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Using cognitive models to map relations between
neuropsychological disorders and human decision making
deficits

Findings from a complex decision making task (the Iowa gambling task) show that individuals with neuropsychological disorders are characterized by decision making deficits, leading to maladaptive risk-taking behavior. I will present a cognitive model which distills the performance in this task into three different underlying psychological components: the first measures the relative impact of rewards and punishments on evaluations; the second estimates the rate that the contingent payoffs are learned; and the third determines the consistency between learning and responding. Findings from twelve studies are organized by distilling the observed decision deficits into the three basic components, and locating the individual in this component space. The results improve the sensitivity of the task to individual differences between (a) patients with different lesions, (b) abusers of different drugs, and (c) prisoners incarcerated for different crimes. In addition, the parameters are differentially affected by distinct psychoactive chemicals.