## If It's Broken, Fix It: The Effectiveness of Moral Reminders Depends on Prior Behavior

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## What type of moral reminders work and for whom?

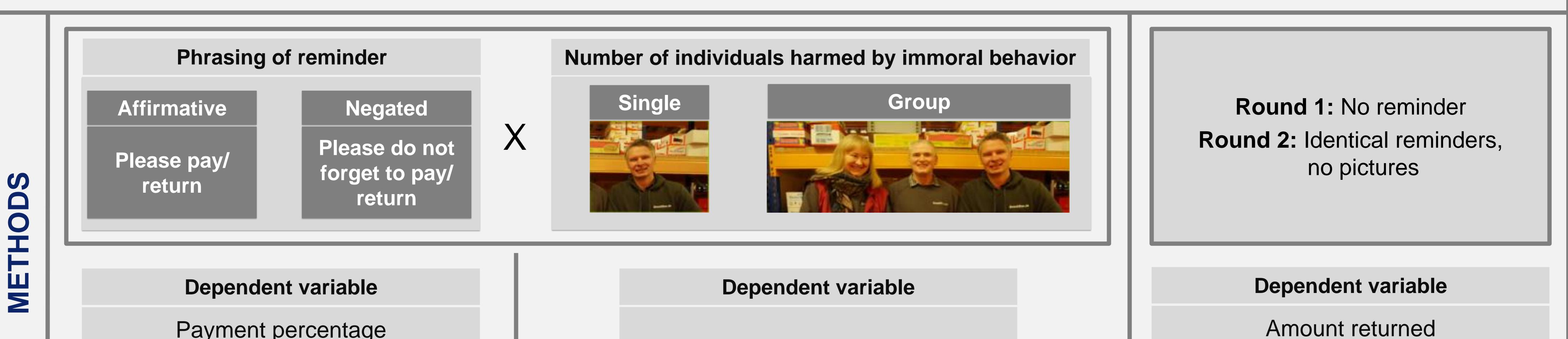
- To date, there is inconclusive evidence on whether moral reminders work.
- We test three factors that may reconcile prior work: The way they are phrased, the number of people hurt by immoral behaviors, and people's behavior prior to the reminder.
- We do so in a field study setting measuring honesty and in online studies measuring reciprocity.
- We find that the main factor which determines whether reminders work is people's prior behavior: Reminders have a positive effect only on those who were not doing the right thing to begin with.

Study 1 – Field Study (Dishonesty) Employees paid for snacks, using an honor system Study 2 – Trust Game (Reciprocity) Focusing on the amount of money returned by the receiver

Study 3 – Trust Game (Reciprocity) Identical to Study 2, with two rounds

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	after the intervention minus Payment percentage prior to the intervention	Amount returned	in round 2 minus Amount returned in round 1
RESULTS	<ul> <li>No effect for phrasing or number of individuals hurt.</li> <li>Any reminder increased honesty compared to no reminder, but only among those who complied less to begin with.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>No effect for the number of individuals hurt.</li> <li>Any reminder increased reciprocity compared to no reminder, especially when phrased affirmatively.</li> </ul>	- Reminders (in round 2) increased reciprocity, but only among those who had paid less (in round 1).
		Return above the median in round	d 1 Return below the median in round 1

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## CONCLUSION

- We found some evidence that affirmative phrasings seem to be better than negated ones, and no effect for the number of people affected by the behavior.
- However, we consistently show that any reminder increases moral behavior, but only for people who are less compliant to begin with.
- Thus, we conclude that before deploying any interventions the most critical factor to consider is people's prior behavior.

