

A DATA BRIEFING FROM DT LINUX

SAMPLE PREVIEW

What Happens to Group Behavior When One Person Breaks the Rules?

Six sourced studies on how one rule-breaker changes everyone else, from a graffiti experiment that doubled littering and theft to the single dissenter who cut conformity by 80%

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DT LINUX

This is a free preview. The full report contains complete analysis of all six cases, full sourcing, and an interactive data dashboard.

What's inside this report

The full report walks through six real, sourced studies on how one rule-breaker changes a group, from a graffiti field experiment to a conformity study, organized into three tiers: The Spread, The Spiral, and The Split.

No.	Context	Tier	Why it's on the list
1	One broken rule doubles the odds of another	The Spread	A visible rule violation (graffiti) roughly doubled how often people littered (33% to 69%) and stole (13% to 27%) nearby, in matched field experiments.
2	Cheating spreads from insiders, not outsiders	The Spread	Watching someone cheat raised a bystander's own cheating to 24.3% when the cheater looked like one of their own group, versus just 3.6% when the cheater looked like an outsider.
3	Unchecked free-riding collapses cooperation, fast	The Spiral	In repeated group money games, contributions collapsed toward near-total free-riding within 10 rounds once rule-breaking went unpunished, then rebounded to 91% once punishment became possible.
4	One bad coworker is contagious, literally	The Spiral	Across 477 real financial-firm mergers, an advisor was 37% more likely to commit misconduct after being placed alongside a coworker with a history of it.
5	Insiders who break the rules get punished harder than outsiders who do the same	The Split	People kept noticeably more social distance from an underperforming member of their own group than from an equally underperforming outsider.
6	One dissenter breaks the group free, too	The Split	Conformity to an obviously wrong unanimous group answer fell from 32% to just 5% once a single person broke ranks and gave the right one.

The full report also includes an interactive, filterable dashboard version of this comparison, and a related-topics and keyword brief for further reading.

The clearest case: one broken rule doubles the odds of another

In 2008, Kees Keizer, Siegwart Lindenberg, and Linda Steg published a set of field experiments in *Science* that tested a deceptively simple idea: does visible evidence that one rule has been broken make people more likely to break a different one? Working in real locations around Groningen, the Netherlands, the researchers set up matched scenes that were identical except for one manipulated detail, then quietly observed how passersby actually behaved, not how they said they would behave.

In one experiment, researchers leaned bicycles against a wall posted with a clear no-graffiti sign, then left a flyer tucked under each handlebar with nowhere obvious to throw it away except the ground. When the wall was clean, 33% of riders littered the flyer. When the identical wall was covered in graffiti, littering rose to 69%, almost exactly double, with nothing else about the scene changed.

A second experiment went further, testing whether disorder could nudge people toward an actual property crime. Researchers left an envelope with a clearly visible banknote sticking out of a mailbox. Next to a clean mailbox, 13% of passersby took it. Next to a graffitied one, 27% did, again almost double, for a rule violation with real stakes rather than a dropped flyer...

Get the full report

This sample covers the opening case. The complete report walks through all six studies in full, with the same standard of sourcing throughout.

- **Full analysis of all six cases**, including the cheating-contagion experiment, the public-goods cooperation collapse and recovery, and the financial-adviser misconduct natural experiment
- **The complete "caveat that matters most" section**, tying all six cases together into one running argument about when rule-breaking spreads and when it doesn't
- **A full, cited source list** covering every study used
- **An interactive data dashboard** with filterable charts, a downloadable schema, and API access details
- **A related-topics and keyword brief** for teams researching group behavior and organizational culture further

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