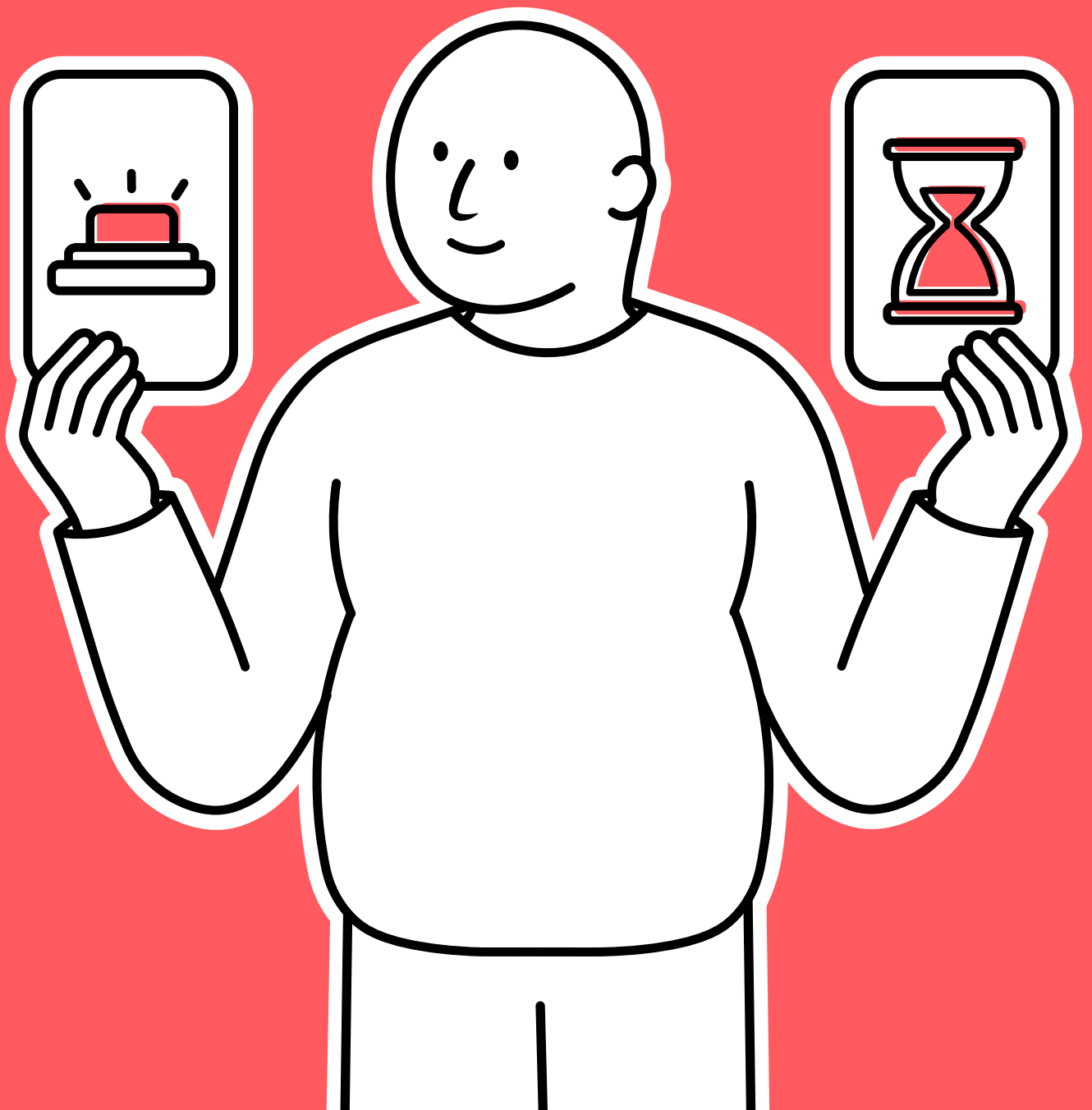


System 1 and 2:

How People Really Decide



Introduction

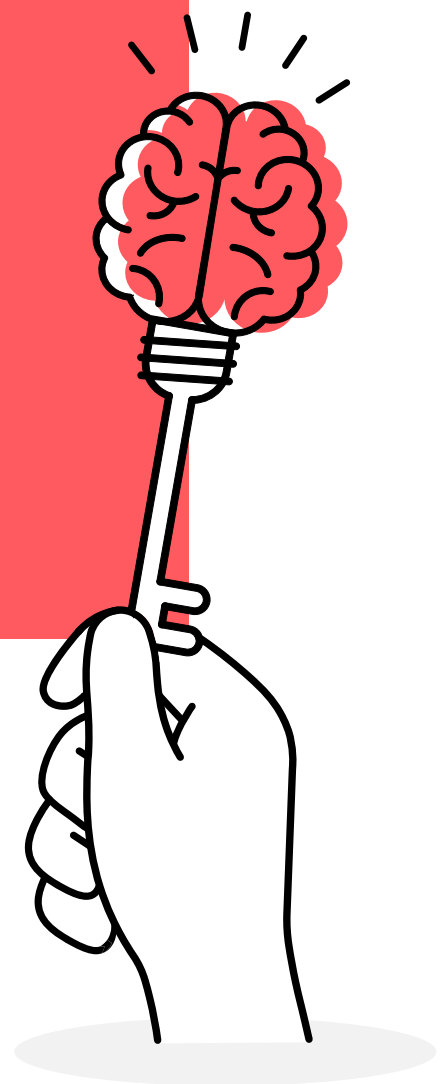
You have two ways of thinking. One runs by itself, in a fraction of a second, on feeling and habit. The other is slow, takes effort, and only switches on when it has to. Psychologist Daniel Kahneman named them System 1 and System 2 in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011). He borrowed the terms from psychologists Keith Stanovich and Richard West.

The point isn't that System 1 is stupid. It's fast, and most of the time it's right. The point is that almost every piece of communication, every form and every campaign gets built for System 2, while System 1 has already made most of the decisions before System 2 wakes up.

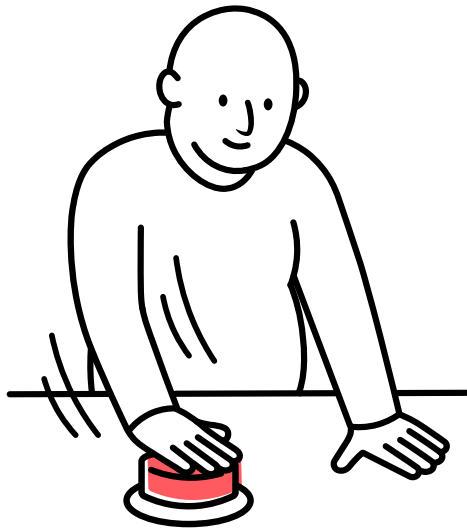
This card shows what the fast brain responds to, and what that means for the things you make.

Astrid Groenewegen

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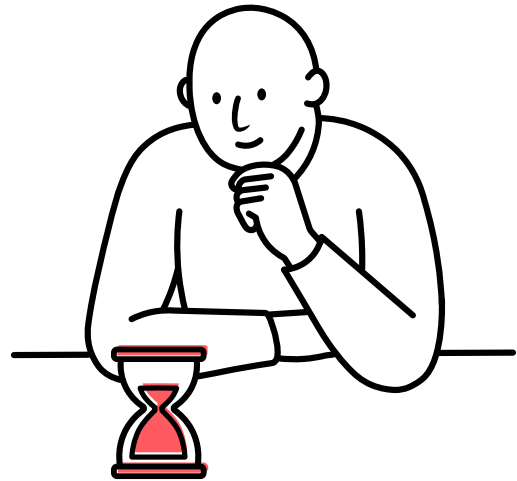


SYSTEM 1



fast, automatic, unconscious,
emotional, effortless, always on.

SYSTEM 2



slow, conscious, rational, effortful,
only switches on when needed.

THE QUESTION BEHIND EVERYTHING YOU MAKE

Am I speaking to the fast brain or the slow one?
And which of the two is actually working at that moment?

Speed:

How much thinking time am I assuming?

System 1 needs a fraction of a second to form a judgement about a page, an email or a face. That judgement exists before anyone has read your first sentence. Everything you explain afterwards is arguing with an impression that's already set. Which makes the first impression strategy rather than politeness.

Check: is the first impression already right, or does my copy have to repair it?

Fluency:

What reads easily, feels true

The easier something is to process, the more honest and appealing it seems. Psychologists Adam Alter and Daniel Oppenheimer showed that shares in companies with easily pronounceable names outperformed those with awkward names in their first days of trading. Same company, different sound, different judgement. Difficult words and busy design don't make your message look serious. They make it look less credible.

Check: does it read by itself, or does someone have to sit down for it?

The anchor:

The first number colours everything after it

Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman had people spin a wheel, then asked them to estimate something entirely unrelated. Those who spun a high number estimated higher. A completely random number steered the answer. Every first price, percentage or quantity someone sees from you does the same work.

Check: which number do people see first, and did I choose it?

The frame:

Same fact, different choice

Tversky and Kahneman gave doctors a treatment described once as a ninety per cent survival rate and once as a ten per cent mortality rate. Identical numbers, and yet one group chose very differently from the other. There is no neutral way to tell someone something. You always pick a frame, even when you don't think about it.

Check: which frame am I using, and is that a choice or a habit?

The default:

Whatever is already switched on, wins

Eric Johnson and Daniel Goldstein compared organ donation across European countries. Where people had to opt in, a small minority took part. Where people were enrolled unless they opted out, nearly everyone did. Same continent, comparable people, different default setting. What's filled in beforehand isn't a detail, it's the decision.

Check: what happens when someone does nothing, and is that what I want?

The exception:

When you actually want System 2

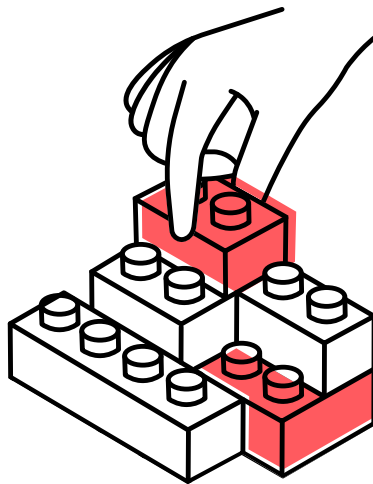
Sometimes you want people to stop deciding on autopilot. A large purchase, an irreversible choice, a risk they need to understand. Then friction works in your favour: an extra question, a summary they have to confirm, a moment of pause. Making everything smoother isn't always better. The question is which brain you want doing the work.

Check: is this a moment for ease, or for deliberate attention?

System 1 drives more of your customers' behaviour than your organisation has ever written into a strategy. Take that seriously and you stop persuading and start designing. In the Behavioural Design Fundamentals Course you'll learn in two days how that works.

Astrid Groenewegen

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[DOWNLOAD THE FUNDAMENTALS COURSE BROCHURE HERE](#)

Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow. Tversky, A. and Kahneman, D. (1974, 1981). Johnson, E. and Goldstein, D. (2003). Do defaults save lives? Science. Alter, A. and Oppenheimer, D. (2006). PNAS.



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