Experiment Example: Wason Selection Task Problems

Abstract Problem

Part of your new clerical job at the local high school is to make sure that student documents have been processed correctly. Your job is to make sure the documents conform to the following alphanumerical rule:

“If a person has a ‘D’ rating, then her or his documents must be marked code ‘3’.”

You suspect the secretary you replaced did not categorize the students’ documents correctly. The cards below have information about the documents of four people who are enrolled at this high school. Each card represents one person. Side A tells a person’s letter rating and the Side B tells that person’s numerical code.

For each document, you are shown one side of the card but not the other. On the basis of this information, indicate whether you would definitely need to see the other side of the card to know if the rule was violated for that document.

Drinking Age Problem

In its crackdown against drunk drivers, state officials are revoking liquor licenses left and right. You are a bouncer in a local bar, and you’ll lose your job unless you enforce the following rule:

“If a person is drinking beer, then he or she must be over 21 years old.”

Below are cards representing four different customers sitting at a table in your bar. Each card represents one person. Side A of the card tells what the customer is drinking, and Side B tells that customer’s age.

For each customer, you are shown one side of the card but not the other. On the basis of this information, indicate whether you would definitely need to see the other side of the card to know if the customer was violating the rule.
Bo Problem

You are an anthropologist study the Namka, a hunter-gatherer people who live in southwest Africa. Bo is an old Namka man in the village that you are studying. Bo is always accidentally breaking his ostrich eggshell and would like to “stockpile” some—the Namka use ostrich eggshells as canteens because they are light and hold lots of water.

Four strangers stumble into Bo’s village one day. They are hungry and want to bring meat back to their families. Bo approaches each man privately and offers him the following deal:

“If you give me your ostrich eggshell, then I’ll give you duiker meat.”

Bo explains that he will need the eggshell tonight to give to his son, who is going on a long hunting expedition, but Bo will not be able to deliver the duiker meat until the next day. You suspect that Bo might try to cheat on these deals. The cards below have information about the four deals Bo made with these four men. What happened in one deal had no effect on the outcome of any other deal. Each card represents one man. Side A tells whether or not the man gave his ostrich eggshell to Bo, and Side B tells whether Bo gave the man duiker meat the next day.

For each man, you are shown one side of the card but not the other. On the basis of this information, indicate whether you would definitely need to see the other side of the card to know if the rule had been violated in that instance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gave eggshell</th>
<th>Did not give eggshell</th>
<th>Received meat</th>
<th>Did not receive meat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Spilled Blood Problem

You work as a government inspector of hospitals and other health care facilities. Because of the dangers of diseases that can be transmitted through blood, all hospital employees in the United States are supposed to adhere strictly to the following rule:

“If you clean up spilled blood, you must wear rubber gloves.”

You are inspecting a hospital and need to know whether employees follow this rule. The following cards represent four incidents where a hospital employee was called upon to clean up a spilled substance. Side A of the card tells whether blood was among the spilled material, and Side B tells whether the employee wore gloves when cleaning up the spill.

For each incident, you are shown one side of the card but not the other. On the basis of this information, indicate whether you would definitely need to see the other side of the card to know if the rule had been violated in that instance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>blood was spilled</th>
<th>blood was not spilled</th>
<th>employee wore gloves</th>
<th>employee did not wear gloves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Class Scheduling Problem

You are choosing what courses you are going to take next semester. You have a morning part-time job that puts constraints on what classes you can take. Specifically, your schedule has to conform to the following rule:

“If a class meets on Monday or Wednesday, then it must be in the afternoon.”

The cards below represent four different classes that you might be interested in taking. Side A tells the day of the week that the course meets, while Side B tells whether the course meets in the morning or the afternoon.

For each class, you are shown one side of the card but not the other. On the basis of this information, indicate whether you would definitely need to see the other side of the card to know if the class conflicted with the rule above.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday &amp; Wednesday</th>
<th>Tuesday &amp; Thursday</th>
<th>Morning</th>
<th>Afternoon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>