

A PRODUCT FROM WWW.BUDDI.BE



THE
OFFLINE
BRAIN IN
COVID
BUSINESS
TIMES

BY ANGELICA KRSTESKI

AN INFORMATIVE
STUDY & E-BOOK



About the author



HI, I'M ANGELICA, YOUR HEART & BRAINS IN BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

I guide innovative technical companies, their teams and employees through complex processes and change based on clarity, space and connectivity.

www.BUDDI.be



This study and e-book is

Based on 11 qualitative interviews*

male #4/female #7, age 30-55, senior profiles
within the Belgian industrial business landscape

Time span : October 2020 - January 2021

Special thanks to the following participating companies:

Vlerick Business School

3M

Engie Electrabel

Barco

The House of Marketing

and those wanting to stay confidential

A personal thank you to

Luc Swinnen for inspiring me through his book
"Rust in je hoofd"

&

Robert O'Neill - Pyramidion Message Engineers
for planting the seed for this study

+

News sources De Tijd, VRT NWS, Radio 1
work by thought leaders

Eric Mosley, Brené Brown, Simon Sinek

books and interviews by subject matter experts

Luc Swinnen, Michaël Van Damme

and various informal discussions in my personal network

*For confidentiality reasons, no names of individuals are mentioned.
This study is not intended to be a quantitative survey, however,
it should be perceived as a summary of random personal testimonials
of employees in an industrial business environment
and the author's personal reflections to those.
© 2021 Angelica Krsteski. All rights reserved.



THE CHAPTERS IN THIS E-BOOK

1. OVERALL FINDINGS & SUMMARY

Page 5

2. THE HEART OF BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Page 10

3. THE EVOLUTION OF THE COVID WAVE

Page 15

4. HOME OFFICE & HOME EVERYTHING

Page 21

5. ONLINE VS OFFLINE

Page 26

6. EFFICIENCY VS CREATIVITY

Page 35

7. INFLUENCING FACTORS

Page 42

8. TIPS & TRICKS

Page 49

9. THE UNEXPECTED

Page 52

10. INSPIRATIONS

Page 55

11. A PERSONAL WORD

Page 58



*the offline and online brain
are equally important
in every day work life*

*0
1*

overall findings & summary

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski



Purpose of this study and e-book

Ever heard about the offline brain? In this study and e-book you will learn all about our offline and online work behaviour, especially since the measures taken by local governments and companies due to the global pandemic caused by covid-19. In this rapidly changing world the offline brain is and will be key in the process of business transformation towards a more sustainable way of doing business.

Online and OFFLINE brain

A human brain basically functions 3-fold. The *online part of the brain* that supports us in tasks, meetings, checking boxes, performing and executing actions. The **offline part of the brain** is the center that allows us to let the mind be free, to gaze, to unwind, to be inspired, to make unexpected associations, the starting point of the creative idea. And then there is the *3rd part which connects both*, as one part cannot function without the other: an innovative idea cannot exist without acting upon it in order to make a difference.

Confirmed Paradox

Based upon qualitative interviews on this matter and multiple external resources, some surprising results come forward, such as a confirmed paradox. One could have thought the lockdown allowed more time for the mind to be more frequently in the offline state. However, it has been confirmed by all participants, the focus on efficiency & execution has been higher than ever. Room for the spark of creativity has significantly been reduced over the last year. And let the creative, offline process be one of the most important aspects of work pleasure & satisfaction.



How is the fun, creative state being missed?

1. Spontaneous encounters with (in)direct colleagues or relations is right on top. An online meeting cannot replace that feeling of a spontaneous “connection” especially with people you might otherwise not meet on ideas or topics you might otherwise not discuss. Video interactions become much more transactional.
2. Being on the road. To work, from work, to customers, being stuck in traffic. It is the perfect time to “process” all the thoughts of the day.
3. Not having enough separation between the physical workplace and the home.
4. People getting their creative, offline impulses often outside of work, which are now much more limited due to the many restrictions (not seeing friends & family, delayed holidays, etc).

Evolution during the covid waves

The study elaborates further on the impact and evolution of both spring '20 and winter '20-'21 lockdown waves and the many influencing factors such as personality, gender, size of company, job role, culture etc...

Where the first wave came as a real shock both on the personal and the digital side and impacted enormously the resilience of employees and leaders, the second wave has triggered something even more profound: how to deal with the human aspect of businesses in transformation in a very sustainable, long term way? Most of us do not have any clear answers yet, but recognising that is a great starting point.



Work culture as magnifying glass

It has been confirmed by the interviewees and many thought leaders that the covid-19 pandemic has been a magnifying glass of the work culture. Teams which were very connected before the pandemic, have become even more so. That connectivity triggers our offline brain to such an extent it also allows our online brain to function better.

On the other hand, where deep underlying issues of work culture were lingering before lockdown, those have become even more profound resulting often in larger employee demotivation and people leaving the company. Note: this can be team to team specific, even in the same company.

Best practices

Finally best practices and personal tips & tricks from the interviewees and author are shared on the current efforts to influence and activate the offline brain. 2 personal favorites:

- 1) Outdoor brainstorm sessions with non-direct colleagues
- 2) Weekly (video) meetings with your team to share non or indirect work related subjects. Make it fun, open and safe.

As a company, as a team leader or as an individual it all comes down to wanting to be part of a community:

THANK: people have been through so much, a thank you is often all we need

TALK: making this part of the work culture, providing the infrastructure beyond video calls

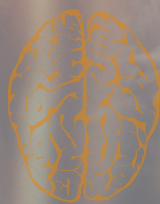
CELEBRATE: success for sure, but let's not forget celebrating and supporting the efforts and the personal huge moments in life such as birth, marriage and personal loss.





*the impossible
is possible*

INTERVIEWEES



*How can we use
the offline and online brain
to the fullest?*

*0
2*

the heart of business transfor- mation

Compiled by *Angelica Krsteski* as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

Business transformation...say that again?

First of all: what is this book all about? What message or story am I trying to convey here?

Well, the Covid-19 pandemic has been accelerating transformational processes within business organisations in a fast pace. But **what is business transformation?**

It is an unforeseen and accelerated digital explosion, with all its pros and yet its human limitations

It is flexible working – when, how, where, with whom in the most variable sense

It is about leaving a legacy instead of chasing results

It is about the process and not just the outcome

It is about a human way of working together

It is about being yourself as an employee and employer

It is about individual strengths yet being complementary and enforcing as a team

It is about spontaneous interactions

It is about finding the sweet spot between effectiveness and creativity

It is about sustainable and ethical long term relations, goals, trust & success.



How is that connected to our brain?

At the centre of this discourse is the scientific concept of the offline and the online brain network. Both being complementary to one another allowing new brain connections to be made and unlocking the fullest potential of our mental capability but also mental wellbeing. Introducing space to the brain is THE most important aspect of creative work and the ability to look at things with clarity.

For the mind to be creative, we need 2 things:

INSPIRATION

(an idea)

And

EXECUTION

(of that idea)

Inspiration comes from the **the offline brain network or default mode network**, which is triggered by selfcare, walking, wandering, gazing, spontaneous interactions, being in nature, providing space to the brain. it brings something magical: making unexpected associations! Hence the creative idea.

Yet, having many ideas is not enough to express our creativity fully. We need to act upon it somehow, to write, to build, to paint, to draw, to meet, to make, to produce. Thanks to our **online brain network or central executive network**.

Our brain is doing wonderful things when it can connect those 2 networks. To bring out the most broad and fully “you”.



But are we as employees and employers using both of those systems to the fullest ?

That is the start and subject of this study and e-book...

It is my strong, belief after many years of being active myself in medium to large scale organisations, of being a team member, a leader, a colleague, a mother, an influencer, that **everyone benefits from a balanced work life, where both offline and online thinking and working have their place and are equally valued**. As creativity cannot take place without inspiration, nor can it lead to anything without acting upon it.

Offline and online go hand in hand, but how has this been perceived and experienced by the interviewees from several medium to large scale organisations?

How has the covid-19 pandemic influenced the organisational policies and behaviours in regard to effectiveness and creativity?





*For the mind
to be creative
we need
inspiration
and
execution*

RADIO 1 -VRT

*How are the covid lockdowns
influencing our
offline and online behaviour?*

0
3

the evolution of the covid wave

Compiled by *Angelica Krsteski* as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

Two waves of lockdown, two realities

This study has been conducted in Belgium. However, worldwide many countries have experienced similar “waves” of lockdown, of partial to full work-from-home policies, in one country more severe than in others, but in general with a similar impact on human psychology and behaviour.

Together with 2 covid lockdowns in Belgium, companies and employees have experienced 2 waves: from being very uptight and overloaded by the online transition in the **first wave (March-June 2020)** towards some more relaxation and finding balance for the wellbeing of the “offline” brain during summer, before entering the **second & third wave and lockdown in Oktober 2020 & April 2021 respectively.**

Nevertheless, the second & third wave are perceived as more intense, as the limits of our offline and online brain are being put under a enormous test.

What did the 1st wave look like for most of us?

The first wave came as a shock and most people needed some weeks to settle in.

1. Companies made a 180° degree turn on digital working, video meetings, training, offerings etc.
2. At the same time a new balance needed to be found at home: working more effectively with children around, searching for new routines and compromises with your partner and fysically finding a separate workplace in or very close to home.



3. Fires needed to be put out, very fast reacting to customers and partners. People were so consumed with necessary operational activities, there was little room for creative work.

4. The crisis needed to be managed by the leaders of the company trying to keep everyone “on board”: employees, stakeholders etc

The online brain has been working over-hours in catching up with the overload of online work, firefighting, adapting to a new normal. I would dare to say even more than pre-covid times. Even when most people were stuck at home, the obtained extra time and overall supporting culture of “we are in this together” did not compensate fully for the additional load on the online brain.

An offline break over summer 2020

Most companies started to take action towards more awareness of the mental wellbeing of their employees around the summer 2020, together with the governmental measures being reduced. Some examples were **measures taken by companies to allow more offline interaction:**

- Organising rotational turns for people to work from the office i.e. 1x or 2x /week or month
- Taking measures at the office to allow a safe way of physically meeting as a team at key stages of a project (daily follow up is easier to do online versus decision making or creative brainstorming)



- Creating workgroups within the employee base for organising “fun connecting moments”
- Stimulating outdoor brainstorm sessions with non-direct colleagues living within a certain radius from each other.
- Continuing to invest in online teambuilding, accessible to everyone by providing a choice of options to participate (although this was not the case in all companies)
- Introducing more frequent online "connecting" moments with the team or even the whole company, allowing people to be heard or raise questions.
- Develop a culture to truly ask and re-ask how people are doing beyond " I am ok..."
- Introducing an external coach people can turn to with some sensitive issues or as a neutral person to talk to

These signals also announced more room for growth and innovation instead of being in the survival mode.

How "necessary" is your job?

That being said, the more complex the company, the more focus on a full digital/online approach, the less offline possibilities were granted, as home office became the standard way of working.



Exceptions have mostly been made for production oriented organisations and job roles which require team supervision or senior leadership roles. In that sense, **production or "necessary" job roles have been less affected by the online brain overload** compared to others. But we should not underestimate the supervisor's role here as they are balancing out the company "rules" versus what is needed in reality for the good of the team such as making exceptions for those who are "home" tired or those afraid to come to the office.


Mental agility stretch in the 2nd & 3rd wave

The covid waves, especially the second one over the winter time, have surely resulted for many people to be in a process of constant mental adjustment and worry, having an impact on:

- Taking worries from work at home and visa versa
- Energy levels not reloading as easily
- An increased turn-over of employees as underlying issues are being magnified (see chapter 7)
- Having a stronger need to connect with colleagues

Our brain and attitude has been stretched more than ever. And a "one solution fits all" is not the answer. Many participating people in this study have confirmed everyone has his/her personal story with individual ups and downs. Team and HR leaders have the challenge to look at every situation from individual to individual.





I cannot answer all questions and uncertainties, but what I can provide is full transparency and assuring our employees, we have all the capabilities in-house to get through this together.”

WOUTER TORFS

*What is the paradox
in working from home?*

*0
4*

home office & home every- thing

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

The home office paradox

Let's look a little deeper into the dynamics of "home office" as such and how drastically the meaning of this word has changed over the last year.

Where home office used to be seen as a welcome luxury in gaining quiet time, focus & efficiency within the comfort of your own home, **the word for sure has received a new meaning.** Since the global pandemic, many people have been confined to their home desk for a year or more.

It is clear that the balance between the offline and online brain has been put to a large test and a paradox remains: did the covid pandemic allow more offline time or is the contrary true?

Benefits of working from home

Working from home on the one hand means more "free" time, allowing more time and space for the offline brain. How?

- Having more flexibility to structure the day
- Having more me-time, in the mornings and evenings
- Making it more "socially acceptable" to break the workday with a walk, a run or another hobby
- Finding support with colleagues, some relations have deepened and people got to know their colleagues in a different, more profound way
- More focus on the results and impact of your work instead of the number of hours spent a day
- More space and time for online learning and development, both internally and externally, in fields where there was scepticism before.



But is that really true? Did large scale home office allow more time to unwind and process our thoughts ?

Home office pitfalls

Let's look at the other side of the coin and the many possible pitfalls when continuously working from home:

- More bore-outs, as every day is the same
- People not permitting themselves to use the extra time for themselves instead of their work
- No clear cut between work and private life
- Needing more self-discipline in protecting your boundaries
- More evening work i.e. events and trainings “on top of”
- Not feeling “good enough”, as a parent, an employee,...
- Finding it harder to focus, influencing both efficiency and quality of work
- As a supervisor you need to stay calm and enthusiastic despite your own struggles

Home office used to be a moment of focus, whilst one could say people are now longing for their office desk for exactly the same thing! **Therefore the offline brain is not just about one specific state, on the contrary, it is about breaking out of routined habits** to be able to make new associations and to discover new solutions in unforeseen, spontaneous situations.

“Being fit, you are able to perform much more in 6 hours compared to working for 10 hours with a full head”

–

Interviewee



Creativity finds its way

But let's be optimistic! People have been finding **new creative ways to trigger their offline way of working:**

- Using an unused space as a new office, could be in your house, garden or even down the street in another physical location
- Bringing and collecting kids from school by bike, taking that quality time as part of the work day
- Having a daily walk or yoga routine
- Walk meetings: face to face or ear-plug meetings
- Proactively introducing new routines and blocking time in the calendar
- Literally sitting in the sun to capture vitamin D when you can
- Letting go of perfectionism
- Taking extra leave or holidays
- Accepting some days are just shitty. That is ok. There will be another day tomorrow. We don't need to be at our best all the time.

Basically it is about **finding a personal balance between offline and online activities and for employers to provide the space to figure that out for ourselves** as we are all different, think and behave different (more about that in chapter 7).





*It is better to use
50% of your time
well spent, than to
be distracted for
100% of your time*

INTERVIEWEE

*Houmans are
social species in need of
spontaneous interactions*

*0
5*

online vs offline

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

Online and offline go hand in hand

Where remote working used to be more the exception, we can all agree that home office and other ways of remote working are going to be keepers also post-pandemic.

Many people, being employees or freelancers, have discovered the comfort of working close to home and the amount of time saving it can bring in our daily lives. Needless to say, **online activities have exploded over the last year and have also convinced the most sceptic of people and organisations.**

Being online is definitely a must-do tactic for businesses to stay alive, but lets also not forget to keep on investing in offline ways of working and connecting.

Triggering the offline brain online

An example: a sales person, who is usually on the road and also trained and coached to do so as frequent as possible, had to make a complete 180° shift to drive lead generation, prospecting and project maintenance from home.

For some with a strong hunting drive, it has surely opened doors as many people inside organisations were more open to an online conversation with a "stranger".

This is for sure one way to use our offline brain. The offline brain loves new input, new angles from where it can work out of the box. So a digital introduction does not necessarily need to be subordinate to a live one.



The role of non-verbal communication

However, we should not underestimate the role the environment, body language & spontaneity play in a conversation.

First of all, it is crucial to make some degree of **eye contact** during online meetings. For sure this is also the reason that an online meeting or brainstorm becomes more challenging as the group gets larger.

Secondly, it has been scientifically proven, it is important for the viewer to know and see **the physical environment around the person** they talk to. Therefore it is better to move the camera further away so that more physical parts of the person are visible as well as the setting they are in, even if it is just your kitchen. It also makes it easier to gesture your arms and use the full body language we otherwise would do in live sessions.

Example: the offline brain in sales

Let's go back to that same sales person. So she or he has done some good online hunting, made a few door openers and scored several online getting-to-know-each-other meetings, replacing the coffee conversations onsite. Although it is beautiful how marketing is producing all kind of online sales tools to move the customer from awareness to buying, let's not forget **the buying process is not always that predictable.**

When a sales person steps into the door of the customer, smells the vibe, sees the displayed products & awards, watches the activities taking place in the factory or in the office, even without saying a word, he/she will have captured more information than several online meetings in a row.



This also counts for the customer, as many of their expectations are never clearly pronounced over words, but they are hidden between the lines and the activities and people surrounding them.

Often the deal starts when a sales person can identify the unspoken need. This is what the offline brain does. It can capture that by using the senses and making unforeseen associations from one idea to the next which will eventually convince your customer and visa versa. So please keep on convincing people to go in the field, even if it requires queuing for 2 hours in a traffic jam.

Spontaneous indirect encounters

Basically the same idea applies to all our encounters with other people, whether they are customers, partners, direct or indirect colleagues. In fact, **most of the interviewees in this study have indicated they miss the spontaneous coffee encounters the most** and surprisingly not only with their every day contacts, but mostly *with people they do not have a strong relationships with.*

The offline brain loves to connect and to be surprised. And let's face it, online meetings have made all our interactions much more transactional, straight to business and less spontaneous.

Spontaneous encounters, conversations and ideas are what most of us love, even though we might not always realise it. And for sure one personality type is more prone to that compared to others (see chapter 7).



Key in the post-pandemic world will be to combine the best of both the online and offline world.

Online keepers

According to the interviewees, these are some of the most efficient online keepers:

- Hunting, prospecting, **introductions and all kinds of initial coffee moments** to find out if there is a match, is perfectly fine and time saving online.
- Follow up, **operational type of meetings** between people who have already been introduced to each other or have worked together before
- Using social media to maintain & grow your network, preferably through **online events with partners** in order to reach a larger and new audience. Use small break-out sessions so people can actually network with each other online.
- **Online trainings** are ideal for informative, factual topics such as learning a new tool, program or specific knowledge. It is less interesting for learning soft-skills.
- **Not all online meetings need to be video meetings.** Video has been so much embedded, people need to be dressed-up, presentable and available all the time. Some examples: sometimes it can be perfectly ok to switch off the camera when a certain topic in a long meeting is not applicable to you. Or a 1-on-1 conversation can work just as good using ear plugs whilst walking.
- Efficiency does not need to be the first priority in every meeting. Let that be a good way to measure what type of online meeting is most suitable.



As most of you realize by now, not all our human interactions can be replaced with online ones. An overview of the offline must-do's even in covid times.

Offline keepers

- Full online sales and project work over the entire project spectrum requires more time and energy eventually. **Face to face moments are preferable at key moments :**
 - o elaborate introduction or kick off
 - o brainstorm & creative sessions
 - o decision making moments

In these moments the offline brain plays an important role for idea generation and problem solving out of the box. It also accounts for our "judgement" towards a new person, where body language and the way we connect is far more important than what is actually being said.

- **Setting clear boundaries in availability.** For some reason there is a tendency to expect a higher degree of availability, while it is becoming more difficult to reach someone ad hoc. Focus and time management is more important than ever when working remotely.
- **Spontaneous phone calls:** regular phone calls don't seem to be used anymore, especially in the generation < 35. Everyone is scheduling at least 30-60min of your time through a planned meeting & additional email correspondence while some topics can easily be finished in a 5 to 10min direct phone conversation on the spot. A spontaneous phone call or message is also much more personal if you want to check in how colleagues are really doing.



Offline keepers (2)

- When **learning soft skills**, much of what is being learned not only comes from the coach or trainer, but from what is being shared within the group of trainees. It is all about learning through experience and story sharing. This often requires a high degree of connectivity within the group. Therefore such trainings or workshops are preferably done in a space or setting away from every day work where the safety & creativity of the group is more stimulated.

Online activities causing stress

Last but not least, **being online can be an important part in causing additional stress to yourself, your colleagues or direct reports**. Learn to recognise the signals your body and mind are giving you & identify small things that can be done to address them.

Create a culture at work where it is ok to be vulnerable and where such things can be discussed. Or hire a neutral coach to help you and the team.

Stress release tricks I use very frequently during or in between online moments:

- When the head is full or caught in negative thinking, just go outside. A **20-30 min walk** can change your perspective significantly.
- It is ok to take some **me-time during the day**, something to break the day or look forward to, like making soup, baking a cake, do some exercise, whatever takes you away from what you are doing the entire day.



Stress release tricks (2)

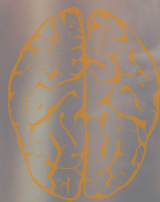
- **Drink a lot** so you can go to pee and stand up a lot!
- **Do your online meetings standing**, especially if you are the one talking. It brings in so much more dynamics. You can use gestures more freely and use the space around you.
- Make **a week plan** on Monday with 1 or 2 key priorities and 5 to 8 max to do's. When a new to do comes up, another will have to be postponed. Try to prioritize and focus to reduce distraction.
- For your **key priorities**, go and sit in a place where you are not being disturbed, put away the phone, and **do them during your prime time of the day**, when your are at your best. For some it will be the morning, for others the late afternoon or even evening. It is easier to work on smaller to-do's when you feel more tired, having a dip or when you are in a distracted environment.
- **Change your work place** during the day, from your home office to the kitchen to the garden and back.
- Do not consider a **1-on-1 walk meeting** to be less efficient. Yes, you will need extra time to drive there and back, but do not underestimate the additional energy you will get from human interaction and spontaneous topics you would never have discussed in a transactional online meeting.





*Organize in a
safe way,
what is needed*

INTERVIEWEE



*Working from home,
creativity has been
subordinate to efficiency*

0
6

efficiency vs creativity

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

Efficiency, the holy grail in business?

The word “efficiency” has been used quite frequently up until now and yes in our modern society and business world it is often considered the holy grail. How can we get most of our time? How can we earn money the easiest and fastest way possible? **How can we use every moment of our day to the full extent?** How can we tick off as many boxes as possible ?

I am sure, you have all received the following HR courses by now: time management on how to make your day more productive, ninja course on how to be more versatile, a few yoga or sport classes as oxygen to become even more productive?

But how many companies have told their employees to take some "work time" for themselves ? To take a walk? To go for a run? To meditate? To do some breathing exercises? Not during lunch break but at a moment of choice. **That it is ok not to spend every moment of your day ticking off boxes.** Basically, how to use and stimulate our offline brain as an essential energiser during the day.

Our work culture is "online" focussed

As described in chapter 2, our work culture is almost constantly stimulating our online brain. We go from one task to another, from one meeting to another. **New connections in our brain can only be made when the offline brain is also being stimulated equally.** This is how creativity, innovations, change and all forms of art, can be born AND nurtured to grow.



Lockdown, a pauze for the online brain, or not?

Initially during the covid pandemic, the long term lockdowns and home office policies, the extra time felt good and welcome (more time for yourself and your family!) but **soon enough most of that additional “offline gain” was consumed with extra tasks of the online nature:**

- Putting down fires
- Managing & aligning employees, stakeholders and partners through the crisis
- Employees leaving and work being re-distributed on top of existing duties
- Accelerating new programs to compensate for « lost » time
- Working harder for the same results due to reduced human interactions
- A constant flow of online communication

Some not so obvious math!

The mental wellbeing equation is as simple as this*:

50% online stimulation + 50% offline stimulation
=
100 % mental & physical wellbeing = balance

100% online stimulation + 0% offline stimulation
=
0% mental wellbeing = shortage

*the numbers used here are not scientific numbers based on research, but are merely used as a metafor



Shortage in offline stimulation can lead to burn-out

Working from a shortage is not necessarily bad for a short period of time. In fact extra hormonal action will cope with that to lead us through a certain amount of urgent action (= our fight mode). But in no way, can it become the new normal.

In fact when continuing to work and live from that shortage, it will become even more profound resulting in mental instability, physical pains as body alarms, lack of focus and resilience and eventually burn-out. **The body freezes and runs away instead of looking at the issue with clarity and calmness.**

“In the ratrace, you come to a dead end”

–

interviewee

The alarmbell is ringing

By the time we have reached a full year of covid pandemic, home office and high stimulation of the online brain, more and more employers, employees and employment organisations are ringing the alarmbell.

If companies would not be stimulated by **the need for mental wellbeing** of their most important assets (= their employees), they should be interested in the impact it has on the **creative aspect of problem solving and generating new ideas** on how to overcome the economical crisis with innovative projects. Because at the end of the day these projects are still driven by people.



Offline energizers in the freezer

So according to the study, the following offline energisers are being missed by our interviewees:

- **Spontaneous interactions** at the coffee machine or in the hallway of the office, at customers, at events etc
- Moments of creative **ideas at lunch breaks** or diner parties with (indirect) colleagues
- Meeting **random people**
- All aspects of direct human relations
- The opposite of going on autopilot, the **unexpected parts of the day**
- Being recognised
- Being thanked for the efforts being made

Creative ideas to "soften" the online pain

Surely, the pandemic has also brought to the surface **the need for a different approach** which is definitely also being picked up by our companies and business leaders. Let's also place many good efforts in the spotlight:

- Creative **online brainstorm sessions** using online tools (Miro, Mural,...), break out sessions in small groups, online network options etc
- New meeting format: **the company talkshow !**
- Facilitating **creative job openings & job switches** based on capabilities & talents instead of background or education. A beautiful example was given of someone making a jobswitch to a new role as "Master of Ceremony" for facilitating online events. Great thinking to separate the facilitating versus the trainer/speaker part allowing more focus for the coaches and diversion for the participants.




Creative ideas to "soften" the online pain (2)

- Evaluating employees based on **behaviour & impact** instead of pure results.
- **Overruling the process when needed** to allow space for individual creativity.
- Making **courageous decisions**: focus & excell on one aspect instead of trying it all:
 - o operational excellence (Coolblue) versus
 - o customer intimacy (Telenet) versus
 - o product leadership (Apple)

“Change starts from what is possible instead of what is being enforced”

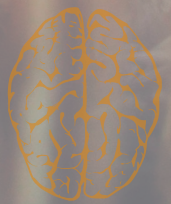
-
interviewee





*Innovation is often
being replaced by
execution. Everyone
should be allowed to
jump out of that
spinning wheel, to
reload and to jump
back in*

INTERVIEWEE



*Work culture, personality
and background are
magnified during the pandemic*

0
7

in- fluencing factors

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

No one size fits all, but diverse factors at play

Let me be the last person to claim there is a one size fits all. From all the suggestions and examples given so far on how to utilize the offline brain more frequently, surely **every person, team or company will have to decide for themselves what appeals and works for them**. But let that “choice” be the key of the offline success: to create a culture where diversity is considered a strength, not a weakness.

Diversity is present everywhere. The way people are dealing with the pandemic or other crisis situations depends a lot on **many influencing factors**:

- the existing work culture you are in
- your personality type
- your roots or culture you were brought up in
- your current job role
- the ethics and culture of the countries you work with
- dominant male or female energy
- your age and generation values
- so much more...

All of these mentioned factors have been brought up and discussed by the interviewees of this study, so allow me to focus on some a bit more.

Magnifying glass

What came out very clearly is the magnifying glass all of these influencers have been put under. I did not just hear that during the interviews, but also experienced this myself. And many around me confirm. **What went well before the pandemic, has been a strong anchor and has had a strong potential to positively develop further.**



Examples can be found in many ways. Think about a strong team, with members that continue to support each other during the hard lockdown times. Many of them developed even more profound relationships, helping each other and learning from each other. Generations, young and older, sharing their skills with one another.

Another example is my personal yoga or meditation practice. During the pandemic, it developed into a daily routine and a membership to an online community. This brought yoga more profound in my life as ever before.

Work culture

Work and life cultures are not so easily shaped or changed compared to personal routines. So for sure the magnifying glass has had an enormous effect there.

Sadly disconnected teams became even more so which led to a large amount of employees looking for another job during the pandemic time. **When it is hard to work in a work culture that does not fit your values, it becomes almost impossible to work in such an unmatched culture in an online way.**

Companies who have invested sufficient energy, money and time in connecting employees and teams, have been more resilient and successful and will be for the years to come. They do not only ride that current wave but keep on investing in people to make sure there is still a next wave ahead.



Personality types: introverts and extraverts

My personal favorite subject! Although I would highly recommend to discover your own and your co-workers personality types in many available tests (ie. Enneagram, Myers-Briggs, ODC, etc), this is not the subject of this study.

However, it is really important to understand **the basic concept of energy drivers and drainers**. This will be different for the many personalities out there, but let me simplify this for a moment into 2 categories: the introverts and the extraverts.

Often these descriptions have been misused or misunderstood. Introverts do not necessarily need to be shy or nerdy types of people, whilst extraverts do not need to match the archetype of a loud and self-esteemed sales person. Throw all of that overboard!

What if I tell you an **introvert's energy is mainly driven from within**: being very comfortable and focussed when alone with their ideas or work. **Extraverts on the other side flourish when they meet other people or can be part of a group. Their energy drivers are mainly found externally.**

Needless to say extraverted people have been suffering more from lockdown and home office compared to introverts and need some extra attention and care.

“I am very nostalgic”

-

an extraverted interviewee



Dominant male or female energy

I prefer to use the terms male or female energy instead of gender. **A person who relates to “male” energy is a very task, goal and result oriented person.** Often this resonates with the male gender but women can definitely also have a dominant “male” energetic drive. In fact, most of the business environments and leaders are driven by male energy.

On the other hand, **a person who relates more to « female » energy, will be mostly driven by inspiration, intuition and human connectivity.** Again not just females can have a female dominant energy, also males do. And that preference is not necessarily related to sexual orientation.

That being said, people driven by “female” energy, will have a natural stronger tendency for the offline brain stimulation, or in case they are not doing so already, they should, in order to feel more naturally true to themselves.

In the pandemic online world and often male dominant organisations, there is a lot of room and praise for male energy driven people, efficiency and tasks. Whilst the female energy side can bring in more creativity, spontaneous dynamics and intrinsic motivation, it is not always equally valued. Therefore it is important to balance out those types equally in teams and not to measure people only to “male” standards such as measurable kpi's. **“Female energy” driven people need more space to do what they are good at intuitively.**



Cultural roots & habits

Often the only obstacle in being more offline, is ourself. We might have been raised in a culture or in a parental situation where hard work has always been praised or set as the standard. Noticing this behaviour can help us break out of that routine. But is also helps a lot if the company culture and leadership in all levels of the company, set the example of allowing more time for the offline brain.

Apart from our own cultural background, we might also be confronted with teams or people from different cultural and ethical background. In Belgium for example, the culture is quite traditional: hard work and risk-aversity prevail. In the Netherlands, there is a tendancy for efficiency 'to do more with less' and fast decision making. Whilst in Germany first of all the rules, externally and internally, need to be respected.

Job Role

Depending on the actual job role, some people have been impacted more than others by the online isolation.

As said before, people being part of an operational factory, lab or unit or people higher up on the corporate ladder have been less affected by the offline overload. Due to their job descriptions, they have been allowed time at the office or factory, to interact with other humans in an physical (safe) way.

To all the people managers out there, please always remember, **the need for human contact is universal and should not be limited to a certain job role, age or background.**





*The need for human
contact is universal
and should not be
limited to certain job
roles*

AUTHOR

*Add more space
in the daily work environment*

0
8

tips & tricks

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

As we have discussed many insights on the right balance between the offline and online brain already, let's recapitalize the following **tips and tricks on how to bring more space in the daily work environment** for the offline mode.

1. Allowing indirect colleagues to physically meet up within a certain radius around their homes for a walk or a brainstorm session outdoors. This way you get to know new faces within the company and stimulate new ideas.
2. Having 1-on-1 outdoor walk meetings with direct colleagues on a work subject. It might require more time for travel but will heavily stimulate the intrinsic motivation and creative brain of the employees.
3. Having friendly online meetings or spontaneous phone calls with direct colleagues or relations, non work related, to check in.
4. Reduce the number of planned online video calls or set your own boundaries in saying "no". Is it really necessary to block this time?
5. Weekly or biweekly entire company connect meetings using fun online activities, new formats like a talkshow on the couch. Make it all about communication & care and reduce the amount of informative content.
6. Individual support is needed, making sure everyone is heard at least once a month.
7. Hiring an external, neutral coach people can turn to with issues & practical questions. Burn-out prevention tools such as breathing exercises can offer stress-release, easily to be incorporated in a work day.



8. Creating workgroups on non work related topics from the employee community – give them a project of common belonging: start to run, a personal coach, cooking workshops, quiz etc
9. Continue to invest in teambuilding now more than ever if you want to catch the next wave to surf on.
10. Create a culture where colleagues can recognize the signals of work-overload, depression and burn-out. Help people support each other.
11. Provide online meditation tools or meditation coaching. Meditation is brain training for more focus, resilience and concentration, scientifically proven to change the brain in a structural way.
12. Take people out of their daily work activities with 15min challenges to break the ice, bring in a level of fun and connectivity and to stretch the legs if possible.
13. Give new employees the visibility they deserve.
14. Celebrate ALL the successes, not just business results but surely the private ones such as retirements, births, marriage etc.
15. Thank your employees, colleagues and relations for all their efforts



*Magic happens
when we give it a try*

0
9

the un- expected

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

The unexpected

Whether we love to work from home or miss the office, whether you are an introvert or an extravert, I think we can all agree on one thing: **none of us could have ever imagined such a drastic change in how we work and live on a daily basis** since the start of the pandemic more than one year ago.

What amazing things did we accomplish?

Going FULLY online

High quality online learning, training & networking

Reduced scepticism for change

People are open, accessible for new human interaction

Learning to trust each other

The birth of “walk” meetings

Support in unexpected corners

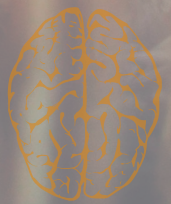
People can do amazing things, things we might never have expected to happen before. **We are much more flexible than we think we are. We just need to do it.**





*It is all a
mindset, just give
it a try!*

INTERVIEWEE



*Using my senses
is how I learn*

*1
0*

in- spirations

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

My inspirations for this book & life

I am always open to be inspired, anywhere, anytime and by anyone or anything.

My nr 1 inspiration source is **NATURE**, it is always there and it is everywhere.

Nr 2 are the **“accidental” encounters** with (new) people & new ways of thinking that come along my path. The offline brain allows just that.

Nr 3 is a list of **books, podcasts and other references** of recognised people in their field of expertise, talking about “the offline brain” in one way or another. Enjoy!

My favorite podcasts/interviews

Brené Brown – Dare to Lead Podcast series (Spotify only)
<https://open.spotify.com/show/4P86ZzHf7EOIRG7do9LkKZ?si=0QcFOkTrTsiQ9eDpUBT5Zw>

Studio of Life – Podcast & Youtube series
<https://open.spotify.com/show/1EuG4hVCJfRutOT4Se61Ep?si=09uabHsqQ9eAtEUmST524A>

Michael Van Damme (The Forge) – Radio 1 Interview
https://www.linkedin.com/posts/the-forge-_telework-creativity-innovation-activity-6758012150037413889-xvcj

Read my lips

<https://readmylips.be/podcast-overmorgen>



Must-reads

Eric Mosley – Making work human

Simon Sinek – The infinite game

Luc Swinnen – Rust in je brein

Hide Helsen – Dreamers who do

Inspiring Projects

United Nations – **Sustainable Development Goals** (Sdgs)

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Inge Ferwerda – BE CREATIVE – **Creatives for Goooooooooooood**

<http://creativesforgood.org>

BE News / Media

De Tijd – Corona articles and specials

<https://www.tijd.be/dossiers/het-corona-effect/herbekijk-de-webinars-van-de-tijd>

VRT NWS

<https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/nl/2021/03/25/gezinspsychologe-nina-mouton-aan-ouders-schuldgevoel-opzij-zet/>

Radio 1 - De wereld van Sofie

<https://radio1.be/programma/de-wereld-van-sofie#podium19>

Voka

<https://www.voka.be/nieuws/we-moeten-ook-praten-over-het-telewerk>



*Everyone is just a
simple human being*

*1
1*

a personal word

Compiled by Angelica Krsteski as part of
"The offline brain in covid business times"

A personal word from me

The topic for this study and e-book originated from a personal important mission, having left the corporate world after 14 years for a freelance career: my deep deep wish for the innovative and technical business world, which I admire so much, to allow more space for humanity in every day work life.

I deeply believe that self-motivated people, who work from their strengths and feel supported by their colleagues & the entire work culture, can do amazing things. They bring in innovation & creativity to make our world a better place.

When starting this study, it was never my intention to write a book about it. But as I gathered so much valuable information, this was the only way for me to capture all that has been said (or at least a part of it!). I am not a novelist or an experienced writer, nor am I qualified to write a book in the English language, but I hope you can overlook these imperfections and have my enthusiasm for this topic take over and inspire you.

Our brain can do amazing things. Our hearts can do even more.

Namaste - my respect to you

Angelica





About the author



HI, I'M ANGELICA, YOUR HEART & BRAINS IN BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

I guide innovative technical companies, their teams and employees through complex processes and change based on clarity, space and connectivity.

www.BUDDI.be

