

Running Case Study 12

Experimentation



Surfing the web, Rebecca discovered a widely used moral experiment, the trolley experiment, and wondered whether playing this experimental game with her respondents would allow her to assess their morality. The thought experiment is designed as follows:

Trolley Experiment

Please, answer for each of the scenarios below the question asked.

Scenario 1

A trolley runs out of control down a track. In its path are 5 people, tied to the track. They cannot be untied in time and if the trolley hits them, all die. You can flip a switch, which will lead the trolley to a different track to which just one person is tied, who dies if you flip the switch.

Do you flip the switch? Yes No

Scenario 2

A trolley runs out of control down a track. In its path are 5 people, tied to the track. They cannot be untied in time and if the trolley hits them, all die. You stand on a bridge over the track; if you throw something very heavy on the track it will stop the trolley. It happens that next to you stands a very fat person. If you hustle this very fat person down the bridge on the track, the person will stop the trolley, but die.

Do you hustle the person? Yes No

Scenario 3

A trolley runs out of control down a track. In its path are 5 people, tied to the track. They cannot be untied in time and if the trolley hits them, all die. You stand on a bridge over the track; if you throw something very heavy on the track it will stop the trolley. If you hustle your mother down the bridge on the track, she will stop the trolley, but die. (You cannot jump on the track yourself.)

Do you hustle your mother? Yes No

But Rebecca also thought about another experiment that she developed based on a game she used to play at high school. She wanted to see whether people are honest. The game is played with two dice and called 'piglet'. The highest score possible is a 1 and a 2, followed by each of the six doubles in order, and then the sum of the two dice. Two players play the game. The first player throws the dice with a dice cup and looks secretly at the result. Then they announce the result to the other player, who can either believe it or not. If the following player believes it, they have to throw a higher result and announce that to the next player who again can either believe or not. If a player does not believe an announcement, they lift the dice cup. If the announcement is right, the announcer gets a point and the play continues. If the announcement is wrong, the person disbelieving the announcement gets a point and a new round starts. Rebecca designed the following scenarios and a friend of hers programmed it as a small computer game. Based on all three scenarios, Rebecca wanted to construct an honesty score.

Rebecca thought about playing this game on a computer with the following scenarios.

Scenario 1

The computer announces that it has thrown a 6 and 3. The announcement is correct. Now the respondent throws the dice and gets a 4 and a 2. Respondents have to write in their announcement.

Note: If they are honest, the respondents automatically lose a point. Thus, most people will not be honest and say, for example, double 1.

Scenario 2

The computer announces that it has thrown a 1 and 3 (the lowest score possible). Now the respondent throws the dice and gets a 4 and a 2, a pretty low score. Respondents have to write in their announcement.

Note: Respondents can be honest, but they can also announce a higher result that is more difficult to beat in the next round.

Scenario 3

The computer announces that it has thrown a 1 and 3 (the lowest score possible). Now the respondent throws the dice and gets a double 1, a pretty good score. Respondents have to write in their announcement.

Note: Respondents can be honest, but they can also announce a higher result that is more difficult to beat in the next round.

- 1 Do you think that participants in the ethical game designed by Rebecca behave differently in real life? Why? And if you think they behave differently, do they behave more, or less, ethically?
- 2 What is the experimental design Rebecca's ethical game follows?
- 3 Is the idea of looking at the ethical behaviour of business students at two different universities a kind of quasi-experiment?