures because they directly support them (voluntary motivation) or whether they think they *have to* follow the measures, for example to avoid criticism or a fine ('must' motivation). Mapping the shift

Figure 1. Shifts in voluntary motivation.



in voluntary motivation (Figure 1) and ‘must’-ivation (Figure 2) is important because it predicts whether the population will show sustained adherence or begin to show nonchalance.

Three findings stand out since the weekend after the last National Security Council on April 24. While voluntary motivation seemed to be decreasing in recent weeks, this decline has reversed since last Friday (Figure 1). At its lowest point last week, voluntary motivation reached 51%. However, since the confirmation that the announced relaxations of the measures have been implemented, motivational support climbed up again to 58%. Second, the ‘must’-ivation to follow the measures also decreased (Figure 2).

It appears that not all groups are equally susceptible for these motivational fluctuations. In particular, young adults’ voluntary motivation had quite some ups and downs: it dropped to 35% support last week to climb again to 51% during the latest measurement. The voluntary motivation of older people appears to be much more stable: the motivational support in this age group has been over 60% all along. This motivational constancy suggests that older people are more deeply convinced of the importance of the measures. For them, following the measures embodies a number of core values, such as solidarity and health. Thanks to this greater conviction, older people seem to be resistant to the ‘squabbling’ of politicians and the media. In this respect, their motivation is less dependent on external communication and the relaxations of the measures, as opposed to young adults. Young adults could mirror older individuals in this respect.

Figure 2. Shifts in must-ivation

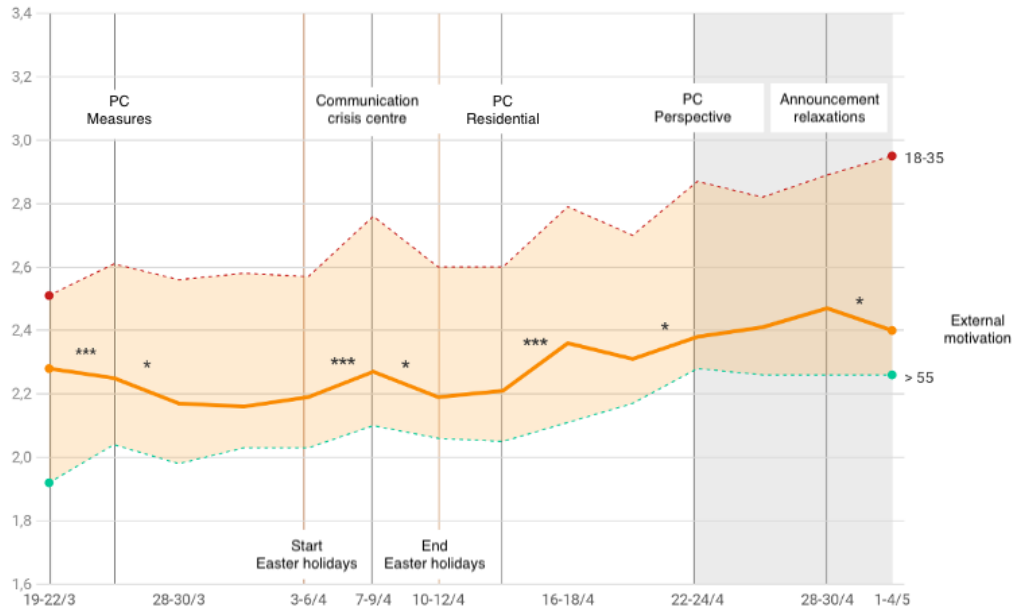


Figure 3. Global evolution in (de)motivating communication

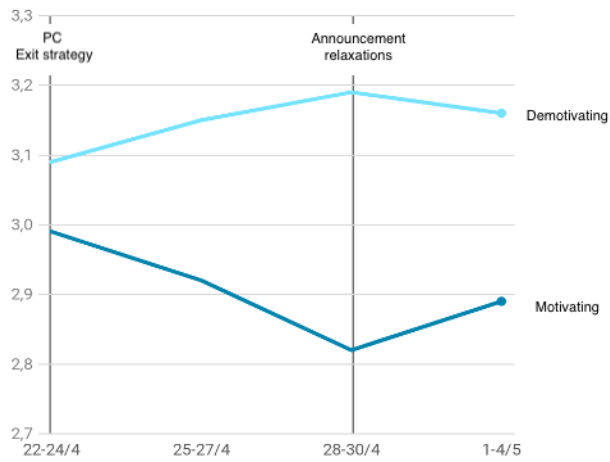
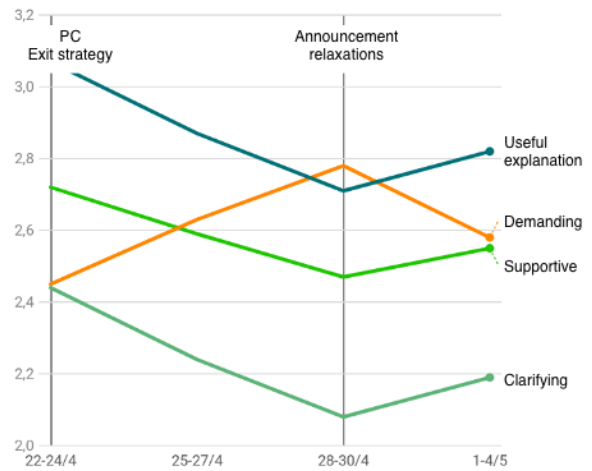


Figure 4. Specific evolution in (de)motivating communication strategies



Mother's Day Gifts

At least two factors could explain this positive evolution. First, motivational communication from the government improved last week. Figure 3 shows the overall evolution in motivating and demotivating communication over the past ten days. The businesslike, fragmented, and unconnected communication from the National Security Council on Friday, April 24, was perceived as rather demotivating. In the aftermath of the press conference, participants felt that the government continued to communicate in a rather demotivating manner. People felt like the government was not clear, and they experienced little support from the government (see Figure 4). At the same time, people experienced the government as very (much) demanding. The face mask saga of last week undoubtedly contributed to this. The government imposed the wearing of face masks but could not fulfill its promise to provide its citizens with those face masks. Like a teacher promising her preschoolers to help make a Mother's Day gift, but then unexpectedly retracing her steps and sending them all home with a step-by-step plan. Although the one preschooler is independent enough to make the gift him- or herself, the other one might just feel lost. But since late last week, at the time when the confusion surrounding the face masks had cleared up, the government's communication was once again perceived as more motivating. The introduction of face masks and the explanation of why this was done made the population reflect on its motivation, which helps explain why voluntary motivation among the population has increased slightly since May 1.

A second explanation for the increased motivation is undoubtedly the relaxations of the measures in itself. The confirmation of the announced relaxed measures last week gave the population the necessary motivational oxygen. Thanks to these relaxations, the population regains some of its lost freedom. Those who start working at the office again come into contact with a broader social network, which ensures that the batteries can be recharged. This renewed energy allows the population to continue its efforts. After all, it is tempting, after the many weeks of sustained effort, to neglect the rules for a while.

Beyond a 'must'-ivating call for perseverance

It is to be hoped that the government can continue on the positive momentum of recent days. However, since the perception of motivating communication is still lower than the perception of demotivating communication (see Figure 3), there is still room for improvement. Tomorrow's communication from the National Security Council is another motivational important moment. Our Motivation Barometer shows that in the aftermath of the April 15 and 24 press conferences, voluntary motivation dropped significantly each time, by 11.4% after April 15 and 5.4% after April 24 (see Figure 1). Although the

government was right to call on the population to persevere during those press conferences, more is needed. A hollow call for persistence only 'must'-ivate but does not necessarily motivate. In order to motivate, the government should communicate in such a way that the population finds it worthwhile to persevere on their own initiative. To support the government in its motivational communication, we provide an overview of 8 communication recommendations in Table 1.

Rebound effect

Following measures requires a lot of self-control from the population. We have to restrain ourselves and resist the temptation of forbidden fruits (e.g., contact with family). Because this pushes the limits of the population, this asks energy. One risk in relaxing the measures is the occurrence of a rebound effect. Because following measures takes a lot of energy, some individual's self-control risks collapsing when measures are relaxed. Some of us might go all the way, a phenomenon known in psychology as *psychological reactivity*. If social contact is permitted, we go crazy, for example, and deal with the measures very casually. The risk of such a rebound effect is higher when self-control is more 'must'-ivated. Think of household or administrative tasks that you do against your will because you have to. In the evening, your family members are more likely to be the victim of the burden you had to carry during the day. Voluntary motivation requires much less energy. If people follow the measures with full conviction, they will keep them up for a longer period of time. Then a temporary change in behavior becomes a habit.

The spirit of the measures

Not only the government could take its motivating task seriously, also, each citizen could critically question why he or she is making the effort to adhere to the measures. By clarifying the added value of adhering to the measures for yourself, the measures become more deeply embedded. They become part of our new lifestyle. Citizens cannot expect a perfect motivational parcourse from the government. If the measures are relaxed, certain parts of the population will undoubtedly feel disadvantaged. Moreover, the exact rules will not always be clear-cut, more often, we will be confronted with unforeseen circumstances. **Goodwill from the population will be much needed.** Rather than interpreting the measures only by the letter of the law, it will be important to see the 'spirit' of the measures. This could be done by focusing on the necessity of the measures. Recognizing that adhering to the measures is an act of solidarity will also be helpful. Alongside the protection of your own health, you are protecting the health of your neighbors and other citizens. This altruistic concern is an anti-dote to self-interest in adherence to the measures. If this self-interest predominates, apostasy from the measures becomes a new virus. Demotivated fellow citizens infect each other. A couple that visits a do-it-yourself store separately in order to be able to shop together encourages copycat behavior. Fortunately, this goes in

both directions: voluntary motivation is also contagious. Every citizen can therefore make a difference by sensibly and wholeheartedly supporting the measures and thus inspiring others.

CONTACT INFORMATION

- **Principal Investigator:**

Prof. Dr. Maarten Vansteenkiste (Maarten.Vansteenkiste@ugent.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



Table 1. Summary of eight motivational communication recommendations for government

Overview	Explanation
<p>Organize three different press conferences, each in a different national language. Keep these limited to a maximum of 15 minutes. Attention wanes after 15 minutes, even earlier.</p>	<p>Be transparent regarding the criteria you use to justify enforcement, relaxations, or tightening of the measures. Is it the number of people in intensive care, the number of new infections, or a combination of different criteria? Insight into these crucial conditions motivates the population. In this way, the population is involved in the decision-making process and has a collective goal to work towards. If we achieve the specific objective, confidence grows and so does motivation. At the same time, it becomes clear when a tightening up of measures may be imposing itself again. If not, this decision process remains "mystical." As if parents promise their youngsters that they can go to a party if they "do their best at school", but do not clarify what exactly doing your best means.</p>
<p>Discuss measures not only in a time-related but also in a domain-related way (e.g., social contacts; sports & recreation; work; education etc.). The population thinks primarily in terms of life domains, such as "When will I be able to see my grandchildren again?" and "Will I be able to play soccer with friends soon? Use different icons for these different life domains. This will make it easier to follow.</p>	<p>Motivating the population does not necessarily mean introducing relaxations of the measures. At such times it is crucial to provide convincing explanations for the choices that are made and to show empathy in the communication. Dare to address specific target groups. Parents of toddlers feel more understood if they are explicitly addressed. Even toddlers can be addressed. Ketnet could make a child-friendly version of this.</p>

Larger motivational picture	Authenticity - humanity
<p>Distinguish between the 'why', the 'what' and the 'how' of measures. First explain the 'why' and the 'what'. If the 'how', the concrete modalities of certain decisions, are not yet clear, then provide an extra formal moment of communication about the 'how'. This will avoid fragmented communication that causes agitation (cf. the mouth mask saga).</p>	<p>Show gratitude to the people. This was a powerful opener at the previous National Security Council press conference. Do it again and dare to address specific target groups in your thank words. Our Motivation Barometer shows that single people and young adults have a harder time. For example, send a thank you card along with the face masks. Gratitude shows empathy. And if the population feels understood in their burden during this 'collective marathon', this will enhance their motivation.</p>
<p>Invest in a connecting and inspiring story. The metaphor of the 'collective marathon' works wonderfully for this. With this image, every citizen feels immediately understood in their burden. This metaphor also makes clear the need for intermediate goals for the people. Just as marathon runners set themselves intermediate goals, it is crucial that the government communicate transparently about the specific targets on the way to the finish line.</p>	<p>Show your human side by indicating yourself that these corona times are weighing on you as well. Indicate why you remain motivated to persevere. This can be inspiring. Not only is the virus contagious, so are motivational processes. Along with the thank you card for the population, send two stamped, yellow corona support postcards. The population can send these to two people of their choice. This way everyone motivates each other.</p>