

General Education – Possible Assessment Related to Ethical Reasoning

Defining Issues Test of ethical judgment (DIT/DIT-2)

Overview: The complete DIT-2 consists of five dilemmas (each followed by 12 issue-statements); The five dilemmas of DIT-2 are: (a) a father contemplates stealing food for his starving family from the warehouse of a rich man hoarding food; (b) a newspaper reporter must decide whether to report a damaging story about a political candidate; (c) a school board chair must decide whether to hold a contentious and dangerous open meeting; (d) a doctor must decide whether to give an overdose of pain-killer to a suffering but frail patient; (e) college students demonstrate against U.S. foreign policy.

The Center's Scoring Service supplies Instruction Booklets, Answer Sheets, and Guides for DIT-2 or DIT-1. Answer sheets are then sent back to us for scoring. In turn, we supply a paper copy REPORT, and a floppy disk with subject scores. DIT-2, DIT-1 Complete Form, and DIT-1 Short Form are all the same price. The new "Guide for DIT-2" gives details for custom designing the DIT, devising your own dilemmas, and experimenting with various scores from the DIT. Researchers outside the Minnesota Center will have the most important verdict on the usefulness of DIT-2.

Research related to validity: The positive attributes of the DIT and its conceptualization of moral judgment schemas are more apparent in a time of increasing respect for implicit knowledge and processing. The DIT offers a means of measuring moral judgment that fits with current views in cognitive science. Although the MJI and interview techniques generally are worthwhile for measuring production competence, the DIT is better able to measure understanding at the level that drives most decisions for most people (Navarez and Bock, 2002.)

The Four-Component Model – the Basis for the Assessment: Breaking the process down into its component parts enhances understanding of ethical decision-making and behavior, moral psychologist James Rest identifies four elements of ethical action. Rest developed his Four-Component Model by asking: "What must happen psychologically in order for moral behavior to take place?" He concluded that ethical action is the product of these psychological subprocesses: (1) moral sensitivity (recognition); (2) moral judgment or reasoning; (3) moral motivation; and (4) moral character (Johnson, 2006.) Rest developed the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to measure moral development. Subjects taking the DIT respond to six scenarios and then choose statements that best reflect how they went about making their choices. The statements (which correspond to the levels of moral development) are then scored. In the best-known dilemma, Heinz's wife is dying of cancer and needs a drug he cannot afford to buy. He must decide whether or not to steal the drug to save her life. Over 800 studies have been conducted using the DIT (Johnson, 2006.)

More recent research related to validity: Adult participants complete the DIT-2, then evaluate the raw responses of others to discern political orientation and ethical development. Results show that individuals scoring higher on the DIT-2 rank others' ethical judgment in a way consistent with DIT-2-based rankings. Accuracy at assessing political orientation, however, is low. Results support the DIT-2's validity as a measure of ethical development, not an expression of political position (Baily, 2002.)

DIT-2: <http://www.centerforthestudyofethicaldevelopment.net>