

## Spangler Ethical Reasoning Assessment – Sources

There is a great deal of literature about the ways people can and should understand how they arrive at the “right” answer. The SERA organizes this literature into 6 categories of ethical reasoning. The 6 categories are arranged on three scales:

- 1) Rules Orientation:  
Appliers ↔ Situationists
- 2) Individual/Group Orientation:  
Individualist ↔ Communitarian
- 3) Calculations/Relationships:  
Calculator ↔ Relationalist

Even if you never formally studied, ethics, you use some of each of these types of reasoning in your decision making. We learn and develop these reasoning preferences through school, relationships and work experience. The SERA shows your preference – how comfortable you are using – each type of reasoning.

*The items in the Applier/Situationist scale are from three sources.*

- The first source is rules-based ethical theory “deontology,” which comes mainly from the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Most professional “codes of ethics,” such as that for accountants, have a rules-based format, and involve applying rules to specific situations.
- The second source is “casuistry” or “case-based” reasoning. Case-based reasoning involves extending theoretical rules from particular instances, called paradigm cases. Judicial decisions are an example of case-based reasoning.
- The third source is “consequentialism,” a type of ethics that looks first at the consequences, or the desired outcome of a decision. You can say that Appliers put means before ends while situationists put ends before means.

*The items in the Individualist/Communitarian scale*

- are based on individualist political theory (the primary good is to protect individual liberty) and
- utilitarianism (do the greatest good for the greatest number)
- This scale measures how you value what may be good for each individual in relation to what may be best for a group as a whole.
- This scale also suggests the orientation of your moral compass. It indicates how much you value being a “rugged individualist,” and how much you trust your own personal judgement vs. how loyal you feel to certain community traditions (the community could be family, corporation, ethnic group, religion).

*The items in the calculator/relationalist scale*

- Are based on rational decision theory and feminist ethics of care.
- An individual does not have to practice econometrics, however, to be a calculator. Any attempt to make a decision by listing and balancing burdens and benefits is a type of calculation.
- People who pay attention to interpersonal dynamics are relationalists. Being a relationalist is different from worrying about hurting other people’s feelings. Relationalists are concerned about trust among members of a group, over time. They consider what behaviors will erode or build group cohesion, what behaviors will weaken or strengthen relationships.