



Instructor Guide: Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency

Laboratory implementation, theoretical foundations,
experimental evidence, and variants

Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab
Department of Economics



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<https://beer-lab.org/>

How to use this guide

This guide supports the preparation, implementation, and classroom discussion of the precedent, interpretation, and judicial consistency activity available through the Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab (BEER Lab) at the Department of Economics of Tecnológico de Monterrey. It is intended for instructors with different levels of familiarity with experimental and behavioral economics.

The document offers three reading paths. The **quick guide** is enough to launch a session. The operational chapters explain each screen used by instructors and students. The conceptual chapters present the theories, predictions, and empirical findings needed to lead the post-game discussion.

Access instructions and common screens are explained once. Each variant then focuses only on what changes relative to the basic game: configuration, group size, decisions, predictions, relevant outcomes, and academic literature.

Author

This guide was prepared by Stanislaw Maldonado, research professor in the Department of Economics at Tecnológico de Monterrey, Monterrey Campus. For questions or suggestions about its content, please contact the author at stanislao.maldonado@tec.mx.

For the instructor

This guide follows the English-language interface. Spanish configurations use the same logic. Never project individual codes or connect outcomes to names, student identification numbers, or seats in the room.

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Preparation and access

1.1 Family overview

Purpose	Examine reference following, consistency on repeated facts, and revision in an individual case battery.
Experimental unit	one person per case
Participants	Any positive count; individual decisions.
Suggested duration	20–40 minutes of play; 60–90 with discussion.
Basic edition	One file; ten-file battery in fixed or randomized order.
Extended edition	8 conditions, including the reference; ten cases.
Decision	precedent, interpretation, judicial consistency
Payoff	ECU per case; sum of active cases. See role-specific accounts.
Topics	precedent; interpretation; judicial consistency; anchoring; review
JEL	C91, K40, K41

1.2 Locate the activity and choose a comparison

Start at <https://beer-lab.org/en/> and select CLASSROOM in the top menu. This opens <https://teaching.beer-lab.org/en/>, where you can search for this activity by title and filter by topic or JEL code. The card distinguishes Español and English; Show extended version changes the edition. The directory language does not by itself determine the session language. Check the configuration name before creating a session and clear filters from an earlier search if the card is missing.

The stable address for this family is <https://precedent.beer-lab.org>. Participants enter through https://precedent.beer-lab.org/room/precedent_en; instructors prepare sessions through <https://precedent.beer-lab.org/demo> or <https://precedent.beer-lab.org/rooms>. The preview verified on this computer is <http://localhost:8213/demo>. A local address works only on the computer running it. Classroom use across several devices requires the institutional instance. If the card is not yet visible, its catalog integration remains to be completed. Do not substitute a similar family and thereby change the rules without noticing.

Distinguish four links. The room is the entry point shared with the class. The instructor panel selects configurations and creates sessions. An individual link identifies one specific participant slot and belongs to one person. The report belongs to that session and contains information reserved for the instructor. Sharing the panel is different from sharing the room: it can expose

administrative controls or outcomes that should still remain hidden.

Before inviting participants, define a question: which institution will you compare, and what outcome would be compatible with the proposed mechanism? Select the reference condition and one extension that changes the relevant dimension. Record what remains constant, how you will assign conditions, and when discussion begins. Changing several rules simultaneously can create an interesting class, but prevents attribution of the observed difference to just one rule. The extensions support several lessons; they need not all be run in a single meeting.

1.3 Prepare a usable session

The experimental unit in this family is one person per case. The roles are Decision maker. Prepare 1 slots per interactive unit where applicable, and check the requirement displayed by the creation form. Rematching needs several units for composition to change; with only one unit there is no alternative counterpart. In an individual activity, each student advances independently. Do not add artificial participants to a real session merely to complete groups: this changes both the experience and the data you intend to discuss.

Open a demonstration beforehand. Read the instructions from every role and solve one numerical example by hand. Check the reference balance, resources already committed, transfers, and costs that consume resources. A starting figure of 100 ECU does not imply that everyone can spend 100 on every decision. Some games subtract a loss or an invested claim before choices occur. Final payment appears at case completion and accumulated payment adds all active cases. This guide explains how to reconstruct those values independently of the results screen.

ECU means Experimental Currency Units. They are the activity's accounting unit, not an automatic equivalence with pesos or dollars. This delivery does not announce a cash conversion. If the laboratory organizes a paid session, agree and communicate the exchange rate and payment rule beforehand. Do not associate higher earnings with a better grade: maximizing points and producing a well-supported academic explanation are different objects of assessment.

Allow time for reading and private questions. Check that each device can enter the room and that participants do not share an individual link. Project only public instructions. A student viewing a private file should not display it to the entire class. Prepare an alternative for someone who does not participate: they can examine aggregated outcomes after the activity and solve the same conceptual exercise without receiving private information during decisions.

For the instructor

Before starting, confirm title, language, edition, number of cases, and participant count. Demo and Rooms must contain only this family's configurations and four rooms. If another game appears, consult laboratory coordination before starting. Correct filtering protects both the instructions and subsequent downloads.

1.4 Accompany the participant sequence

The welcome page introduces the laboratory and its rules: decide privately, remain silent, and seek assistance without communicating decisions. Instructions, the session's specific condition, and comprehension questions follow. These questions check resources, number of cases, ECU meaning, and a central mechanism. An incorrect answer produces a corrective explanation. Ask the student to identify the relevant rule before submitting again; do not treat that error as evidence about preferences or strategy.

After comprehension, the case page identifies position and period. Decision pages appear when that role must act. In interactive games, waiting pages allow the program to collect the information required before advancing. Waiting does not reveal another person's decision and does not mean a choice was rejected. The individual activity has no synchronization between participants. The instructor should distinguish expected synchronization from a connectivity problem.

Case results show payments and accounting components. The closing page states that the activity is finished and asks participants to remain there. Do not launch another session in the same tab until discussion has ended or data have been saved. If a student finishes early, request silence. Comments about offers, votes, or losses can affect people who are still deciding, particularly in repeated versions.

What participants will see

Each person receives the information needed for their own role. A screen can display a private balance or file that other positions do not know. Instructor assistance should clarify what a rule means without recommending an option or revealing what happened in another unit.

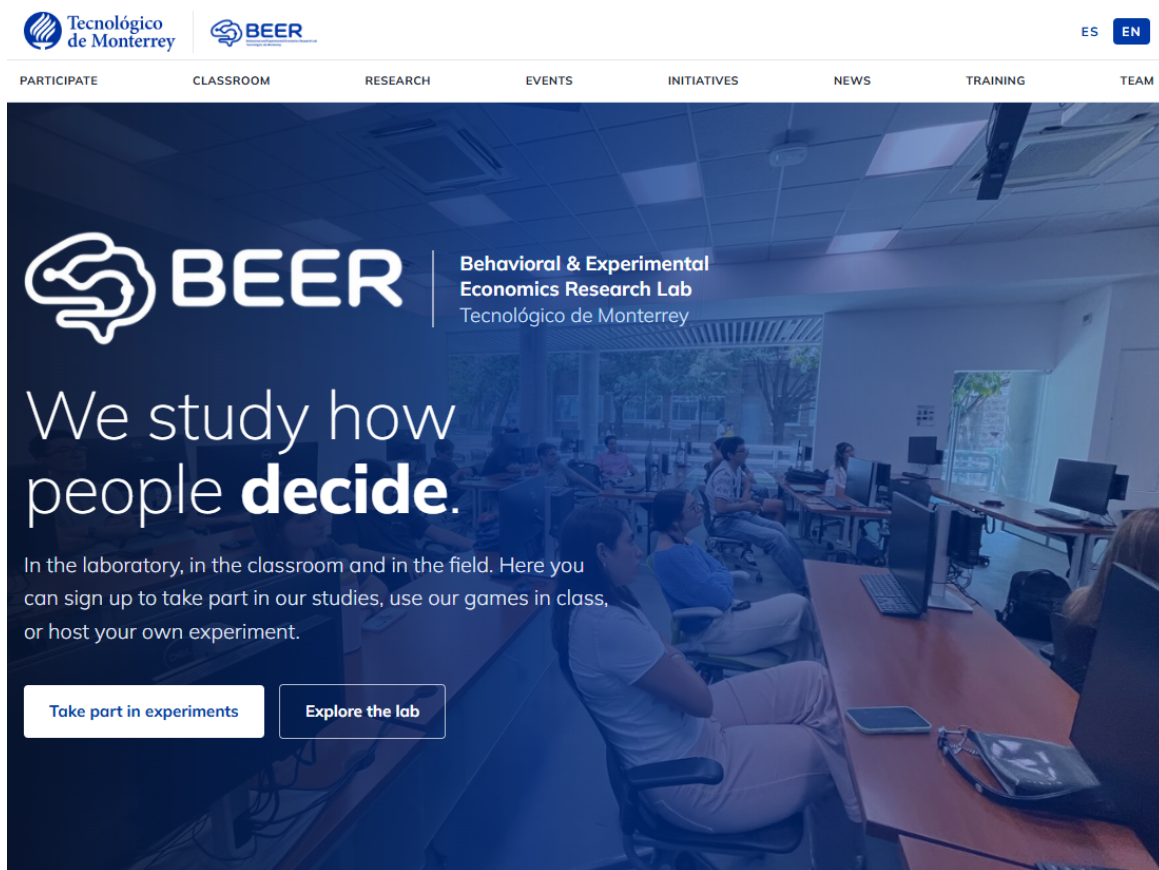


Figure 1.1: Current institutional navigation: select CLASSROOM to open classroom experiments.

The screenshot displays the BEER Lab website interface. At the top, there are logos for 'Tecnológico de Monterrey' and 'BEER'. To the right, there are language selection buttons for 'ES' and 'EN', with 'EN' being the active selection. Below the logos is a horizontal navigation bar with the following links: PARTICIPATE, CLASSROOM (which is underlined), RESEARCH, EVENTS, INITIATIVES, NEWS, TRAINING, and TEAM.

The main content area features a large blue-tinted image of a classroom. Overlaid on this image is the text 'INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS' in small white capital letters, followed by 'Classroom experiments' in a large white font. Below this, a paragraph reads: 'Experimental economics games for classroom activities and discussion. Open the game your instructor tells you.' Further down, there is a line of text: 'Instructors: how to use these games in class or propose a new one → [instructor guide](#)' and another line: 'Lab research: beer-lab.org/en/research'.

Below the main content area is a search bar with the placeholder text 'Search by title, topic, keyword or JEL code...'. Under the search bar are two dropdown menus labeled 'Topic' and 'JEL code'. To the right of these menus, it says '103 games'.

Below the search bar, there are two columns of game descriptions. The left column is titled 'Electoral Accountability and Political Selection' and describes a game about officeholder behavior. The right column is titled 'Aggregate Demand and Aggregate Supply' and describes a game about spending choices and equilibrium.

Figure 1.2: Current institutional navigation: search by title, topic, or JEL code and confirm language and edition.

oTree Demo Sessions Rooms Data Server Check Logout

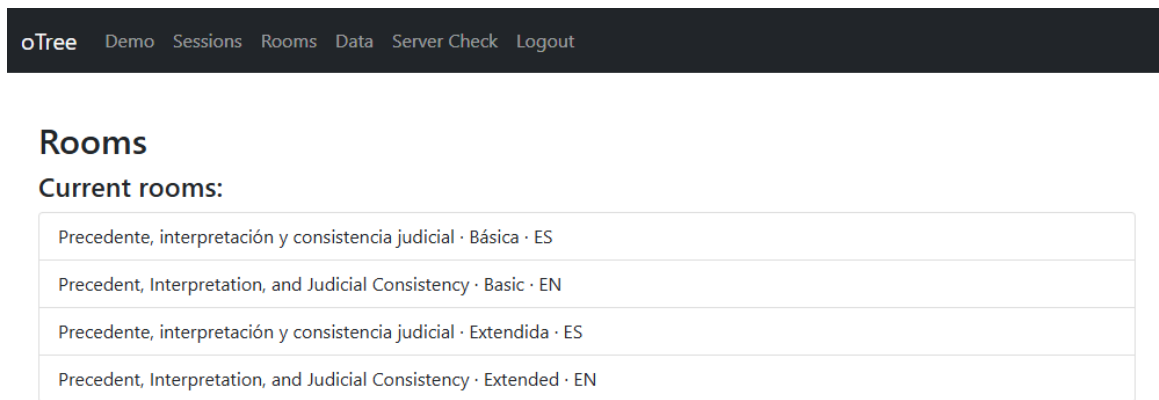
Demo

Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Básica · ES · Un caso
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Básica · ES · Diez casos · Participantes estables / orden fijo
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Básica · ES · Diez casos · Batería en orden aleatorio
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Basic · EN · One case
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Basic · EN · Ten cases · Stable participants / fixed order
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Basic · EN · Ten cases · Battery in random order
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Referencia vinculante
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Referencia orientativa
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Decisión inferior contradictoria
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Solicitud de monto bajo
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Solicitud de monto alto
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Declaración de razones
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Oportunidad de revisión
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES · Expedientes sin etiquetas
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Binding reference
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Advisory reference
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Conflicting lower decision
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Low requested amount
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · High requested amount
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Stated reasons
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Opportunity for review
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN · Files without labels

Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial / Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency — BEER Lab

Selecione una variante de este juego. Select a version of this game.

Figure 1.3: Demo lists this family’s configurations. Confirm language, edition, and horizon before creating a session.



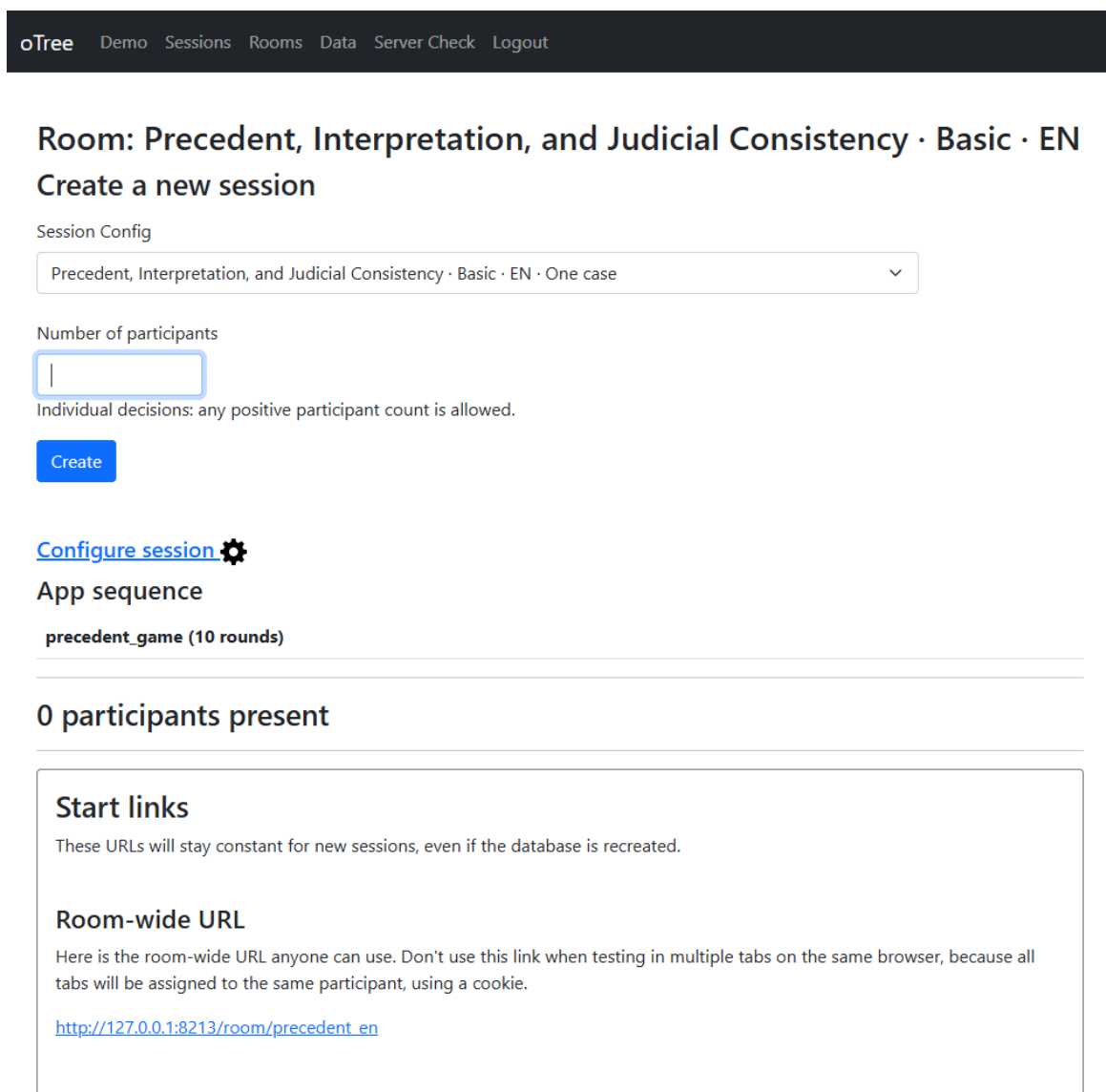
oTree Demo Sessions Rooms Data Server Check Logout

Rooms

Current rooms:

Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Básica · ES
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Basic · EN
Precedente, interpretación y consistencia judicial · Extendida · ES
Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Extended · EN

Figure 1.4: Four rooms distinguish language and edition; share only the room corresponding to the session.



oTree Demo Sessions Rooms Data Server Check Logout

Room: Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Basic · EN

Create a new session

Session Config

Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency · Basic · EN · One case

Number of participants

Individual decisions: any positive participant count is allowed.

Create

[Configure session](#) ⚙️

App sequence

precedent_game (10 rounds)

0 participants present

Start links

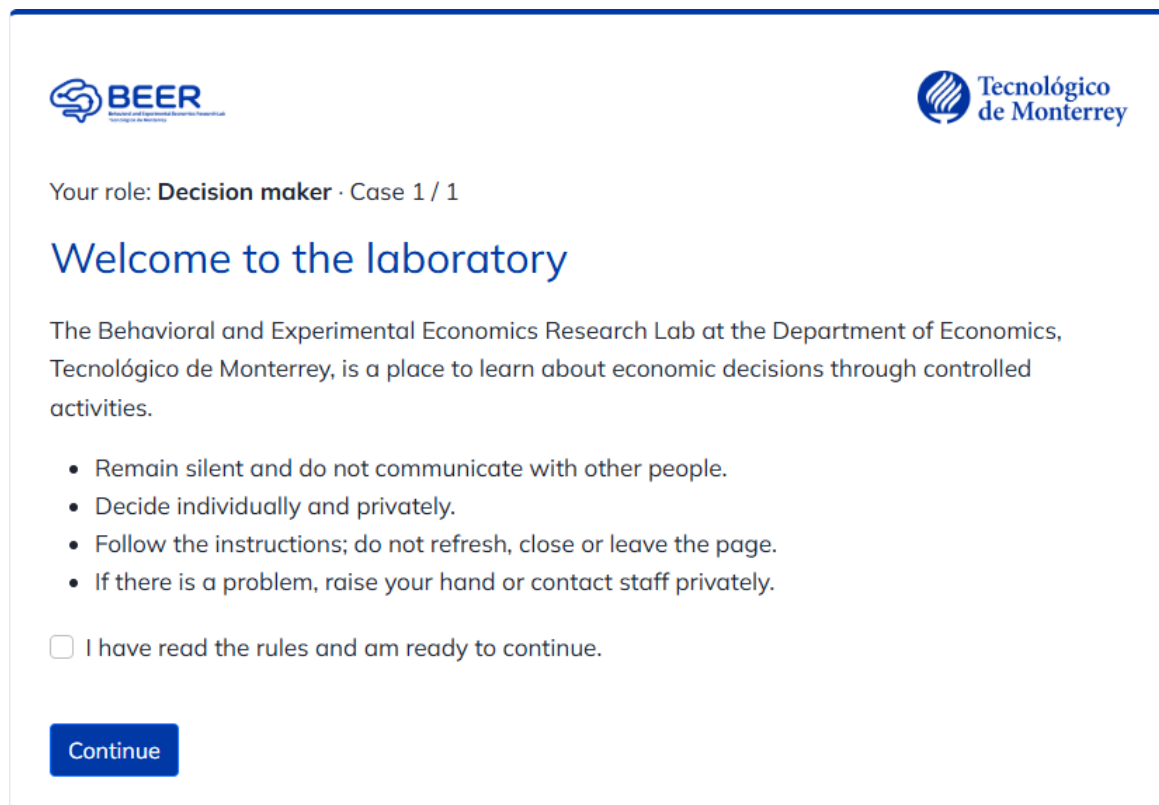
These URLs will stay constant for new sessions, even if the database is recreated.

Room-wide URL

Here is the room-wide URL anyone can use. Don't use this link when testing in multiple tabs on the same browser, because all tabs will be assigned to the same participant, using a cookie.

http://127.0.0.1:8213/room/precedent_en

Figure 1.5: Instructor form: check participant count and configuration before creating.



BEER
Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab
Tecnológico de Monterrey

Tecnológico de Monterrey

Your role: **Decision maker** · Case 1 / 1

Welcome to the laboratory

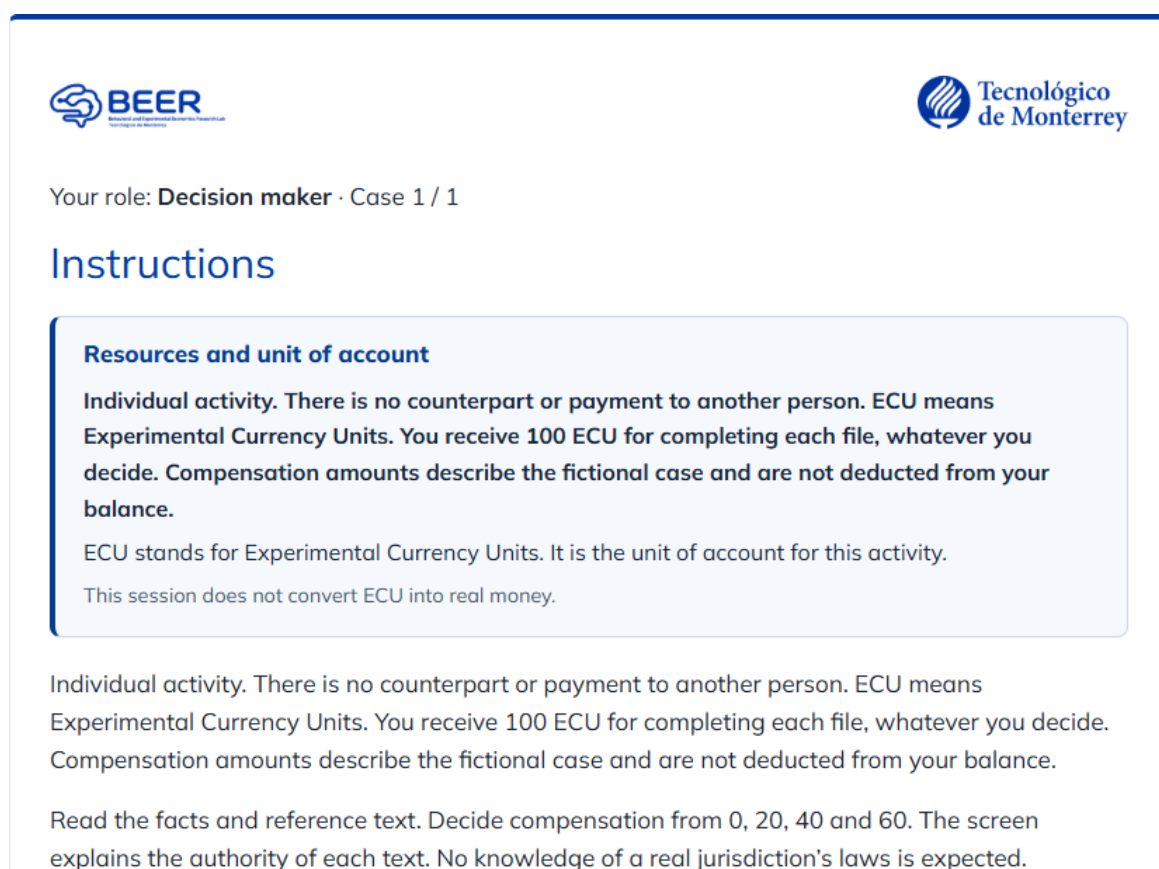
The Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab at the Department of Economics, Tecnológico de Monterrey, is a place to learn about economic decisions through controlled activities.

- Remain silent and do not communicate with other people.
- Decide individually and privately.
- Follow the instructions; do not refresh, close or leave the page.
- If there is a problem, raise your hand or contact staff privately.

☐ I have read the rules and am ready to continue.

Continue

Figure 1.6: The welcome page introduces the laboratory and private-decision rules.



BEER
Behavioral and Experimental Economics Research Lab
Tecnológico de Monterrey

Tecnológico de Monterrey

Your role: **Decision maker** · Case 1 / 1

Instructions

Resources and unit of account

Individual activity. There is no counterpart or payment to another person. ECU means Experimental Currency Units. You receive 100 ECU for completing each file, whatever you decide. Compensation amounts describe the fictional case and are not deducted from your balance.

ECU stands for Experimental Currency Units. It is the unit of account for this activity.

This session does not convert ECU into real money.

Individual activity. There is no counterpart or payment to another person. ECU means Experimental Currency Units. You receive 100 ECU for completing each file, whatever you decide. Compensation amounts describe the fictional case and are not deducted from your balance.

Read the facts and reference text. Decide compensation from 0, 20, 40 and 60. The screen explains the authority of each text. No knowledge of a real jurisdiction's laws is expected.

Figure 1.7: Actual instructions: identify resources, costs, and the session rule before starting. (1/2)

When asked for a reason, choose the one that best describes your decision. It is your statement, not verification of your reasoning. When review is available, a text check appears before your final decision.

The battery includes files with repeated relevant facts and different labels. Under fixed order everyone follows the same sequence; under random order each person receives a saved permutation of the same ten files.

At the end your decision and fixed payment are shown. The instructor may compare distributions and decisions on identical facts. Academic grading does not depend on selecting a particular amount.

Specific rule for this session

The announced reference text is binding for the fictional case.

Number of cases: 1 · Stable participants / fixed order

Each case begins with the described resources. Final payment sums all active cases.

Continue

Figure 1.8: Actual instructions: identify resources, costs, and the session rule before starting. (2/2)



Your role: **Decision maker** · Case 1 / 1

Check the rules

Resources and unit of account

ECU stands for Experimental Currency Units. It is the unit of account for this activity.

This session does not convert ECU into real money.

What is the individual reference balance before claims, losses or decisions?

101

Your answer: 101. The correct answer is 100. The reference balance before losses, claims or decisions is 100 ECU. Adjustments are explained separately.

How many cases are included in this session?

Figure 1.9: An incorrect answer receives an explanation. Address understanding before interpreting choices. (1/2)

2

Your answer: 2. The correct answer is 1. This session contains 1 case(s); this is not group size.

What does ECU mean?

An academic grade

Your answer: An academic grade. The correct answer is Experimental Currency Units. ECU means Experimental Currency Units. No conversion to real money is announced.

Choosing different compensation changes your fixed payment.

True

Your answer: True. The correct answer is False. Compensation describes the case; payment for completing it is fixed.

Continue

Figure 1.10: An incorrect answer receives an explanation. Address understanding before interpreting choices. (2/2)

Precedent and interpretation as an individual activity

2.1 What is observed and why there are no groups

This activity examines how one person applies a reference text to fictional case files. There is no strategic counterpart, bargaining, or payment dependent on other students' choices. The unit is a person resolving a case. A battery contains several cases completed by that same person, so those responses are related. Absence of interaction is a design property, not an incomplete version of a paired game.

The teaching objective is to distinguish following a reference, consistency across comparable cases, and revision of a decision. These are different concepts. Someone may depart from a rule consistently, apply it accurately in some cases but not others, or change after receiving a textual check. None of these properties alone describes a judge's professional competence. Participants solve a stylized task in which all relevant information is announced.

Chosen compensation is not transferred to another person. Each completed file pays 100 ECU regardless of the answer. Harm and compensation figures describe the imaginary case; they do not reduce the student's balance. Completing ten files yields 1,000 ECU. This structure avoids creating a monetary reward for obeying a response and then interpreting compliance as an unprompted preference for precedent.

2.2 The rule and case battery

The text specifies a threshold: established harm of at least 50 implies reference compensation 40; below 50, compensation is zero. Available decisions are 0, 20, 40, and 60. Battery harms are 20, 65, 45, 80, and 55, each presented twice with different labels. Participants are not asked to calculate compensation proportional to harm. The discontinuity at 50 is part of the announced fictional rule.

With harm 20, literal application gives zero. With harm 65, it gives 40. With harm 45, zero still applies despite proximity to the threshold. Harms 80 and 55 both imply 40. Compensation therefore does not rank every file by harm intensity; it groups cases on either side of the rule. Choosing 20 may seem like a compromise but is not what literal application of the text returns.

Under fixed order, everyone receives the same sequence. Under randomized order, each person receives a stored permutation of the same ten files. Cases are not sampled with replacement: every battery item appears exactly once. This permits comparison of responses to the same facts without confounding order changes with changes in case composition.

The one-file basic version suits familiarization or a short demonstration. The fixed battery supports discussion of consistency across repeated facts. The randomized battery illustrates how presentation order may affect interpretation. Fixed partners and rematching are not appropriate labels because nobody interacts with a partner. Students can finish at different times without preventing others from advancing.

2.3 Following a reference does not resolve every legal controversy

In the basic condition, the fictional court declares the reference binding. The distance measure compares chosen compensation with the value announced by that text. If the reference is 40 and someone chooses 60, distance is 20; choosing zero gives distance 40. Zero distance indicates agreement with this activity's rule. It does not establish universally correct legal interpretation or superior ethical judgment.

Actual rules can involve open-ended concepts, contested facts, conflicting authorities, and exceptions. This activity removes much of that complexity to observe a precise relationship between text and decision. Simplification is useful when it remains explicit. At closure, ask which additional information would be needed to transfer the reasoning to a real case and which measures would cease to be sufficient.

Theoretical foundation

Consistency across two files means choosing the same compensation when their announced relevant facts match. Agreement with the reference means selecting the amount implied by the text. Someone choosing 20 in both files with harm 65 is consistent across cases but departs by 20 from the reference in each.

2.4 A complete indicator example

Suppose a person resolves two files with harm 65, choosing 20 first and 40 second. Mean compensation is 30. The reference is 40 in both, so absolute distances are 20 and zero, averaging 10. The pair is inconsistent because decisions differ. Accumulated payment is 200 regardless of these measures.

Another person chooses 60 in both. Mean compensation is 60, mean distance is 20, and the pair is consistent. Looking only at consistency would make this person equivalent to someone choosing 40 twice. Looking only at average compensation would conceal within-person variation. The report therefore supplies complementary indicators rather than pretending one number summarizes every dimension.

Authority, information, and review

3.1 Advisory reference

The reference changes from binding to advisory, and departure is expressly permitted. Facts, options, and payment remain unchanged. The comparison concerns announced authority, not the cost of disobedience. No condition imposes a fine for departing. Every available compensation produces the same monetary income, so monetary theory alone does not determine the selected amount.

Examine compensation distributions and distance from the text. In this condition, positive distance should not be called noncompliance because departure is allowed. The same numerical measure has a different institutional interpretation. Ask whether the reference is used as information, a coordination device, or an obligation, while recognizing that a single response does not identify which motivation operated.

3.2 A conflicting lower-level decision

An earlier lower-level decision awarding 60 in a similar case is introduced. The announced hierarchy prioritizes the higher court's text. The literal reference therefore remains zero or 40 depending on harm. Another number can attract attention or create confusion without changing the rule declared applicable to the task.

Compare selection of 60 against the basic condition within each harm level. An increase is compatible with influence from the lower decision but also with misunderstanding the hierarchy. Distinguishing these explanations would require specific comprehension measurement or separate variation of rank and amount. The extension does not assert that real legal hierarchies are this simple or that every prior decision should be followed mechanically.

3.3 Low and high requested amounts

One party requests either 10 or 90 while established harm and the reference text remain constant. Those figures do not create additional compensation options: choices remain 0, 20, 40, and 60. The contrast asks whether a number without normative authority shifts choices within the available set. A difference is compatible with anchoring, after ruling out differences in cases or instructions.

Anchoring describes possible dependence on an initial number; it does not require copying that number exactly. Nobody choosing 90 cannot refute anchoring because 90 is unavailable. Compare means and distributions conditional on harm. A response based on the reference should remain

unchanged when only the requested amount changes. There is no subsequent negotiation and the requesting party cannot revise its demand.

3.4 Stated reasons

After selecting compensation, participants choose a reason: application of the text, distinguishing the facts, or departure from the reference. This is a subsequent statement, not direct observation of a mental process. Selecting a reason changes neither payment nor the chosen amount. The sequence permits comparison between a decision and its justification without confusing a label with outcome revision.

If someone selects application of the text while choosing an amount different from the reference, there is a descriptive discrepancy worth discussing. It does not establish deception: the threshold or reason label may have been misunderstood. Likewise, an apparently suitable reason does not prove that reasoning caused the decision. Distinguish an outcome, a reported explanation, and evidence about the process connecting them.

3.5 Opportunity for review

After the initial choice, a literal check of the text appears and a final decision is recorded. The participant can retain or change compensation. The report calculates distance using the final decision and records whether it differs from the initial choice. Both are retained in the export for analysis of change direction and size. Payment remains fixed.

Suppose harm is 45, initial compensation 20, and final compensation zero. Review reduces distance from 20 to zero, and the change indicator equals one. If the initial decision was zero and final decision 20, the change indicator also equals one, but distance increases. Revision frequency is therefore not improvement frequency. Evaluate agreement with the text by comparing initial and final distances, not merely counting changes.

3.6 Files without labels

File-identifying letters are hidden while facts and the reference remain. Repeated harm values still permit recognition of equivalent cases. The intervention removes a superficial label, not every possibility of memory or recognition. It is not anonymization of actual people: those letters never identified students or real litigants.

Compare paired consistency and distributions by harm with the basic battery. If consistency changes, propose hypotheses about attention to facts, memory, or use of labels. The activity records neither eye movements nor recall, so it cannot directly discriminate among those mechanisms. Its value is showing that a precise visual manipulation requires an equally precise description of what was removed.

Critical reading of evidence and outcomes

4.1 Relationship to research on judges

Spamann and coauthors published *Judges in the Lab: No Precedent Effects, No Common/Civil Law Differences* in *Journal of Legal Analysis*, volume 13, pages 110–126, in 2021. The study examines judges' decisions under variations in precedent and other file elements. It motivates observing actual use of references instead of inferring behavior solely from doctrinal descriptions.

This activity is much simpler: students, one threshold rule, four choices, and fixed payment. It does not reproduce the materials, sample, or professional complexity of that study. Its extensions teach distinctions among authority, requested amounts, reasons, and review. A null classroom difference does not automatically confirm the article; a difference does not refute it. Populations, interventions, and measures must be comparable before drawing either conclusion.

4.2 Consistency and sample size

The battery contains five pairs of repeated facts per person. A pair enters the consistency rate only when both final decisions are complete. Its denominator is eligible pairs, not cases or students. During an incomplete session, someone can have completed several files without yet contributing a pair.

A class of twenty people completing ten cases produces 200 case observations and 100 comparable pairs. It does not produce 200 independent decision makers. For conditions assigned by person, the assignment unit remains the person. Round tables describe sequence positions. Under randomized order, harm composition can vary across rounds, so a trend in mean compensation does not itself establish learning.

4.3 Exercise: identical averages, different behavior

Two students resolve two cases with reference 40. The first chooses 20 and 60; the second chooses 40 and 40. Both average 40. The first has mean distance 20 and is inconsistent; the second has zero distance and is consistent. Average compensation agrees with the rule for both, but only one followed it in every decision.

Ask students to draw the distributions. One has observations on either side of 40; the other concentrates at 40. This explains why histograms accompany means. It also shows that averaging

before computing distance can hide offsetting deviations. The report computes absolute distance case by case and only then takes the average.

4.4 Exercise: order and composition

Suppose the first position in randomized batteries contains mostly harm-20 cases and the second mostly harm-80 cases. Even perfect reference following raises average compensation between those positions. The correct interpretation is changed case composition, not necessarily learning or generosity. To examine individual change, compare identical facts or account for composition.

Construct a table with the five harm values as rows and fixed versus randomized order as columns. In every cell report number of decisions, mean compensation, and mean distance. Then compare paired consistency within person. This combination helps distinguish composition differences from different responses to equivalent facts. With small cells, display counts and avoid conclusions resting on apparently precise percentages.

4.5 Exercise: reasons and review

A participant chooses 60 with harm 65 and declares application of the text. Point out that the announced reference gives 40 and ask them to reconstruct the interpretation. Accusing them of moral inconsistency is unwarranted. If someone in the review condition changes 60 to 40 after seeing the check, distance falls by 20 and change equals one. These variables describe revision but do not directly measure how much was understood.

For a final assignment, design a comparison separating ignorance of the text from deliberate departure. One possibility asks what the rule literally implies before requesting a personal decision. The answer should acknowledge that the preliminary question may influence the later choice. Measuring a mechanism can change it; elicitation order is part of the design.

4.6 Advanced exercise: distinguish a norm from an incentive

The reference is binding in the baseline instruction, yet no monetary penalty follows departure. Thus its force in this activity is instructional and normative rather than pecuniary. A student maximizing only experimental money is indifferent among all four amounts. A student who values following a stated institutional rule can prefer the reference answer even though earnings do not change. Both descriptions are logically possible under the payment structure.

Ask how the design would change if a bonus rewarded matching the reference. Agreement could increase, but the result would then combine the effects of authority and money. A two-factor experiment could separately vary binding language and the bonus. Students should specify four conditions and explain why comparing only binding-with-bonus against advisory-without-bonus cannot isolate either factor. This extends the lesson from interpreting choices to designing informative institutional comparisons.

4.7 Advanced exercise: revise a measurement proposal

A proposed report defines consistency as average compensation equal to average reference compensation. Reject that definition using the example of 20 and 60 around a reference of 40. Then propose two separate measures: the proportion of identical-fact pairs receiving identical decisions,

and average absolute case-level distance from the text. Explain why both are needed and which unfinished cases should be excluded from each denominator.

Next consider someone who chooses 20 in every file. They are perfectly consistent within each repeated-harm pair, yet do not distinguish cases on either side of the threshold. A broader responsiveness measure could compare decisions across different harms. The current report does not label within-pair consistency as full legal coherence; its name and denominator are intentionally narrow. Good measurement begins with matching a statistic to the concept it actually observes.

4.8 Conceptual closure

Consistency, reference following, and revision require different observable definitions. An institution may value all three, but they are not interchangeable. Classroom decisions provide practice constructing those measures, identifying denominators, and designing comparisons. Claims about actual courts would require richer files, relevant samples, and an external-validity argument that this activity does not attempt to replace.

4.9 Reference operating rules

The following record collects the effective basic-condition instructions. Use it to check that demonstration accounts match the worked examples. The preceding extensions explain condition-specific changes.

Individual activity. There is no counterpart or payment to another person. ECU means Experimental Currency Units. You receive 100 ECU for completing each file, whatever you decide. Compensation amounts describe the fictional case and are not deducted from your balance.

Read the facts and reference text. Decide compensation from 0, 20, 40 and 60. The screen explains the authority of each text. No knowledge of a real jurisdiction's laws is expected.

When asked for a reason, choose the one that best describes your decision. It is your statement, not verification of your reasoning. When review is available, a text check appears before your final decision.

The battery includes files with repeated relevant facts and different labels. Under fixed order everyone follows the same sequence; under random order each person receives a saved permutation of the same ten files.

At the end your decision and fixed payment are shown. The instructor may compare distributions and decisions on identical facts. Academic grading does not depend on selecting a particular amount.



Your role: **Decision maker** · Case 1 / 1

Resolving a case

Fictional file A. Established harm: 20.

Reference text: when established harm reaches 50, compensation is 40; below 50 it is zero.

The court instruction for this activity establishes that the reference is binding.

Compensation you decide

Continue

Figure 4.1: Decision for Decision maker. Check the information and options available to this position.



Your role: **Decision maker** · Case 1 / 1

Case outcome

Your payment for this case: 100 ECU

Payments by role

Decision maker	100 ECU
----------------	---------

Case outcome

Decided compensation	0
Text benchmark	0
Distance from text benchmark	0
Revised decision	0
Harm	20

Accounts and components

Completion payment	100 ECU
--------------------	---------

Continue

Figure 4.2: Case result: reconstruct the payoff before moving to the next file.

Reading outcomes and designing discussion

5.1 Begin with the unit and denominator

Open the report for the session that was actually used. Before revealing results, check completed cases, the possible total, and pending cases. The report observation is one case of the experimental unit, not every individual row in the participant file. When several people share a group outcome, recording that outcome for each member does not create independent realizations. This distinction matters for percentages, graphs, and any subsequent analysis.

The report starts hidden. Reveal aggregates after the decisions you intend to compare are complete, and hide them again when reviewing administrative information. Hiding controls the instructor's projection; it does not replace private access to the panel. First ask for a literal description of what happened: number of units, frequency of an outcome, and dispersion. Introduce the economic explanation afterward. This order discourages students from selecting only observations that fit an announced prediction.

Means summarize outcomes but do not describe the entire distribution. Two groups can have the same average payoff and very different inequality. A histogram reveals concentrations, extremes, or absence of variation. Each bar reports the count and share of completed cases taking that value. If everyone chose the same option, the distribution is concentrated; the chart is not broken. With few cases, large differences between bars can arise from chance or one decision.

Role tables show the mean, median, and number of completed payments. The median is the middle ordered payoff; the mean is their sum divided by the number of observations. A large difference between the two is a reason to examine extremes before describing a typical participant. Colors identify positions in the activity, not types of people. Do not use a color or label to attribute moral dispositions to particular students.

Evolution by case shows changes during the session. A slope does not establish learning: it can also reflect different realizations, adaptation to counterparts, fatigue, or presentation order. Repeated observations with fixed groups share people and history. Under rematching, people continue accumulating experience even when group membership changes. To compare formats, retain period and configuration, and avoid treating every row as an independent observation.

Feedback script

First describe a number and its denominator. Then reconstruct a rule that could produce it. Finally propose an alternative explanation and a comparison that could distinguish the two. A convincing explanation connects information, choice, and outcome; naming a bias is insufficient.

5.2 Move from observation to a defensible claim

A reference prediction states what particular assumptions would produce. It may require knowledge of the rules, accurate calculation, exclusive concern for personal earnings, and a specified attitude toward risk. If behavior differs, do not immediately conclude that students are irrational. First check whether the prediction uses the actual parameters, whether decisions depended on private information, and whether several responses were compatible with the same criterion.

Separate three levels of claim. An observation summarizes the session: for example, a certain share selected an option. A compatible mechanism explains how incentives or information could produce that choice. A causal conclusion needs a comparison that attributes the change to a rule while excluding relevant alternatives. Classroom sessions often support the first two levels well. The third requires planning assignment, sample size, and incident handling before seeing outcomes.

Do not exclude a unit because it contradicts the theory. Record technical problems or documented departures from instructions and apply criteria established beforehand. Keep a table of excluded cases and reasons. An unexpected decision remains a valid observation when the person understood the task and acted within available options. Comprehension questions improve the activity but do not exhaustively measure understanding, attention, or effort.

5.3 A sixty-minute lesson

Use the first eight minutes to introduce the institutional question without announcing a desirable answer. Allow ten minutes for reading, questions, and comprehension. Reserve fifteen minutes for the basic activity; actual duration depends on its turns and the class's experience. Spend ten minutes reconstructing an outcome with the accounting rules, twelve contrasting an extension, and five on an individual closing response. If the sequence takes longer, reduce the number of conditions rather than the time needed to understand them.

In a ninety-minute lesson, you can run two comparable sessions and reserve twenty minutes for joint discussion. If the same people complete both, alternate condition order across groups when feasible. If that is impossible, explicitly state that the second condition occurs after learning the first. Do not call the difference a pure institutional effect. Repetition offers an opportunity to teach why order matters in an experiment.

A short assessment can request three products: a correct calculation, a prediction with assumptions, and a limitation of inference. Award credit for identifying a condition under which the prediction would change. Do not grade earnings or agreement with the instructor's opinion. For advanced work, request a small alternative design that changes one rule and specifies an outcome capable of distinguishing two explanations.

5.4 A workshop for reconstructing the export

Begin with a verifiable task: reconstruct one completed case from decisions without looking at the computed payment. In the custom export, locate session, participant, round, and group. Completion indicates whether an outcome exists; phase identifies the last transition reached. Choices are stored in fields numbered by stage. Their meaning depends on role and condition, so the same technical field does not necessarily represent the same question for everyone.

The state field retains a structured record of information, aggregate choices, payments, and accounts. These components trace the program's causal sequence: initial situation, action, institutional rule, and outcome. For spreadsheet analysis, convert components into columns while retaining the untouched original. Avoid text replacements that remove commas or minus signs without distinguishing values from structure. Conversion must preserve numbers, missing values, and position-specific payment lists.

Select a second unit with a different outcome and repeat the reconstruction. The contrast helps locate whether differences arise from choices, a random draw, or an institutional rule. In a programming exercise, a useful check independently verifies a resource identity. A test copying the same payment formula under a different name can reproduce the same mistake and is not an independent accounting check.

5.5 What synthetic data contribute

The analysis folder includes synthetic cases generated under each condition's rules. They support practice importing records, making tables, and verifying accounts. Preserve the synthetic-data label in every derived chart or file. Simulated choices do not represent a student population and are not calibrated to reproduce an empirical frequency. A condition generating more agreements or votes in this file is not an experimentally validated behavioral prediction.

Use synthetic data to examine operation: possible values, balanced accounts, fields changing across conditions, and observation structure. Use classroom data to describe behavior actually observed, subject to assignment and sample-size limitations. Keeping these sources separate prevents a software example from accidentally becoming evidence about human preferences. Students should be able to explain which parts of a synthetic outcome were generated by choices and which follow mechanically from the institution.

5.6 Plan a comparison before seeing results

Write a hypothesis identifying the reference condition, extension, primary outcome, and expected direction under explicit assumptions. Add a secondary outcome capable of revealing an intervention's cost. An institution can improve the metric it rewards while worsening one it ignores. Specifying both in advance makes discussion less dependent on whichever number looked most striking afterward.

Also record assignment. If one classroom group receives one condition and another group receives another, experience or understanding can vary alongside treatment. With random assignment, preserve the unit assigned and do not artificially multiply sample size through rounds or group members. With a before-and-after design using the same people, recognize learning and order as alternative explanations. These choices matter even when teaching is the main objective.

5.7 A short analysis deliverable

Request one page containing a question, a small table, a distribution plot, and an interpretation paragraph. The table should state the unit and number of complete cases; plots should preserve a common scale across conditions. Separate observed outcomes, a compatible mechanism, and a limitation in the paragraph. An excellent answer can find little difference and explain why the design or sample does not establish equivalence.

Keep a minimal implementation record containing configuration, language, horizon, participant count, and incidents. A screenshot of a plot without these rules is insufficient for reproduction. There is no need to present infrastructure or commands during feedback. The purpose is for students to explain how decisions become outcomes and which comparison supports each claim. Encourage them to report one observation that would weaken their preferred explanation, making the analysis open to disagreement rather than a search for confirmation.

5.8 Construct comparable pairs

Sort decisions by person and harm while retaining round, label, and treatment. Every harm value appears twice in a complete battery. Form a pair only when both final decisions exist. Pairing two different people because they saw the same harm would measure agreement between decision makers, not one person's consistency. Pairing by round in randomized batteries would also be incorrect because content can differ across people.

Create an indicator equal to one when the two compensations match and zero when they differ. The report averages it over complete pairs. A second column could record absolute difference between the two decisions, distinguishing a change of 20 from one of 60 even though both count as binary inconsistency. The implemented binary measure supports classroom interpretation; the export permits the magnitude measure as an additional exercise.

5.9 Within-person and between-person differences

Suppose one student always chooses zero with harm 65 and another always chooses 40. Each is consistent across their two cases, but they disagree with each other. Individual consistency can therefore be high alongside collective disagreement. Averaging all four choices gives 20, an answer nobody selected. A group mean should not automatically be described as the decision of a representative participant.

The institutional question determines which comparison matters. Predictability before one decision maker may depend on individual stability. Similar treatment across offices may depend on agreement across decision makers. Compliance with a binding instruction may depend on distance from its text. The report implements specific measures rather than deciding which objective a judicial institution should prioritize. State the objective before selecting its indicator.

5.10 Separate change from improvement

For review, construct a cross-tabulation of initial and final decisions. The diagonal contains retained answers; off-diagonal cells contain changes. Add the reference corresponding to each harm to classify movements as reducing, maintaining, or increasing distance. Moving from zero to 20 reduces distance when the reference is 40 but increases it when the reference is zero. Numerical direction alone has no case-independent interpretation.

The review condition supplies both a textual check and another opportunity to choose. Increased agreement cannot automatically be attributed solely to the check rather than reconsideration. A richer study could add a second decision without feedback as a control. That comparison is not one of the supplied configurations. It is a proposal for discussing identification, not a treatment instructors should assume is already available.

5.11 Requested amounts and authority are different factors

A high party request and a lower-authority decision can both display large numbers but carry different institutional status. Comparing them does not isolate only the number's effect. A request has no normative force within this task; a lower decision resembles a precedent even though the announced hierarchy prevents it from prevailing. Describe content and authority before applying one behavioral label to both conditions.

For a cleaner requested-amount comparison, use low and high requests with identical facts. Calculate compensation within each harm and then average using equal weights on harm categories. If an incomplete session contains more high-harm files in one condition, its raw difference can be compositional. A complete battery avoids that imbalance within person, but partial comparisons still require attention.

5.12 Interpret null differences

If almost everyone follows the reference, little room remains to detect further agreement. This descriptive ceiling effect does not prove that authority or requests never matter. If few people change after review, check how many initial answers already matched the text. The denominator for an opportunity to correct may be much smaller than the total number of files.

A null pattern can also arise from few participants, discrete choices, or a weak manipulation. This activity does not estimate statistical power for a judicial population. Ask what difference would be substantively important and what sample might detect it. No visible difference in a classroom chart does not establish equivalence between conditions, nor does it prove that every participant ignored the manipulated information.

5.13 Assess learning separately from choices

A good short response solves a new case, constructs a pair that is consistent but distant from the text, and distinguishes beneficial from unfavorable revision. Harm 50 is a useful exercise: reaching the threshold exactly implies compensation 40. That value is absent from the published battery, so students must understand the inequality rather than memorize the five observed cases.

Grade reasoning and clarity of assumptions, not compensation selected during the activity. Someone who departed can later explain the rule correctly; someone who agreed may have done so by chance. This separation preserves the teaching value of choices and avoids retrospectively turning fixed payment into an undisclosed academic incentive to select the instructor's preferred answer.

5.14 Report a result without overclaiming

Consider the statement that randomized order made students more legally consistent. To assess it, request the paired-consistency numerator and denominator, the number of independently

assigned people, and the corresponding fixed-order result. Then ask whether harm composition was complete, whether different groups received different instructions, and whether the difference concerns within-person consistency or reference agreement. These questions turn a broad claim into a set of observable comparisons.

A defensible conclusion might instead state that this class displayed a higher share of matching paired decisions under randomized order, while the small number of people and assignment method limit attribution. That wording preserves the observed pattern without treating students as a sample of professional judges. It also identifies the next useful study: one with an explicit random assignment, a preregistered primary measure, and enough independent participants to separate a meaningful difference from noise.

Instructor report · Precedent, Interpretation, and Judicial Consistency

Binding reference · Stable participants / fixed order

Completed cases: **0 / 2** · Pending: 2

Results remain hidden until the instructor chooses to display them.

Reveal results

Figure 5.1: Monitoring view: unrevealed report and case count.

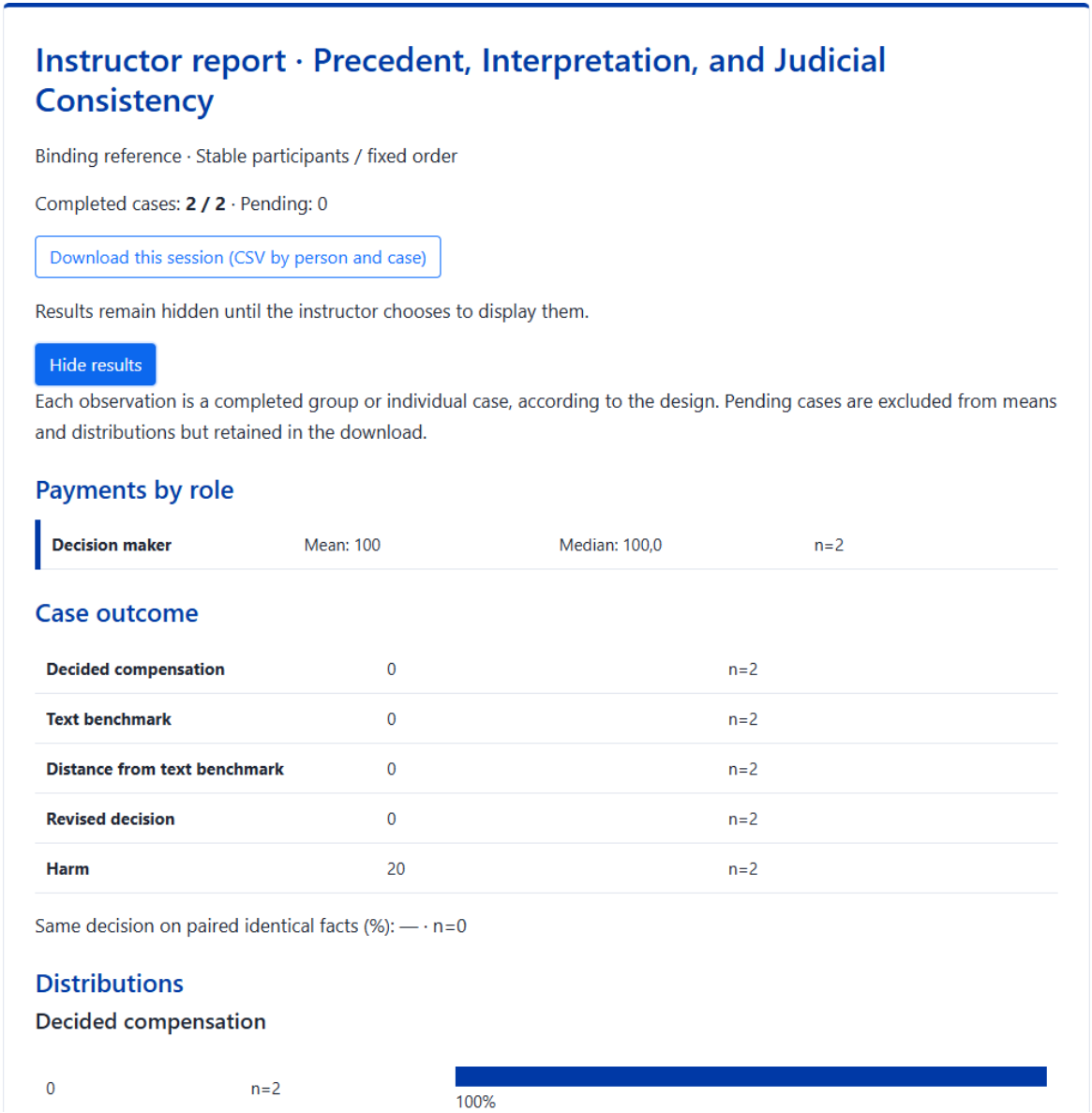


Figure 5.2: Monitoring view: revealed results; read every figure with its denominator.

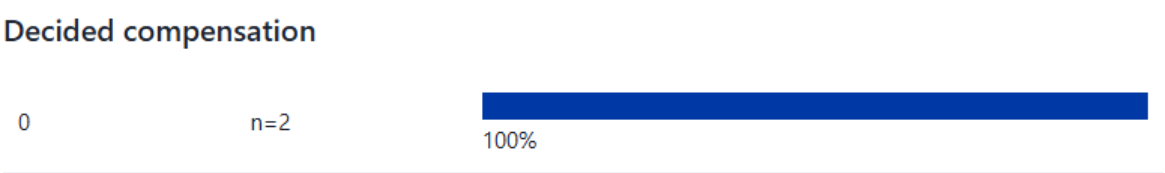


Figure 5.3: Monitoring view: the distribution shows concentration and dispersion.

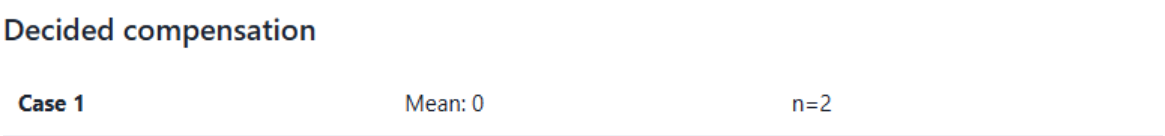


Figure 5.4: Monitoring view: evolution separates cases and available observations.

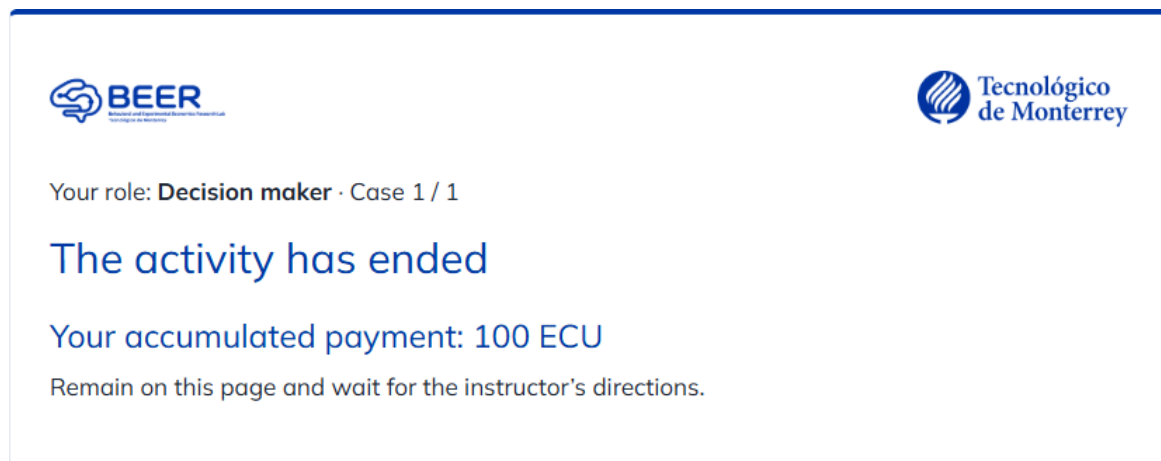


Figure 5.5: Monitoring view: closure confirms there are no further decisions for this person.

Data, retention, and incident recovery

6.1 Download the right session

From the session panel, open Data and use its own download link. The general oTree file is wide: one participant row contains columns for different rounds. This family's custom export is long and retains participant, round, group, role, language, edition, treatment, matching, phase, decisions, completion, payoff, and case state. Pending cases are retained. A blank field may indicate a decision that was unnecessary or has not yet been made; it must not automatically become zero.

Save the original file unchanged with the configuration and date. Use a copy to construct tables. Identify the session by its code and check that the last active round is present. Unused technical rounds do not belong to the experimental horizon. In a one-case version, the report must summarize that case even if the administrator opens the last technical period. Completed and pending counts provide a cross-check between the download and the visible session.

The private report also includes Download this session, which directly delivers the person-by-case CSV for the open session. This option requires no API-key configuration. It preserves all active rounds, including those still pending. The general Data download and this long download represent the same session in different layouts; their organization differs, not the active horizon that must be retained.

Collective outcomes repeat in members' state records. To construct a unit-level file, retain one observation per session, group, and round, or per participant and round for the individual activity. For payments by role, retain individual rows. Do not mix these levels in one average without specifying its weights. The analysis folder includes clearly marked synthetic data for practicing calculations. They are not evidence collected from students.

6.2 Protect interpretation and privacy

Do not collect names, student identification numbers, or demographic variables for this activity. Session and participant identifiers support operational tracking but should not be projected or published with results. Restrict access to the original file. When sharing a classroom table, remove individual codes and use aggregates that do not make a particular decision easy to recognize. A file's fictional status does not describe the real conduct, merit, or responsibility of the person assigned to it.

Classroom data do not automatically constitute a research sample. Before using them in a study, separately define the protocol, consent, data management, and relevant authorizations. You can discuss limitations pedagogically without turning every class into a research procedure. This guide teaches how to read outcomes, recognize observational units, and formulate hypotheses. It does

not promise representative estimates for actual judges, creditors, or data users.

6.3 Recover a session without changing its rules

If someone is waiting, examine the other positions in that unit. Locate the pending slot and check whether its participant is reading, has not submitted, or lost connectivity. Do not decide for them. If two people opened the same individual link, stop interpreting that unit and record the incident. If faithful recovery is impossible, retain partial data and create a new session for a later demonstration.

Correct a language error before choices begin. Do not informally translate for one participant while everyone else receives different instructions. If an incorrect configuration already produced decisions, identify those data separately. Restarting a server while preserving its database does not erase a session. Deleting or recreating the database invalidates previous individual links, requires a new session, and must never be used merely to refresh the interface.

Checkpoint

At closure, confirm that all planned cases are either complete or accompanied by a recorded incident, that the download belongs to the selected session, and that pending outcomes have not become zeros. Save the configuration alongside the data. Reproducibility begins with preserving the rules actually used.

Attention

Reveal the report after the decisions you wish to compare. Showing averages from other groups during play introduces social information. When that information is not part of the treatment, it changes the activity and must be recorded as an implementation incident.

6.4 Available rooms and conditions

Stable room: https://precedent.beer-lab.org/room/precedente_es

Stable room: https://precedent.beer-lab.org/room/precedent_en

Stable room: https://precedent.beer-lab.org/room/precedente_extendido

Stable room: https://precedent.beer-lab.org/room/precedent_extended

Binding reference	The announced reference text is binding for the fictional case.
Advisory reference	The reference text is advisory; departure is allowed.
Conflicting lower decision	A lower-level decision conflicts; the announced hierarchy prioritizes the higher text.
Low requested amount	One party requests 10; harm and the reference text remain unchanged.
High requested amount	One party requests 90; harm and the reference text remain unchanged.
Stated reasons	After deciding, a selected reason is requested.

Opportunity for review	A literal text check appears before a revised final decision is recorded.
Files without labels	File labels are hidden; facts and the reference remain.

6.5 References and provenance

Spamann, Holger; Lars Klöhn; Christophe Jamin; Vikramaditya Khanna; John Zhuang Liu; Pavan Mamidi; Alexander Morell; Ivan Reidel (2021). Judges in the Lab: No Precedent Effects, No Common/Civil Law Differences. *Journal of Legal Analysis*, 13, 110–126. DOI: 10.1093/jla/laaa008.

<https://michigan.law.umich.edu/faculty-scholarship/faculty-publications/judges-lab-no-precedent-effects-no-commoncivil-law>

JEL classification verified with the American Economic Association: <https://www.aeaweb.org/econlit/jelCodes.php?view=jel>

Original BEER Lab teaching design. Additional predictions follow from the rules documented here. Sources and navigation checked in October 2026.