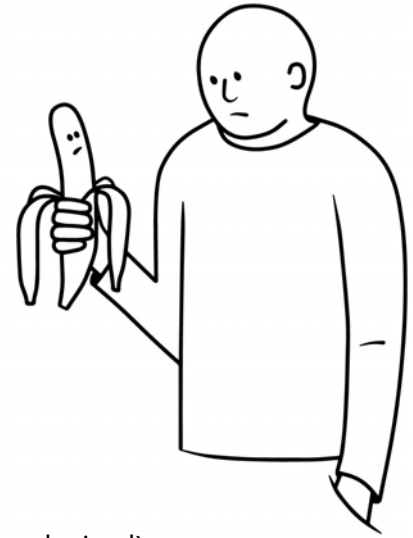

Decoding Humans

How to gain a deep understanding how system 1 influences behaviour.



We know that the decision-making of humans that direct desired (and undesired) behaviours are operated by our automatic (system 1) and reflective (system 2) thinking processes. It can be helpful though to grasp the system 1 short-cuts someone makes that (might) influence their behaviour or need to be considered when designing behavioural interventions.

Steps in behaviour

When decoding the behaviour and especially the non-behaviour of humans, there are roughly four steps, (4 C's) in establishing the desired behaviour. When you do your research beliefs are also important as they influence the convert step. In every step people make:

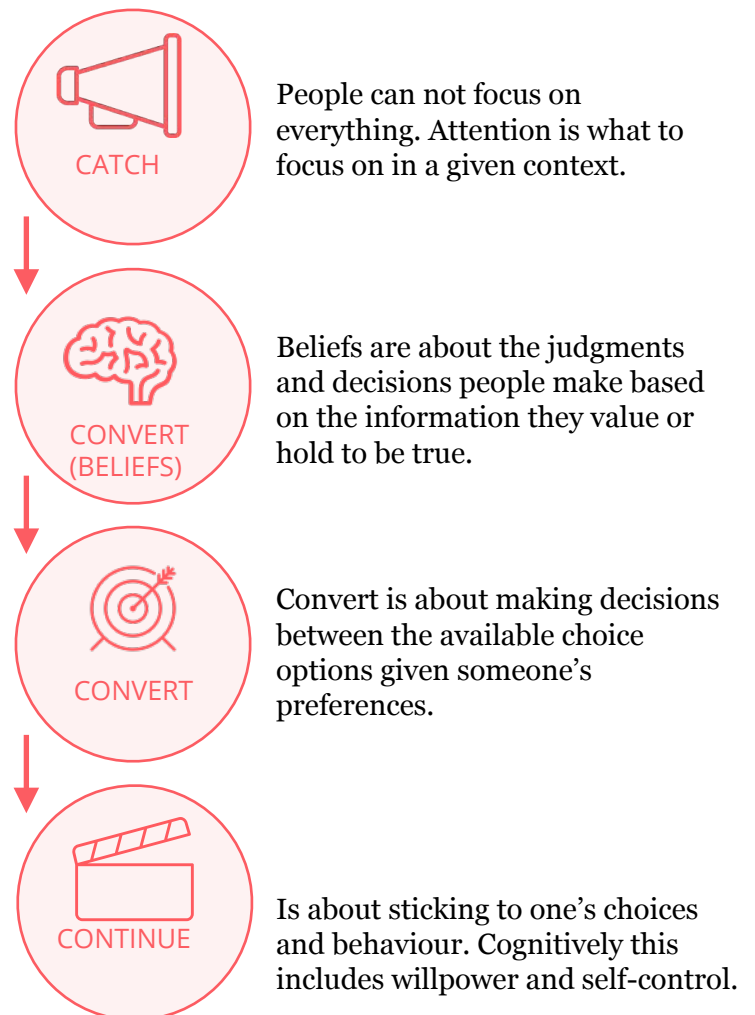
Make **mental mistakes**

Or intuitively back away from the desired behaviours, because of:

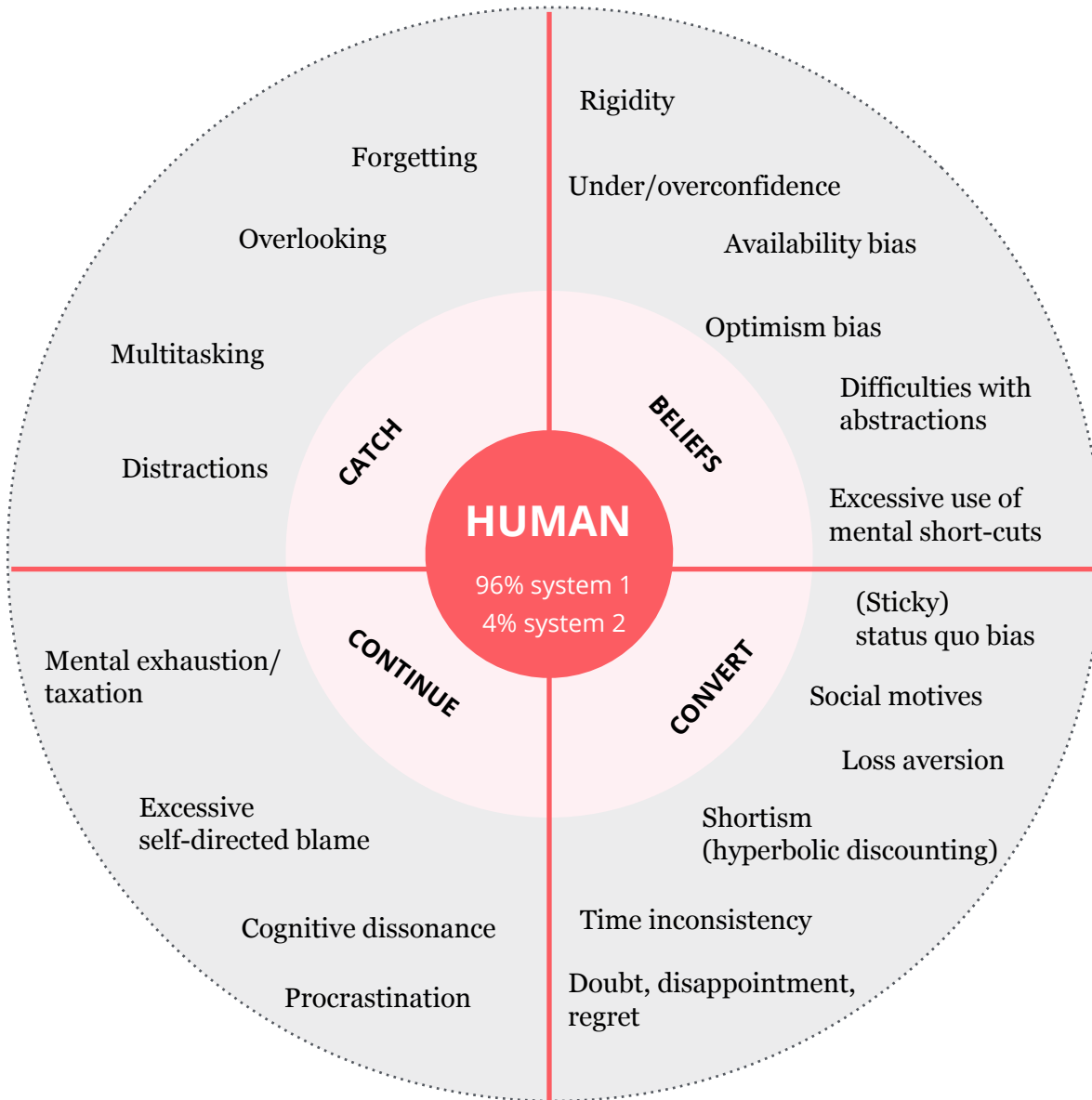
Past experiences or

The social context in which they find themselves.

I have made a checklist for each of the four steps that helps you spot why desired behaviour has not happened, has stopped or will be hard for someone to perform. It enables you to analyse system 1.

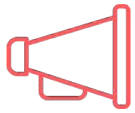


Overview



“ We are designing for system 1. Therefore, we need to be aware of if system 1 is open to change. For example, if someone has a persistent pre-existing belief about something he/she isn't receptive to any message or intervention that doesn't fit that belief. We need to 'open up' system 1 by identifying what keeps it closed.”

Checklist system 1 short-cuts of humans



Catch

	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
Forgetting	Did someone want to engage in the desired behaviour but simply forget to do so and do we need to remind them?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Overlooking	Didn't someone notice what we wanted he/her to do and do we have to make it more salient?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Multitasking	Is someone multitasking , and should we help someone focus (more) on the desired behaviour?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Distractions	Does someone suffer from distractions that we have to take away that keeps him/her from showing the desired behaviour?	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Beliefs (1)

	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
Rigidity	Is someone holding onto pre-existing beliefs that we need to be aware of or consider?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Confidence	Is someone overestimating their own ability to perform a task? Does someone have overconfidence (or under-confidence) thinking they do not need (or cannot) change?	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Beliefs (2)

	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
Availability bias	Does someone indicate they think a future event will happen, but you notice that this was based on similar examples of such event that easily come to mind ? (e.g. Someone thinks vaccination is unsafe because they just read about a child getting sick from it in last week's paper).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Optimism bias	Does someone underestimate the probability of a negative event and overestimate the probability of a positive event happening to them, making it okay for them to persist in current behaviour?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Difficulties with abstractions	Does someone have trouble understanding abstract parts of the desired behaviour, such as money or time involved ? (e.g. People tend to overestimate small probabilities such as an aeroplane crash and underestimate large probabilities such as not being able to make your monthly mortgage payments).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Excessive use of mental short-cuts	Do you notice that someone relies heavily on mental short-cuts , such as stereotypes? Can you indicate with which system 2 information they post-rationalize their system 1 short-cuts?	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Convert

	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
(Sticky) status quo Bias	Is someone sticking to the status quo and does he/she prefer inertia over the insecurity/fear of change ? Or is someone sticking to a default ? Or does someone stick to their current behaviour because they put the effort into it (Ikea effect) even if something already feels lost (sunk cost fallacy)?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Social motives	Are there social norms , or is there peer pressure we need to take into account? Is someone sticking to the rules of a group of people because they believe they are expected to do so? Or is someone responding to the action of others with a similar one ? (e.g. Returning a favour with another similar favour. Or punishing others in response to a harmful action).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Loss aversion	Is someone sticking to current behaviour because he/she is avoiding risk or loss ? Does someone perceive the discomfort as bigger than the happiness derived from the desired behaviour?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Shortism (hyperbolic discounting)	Does someone prefer a smaller reward/positive impact today than wait for a larger reward/positive impact in the future ? (e.g. Rather book a holiday now instead of making extra mortgage payments to secure a carefree future).	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Convert (2)

	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
Time inconsistency	Is someone not aware of the fact that he/she is postponing behaviour? Or is someone not engaging in the desired behaviour because their 'present self' believes their 'future self' will be able to carry out specific actions? (e.g. Not dieting/ exercising now, but believing you will stick to a diet/exercising regime when you really need it).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Doubt, disappointment, regret	Did someone have a bad experience in the past with specific behaviour we need to be aware of?	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Continue (1)

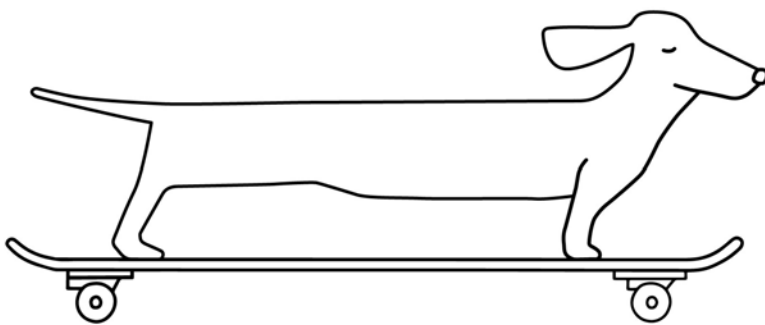
	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
Mental exhaustion/ taxation	Does someone feel it takes too much thought/effort to show the desired behaviour? Or is someone guessing it will?	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Procrastination	Is someone putting off the desired behaviour (convinced that he/she will do it later)? People may use avoidance, denial, distractions or may blame unrelated factors.	<input type="checkbox"/>	



Continue (2)

	WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR	YES	REMARKS
Excessive self-directed blame	Does past failure in the desired behaviour prevent someone from engaging in the desired behaviour again? Is someone blaming him/herself too much for it, resulting in dropping out of the desired behaviour to avoid future failure? (e.g. not dieting again, because earlier attempts failed).	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Cognitive dissonance	When people face challenges to their long-term goals or behaviour , they experience mental discomfort or psychological stress. They tend to fall back in their old behaviours (or beliefs) to reduce the discomfort and restore balance.	<input type="checkbox"/>	

HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST



Read it before you interview to make yourself aware of what to listen for.

Or use it as a checklist after an interview.

Or assign one person (notetaker) during the interview to actively listen to spot the existing system 1 short-cuts.

Decoding Humans

*A checklist for gaining deeper understanding
of human decision-making and behaviour*

www.suebehaviouraldesign.com

's-Gravenhekje 1a, 1011 TG Amsterdam

+31 (20) 223 46 26

astrid@behaviouraldesignacademy.com