

COMPANION ILLUSTRATIONS · THE TWO-TRIAD EXAMPLE, WITHOUT THE MATHS

Tipping Triads

Some habits come in threes and hold each other up. Knock one over and the other two tend to go with it, the way one slide on a snowy slope sets off the rest. This is a picture guide to the six-habit example in the paper. Three of the habits pull a person down and three lift them up. At the end comes the surprise: a person can end up holding habits from both sets at the same time.

The shared mechanism

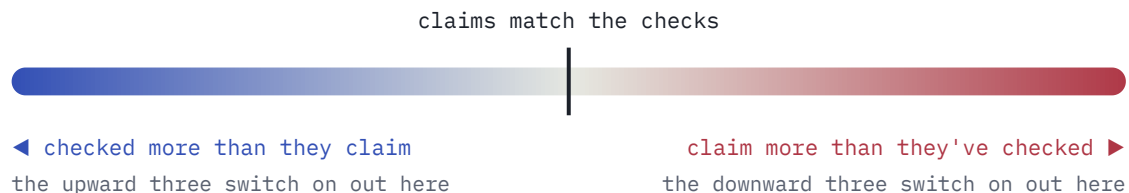
Track D: the downward three

Track K: the upward three

PLATE 0 · THE DIAL AND THE CAST

One dial, six sticky switches

Picture a single dial for how a person stands with the world. Turn it right and they claim more than they've actually checked. Turn it left and they've checked more than they claim. Each habit is a sticky switch that clicks on somewhere along that dial. Once on, it stays on until the dial comes well back.

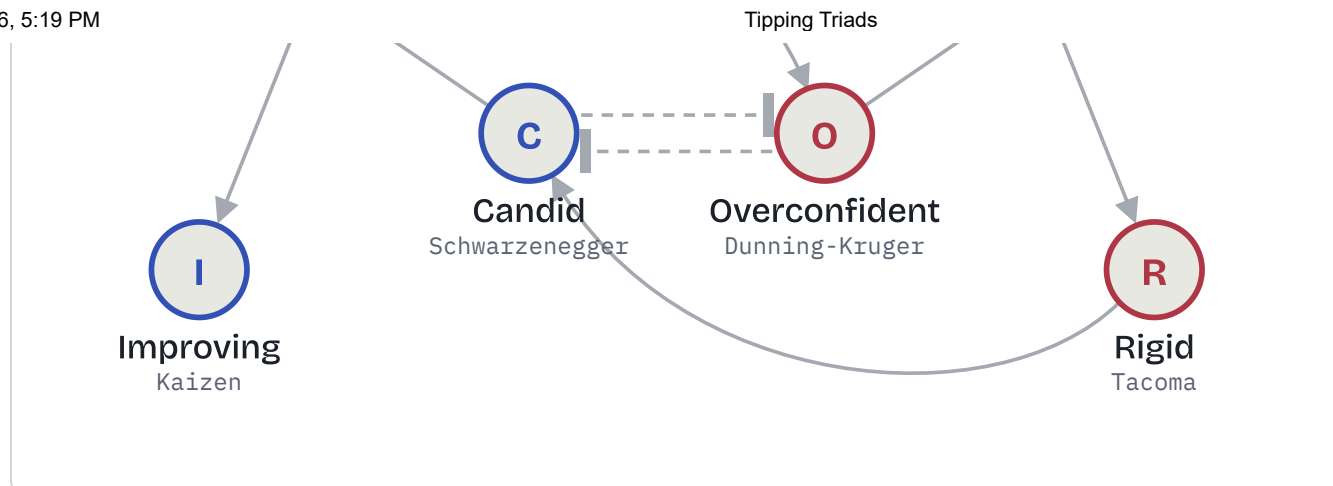


Flowing
Wu Wei



Defensive
Cobra





—> makes the next one easier to switch on ---| makes it harder

Two triangles, each a chain, and a few links across.

Inside each triangle the links run one way: the first habit makes the second easier, and the second makes the third easier. Four links cross between the triangles. They aren't symmetric, and one of them is what produces the surprise at the end.

Track D · the downward three

Overconfident Rates their own skill well above what they've shown.

Paper's label: Dunning-Kruger

Defensive Strikes back when questioned instead of checking.

Paper's label: Cobra

Rigid Won't change course, and so shakes apart under strain the way a stiff bridge does in the wind.

Paper's label: Tacoma

Track K · the upward three

Candid Names their own weak spot out loud and trains it on purpose.

Paper's label: Schwarzenegger

Flowing Follows through without strain. The work just gets done.

Paper's label: Wu Wei

Improving Small, steady gains that never top out.

Paper's label: Kaizen

The nicknames are just labels. The paper says so plainly: its results depend only on where each switch clicks and how strongly they're linked, not on what the switches are called.

STEP 1 · THE AVALANCHE

Trip one and it drags the next one with it

Take away the links and each habit switches on at its own spot on the dial, one at a time, with gaps in between. Put the links back and the switches start going over in groups. The paper found that seven of the ten changes in the linked version move two or three habits at once.

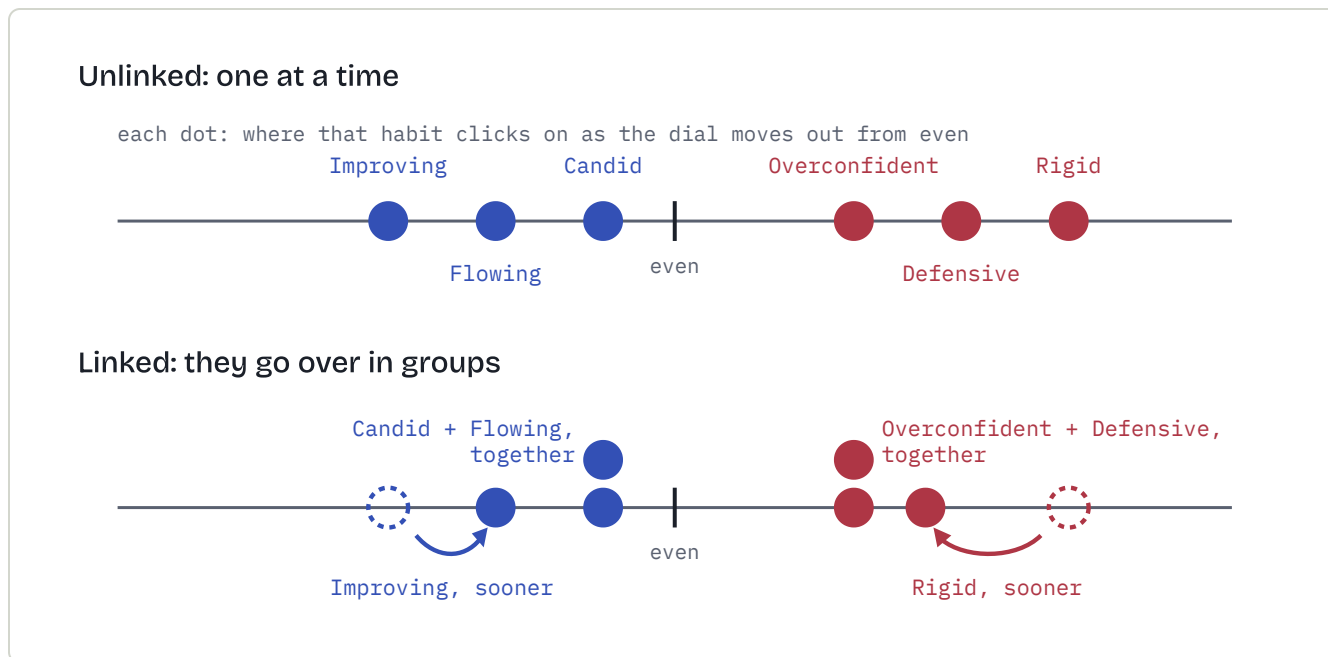


PLATE 1 · SAME SIX SWITCHES, WITH AND WITHOUT THE LINKS

The first domino no longer falls alone.

On the downward side, the moment Overconfident clicks on it pulls Defensive over with it, at a point where Defensive would never have gone on its own. Rigid then needs much less push than before, because Defensive is already leaning on it. The upward side mirrors this: once Candid clicks on, Flowing comes too, and Improving follows sooner.

TRACK D · HOW IT LOOKS IN A PERSON

One inflated claim becomes a stance.

Someone oversells what they can do. When a colleague questions it, backing down now means admitting the oversell, so they bristle instead. After bristling twice, changing the plan would mean admitting both. Each habit makes the next one cheaper to adopt, so the three arrive as a package.

TRACK K · HOW IT LOOKS IN A PERSON

One honest admission becomes a practice

One honest admission becomes a practice.

Someone says out loud, "I'm weak at this part," and starts working on it. With nothing to protect, the work stops feeling like a fight and simply gets done. Work that gets done without a fight is work you can keep improving. The upward three also arrive as a package.

STEP 2 • THE LONGER IT RUNS

Each one on makes the next harder to switch off

The links work in both directions of the dial. While Defensive is on, Rigid is easier to switch on, and it's also much harder to switch off. The person has to come a long way back toward even before it lets go.

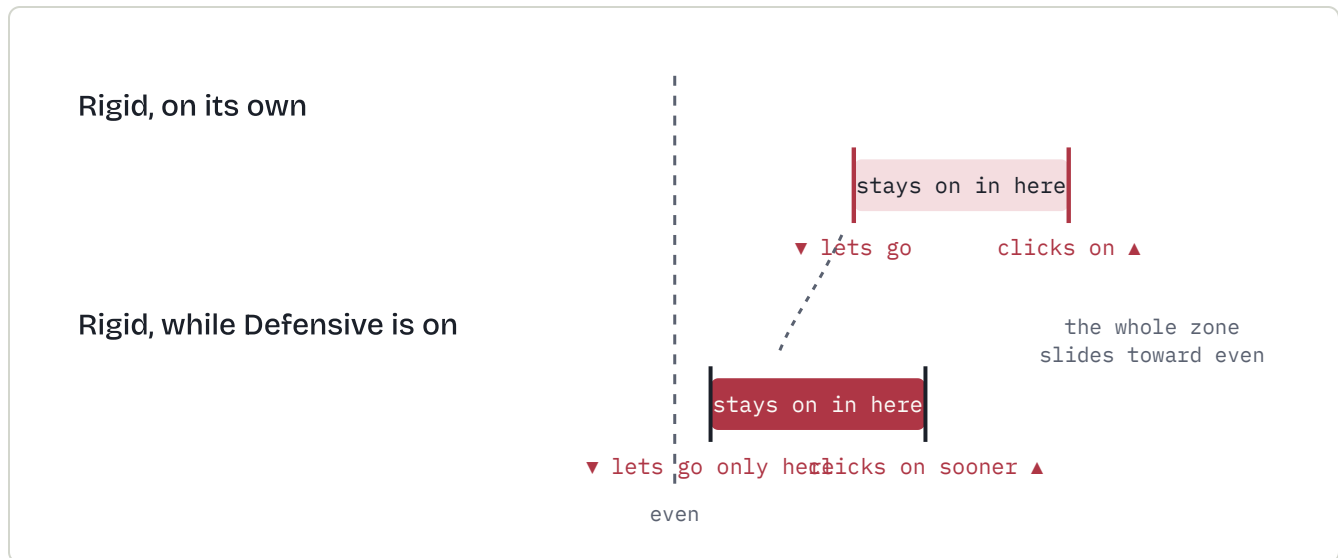


PLATE 2 • THE STICKY ZONE MOVES

Easier to get into, and harder to get out of.

Every sticky switch has a zone where, once on, it stays on. Link it to a neighbour that's already on and the whole zone slides toward the middle. The habit arrives earlier and hangs on until the person is almost back to even. That's the "harder to walk back the longer it runs" feeling. Each habit that joins moves the exit further away for the next one.

Why this is the part that hurts

Picture someone fully locked in on the downward side: overconfident, defensive and rigid. Easing off the overselling a little doesn't help, because each habit is being held up by the others. Nothing moves when you'd expect it to.

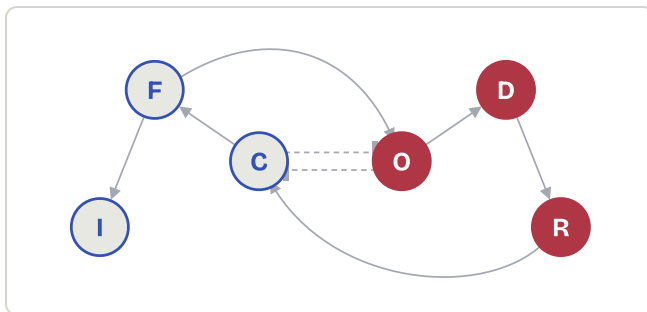
The upward side is sticky in the same way, and there it works in your favour. In the paper's run, a person who has Candid and Flowing switched on keeps both even after the dial has come right back to even.

Stickiness isn't the same as chaos. The paper checked thousands of back-and-forth paths along the dial. Each time, retracing your steps exactly to an earlier turning point put all six switches back where they were at that moment. The system is stubborn, but it still keeps an orderly memory.

STEP 3 · THE SURPRISE

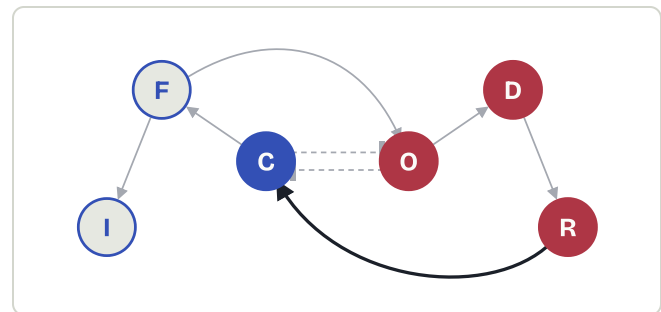
Holding habits from both sides at once

Without the links, the two triangles can never overlap. The downward three only live on the right of the dial and the upward three only on the left, so no one could be on both sides at once. With the links, the paper found a way to land there.



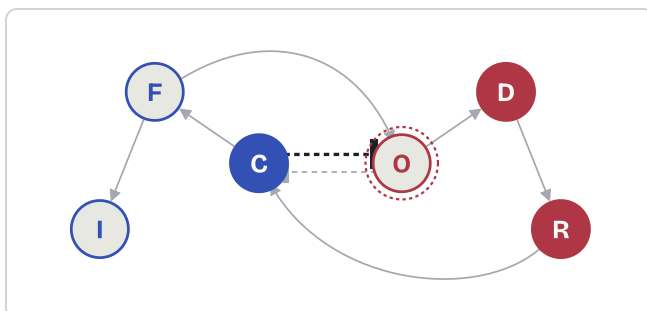
FRAME 1 · FULL LOCK-IN

All three downward habits are on, far out on the claims-ahead side. Easing the dial back a little changes nothing yet.



FRAME 2 · CANDID CLICKS ON FIRST

Still well to the right of even, the strain of being Rigid makes an admission easy enough that Candid switches on.



FRAME 3 · OVERCONFIDENT DROPS OUT

WHERE IT SETTLES

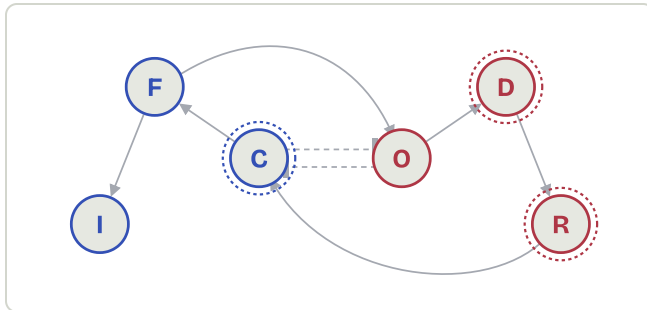
Defensive + Rigid, and Candid

Honest about a weakness, still bristly, still won't change the plan. It's stable.

Candid pushes against Overconfident, and in the same moment Overconfident lets go. It was the first to arrive and is the first to leave.

Tipping Triads

Still won't change the plan. It's stable: small nudges either way don't shift it.



THE MIXED STATE

With no links this combination can't happen at all, by any route.

FRAME 4 · THE SLIDE HOME

Only when the dial comes back further do Defensive, Rigid and Candid all let go together, in one slide, back to neutral.

PLATE 3 · HOW THE CROSSOVER HAPPENS

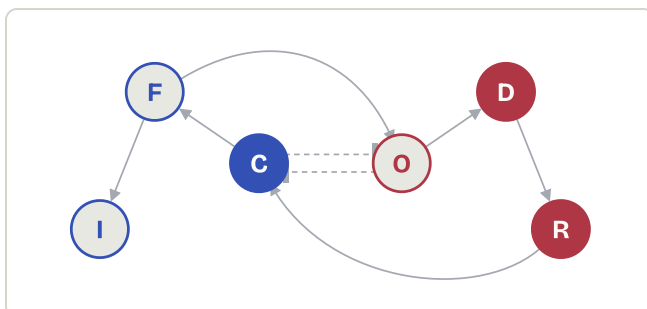
The exit from the lock is an admission, not a retreat.

What breaks a full lock-in isn't just turning the dial back. When Rigid is fully on, things break, and that breakage makes it much easier to say "I'm not as good at this as I thought." So Candid clicks on first, from the far side. Candid pushes against Overconfident, and Overconfident drops out. What's left is someone who is honest about a weak spot but still defensive and still won't change the plan. It's a real, stable place to stand. Coming back further, the rest all let go together in one slide.

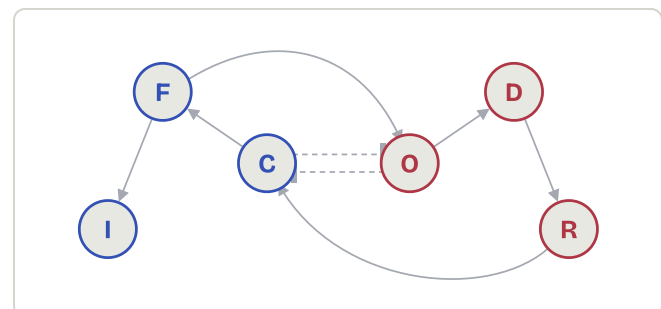
ALSO IN PLATE 3 · THE ORDER SCRAMBLES

First in is first out.

Without the links, a person unwinds in reverse: the last habit to arrive, Rigid, is the first to leave. With the links the order flips. Overconfident was the first to arrive and is the first to go, and it goes by way of the other side. The route out depends on the route in.



STRONG RIGID → CANDID LINK



WEAKER RIGID → CANDID LINK

The route through the mixed state opens.

Full lock-in holds longer, then everything drops at once, straight to neutral.

PLATE 4 • THE RIGHT CONDITIONS

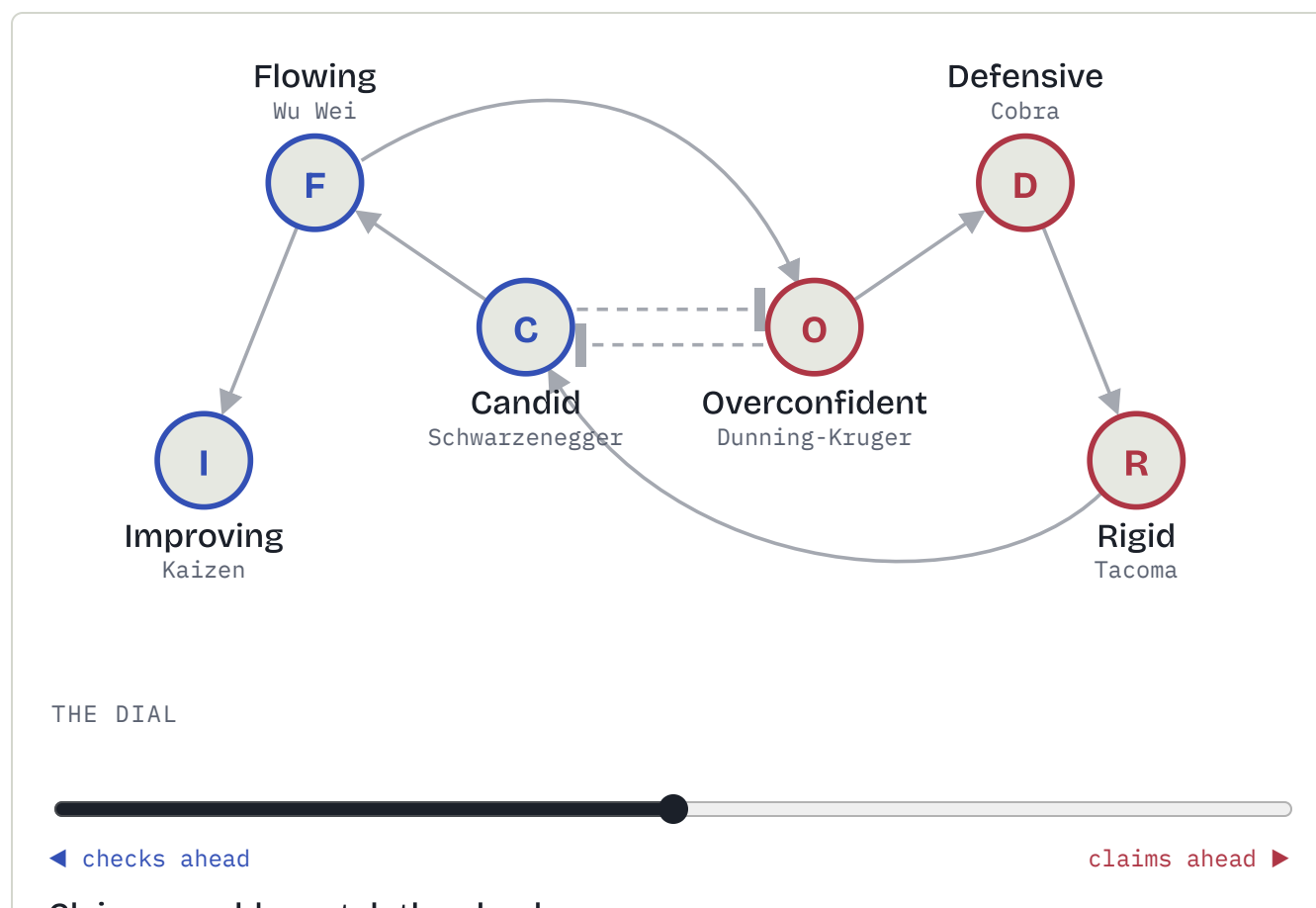
The crossover needs a strong enough bridge.

The mixed state appears only if the link from Rigid to Candid is strong enough, meaning a full lock-in really does make admitting weakness much easier. Weaken that one link, as the paper did, and the mixed state vanishes. The person then stays locked in longer and drops straight back to neutral in a single slide, with no admission along the way. The paper places the tipping point somewhere between its weak and strong settings.

STEP 4 • TRY IT

Turn the dial yourself

This is the paper's own six-switch example, running live. Move the dial slowly. Watch for switches going over in groups, and for switches that stay on after you've turned back.



Claims roughly match the checks

LINKS BETWEEN THE SWITCHES

As in the paper

Weaker Rigid → Candid

No links

Play the story

Back to even

RIGHT NOW

Neutral

No habits switched on.

Press **Play the story** to walk through a full lock-in, the mixed state and the way back. Or drag the dial yourself.

WHAT JUST HAPPENED