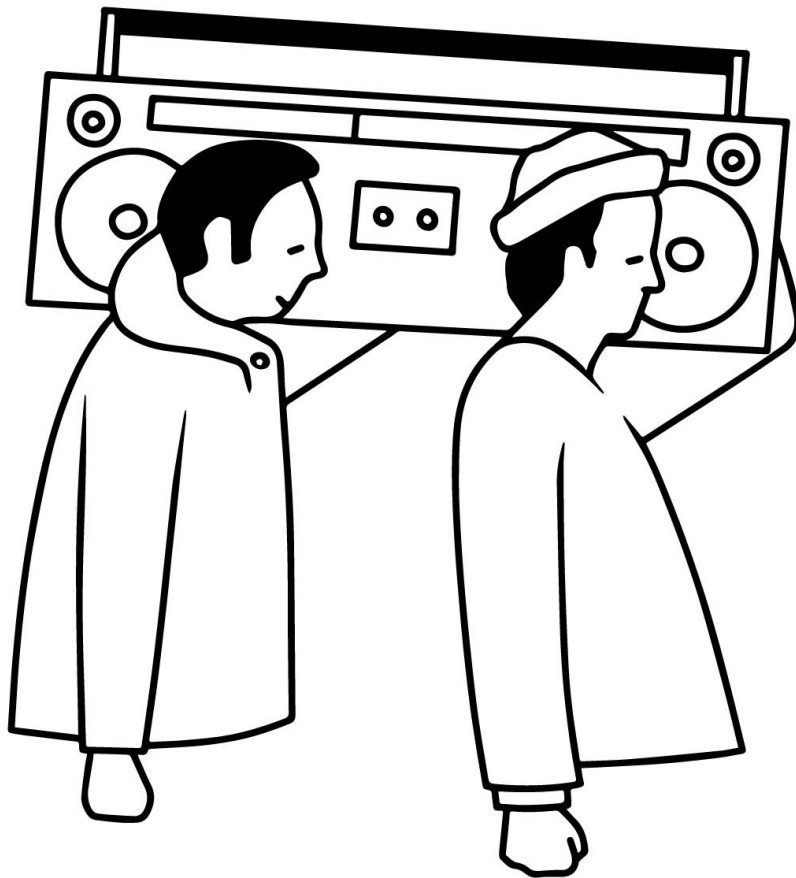# Leading Distributed Teams

The behavioural forces that make or break the transition to high-performance teams working from anywhere.

SUE | **Behavioural Design**

SUE | Behavioural Design

SUE | Behavioural Design is an independent agency for behavioural change that applies and teaches Behavioural Design to help organisations, governments, and non-profits to create better products, services, policies and experiences that help people progress towards their goals.

Our mission is to nudge people into making better decisions in work, life, and play. We aim to improve the quality of life by creating the social, environment, societal, and commercial solutions that challenge the mainstream economic thinking by replacing it by a human frame of mind. Connecting behavioural science with creativity in a design thinking process to come up with radically human-centered, tangible and tested answers.

We work for organisations such as UNHCR, Heineken, ABN AMRO, Dutch and Belgian Governmental Institutions, Roche, Friesland Campina, Sportcity/Fit For Free, ING, Achmea, Amnesty International, CliniClowns, the city of Amsterdam, Iglo, Eneco, Centraal Beheer, Medtronic, Randstad, eBay.

> Behavioural Design is all about creating a context based on deep human understanding that triggers people to make a decision or take action towards their goals.

*The author of this paper is **Astrid Groenewegen**.*
She is a social scientist and co-founder of SUE | Behavioural Design and the SUE | Behavioural Design Academy. With a background in the creative industry, she is specialised in turning behavioural science into tangible ideas. She is driven by her goal to teach as many people as possible about Behavioural Design, enabling them to unlock the power of behavioural psychology for positive behaviour change and better decision-making. By giving people access to actionable Behavioural Design tools to create welfare and wellbeing for themselves, the people around them and the planet we live on. In doing so, hoping to build a powerful worldwide counter-movement of people that will be able to detect and challenge the people who misuse the know-how in this field.

For more information visit:
www.suebehaviouraldesign.com

SUE | Behavioural Design

Foreword from SUE | Behavioural Design

The COVID-19 crisis has almost overnight transformed us to remote teams, leaving leadership and team managers with a daunting task. How can you make sure you and your team operate in this new context of autonomy without at the same time both losing sense of control? How can everyone benefit from this shift in work-life balance without comprising on productivity and the recognition for the work that you do? How do you keep strong team relationships that foster a culture of learning without physical face-to-face contact? How do you make sure your talent feels they are still making progress in this time of a sudden stand-still? How do you secure job satisfaction and loyalty? These are some fascinating and immediate questions on the minds of many leaders right now. Questions that all boil down to this one question: How do you make sure your team can perform at their peak performance, no matter where they are?

By sharing this research paper, we want to give leaders and managers the insights and practical tools to create positive behaviour change within their teams that will benefit both employees and the organisation itself. We have identified the behavioural boosters and bottlenecks that can help leaders and team managers transition their teams to this new 'normal' we all find ourselves in right now. But foremost we hope this research will contribute to the installation of lasting high-performance team habits, regardless of where people work.

There is a very clear indicator that directs us to what makes or breaks a great team. No matter where they are. That clear indicator is team *behaviour*. Your mission, vision, purpose or values can be both motivational magnetic as transparent, often they are not translated into specific behaviours. I*n the end, the most successful teams simply do things better than other teams*. In this paper, you'll find the results of our Behavioural Research. We conducted 36 qualitative interviews with professionals and managers, revealing the forces that can help you to shape behaviours of your distributed teams successfully.

In this sense, the COVID-19 crisis is a fascinating behavioural experiment. It has forced teams to engage in new behaviours abruptly; in fact, behaviour change has never happened so swiftly before. It can be valuable to see if we can identify which of those new behaviours have made teams more successful, so we can turn them into lasting behaviours also after the COVID-19 lock-down. But, as our research has revealed, it can be equally valuable to learn which behaviours drove a decrease in performance.

Know-how on behavioural change will become an indispensable ingredient for leaders to direct the performance of their teams. Both now and in the future. Especially, when taking into account that the whole experience of work itself underwent a dramatic turn-around. Without having to travel, being able to spend more time at home, gaining freedom from back-to-back meetings, for instance, people have come to realise that the whole concept of work in their lives could be vastly different. It may very well be that the way we work will never be the same again. Leaders and managers need to be equipped for this. Our new 'normal' of course also comes with challenges. How do you make sure teams stay productive, creative, connected, stimulated and inspired in a remote context? It is interesting to see what blocks and what promotes positive behaviours. As the old saying goes: 'Never waste a good crisis'. We hope this paper will help you and your team to navigate through this crisis successfully and change the way you work for the better. - **Astrid Groenewegen**

Executive Summary

With this Behavioural Research Project, we investigated how working from home, induced by the COVID-19 lockdown, affects team behaviour. More specifically, we wanted to learn what drives the good, the bad and the ugly. We wanted to learn how working from home contributes to high-performance output on the one hand, and how it affects output negatively. Understanding the forces that boost or undermine high-performance output, will be an indispensable tool for managers to understand how they can lead their teams better, both during and after the crisis.

The fundamental insight for understanding if 'working from home' actually improves the quality of team output, is that **to think outside-in**. You need to take the human behind the employee, and their Jobs-to-be-done - needs, dreams, goals, ambitions - as your point of departure. Once you do this, you will realise that the question: '*Is working from the office better than working from home*? is the wrong question to ask. The more relevant question is: '*What are the Jobs-to-be-done in the lives of employees that they need to be fulfilled through work?* And '*How does 'working at the office' or 'working from home' contribute to the fulfilment of these Jobs-to-be-done*?'

We discovered three kinds of Jobs-to-be-dones that people want to achieve through working: On a first level they have **functional jobs-to-be-done** they want to achieve: get work done, being productive, meet goals, earn a living, etc. On a deeper level, they have **emotional jobs-to-be-done**: the need for recognition, the desire to connect, the need for being challenged, the desire to contribute, and the desire to make a difference. And on a third level, they expect from work some **social jobs-to-be-done** to be fulfilled: Respect, status, and belonging. Understanding these deeper human-centric needs will give you a better view on how to assess the value of 'working in the office' versus 'working from home'.

Both the office and the home office can help people to fulfil these human needs, as well as prevent these needs from happening. We have used the SUE | Influence Framework to map out these behavioural forces. You can find a visual representation of this framework below.

The first set of behavioural forces are the PAINS associated with working from the office. Pains are all the frustrations and barriers related to office work, that prevent people from fulfilling their Jobs-to-be-Done. Now that we're working from home, people suddenly realise **how much friction and frustration they experience at the office**. To name the three most important ones: Distraction, distraction, and distraction. Offices – certainly open offices – are basically trigger machines for distraction. When working from home for the first time, people start to realise how much office distraction prevents them from the focus that is needed to get into deep work. Next to distraction, people talk about lack of freedom and self-control, the boredom associated with repeating the same routine, day after day, the lack of quality of the workspace and not unimportantly: travel time. Now that people experienced a work live without the commute, they realise now how much quality time or me-time in their life is being lost to commuting.

In direct contrast with the PAINS associated with the office are **the GAINS that people are experiencing now when working from home**. A lot of professionals observe a steep increase in productivity and focus. They also note that the quality of meetings is increasing, while the time spent on meetings is declining. A typical gain they validate the most is the improved quality of the workplace: At home, you generally have better coffee and snacks, and you're in an environment you have designed for yourself. Another important GAIN is the sudden freedom to choose when and how you work and when and how to take the quality time that matters to you. Combine this with the extra time

they get from not having to commute, and most people we interviewed report that they experience a much better work-life balance.

The third set of behavioural forces are **the psychological advantages that people get from working at the office. We call those advantages COMFORTS**. Comforts are essential to understand because they explain why people have difficulties in embracing the new behaviours associated with working from home. Our research revealed that one should not underestimate the power of routines and habits: Although people experience a lot of frustrations in the office, the one thing it does very well is that it forces you to get into work mode. This is more challenging for home workers, who need to rely on self-discipline. The second force is social habits: People derive a lot of personal happiness from being around other people. A third psychological advantage of the office is that team members can signal that they are working hard, while managers can signal to their team that they are on top of things. This 'signalling' is a lot harder when working from home. Interestingly enough, people also mention that travel time also has its benefits: it's a highly valued transition moment between 'work' and 'home'.

A last set of forces are ANXIETIES. **These are the barriers and (expected) disadvantages associated with working from home**. Distraction is also the most important one. People struggle with self-discipline or are simply too distracted by family members. Another strong anxiety is the insecurity people feel about their work: They lack the signals that their manager is happy, or that they're being appreciated for their contribution. This gets a lot of people to overcompensate, and it triggers some managers to micromanage. The lack of physical connection with colleagues is also a significant barrier. People – certainly extraverts – need a social connection to thrive.
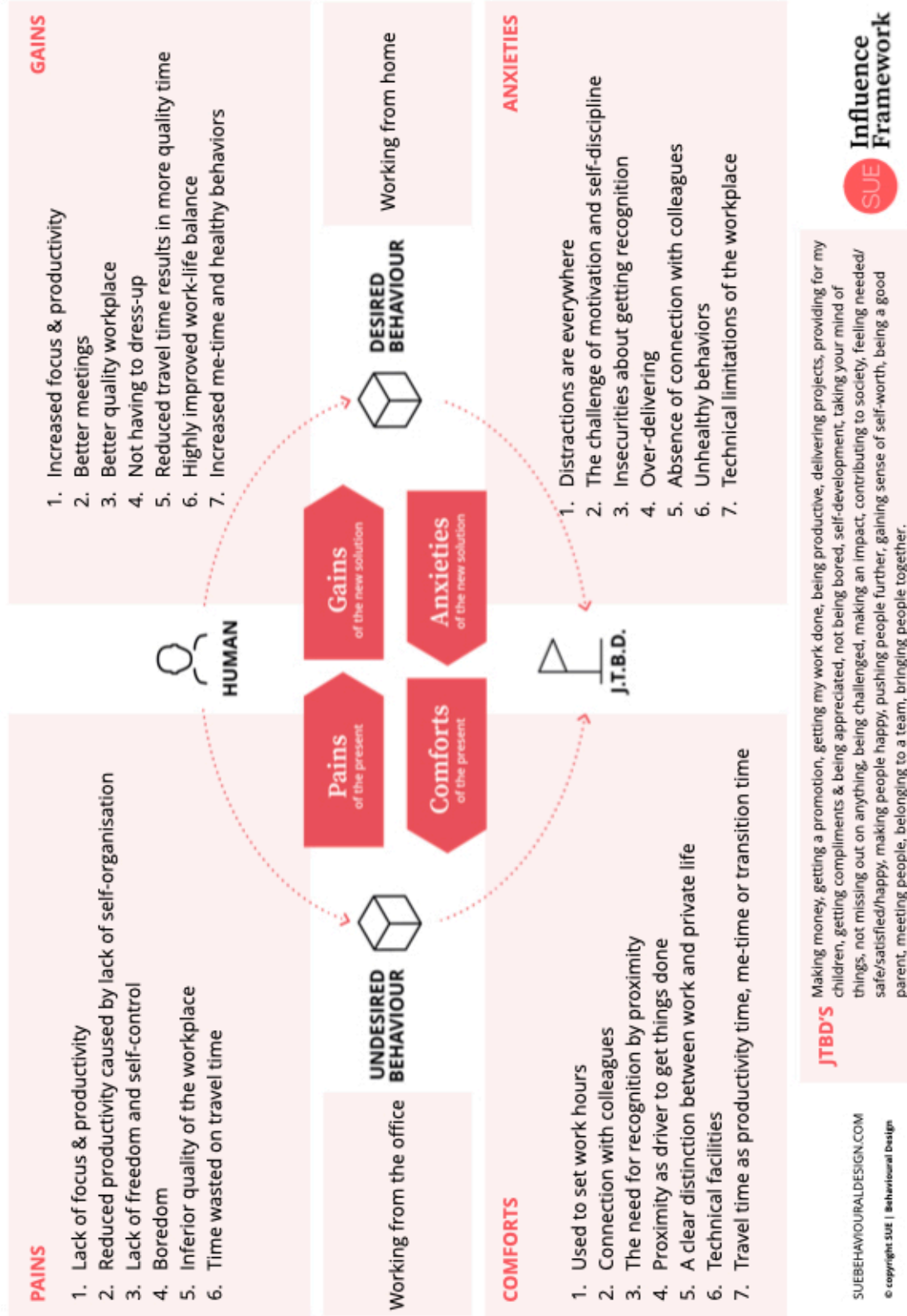
Recommendations for managers and leaders
Managing high-performance teams, whether they work distributed or not, is first and foremost about managing the forces that help people to fulfil their social, functional and emotional jobs-to-be-done. The better those needs are being met, the higher the performance of the team.

Working from home has a lot of potential because it solves quite some problems (pains) associated with working at the office, of which distraction, travel time and the time lost on meetings are the most important ones. But it produces new pains at the same time. It requires much more self-discipline, while the office simply forces you to get into work-mode.

More importantly, to make distributed teams work, leaders and managers need to become aware of the essential Jobs-to-be-Done that people need to see fulfilled. Those are often missing when the team works distributed: the desire for recognition, for friendship and social connection, the desire for status, or for experiencing success and achievement. Leaders of distributed teams need to come up with smart interventions to compensate for the absence of practices that fulfil these needs. We present several behavioural design solutions in the recommendation section at the end of this paper.

Understanding the deeper unconscious drivers of work on the one hand and understanding the forces that get people to experience these drivers or prevent them from achieving them, really is the key to managing distributed teams. We hope you enjoy this paper. If you would like to start implementing these high-performance habits, don't hesitate to call us. SUE can help you with a behavioural analysis of the forces in your team, help you to set up routines and habits or train your managers in the habits of managing high-performance team behaviour.

PAINS

1. Lack of focus & productivity
2. Reduced productivity caused by lack of self-organisation
3. Lack of freedom and self-control
4. Boredom
5. Inferior quality of the workplace
6. Time wasted on travel time

GAINS

1. Increased focus & productivity
2. Better meetings
3. Better quality workplace
4. Not having to dress-up
5. Reduced travel time results in more quality time
6. Highly improved work-life balance
7. Increased me-time and healthy behaviors

HUMAN

Pains
of the present

Gains
of the new solution

Comforts
of the present

Anxieties
of the new solution

UNDESIRED BEHAVIOUR

Working from the office

DESIRED BEHAVIOUR

Working from home

J.T.B.D.

COMFORTS

1. Used to set work hours
2. Connection with colleagues
3. The need for recognition by proximity
4. Proximity as driver to get things done
5. A clear distinction between work and private life
6. Technical facilities
7. Travel time as productivity time, me-time or transition time

ANXIETIES

1. Distractions are everywhere
2. The challenge of motivation and self-discipline
3. Insecurities about getting recognition
4. Over-delivering
5. Absence of connection with colleagues
6. Unhealthy behaviors
7. Technical limitations of the workplace

JTBD'S Making money, getting a promotion, getting my work done, being productive, delivering projects, providing for my children, getting compliments & being appreciated, not being bored, being challenged, making an impact, contributing to society, feeling needed/ things, not missing out on anything, being challenged, making an impact, contributing to society, feeling needed/ safe/satisfied/happy, making people happy, pushing people further, gaining sense of self-worth, being a good parent, meeting people, belonging to a team, bringing people together.

SUE | **Influence Framework**

2. The high-performance behaviours of distributed teams

If you want to lead distributed teams successfully, the key is to get more grip on team behaviours. By understanding which forces build or break successful team behaviour, you can predictably design high-performance team culture, regardless of their location. The COVID-19 crisis has given us the unique opportunity to research the behavioural boosters and behavioural bottlenecks of both working at the office and working remotely. It has revealed new behaviours that contribute to the achievements of teams, and it has unlocked opportunities to positively transform teams. It gives leaders and managers insight into how to manage teams in quarantine but also how to install high-performance team behaviours that will help both employees and the organisation thrive now and in the future.

The foundation of high-performance team behaviour

If you want to know how to successfully lead distributed teams; the question you have to ask ourselves is actually not the question: 'How can we make our remote teams work successfully?'. The better question to ask yourself is 'What do my teams need to be successful? Understanding what makes or breaks high-performance team behaviour is understanding what your team members are trying to achieve for themselves when engaging in work. To get a valid answer to this it isn't about what you think your team members need and want. It is about getting into their heads.

You need to start thinking outside-in.

People have all kinds of underlying motivations and needs that work helps them realise, their so-called job-to-dones[1]. If we map out all the different job-to-dones of employees, we see that everything they do or don't do is related to trying to accomplish their job-to-be-dones. Important side-note to make is that the term 'job-to-be-done' might be confusing. The word 'job' might put you of on the wrong foot. When we are referring to the job-to-be-done of people it isn't their actual work task, but it is what the work helps them accomplish as a human-being. What does having an employment helps them achieve? How does it help them progress towards their goals in life? It is about unravelling *why* they want to work. This can be very functional but work often also has a more social and emotional function for people. It exposes their need for recognition, we want to get things done, we want to have the feeling that what we do has meaning, we want to provide for our families, we want to help other people. These are all examples of job-to-be-dones that we look for work to fulfil.

The realisation of our job-to-be-dones is to which we measure the quality of our experience of work.

This is important for leaders and managers to realise as we see that when people have the feeling their job-to-dones aren't met at work, for instance, they have the feeling they are not recognised for their contribution or they feel their work invades far too much of their private time, employees can get very frustrated. This often manifests itself by demanding a raise or a bonus, but it occasionally has to do
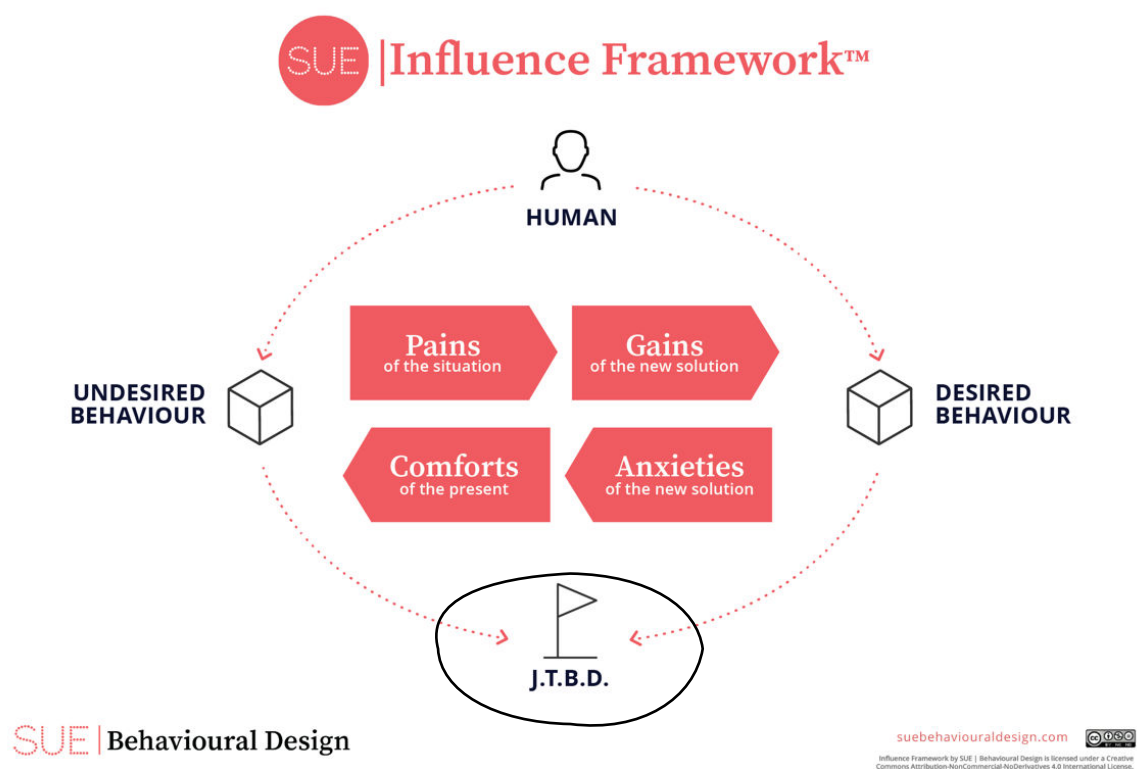
---

[1] https://www.christenseninstitute.org/jobs-to-be-done/

with this. Or when renumeration is an issue it often has become one because of all those other frustrations piling up.

If you want successfully lead distributed teams you have to be very aware that, to turn remote working into a success, it has everything to do with the measure in which people's job-to-be-dones are still realised.

What we have seen in our Behavioural Research is that everyone who has managed to be successful in remote working has discovered ways to fulfil those important motivations and needs they want to see met through work. But it works both ways, everyone who has expressed in our research to be frustrated about working from home is missing some job-to-be-dones that working at the office did help them achieve.

If you want to design lasting positive behaviours, you therefore first have to take a look at the underlying needs that need to be satisfied before designing specific behaviours. So, what we did in our Behavioural Research is first take a step back and see if we could reveal the job-to-be-dones of people. We really have picked people's brains to surface those. It helped us to understand far more clearly what all the frustration are in working at the office. As they are directly related to not being able to realise job-to-be-dones. But also what stands in the way of engaging in high-performance behaviour as distributed team, how does it cross the achievement of work job-to-be-dones when working from home?

Job-to-be-dones or the deeper meaning of work to people

From our Behavioural Research it became clear that the job-to-be-dones, means to progress. To paraphrase Clayton Christensen of Harvard Business School:

People don't simply engage in work; they pull them into their lives to make progress.

Interesting to see, is that the job-to-be-dones we revealed in our Behavioural Research haven't so much changed when people had to shift from working at their offices to working at home. Some job-to-be-dones that derived from our research are quite functional, such as:

Functional job-to-be-dones
These are the goals that people are trying to achieve through their work. They can often be measured by speed and efficiency. For instance, how quick can I progress on the career and salary ladder? If employees cannot reach their goals fast and with enough certainty by the way the work right now, there are opportunities for leaders and managers to help teams grow.

- making money
- getting a promotion
- getting my work done
- being productive
- delivering projects
- providing for your children

But others are more emotional and social. We found these job-to-be-dones:

Emotional job-to-be-dones
Emotional job-to-be-dones are the way your team members want to feel when executing their functional job-to-be-dones. More specifically, they all about how people want to *feel about themselves.* Employees are humans with all kinds of emotions. For instance, feelings of anxiety for not being able to deliver projects on time due to constant interruptions. And even though work maybe provides a very functional job-to-be-done for someone, addressing the emotional job-to-be-done is just as important. In the end, the emotional job-to-be-dones all are manifestations of core desires every human wants to see fulfilled (e.g., belonging, self-expression, control, and so on), so they shouldn't be ignored. Especially, now in this COVID-19 crisis when we saw human emotions rise. To name one very important emotion mangers and leaders have to be quite aware of now is the emotion of insecurity. Will I still have a job after this crisis? Does my manager still see what I am doing? Can I still get in a productivity flow at home? But same goes after the crisis. Meeting someone's emotional job-to-be-done is where you can make the difference as a leader or employer. It is there where you can grow and boost employee loyalty and happiness.

For leaders and managers emotions have great signalling value; they are expressions of people that the feel they get limited in meeting their emotional job-to-be-dones. Don't see them as negatives but as opportunities to be of genuine value as leader or manager.

These are some of the emotional job-to-be-dones surfacing in our research:

- getting compliments and being appreciated
- not being bored
- self-development
- taking your mind of things
- not missing out on anything

- being challenged
- making an impact on other people's lives
- contributing to society
- feeling needed
- feeling safe
- feeling satisfied
- making people happy
- gaining a sense of self-worth
- pushing other people further

Social job-to-be-dones

Finally, there are social job-to-dones. These are related how people want to be or are *perceived by others* or how they want *to connect to others*. These are the social job-to-be-dones we found:
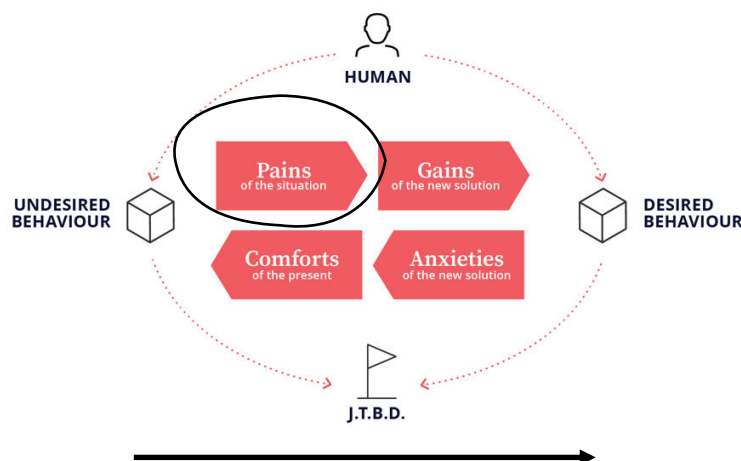
- being a good parent
- belonging to a team
- meeting people
- bringing people together

If we want our positive remote working behaviours to stick, we need to be aware that they need to be able to fulfil these job-to-be-dones. Or if possible, fulfil them even better. Interesting though is that our job-to-be-dones don't seem to vary with the location of work: at the office or at home. Respondents expressed they have the same motivations to work only different forces came to play which make up for their willingness and ability to change work behaviours.

When designing behaviour, you do not work on the behaviour itself.

There are both driving and restricting forces that influence behaviour change. In this part we will unravel all forces related to the old and new working context. We will peel off layer by layer to gain deep human-understanding and connect these with the job-to-be-dones. The statements between brackets are actual quotes from the respondents. The quotes that were published in the Research are not all-inclusive. A lot more quotes were collected; the quotes selected were good illustrations of the insights that surfaced multiple times. We, for instance, took out quotes that were (almost) the same or were one-offs.

The driving forces of behavioural change: PAINS of office working

Interesting enough the whole mandatory COVID-19 quarantine seems to have opened up our eyes about the restricting forces when working at the office, this doesn't differ between managers or team members. Throughout different levels of the organisation, it appears pains have become evident. There are a lot of pains related to working in a shared space with colleagues that once we were in the middle of this context, it didn't seem so frustrating or annoying or at least not so out in the open or manifest.

Now that we have been taken out of the physical co-working context it seems some blinders have been removed.

Our respondents indicated to have experienced very noticeable and clear-cut advantages of not working at the office.

PAIN number 1: Lack of focus & productivity
Most visible pain is a lack of focus: People appear to be continuously distracted at the office. People asking questions, coming by or talking out loud.

- 'I get distracted a lot at the office'.
- 'I keep getting interrupted by colleagues.'
- "The constant chattering of colleagues.'
- 'I get distracted by, for instance by a joke a colleague makes, there is an overkill of social talk.'
- 'I work in an open-plan office; it is so chaotic and noisy'.
- 'I think it is quite chaotic at the office'. '
- 'At the office there are too many communication channels open at one time. You get distracted several ways all the time'.
- 'There are constantly colleagues standing at my desk.'
- 'I lose so much time by all those last-minute requests.'

But people also have some self-reflection.

- 'Now that I am not at the office, I notice that I like to meddle into everything. Whenever someone says something or asks for my opinion, I drop my work. I have days that are filled up with being busy with the projects of other people which totally decreases my own productivity. I have come to the conclusion I am a die-hard meddler.'
- 'I often lose my focus; also because I eavesdrop into interesting conversations, other people are having.'

PAIN number 2: Reduced productivity caused by lack of self-organisation
One pain that was stated over and over again to have a very negative impact on productivity are the number of meetings that are planned at the office.

- 'At the office, I am back-to-back in meetings. I hardly get my work done, I just run from meeting room to meeting room. I don't even have time to have a proper lunch'.
- 'As soon as I arrive at the office, my schedule is instantly filled up with meetings'.

The meeting culture in most organisations is something that the majority of the respondents describe as either: ineffective, inefficient, unneeded, unpleasant and having a major negative impact on their productivity.

PAIN number 3: Lack of freedom and self-control

When we delved deeper into this, another pain surfaced. People feel they don't have control over their own time-management. They appear to feel having very little freedom in organising their day, meetings are planned for them, colleagues come in between, or the work times are not working for them.

- 'I feel I have no control over my own time, as soon as I am in the office the agenda takes over'.
- 'I have a hard time doing my own time-management'.
- 'When I really have to focus, often a colleague drops by with ad-hoc questions. I have to take care of them, but it really limits my control over my own schedule. I cannot get into deep-work when I want to.'
- 'I really do not like the 9-6 work hour mentality, sometimes I feel that I don't have a good day at all, but you just stay at the office as this is what you are supposed to do, but actually you are just sitting that day out.'
- 'I wish my times were more flexible. Getting my kids into day-care in the morning is such a hassle.'
- 'I have to get up so early, and I am not a morning person at all.'

But it is more than meetings alone; people also experience bounded freedom caused by internal drivers.

- 'When I work at the office, I feel I have to be there for eight hours.'
- 'I feel limited because I have to work in someone's else idea of working times, which for me might not be my most productive timeslots.'
- 'I realise now that I really feel a bit suffocated by the set work hours, I do it, but now that I don't have to do this, I have come to the conclusion that I really don't like this straight jacket of set working hours.'
- 'I have the feeling I am being watched.'

PAIN number 4: Boredom

Some indicated not only to feel distracted by their colleagues but also bored by the same faces and routine every day.

- 'You see the same people day in and day out'.
- 'Every day is the same, from the time I get up to the time I go to bed'.
- That having to take that same train over and over again every day frustrates me'.

PAIN number 5: Inferior quality of the workplace and space

Sometimes being at the office isn't all that nice for people. Some gripping pains of working at the office surfaced related to the physical workplace itself.

- 'I hate working in air condition; it makes me feel uncomfortable even sick sometimes. And in summer I feel I am missing out on the nice weather, that can make me feel sad or stupid that I stuck staying at the office'.
- 'We have terrible coffee at our office'.
- 'There is so much background noise'.
- 'It is so quiet at our office. I miss my music'.
- 'I miss having my dog around, I have to spend a lot of money on a dog walking service'.
- 'Our office is so sterile; there are no flowers or real plants'.
- 'Lunch is distasteful.'

Coffee appears to be one of those big, little details as it comes forward several times in our research as a dissatisfier of office life. But also, the space within the office has shown to have some pains:

- 'I never can seem to find a quiet room they are always booked'.
- 'I work in an office with flexible working desks, I don't like it. It feels so impersonal.'
- 'There isn't always a work spot available to me, some days all desks are fully booked'.
- 'When I get at the office, I first have to find a flex desk, I lose time with this'.
- 'The so nicely called office garden, doesn't work one single bit'.
- 'My office is not inspirational at all'.

PAIN number 6: Time wasted on travel time
Last but certainly not least, a significant pain surfaced: the time it takes to travel from and to work.

- 'It takes so much time to travel to and from work, and the traffic is getting worse and worse'.
- 'From where I live to my work is a route that is notoriously famous for its congestions in the morning'.
- 'I spend so much time in traffic congestions.
- 'It is so busy in public transport, I cannot even read, it's a quite stressful beginning of my day'.
- 'Before I am home after work, it is already quite late'.
- 'I have to get up really early to get to work on time'.
- 'The time I spent at work and travelling from and to my work really goes at the expense of my social life'.

PAINS and the impact on the job-to-be-dones
There are quite some pains related to working at the office have surfaced in our research. But not only the quantity of the pains is something to be taken into account, but especially the effect of the pains on the job-to-be-dones of employees is is quite a meaningful signal.

Most of the pains of working at the office are directly blocking the fulfilment of job-to-be-dones.

This is vital information for all leaders and managers out there. Not only because some of the pains cross out realising some of the more functional job-to-be-dones, such as getting work done, delivering projects, being productive, which are crucial from an organisation point-of-view.

It is also vital information because social and emotional job-to-be-dones are being jeopardised by pains induced by working at the office.
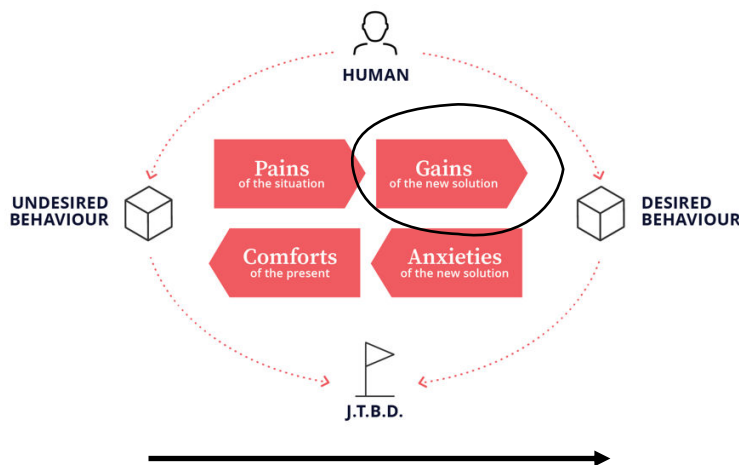
This can potentially have an effect on the motivation of employees to join an organisation or to stay at an organisation. As almost every manager is faced with the challenge to attract and attain the best talent out there, this research at this same time reveals ample opportunities to make changes that can benefit both employees and the organisation. If you know where pains are, you can start 'healing' them. Or, better put: You can do behavioural interventions that help employees realise their job-to-be-dones in a much better way.

In summary, we can conclude there are some categories of pains related to working in an office environment. These are:

- Lack of focus
- Reduced productivity
- Inefficient travel time

- Uncomfortable workplace
- Loss of freedom and control

The driving forces of behavioural change: GAINS of remote working

All our respondents have experienced for some weeks now what if feels like and what they gain by working away from the office. Although the COVID-19 situation hasn't led to the most optimal remote working context. Working in that nice coffee place around the corner, in the public library or somewhere else with excellent Wi-Fi and desk space, for example, is out of the question right now. And some have to deal with some challenge having to 'create' a home-office some with children running around. Still, some interesting gains of not having to be at the office came forward in our research.

GAIN number 1: Increased productivity & focus
One gain that immediately catches the eye is the ability to focus and the benefit of productivity that comes with it.

- 'I can really focus when working at home. I am not so distracted by other people or noises.'
- 'I always thought I am someone who cannot focus; it turned out not to be true. I am very focused and productive now. I think it is because I can now solely focus on my *own* work'.
- 'It is so nice and quiet here'.
- 'I am able to help far more people now, that really makes me feel good'.
- 'I now have time to tackle to-do's that I normally not even get to doing.'
- 'No colleagues are standing at my desk, interrupting me.'
- 'There are fewer distractions at home.'
- 'The last few days I have experienced what it feels like to get into deep working mode. It felt so immensely satisfying. It feels like I am contributing to my work.'

GAIN number 2: Better meetings
Another interesting insight is that meetings seem to have transformed. '

- I have to say that I love the fact I don't have meetings now. Yes, I do Zoom with colleagues, but somehow those meetings are much shorter. I now have time to be more productive'.

The virtual meetings appear to have triggered different, more positive meeting behaviours.

- 'We now somehow know how to distinguish key points from minor issues.'
- 'Zoom meetings all of the sudden work better, we are far more efficient'.
- 'I like the Zoom meeting because everybody really is there. Somehow it feels not done to walk away from your video connection. As in normal meetings, people step out of the room or keep checking their phone'.

GAIN number 3: Better quality workplace
We found some more gains that are the direct opposite of pains of working at the office. Some people seem to really experience improvements in the quality of their workspace.

- 'I really have good coffee'.
- 'I create my own little work nest. I surround myself with objects that make me feel good. I always have flowers near me and my own mug.'
- 'I have my own snacks right by my side'.
- 'I don't have to spend money anymore on expensive lunches.'
- 'I really like working in my own surroundings with my own music.'

The fact you can control your own temperature appears is mentioned several times as a real gain of working at your own place.

- 'I don't have to sit in those centrally controlled vent systems anymore, I can open the windows. Or in my case, turn up the heat. I am always colder than my colleagues.'

GAIN number 4: Not having to dress-up
A new gain also surfaced, that we didn't see as directly solving a mentioned pain, but has everything to do with working in your own surroundings.

- 'I don't have to dress up anymore.'
- 'I am in my comfy trainers.'
- 'I don't have to spend all that time putting on my make-up and doing my hair.'

The sweatpants seem to be a real asset for people. Just as the coffee came back multiple times on the pain side, the sweatpants appear to be a gain for people. This seems to boost feelings of freedom.

- 'I love working in my sweatpants.'

GAIN number 5: Self-control and freedom in daily routine
The feeling of freedom we see coming back in several ways.

- 'I now can plan my own day'.
- 'I can sleep in now. I am much more productive in the evening'.
- 'I can start working later now and take the time to have a proper breakfast with my children'.
- 'I discovered my optimal work rhythm, when I am more productive and when I am not, and I love being in my rhythm, I get into a flow.'
- 'Working at home gives me flexibility.'
- 'Taking a break now feels like taking a break'.
- 'I can take a break now when I feel I need one not when I am meant to take one.'
- 'I love the fact I can now define my own working hours.

The feeling of freedom has truly surged. This has to do with the ability to manage your own time but is also more social.

- 'I don't have the feeling people are watching me all the time or are checking up on me.'

GAIN number 6: Reduced travel time results in more quality time
People have gained more time by not having to travel from and to work.

- 'I don't lose time travelling anymore.'
- 'Now I have less travel time, so more hours in a day.'
- 'I now realise how much time opens up when I do not have to get onto that train day after day. I was already frustrated by it, but it now made me realise that I have gained 3 hours in my day. Not just for work, but for me.'

GAIN number 6: Highly improved work-life balance
If we have to highlight one thing on the gain side of behavioural change, it is the improved work-life balance. This has tilted the scales from a very negative experience of work-life balance into an increase of experiencing a positive work-life balance. Several behaviours add up to this. The mentioned increase in focus and productivity adds up, but also the reduced travel time is a decisive factor. The notion of freedom has catapulted behaviours that make up for a positive work-life balance.

- 'I now can run personal errands during the day, like putting a wash in the washing machine'.
- 'I get to spend a lot more time with my family and friends'.
- 'I am not leaving the house early anymore before the kids wake up and I can have a proper dinner with them. Not just kissing them good night. This feels really good. I always said I am a working mum. I cannot do without my work. I now realise you don't have to choose. I am getting into deeper work now and have far less inefficient time. I get to spend that time with my husband and children now'.
- 'I am really able to combine work with family right now.'
- 'I can really be there now for the people I love at home.'

And pets seem to be important.

- 'I can cuddle with my cat now when I am working.'
- 'I have my dog with me all day.'

GAIN number 7: Increased me-time & healthy behaviours
But it is not only the connection with other living beings that appears to be valued. We found that me-time came forward several times.

- 'I now have some time for myself'.

This me-time is often used by people to engage in healthy behaviours, such as working out, getting some exercise in or eating more healthy foods.

- 'I work out now. I start my day with a 15-minutes Pilates work-out on YouTube'.
- 'Every day I go out for a walk now.'
- 'I now have time to walk my dog; it gives me oxygen'.
- 'I can exercise during the day now'. '

- The time I usually spent in traffic I am now spending doing exercises. Before I never could cramp it into my busy schedule. The loss of travel time has opened up a time slot to work-out'.
- 'I do some grocery shopping during the day, and I am eating far healthier now. Before I was just so tired after work, I grabbed a quick meal. Now I sometimes roast a pumpkin in between work in the afternoon. I would never have done that before. I used to come home so late from work.'

We also see that there is another factor that influences the work-life balance that is more emotional.

- 'I don't feel guilty now that I do non-work-related things in between work'.
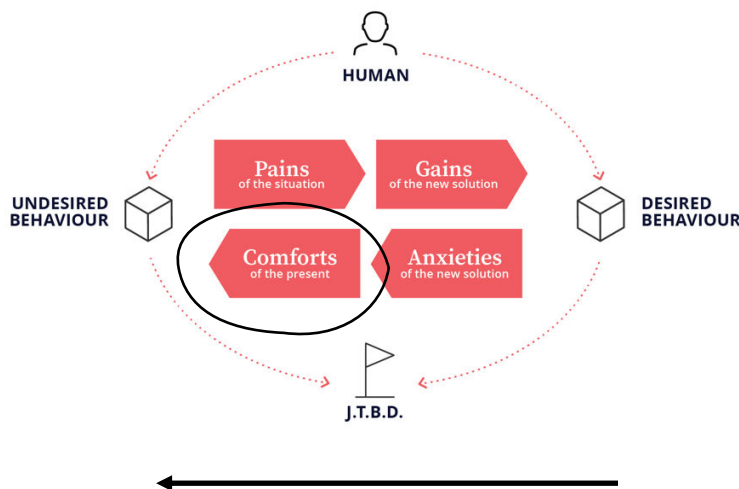
GAINS and the impact on the job-to-be-dones
There are quite some gains. Foremost, the COVID-19 quarantine situation seems to have an enormous positive impact on our work-life balance and productivity and focus. Something that people have struggled to get right for years. Somehow, we all had certain work behaviours that were the social norm of working at the office, which genuinely interferes with our ability to get our job-to-dones fulfilled in a successful way.

We all seemed to agree on or even consciously felt the pains, frustrations, annoyances and barriers of office work behaviours, but the social norm is hard to break.

Now that our behavioural research has revealed that people have experienced and appreciated the gains of remote working, we might have a better opportunity to change behaviour. We know from behavioural psychology, our natural human inclination is not to be outside the group. We are social creatures; Something that is hardwired in our brain. In the early days of humankind, it was simply safer to be part of a group. The COVID-19 crisis has opened up our eyes that may be a different social norm in our current context is far more beneficial to us. We don't have to escape from man-eating sabre-toothed tigers anymore. We do have to escape distraction and inefficiencies that both negatively influence our work and private life. Now we have the opportunity to change the social norm and install new behaviours that will benefit us all, both employees and employers. How we will discuss in the last chapter. In summary, we can conclude there are some categories of gains related to remote working. These are:

- More focus and concentration
- Higher productivity
- Better meetings
- Qualitative workplace
- Improved work-life balance
- More time for physical activity
- More time to spend with family and friends
- Healthier eating habits
- The benefits of no travel time
- Feeling of freedom and control
- Less social pressure on image

The restricting forces of behavioural change: COMFORTS of office working

Raising awareness about the pains of working at an office or providing information about the gains of remote working is just one side of the coin. 'Awareness may help people, information, and incentives may help people form intentions, but behaviour change also depends on removing barriers and creating channels for people that make it easier to choose and act.[2]' We have got to ask ourselves how aspects in people's work context, both in working at the office and working remotely, are shaping the choices and behaviour that *hold them back* from engaging in better work behaviours.

Let's first dive into the force that keeps people in the behaviour to work at the office. What are the advantages of working at the office that prevent them from switching to remote working? What comforts does working at the office give them? What are the habits and routines everyone merely is following? What defaults are there and what is expected now?

COMFORT number 1: Used to set work hours
In our Behavioural Research, we found some habitual behaviour that people perform over-and-over again and therefore have grown so accustomed to that they don't challenge or question them anymore. Or that feel very comfortable or valuable to them. First of all, people expressed that working on set hours is just a routine they are used to and which they have come to accept.

- 'You are expected to be at work, so I am. That's normal, right?'
- 'My working days are structured the same way for as long as I can remember. I get up, take a shower, eat my breakfast, get dressed, take the train to work, spend my working day at the office, and then return home taking the train again.'
- 'I am used to getting up at 7.00 in the mornings.'
- 'I always take the 8.08 train to work.'

The structure a day of working at the office isn't only perceived as being a negative:

- 'Going to the office gives my day structure and guidance.'
- 'The set routines give my day structure.'

---

[2] Barrows, A., Dabney, N., Haynes, J. & Rosenberg, R. (2018). Behavioral Design Teams. A model for integrating behavioral design in city government, p. 10.

COMFORT number 2: Connection with colleagues
Other habits we see coming back are socially related. Again, coffee seems to be a recurring phenomenon, to be precise the daily chats at the coffee machine are something that is significantly valued at the office; it came back several times.

- 'Every day I have what I like to call my coffee machine moment. I have my informal talks while getting a coffee at the central coffee counter.'
- 'I always get my first coffee at the office.'
- 'I am always getting coffee with the same person.'

But some other interaction moments also make people appreciate being surrounded by colleagues at work.

- 'I always take a walk outside with colleagues during lunchtime.'
- 'I like the little how-was-your-weekend chats on Mondays'.
- 'I like meeting new people'.
- 'We always have lunch together in the office cafeteria.'
- 'I feel part of a team.'

COMFORT number 3: The need for recognition by proximity
Delving a bit deeper into the positives of working at the offices had to do with accomplishment and recognition.

- 'I want to meet the expectations of my managers at the office they can see me.'

But it also goes the other way 'round; this is what managers have to say.

- 'I am used to connect with my team on a daily basis. It gives me direct feedback on their progress.'

COMFORT number 4: Proximity as a driver for getting things done
Being close to your fellow-workers has more functional benefits as well.

- 'I find it easier to talk to each other face-to-face.'
- 'We start every morning in front of a scrum board.'
- 'I like to walk over to a colleague to streamline a project or action.'
- 'At work, I am not distracted by my husband and children or home chores.'

COMFORT number 5: A clear distinction between work and private life
Why people feel comfortable with working at the office surroundings is because it gives them a very apparent bounded notion of work.

- 'It clearly gives me a separation between work and private life. At work, I am not a mother for some time.'

COMFORT number 6: Technical facilities
And now that we are on the functional side of things, a very functional insight was mentioned

- 'At the office, we have all the technical facilities, like high-speed internet and an IT department.'

COMFORT number 7: Travel time as productivity time, me-time or transition time

And then something very interesting came up. Whereas travel-time was a very outspoken pain point in working at the office, quite a few people have adapted habitual behaviours to make the most out of the commute. Very fascinating, and hopeful for all mothers out there is that we found a very nice habit that has to do with connecting to mothers.

- 'I always give my mother a quick call when I am on the road.'
- 'I always call my mum when I am in the car.'

Overall a lot of calls are made in the car.

- 'When I am stuck in congestion, I always take care of my calls.'
- 'I do a lot of work when I am in the car, that's where I take my calls.'
- 'My best ideas are born in my car.'

But travel time has also become a valued transition moment, to get people from one emotional state into another.

- 'Driving allows me to switch from my working mode to my private mode.'
- 'I really enjoy doing my own thing in my car'.
- 'I love listening to loud music in my car.'
- 'My travel time is the time in which I don't have to do anything for a moment.'
- 'I always catch up upon the news in my car.'

COMFORTS and the impact on the job-to-be-dones

What we see coming up in our Behavioural Research is that a lot of comforts have to do with people having direct contact with other people. This doesn't only fulfil their functional job-to-be-dones of feeling recognised and getting compliments and getting things done, but it also helps them with their more social job-to-be-dones like meeting people and having the feeling to be part of a team. It's interesting to see that on the hand the contact with colleagues is an added value of working at the office, but on the other hand, that same day-to-day contact with colleagues makes up for so many pains that threaten to accomplish job-to-be-dones. If we want people to benefit from the gains of remote working and release them from the pains of office working,
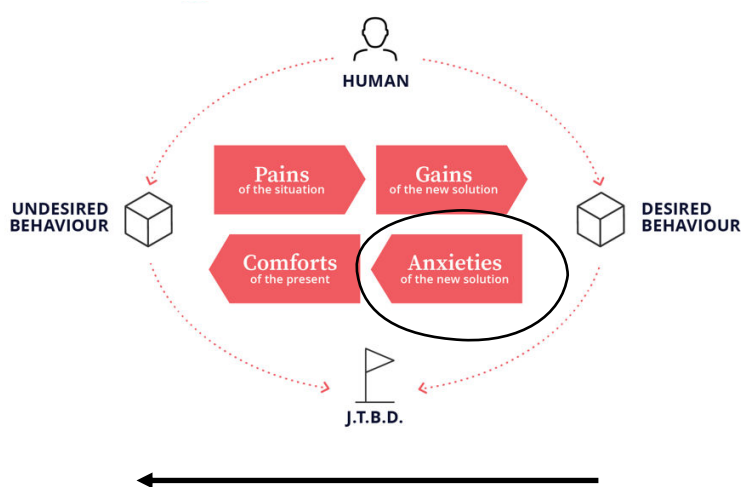
We have to make sure that comforts are replaced with better behaviours that fulfil the same needs underlying the comforts.

If people like the social connection at the office, we have to design for social connection in remote working. If people feel they get stuff done more quickly with face-to-face contact, we have to design for productivity habits in distributed teams. You cannot take away comforts you have to *replace* them with better behaviours that in the end, fulfil the same need.

To sum it up we found several forces that hold people in the working at the office behaviour:

- Provides structure in the workday
- Emotional connection with colleagues
- Functional connection with colleagues
- Technical facilities
- Travel time as me-time

The restricting forces of behavioural change: ANXIETIES of remote working

Last, but certainly not least we took a look at the barriers people related to remote working. Whether they are objectively true or not. They are right in people's minds and therefore hold people back from working remotely.

ANXIETY number 1: Distractions are everywhere
Although we identified that there are many distractions at the office, remote working can also be distractive. We do have to take in consideration that these distractions are multiplied as a result of the COVID lockdown. A lot of people are now restricted to remote working at home and have their partner and children about. But still, it is something worth our consideration. And family members are not the only distractors.

- 'I get distracted by my washing machine.'
- 'I notice that I walk away from my work because I see all those home chores that I end up doing instead of working'.
- 'When I have to clear my mind at the office, I clean my desk. At home, I caught myself cleaning the whole house before I mentally feel ready to get started with my work.'
- 'I notice I keep asking myself the question: to work or not to work?'
- 'I am now shamelessly doing online shopping or spending my time at social platforms.'

But colleagues are also still interrupters.

- 'People don't *see* that you are busy working, because they don't *see* you. I get interrupted by phone calls all the time.'

ANXIETY number 2: The challenge of motivation and self-discipline
And here we move into the area of motivation and discipline. A lot of the respondents struggle with either one of them.

- 'I have little self-discipline'.
- 'It takes much more discipline to work from home. I love the freedom it gives me, but I am also afraid to slack.'
- 'It takes more discipline to work from home, I have managed so far, but it takes extra effort.'

Some doubt whether they are competent enough:

- 'I honestly don't know if I can be disciplined enough to manage my own workday, I am afraid not'.
- 'It takes more motivation to get started with work, nobody checks up on me if I am indeed working.'

ANXIETY number 3: Insecurities about getting recognition
To build upon on this, we also found something connected to nothing being checked upon that has to do with the fear of not being recognised.

- 'My manager doesn't see what I am doing.'
- 'Do my colleagues even see the contribution I make?'
- 'My teammates don't see how hard I am working.'
- 'You tend to get out of sight; your work cannot be checked anymore.'
- 'I feel less satisfied with myself if I have pushed a deadline or didn't get my work done on time. I feel only have myself to blame for this.'

Managers expressed different fears:

- 'I am afraid I lose grip on my team.'

But is not all about control. Several managers also said:

- 'I want to be there for my team; my co-workers don't feel seen if I am not around.'

ANXIETY number 4: Over-delivering
At the same time, we found insights that are contrary to the lack of self-discipline. People tend to over-deliver when working at home. They put in far more hours than they do at the office. On the one hand, this delivers productivity, but people expressed some negative side-effects too.

- 'I take too little breaks.'
- 'Is screen time, now the constant working time?'
- 'I don't have mental piece-of-mind anymore; there is no transition between my work and private environment.'
- 'People don't respect my breaks.'
- 'I work far more than eight hours every day.'
- 'I spend far too much time on the phone.' 'I am always on.'
- 'The work never stops.'
- 'I have a hard time putting down my laptop.'

ANXIETY number 5: Absence of connection with colleagues
Being in the same space with colleagues is another barrier to remote working.

- 'There is no replacement for face-to-face contact.'

This can be both an absence of functional connection:

- 'It takes more energy to get things done with physical contact.'
- 'I want to walk by a colleague to get something done quickly.'
- 'I don't have all the information anymore because I don't have one-on-one contact.'

- 'I miss my sparring partner sitting next to me.'
- 'I don't know when to ask for help; as I don't know when someone is available.'
- 'I don't get response to my chats or emails.'

But the more emotional nature of the connection is also perceived as a miss.

- 'I miss the talks with colleagues.'
- 'Without my informal contact moments, I cannot judge how someone is doing.'
- 'I don't get to meet new colleagues.'
- 'I get bored here working on my own.'
- 'We cannot do any teambuilding or create a team spirit.'

It is not limited to lack of verbal communication; also the non-verbal communication is something people lack when nothing being around each other.

- 'You do miss a lot of non-verbal communication when working virtually.'
- 'I cannot read someone's body language anymore.'

ANXIETY number 6: Unhealthy behaviours
Finally, some unhealthy behaviours surfaced. Some people told us that they start to develop back and neck pains.

- 'I don't have a proper chair at home.'
- 'At home, I tend to start snacking far easier, I just go over to my snack drawer.'
- 'I don't have an ergonomic workplace.'
- 'I get headaches staring at my screen for so many hours.'
- 'I tend to eat and snack much more at home.'

ANXIETY number 7: Technical limitations of workplace
If we want people to start working remotely more, there is a last anxiety we have to take into account. The technical limitations of a home office.

- 'The technical infrastructure of our company isn't prepared for teams working remote.'
- 'I don't have a proper workplace at home.'
- 'I don't have enough digital skills to successfully work from home.'
- 'I have hardware at home that is outdated.'
- 'My Bose headset doesn't always do the trick.'

ANXIETIES and the impact on the job-to-be-dones
If you want behavioural change to succeed the exposure of anxieties that hold people back are a vital optic. Nobody will move into the desired direction if anxieties aren't addressed.

If you want to successfully lead distributed teams, you need to *take away* all the anxieties.

Sometimes this implies thinking about the benefits your team members are entitled to in a very different way. Whereas maybe before the quarantine, your organisation would not even have considered investing in someone's *home* office, it could now very well be a wise investment to make. Not only to manoeuvre through this quarantine but to also:

Provide your teams with the means and tools to turn positive quarantine behaviours into lasting routines that in the end, will benefit their work and wellbeing.
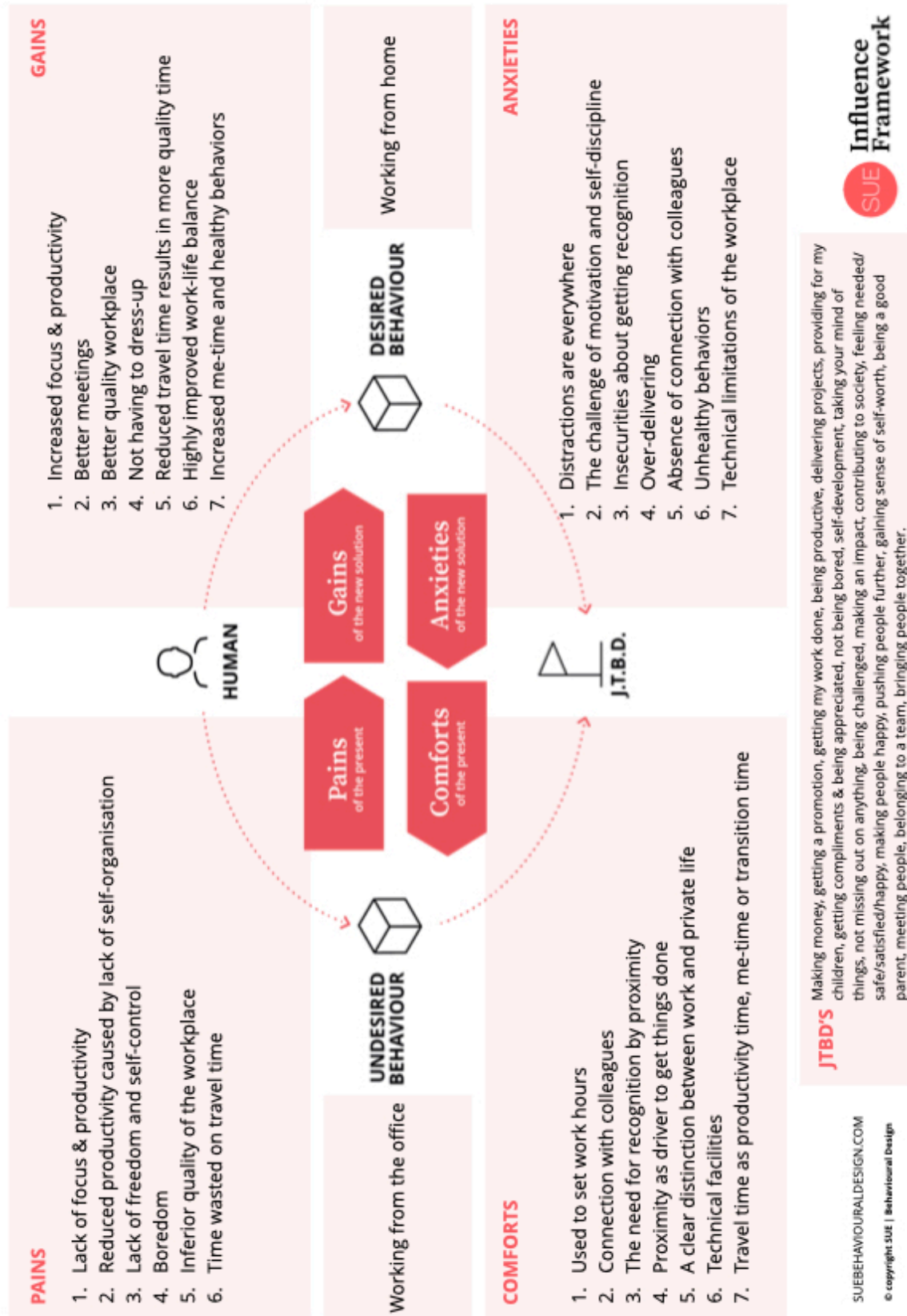
Taking away some of the anxieties also allows leaders and managers to boost loyalty and intrinsic motivation of their employees. We know from behavioural research and large-scale companies like Google that providing employee benefits that emphasise the social-side of the company-worker relationship have a far more positive effect on productivity, loyalty and employee happiness[3] [4]. This research has exposed ample opportunities to take away anxieties that will not only create better team behaviours but also build employee goodwill. Finally, we revealed a lot of anxieties that actually can be solved by simply installing some new behavioural habits. The role of leadership and management should change from controlling to facilitating. This Behavioural Research has exposed how taking away anxieties is more than just 'tackling issues'; It can be far more impactful as it can change the way you lead and how both you and your team live.

To sum things up, this is what holds us back from working away from the office:

- Distraction by home chores
- Lack of functional connection
- Lack of emotional connection
- Need for recognition
- Need for control
- Lack of self-discipline or motivation
- Overdelivering
- Unhealthy work conditions
- Technical limitations

---

[3] Ariely, D. (2008). Predictably Irrational. Harper Collins.
[4] Bock, L. (2015). Work Rules. Insights from Inside Google that will transform they way you live and lead. Twelve.

Influence Framework

GAINS

Working from home

DESIRED BEHAVIOUR

1. Increased focus & productivity
2. Better meetings
3. Better quality workplace
4. Not having to dress-up
5. Reduced travel time results in more quality time
6. Highly improved work-life balance
7. Increased me-time and healthy behaviors

ANXIETIES

1. Distractions are everywhere
2. The challenge of motivation and self-discipline
3. Insecurities about getting recognition
4. Over-delivering
5. Absence of connection with colleagues
6. Unhealthy behaviors
7. Technical limitations of the workplace

HUMAN

Gains of the new solution

Pains of the present

Anxieties of the new solution

Comforts of the present

J.T.B.D.

PAINS

1. Lack of focus & productivity
2. Reduced productivity caused by lack of self-organisation
3. Lack of freedom and self-control
4. Boredom
5. Inferior quality of the workplace
6. Time wasted on travel time

Working from the office

UNDESIRED BEHAVIOUR

COMFORTS

1. Used to set work hours
2. Connection with colleagues
3. The need for recognition by proximity
4. Proximity as driver to get things done
5. A clear distinction between work and private life
6. Technical facilities
7. Travel time as productivity time, me-time or transition time

JTBD'S Making money, getting a promotion, getting my work done, being productive, delivering projects, providing for my children, getting compliments & being appreciated, not being bored, self-development, taking your mind of things, not missing out on anything, being challenged, making an impact, contributing to society, feeling needed/ safe/satisfied/happy, making people happy, pushing people further, gaining sense of self-worth, being a good parent, meeting people, belonging to a team, bringing people together.

SUEBEHAVIOURALDESIGN.COM

© copyright SUE | Behavioural Design

3. Recommendations for leaders and managers

From this Behavioural Research, some valuable insights on positive and negative work behaviour have surfaced. It becomes clear that leadership and management can genuinely contribute to install new work habits that will boost the performance of teams in doing so, creating thriving employees and organisations. In this section, we give some recommendations and actionable insight that leaders and managers can start applying as of today to lead distributed teams successfully.

Recommendation 1: Design for minimal interruptions
If we want to point out one barrier to teams getting into a high-performance work mode, both working from the office and in working remotely, it is the constant interruptions people are suffering. Our research showed these are both physical interruptions (that colleague standing next to your desk), scheduling interruptions (stacked up inefficient meetings) and technological interruptions (emails, phone calls, etc.) 'Modern technology has increased the variety of ways and the ease by which a knowledge worker can interrupt or be interrupted'[5]. We have all adopted behaviours that made the boundaries between work and private life fade. Almost all of us check our work email at home or take that last business call. This is not new. However, this Behavioural Research has shown that:

Interruptions interfere with almost every job-to-be-done people are trying to accomplish.

People cannot get into productivity flow; they cannot add the value they potentially could add by getting into deep work, efficiency drops dramatically, with that their confidence, feeling of control and progress falters. On average, this loss of attention has been said to limit a knowledge worker productivity with 28%[6]. This all has apparent effects on the functional job-to-dones but most certainly also on the emotional and social job-to-dones. However, this research has also opened up new opportunities for leaders and managers to transform their team to high-performance teams by helping them fight interruptions and distractions. We literally see in our research that the interruptions and distractions at work are so bad that the travel time in the car has become a spot to get work done when there finally is no one around. It is not a detail anymore; disruptions have an enormous impact on the workforce.

It is not just about making agreements when to turn off your phone, it is about helping people to get into deep work.

This will enable people to not only deliver projects on time and enhance productivity, but it will also give the opportunity for people to use the 'reclaimed' time for personal progress to spend on learning new things, taking a walk outside or exercise, mesmerising to spark creativity, or realising the better work-life balance that people have indicated to appreciate so much. Our research clearly exposed that if you want to transform your team to a high-performance team, helping teams to get into deep work should be a priority. Regardless of your team's location; this needs to be addressed both at the office as in working remotely. Although it starts with functional guidance from managers to their teams, for instance, by getting a clear understanding on what interruptions people are suffering from (is it background noise, needed discussions with colleagues, unnecessary distractions). By installing new behaviours on how or when interruptions are allowed. By putting technology or tools in place that signal when people are busy (Pomodoro, digital status flags).

---

[5] Feintuch, J.B. & Spira, J.B. (2005). The Cost of Not Paying Attention:How Interruptions Impact Knowledge Worker Productivity.
[6] Feintuch, J.B. & Spira, J.B. (2005). The Cost of Not Paying Attention:How Interruptions Impact Knowledge Worker Productivity.

The end game is a team that finds the perfect balance between the much-appreciated sense of freedom and control, combined with a feeling of connection and recognition. It requires leaders and managers to embrace the autonomy of their teams, including the location where they work and lead much more on output than on (physical) visibility.

Recommendation 2: Install behaviours that build trust

When starting to work remote, we have seen that both managers and team members have shifted to new behaviours. Managers appear to lose their sense of control not only on the output of their teams but also on 'being there' for their team. On the other hand, team members indicated that they feel their contributions may not be seen or recognised when working remote. This results in two counter-productive behaviours. Managers tend to start micro-managing, and team members tend to start over-delivering, anxiety that came back several times in our research: putting more hours in than necessary. To make remote working work, leadership needs to build a culture of trust. Trust in itself is an abstract concept but can be translated into particular behaviours. Trust is often to accountability. The fastest way to make people accountable is to give your team clear goals and make clear how progress is to be communicated. These can but doesn't need to take place in daily check-ins. From behavioural research, we know that a clear deadline can have a very positive effect on fighting the human tendency of procrastination, hence also solving the anxiety of lack of self-discipline. This way, as a manager, you can both foster autonomy, one of the drivers of your employee wellbeing, but you can also stop micromanaging.

Recommendation 3: Change the default to distributed teams

Remote working has exposed a very painful location-based work behaviour: the overload of ineffective meetings. Remote meetings seem to have solved this overnight. Meetings have become more structured, efficient and attentive. In post-quarantine reality, not all meetings may be shifted to virtual-only meetings, even now the pains of physical meetings have been exposed so clearly. However, from a Behavioural Design point-of-view, it can be a very effective intervention to change the default. Make all meetings virtual unless indicated otherwise. Our brain is wired to take the road of minimum cognitive activity; changing the default is already too much of a hassle for most of us. By connecting this to the gains of meeting virtually, it can be a very effective behavioural intervention.

Recommendation 4: Design positive signalling behaviour

If we look a bit further through the lens of behavioural psychology, it could very well be that the reason why so many physical, time-consuming meetings are planned, is signalling behaviour. If you are in a meeting, you are busy hence you are important. Leadership and management should be very aware of this human inclination to engage in status signalling behaviour. It has become an obsession in many organisations. The fixation should instead be an obsession about outcomes. This requires a change from management: shifting from 'time-in-seat' as an accountability KPI to 'accomplished goals' as primary KPI[7]. Several very practical behaviours can be installed to make sure everyone can benefit from remote working without losing both accountability and freedom. Behaviours such as making sure your team members will do check-ins or hold retrospectives. But also new management behaviours such as giving shorter feedback loops and adding simplicity to goals or installing very clear deadlines.

> *'I think there's an opportunity here to learn how to be a manager that values output, not time-in-seat. To me, the value of remote work is that trust and that ability to empower every person to manage their time, to manage their days and their responsibilities around an output. We make a promise to each other: I'm gonna deliver on this thing, and if I can't deliver it to you, I'm going to communicate why. –* Natalie Nagele, Wildbit.[8]

---

[7] Foster, W. (2020). How to build trust on a remote team. https://zapier.com/blog/build-trust-remote-work/
[8] Foster, W. (2020). How to build trust on a remote team. https://zapier.com/blog/build-trust-remote-work/

Recommendation 5: Reframe 'working from home'

The default for most organisations has been working (mostly) from the office. Doing otherwise is often depicted as 'working from home' or 'remote working'. If we want to pick the fruits of remote working labour, we should be aware that both terms have established all kinds of associations in our minds that trigger all sorts of anxieties of not being seen, recognised or being accepted. Team leaders can turn this around by actively reframing 'working from home' or 'remote working' to managing 'distributed teams'. Do not underestimate the power of words when designing behaviour. When talking about distributed teams, the frame in everyone's head, both of management and team members, that is activated is that you are still part of a team, it, therefore, prompts associations of connection. Tackling anxieties about loss of connection. 'Remote working' or 'working from home' prompts precisely the opposite: disconnection from the team. Something our research has shown to hold someone back from working away from the office.

Recommendation 6: Reframe virtual tools from communication to collaboration tools

To make remote working a lasting success or installing more remote working behaviour to activate the gains, we should also reframe the remote working tools. Our observation is that tools are often referred to as 'virtual *communication* tools'. To make remote working a success, we have to start seeing them as virtual *collaboration* tools facilitating to connect as a team. When taking on this different frame, we almost automatically direct our attention to making these tools better tools for collaboration and connection. There has been an interesting paradox in our research: physical contact with colleagues has a very negative impact on our focus, productivity and ability to help others. On the other hand, it is considered a miss when colleagues are not around. In our research, people referred to both functional and emotional connection.

Recommendation 7: Design for social connection

When rethinking our virtual tools as collaboration tools for connection, some specific behaviours can be installed to ensure both functional and emotional connection when working remotely. For instance, our research showed that somehow all our virtual meetings have become very efficient. Which on the one hand has many benefits, but on the other hand, has made work go all about work. People have indicated to miss the informal chats. Some behaviours can be designed to bring back some social balance in remote working. You can develop the behaviour as a team you start every meeting with 2-minute personal time. Ask how someone is doing or tell a personal anecdote but agree that there is a time-limit. Finding that optimal time limit is something you have to prototype as a team.

Recommendation 8: Make video the default

Setting the default to video mode instead of audio mode only when in virtual collaboration is also a behaviour that can boost collaborative connection. Starting and ending every get-together with a hello and goodbye wave.

Recommendation 9: Design for minimal disruptive behaviour

On the practical side, you also can install very clear behaviours. Clarify what background noise and interruptions are allowed during video collaboration (and also by phone, as we saw this was a great annoyance of remote working). And clarify what response time is allowed for chats or emails. We believe response time lies underneath one of the anxieties that surfaced in our research, the notion that you can get things done faster when walking to the desk of a colleague and dealing with him/her face to face. People want to have control over response time. Which at the same time caused a lot of painful interruption, as our research showed. By making clear agreements on response time and availability, we can tackle this anxiety. Clear agreements on contact and response timers also make it easier for everyone to benefit from the freedom of structuring their day, boosting his or her work-life

balance and being able to engage into deep-work without interruptions. These are the most desired quarantine behaviours people indicated they want to keep.

Recommendation 10: Include home office commodities in employee benefit packages

One of the critical notions of Behavioural Design is making the desired behaviour easier or undesired behaviour harder to do. If you want people to get out of their cars, hence not wasting their time with travel time, make it harder for them to take the car. On more on the positive side, making it easier for them to work at home. Several anxieties of distributed teamwork have to do with the quality of the workplace. Not having a decent WIFI connection, lack of technical support, or not having an ergonomic workplace. Instead of offering your employees a company car or public transport card, you could consider offering them a home-office package instead. Making sure they will get a decent chair, good computer, high-speed internet connection, and access to an IT expert. You could design very positive behaviour of not having to travel and making a contribution to the environment. If you add a healthy lunch and healthy snack service, or maybe even flowers or a Spotify subscription as flowers and music came back several times of boosting people's experience of a qualitative workplace. You also make it easier for people to work on their mood and health, which is beneficial for them but also has significant positive for the organisation itself. If you have people actively sign-up for these services, you activate commitment. A well-known principle in behavioural economics to make people follow-up upon their intentions.

Along this line of thinking, you could also offer virtual exercise classes your employees could sign-up for. It enhances their health, primes in their brain they can work differently and are allowed to engage in personal activities during the daytime without feeling guilty. It also allows them to enrol in a corporate fitness program without having to feel ashamed by working out in front of colleagues. At the same time, it also is a strong signal from the company to value employee wellbeing. We know from behavioural science that experiential bonuses are far better rewards than monetary bonuses. Monetary bonuses are killers for intrinsic motivation, the positive effect of an experiential bonus not only lasts longer it also makes a longer-lasting impression[9].

Recommendation 11: Adapt your management style, suppress overwork behaviour

To promote a healthy work-life balance leadership also has a vital role to play. Especially when shifting to more remote working, we have seen in our research that people tend to work even more to compensate to make up for the lack of their visible contribution to their team. Working too many hours is behaviour. Management can shift the work-life balance to the positive side by being very clear on the acceptability of this behaviour and correct this by avoiding a culture of overwork and by allowing flexibility in work hours. Managers can achieve this by having clearly defined goals and shorter feedback loops with team members.

Recommendation 12: Engage in appraisal behaviour and give complements

Overwork often also comes from unclarity in expectations and lack of recognition. Behavioural research has proven that appraisal and complements have a proven positive effect on the motivation and performance of people[10]. Behaviour that management can learn to adapt. The effect is far longer lasting than giving out monetary rewards as the current behaviour of a lot of managers is right now.

---

[9] Ariely, D. (2008). Predictably Irrational. Harper Collins.
[10] Ariely, D. (2008). Predictably Irrational. Harper Collins.

Bonus: why not take some of the positive behaviours back to the office?
Even if the transition to entirely remote teams isn't feasible or wished most of the behaviours can also be installed in the psychical office space. It does take a very clear vision from leadership and management and a willingness to make new behaviours not just acceptable but especially easier to do, for instance, by providing opportunities for employees to engage in psychical activity during the workday. A behavioural intervention could be installing walking meetings or walking lunches. Or promoting healthy eating behaviours by making the undesired behaviour harder to do, by taking away snack machines or unhealthy lunch options and the desired behaviour more accessible to do by providing healthy breakfast, lunch or even dinner for free.

4. Afterword and Next Steps: moving into action

We genuinely hope this Behavioural Research report has given you insights and a practical guidance in changing work for the better. We do understand that every organisation or every team even is different. It may very well be that your primary objective isn't to set-up distributed teams, but your interest is making distributed teams work right now in the quarantine situation. However, we do hope that this Behavioural Research has shown you how vital it is for leaders and managers to understand the job-to-be-dones of their employees and team members. It is the stepping-stone on which high-performance team behaviour can be built. This Behavioural Research has exposed that both working at the office and working remotely come with restricting and boosting forces. It has given us a clear insight into opportunities for change that will contribute to the better realisation of job-to-be-dones. That, in turn, will positively impact both the employees and the organisation.

Maybe you'll end up in the magic middle.

By not going all the way to distributed working but giving your teams the opportunity to work more flexible. Maybe it gives you the pointers on how to direct your teams to a change in behaviour you wanted to happen for a long time already. Or maybe it does both. We hope that it has helped you progress in this time of massive standstill.

Do be aware that change never happens overnight. Although behavioural interventions are often quite small, and not every expensive or time-consuming, they have to become habits of your teams. We have to change the status quo. To do so successfully, there are four requirements:

1. **Don't manage your team based on rationality or your own assumptions**
Often management doesn't understand why team members don't move in the desired direction. This is because teams are often managed very rationally. They are given clear information, specific instructions and an attractive mission or purpose even, so why don't they perform? To turn teams into high-performance teams, you need to understand their irrationality. You have to take the time to analyse the forces and job-to-be-dones from your team members. Not based on your notions, but outside-in. Based on their pains, gains, habits and anxieties. We have found over and over again that there is a big misconception that team members are unmotivated or unwilling to change. In fact, they have anxieties and habits that are overlooked by management and are surprisingly easy to solve.

2. **Don't stop at a vision, mission or culture statement, go down the level of behaviour**
High-performance team culture is nothing more than the sum of behaviours (especially when nobody is looking). Leadership and management often forget to translate strategic vision into actionable behaviours. It is there that change truly happens and a vision, mission or culture come to life.

3. **Don't expect behaviour change to happen overnight**
Especially if you want the new behaviour to stick, for teams to adopt new behaviours, they have to stop what they are doing now. That entails change, and we as humans find change hard. But you can make use of methods from behavioural science to turn one-off change into sustainable habits. Using a deep understanding of the human decision process to boost the willingness to change behaviour and integrating proven tactics from behavioural psychology to make the desired behaviour easier to perform.

4. Prototype, learn and adapt

Take on a prototyping mindset. Just go ahead and install some behaviours or tackle some bottlenecks and see what happens. Prototype, learn and adapt—the beauty of behavioural interventions that most of them can be implemented quite quickly at limited costs. Take a team and prototype behaviours. Some may work; others may not. Move forward with the behaviours that are successful for your team. Success is contagious. After having run a successful pilot, other teams (or managers) will want to jump on the bandwagon of high-performance. But don't wait until you have worked out the perfect solution. You can start today. That on the role as the facilitator of your team. Treat this as a mutual learning process and then adapt quickly. What you most probably will see happen is that your team will start learning and adapting itself.

Next steps

If you would like to unlock the power of Behavioural Design within your organisation, we can help you out with:

1. Behavioural Research
Gain deep understanding of the psychological forces that shape your team behaviours.

Get a custom Behavioural Analysis of your team(s). We will interview your team members (online or offline). In this research will unlock the forces that are holding your teams back from peak performance. And we will reveal valuable opportunities for change. You will get both insights and actionable recommendations, allowing you to implement and experiment with new behaviours right away.

2. In-company training
Train your team in the habits of high-performance teams and behaviour in organisations.

Train your staff in the psychology of change. Learn how to build and sustain habits that foster high-performance output and that transform the culture into a culture of collaboration. They will learn a powerful model to understand why people resist change and how to use that understanding to design new behaviours and habits. In this three-week training of 3 x 3 hours (via Zoom or Teams), they will develop, prototype and test behavioural interventions in their teams.

3. Online certification course
Enroll teams, and managers in this online course on the psychology of team behaviour.

Reward or inspire your team to enrol in our online training on the behaviour and habits of high-performance teams. They will learn the essential psychological techniques to understand the psychological forces that shape team behaviour. They will also get a set of ready-to-implement success habits to start implementing today.

4. Behavioural Design Sprint
Research, prototype and test interventions to change your team behaviour for the better.

Need some rapid behavioural change in your company or team? In a 13-day sprint, we will design, prototype, test and fine-tune the behavioural interventions that will transform your workplace, in close collaboration with your team. It all starts with a deeper psychological understanding of what prevents your team from changing, and we'll come up with strategies and tactics to make the change less complicated and more motivating.

SUE | Behavioural Design

* The virtual services of SUE | Behavioural Design can take place in Zoom, MS Teams, or Whereby depending on the security protocols in your organisation. The online training takes place in a Secure Sockets Layer (or SSL) the standard security protocol that encrypts any data shared between a web browser and web server. A secure connection ensures that any data taken from our training platform is confidential.

Further questions or contact
Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are more than happy to help you.

SUE **Behavioural Design**

's-Gravenhekje 1a
1011 TG. Amsterdam
The Netherlands
+31 (20) 2234626
hello@suebehaviouraldesign.com
www.suebehaviouraldesign.com

We can also plan a virtual meeting, please contact Susan de Roode at susan@sueamsterdam.com in charge of Customer Happiness & Sales for more information.

Appendix A: The research set-up, gaining behavioural insights

The SUE | Influence Framework™ is a mental model to reveal the forces that stand between old and desired behaviour. It is built upon the most replicated theories from behavioural economics. It takes the irrational human being as a starting point. A human-being greatly influenced by the context, in which he or she has to come to decisions and behaviours. In our qualitative research, we interviewed people who were used to working, for the most part, in physical offices with colleagues and are now required during the COVID-19 crisis to fulfil their job requirements from home. Research subjects were both full-time and part-time workers. We have interviewed people from different industries such as telecom companies, design agencies, banks, public health services, educational institutions, NGO's and retailers. With various jobs such as HR specialists, UX designers, innovation managers, strategic planners, creatives, health care professionals, teachers, fundraisers, project managers, and managing directors. Both either working under contract or self-employed. The old behaviour was defined as working for the most part at an office with colleagues, and the new behaviour was defined as working from home.

In total, we have interviewed 27 people. Important side-note is that the goal of this research is not significance, but genuinely understanding the core of the human challenges in the pre and current COVID-19 work situation. The aim was gaining insights, truly grasping which behavioural forces are at play at this moment. To gain valuable insights, Nielsen/Norman Group has proven 6 to 8 people to be a sufficient number to gather 90% of all insights[11]. We have done a few rounds of qualitative interviews because of the unique nature of the COVID-19 crisis. We wanted to make sure to capture all relevant insights to discover behavioural patterns.

The quotes that were published in the Research are not all-inclusive. A lot more quotes were collected; the quotes selected were good illustrations of the insights that surfaced. We, for instance, took out quotes that were (almost) the same or were one-offs. All quotes in this research represent insights we came across several times in our Behavioural Research.

In our Behavioural Sprint process, we move from the qualitative insight phase into ideation. Once we have come up with behavioural interventions based on the behavioural insights, we run prototypes and preferably pilots. If the pilots give back positive results on the desired decisions and behaviour, we do apply quantitative research to find the causal prove of the positive impact on a critical number of people worthwhile scaling up the behavioural intervention.

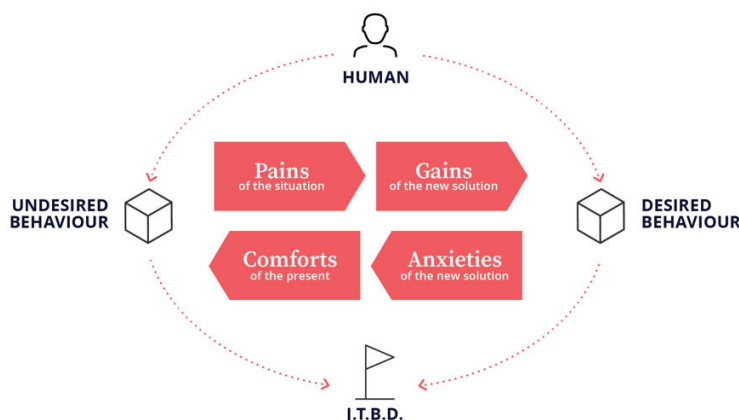[11] https://www.nngroup.com/articles/why-you-only-need-to-test-with-5-users/

Appendix B: About the SUE | Influence Framework™

The SUE | Influence Framework™ was developed by the team of Behavioural Design experts at SUE | Behavioural Design. Europe's number one Behavioural Design agency. It has been used to help organisations, governments and NGO's to gain deep human understanding in the behavioural boosters and bottlenecks that drive behaviour. The SUE | Influence Framework™ has been an indispensable building block in spotting opportunities for positive behavioural change and better decision-making. Helping people make use of debt-help programs, discard their phones in traffic, take actions toward financial independence, get into an exercising routine, deal with diabetics, donate for refugees, recycle their waste, eat healthier foods, take on better mortgages, take care of their pensions, have a better hotel experience, make sustainable energy choices, and so on. The SUE | Influence Framework™ is both applied in our Behavioural Design Sprints and taught at our Behavioural Design Academy. And has been proven to be an indispensable stepping-stone to gain more control over successful outcomes of work-related or personal goals.

If you would like to learn more about the SUE | Influence Framework™ please check out this short article on our website or watch our explanatory video of 4.15 minutes.

The SUE | Influence Framework™ is a model that is the heart of understanding and designing influence. The best way to think of the SUE | Influence Framework™ is to see and use, it as a tool that brings the dynamic forces to the surface that shape behaviour. With this framework, you will be able to understand why people do the things they do and what prevents them from changing their behaviour. Understanding these forces helps you to spot opportunities for behavioural change.

The SUE | Influence Framework™ leads to radically human-centred insights and forces you to think outside-in instead of inside-out.

1. The human: the person(s) you are trying to influence.
2. The job-to-be-done: that person(s) underlying motivation to show specific behaviour.
3. The four forces: that stand between current and desired behaviour.
4. Desired behaviour: a clear definition of what you want someone to do

Click here if you want to find out more about our Behavioural Design Sprints or Behavioural Design Academy. Or contact us at hello@suebehaviouraldesign.com or +31-20-2234626.

SUE | Behavioural Design

33

SUE | **Behavioural Design**