



# Measuring Integrity in high-stakes situations

Framework SJT integrity – Internal document



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# 1. Hudson's position on integrity measurement

Hudson has consistently taken a clear position on the assessment of integrity in high-stakes selection contexts: **classical self-report integrity questionnaires do not provide a valid measurement of integrity** under such conditions.

This position is grounded in well-documented methodological limitations. In high-stakes selection situations, candidates are strongly incentivised to manage impressions and respond in socially desirable ways. As a result, self-report items that explicitly ask about honesty, rule-following, or moral conduct become transparent and easily fakeable. Candidates who respond strategically tend to score higher than those who answer candidly and admit to occasional lapses or moral ambiguity. This leads to exactly the opposite of what such instruments intend to achieve: more honest candidates scoring lower than less honest ones.

For this reason, integrity cannot be validly “measured” through self-report questionnaires in high-stakes selection contexts. While it would undoubtedly be attractive if this were possible, the empirical reality is that such instruments fail precisely when accuracy matters most. This does not imply that integrity is irrelevant or unknowable — only that **different, more indirect methods are required to obtain meaningful indications.**

*Integrity is not a score, but a pattern of judgment and behaviour across contexts.*

Importantly, Hudson does not claim that integrity itself can be reduced to a single score or trait. **Integrity is context-dependent, situational, and shaped by competing values, incentives, and norms.** No single assessment tool can capture this complexity in isolation.

Rather than attempting to label individuals as “more” or “less” ethical, Hudson advocates a **multi-method approach**, in which we recognize that each method has limitations, but when combined, they yield a more valid and nuanced picture — even in high-stakes selection situations.

## 2. The role of Situational Judgment Tests (SJTs)



## 2.1. Design principles of the SJT integrity

A Situational Judgment Test presents candidates with realistic workplace scenarios and multiple response options, each representing a different course of action. In the context of integrity, these scenarios typically involve:

- Moral tension (e.g. values versus targets or pressure)
- Conflicting stakeholders
- Ambiguous norms or unclear rules

Response options are deliberately not framed as simply “right” or “wrong”, but differ in how candidates prioritise ethical considerations, stakeholder interests, and short-term versus long-term consequences.

Crucially, candidates are asked: *“What is the best response in this situation?”* rather than *“What would you do?”*

Research consistently shows that asking for the *best* response provides higher validity in high-stakes contexts. When asked what they would personally do (*“What would you do?”*), candidates differ substantially in their response strategies: some answer honestly, while others focus primarily on impression management. Asking for the best response (*“What is the best response in this situation?”*) anchors answers in evaluative judgment rather than self-presentation.

## 2.2. SJTs measure judgment, not behaviour

An integrity-oriented SJT does not measure actual behaviour, moral intentions, or future ethical guarantees. Observable behaviour can only be approximated through designed situations that mimic real-world dilemmas, such as simulations or assessment centre exercises.

What an SJT *does* measure is **situational and ethical judgment**:

- Do candidates recognise that ethical considerations are at stake?
- Do they understand what constitutes acceptable versus problematic behaviour?
- How do they reason when values, pressure, and ambiguity collide?
- How consistently do they prioritise ethical principles across different situations?

**Knowing what ethical behaviour looks like, and recognising when it is required, is a necessary (but not sufficient) prerequisite for ethical action.** Candidates who consistently display poor ethical judgment patterns in SJTs represent a higher integrity risk in practice, even though strong SJT performance alone can never be interpreted as a guarantee of ethical conduct.



## 2.3. How to interpret SJT Integrity scores

Imagine two participants, one obtains a stanine score of 7 on a specific integrity-related competency or value, while the other obtains a score of 3.

### What you should not conclude

- This does not mean that the person obtaining a score of 7 *is more honest* or *has more integrity* than the person scoring 3.
- A higher score does not guarantee that the person obtaining a 7 will act ethically in real-life situations.
- Conversely, a lower score does not imply that the person is unreliable or dishonest in nature.

SJT integrity **scores do not constitute moral labels or ethical verdicts.**

### What you can conclude

A person scoring higher typically:

- more frequently recognises that an ethical aspect is at stake
- more often weighs competing interests in line with integrity-related principles
- makes more consistent decisions that take long-term consequences and stakeholder impact into account

A person scoring lower typically:

- shows less consistent ethical reasoning across scenarios
- fails to detect ethical signals in some situations, or prioritises other considerations instead (e.g. targets, pressure, hierarchy)

### Implications for use

Lower scores on integrity-related SJT dimensions should therefore be interpreted as **prompts for further exploration**, for example through targeted interview questions or behavioural simulations, rather than as disqualifying evidence in themselves.



## 2.4. The signalling value of an integrity-focused SJT

Beyond its informational value, an integrity-oriented SJT also serves an important **signalling function** within the selection process. By explicitly including integrity-relevant dilemmas and ethical decision-making scenarios, organisations communicate to candidates that honesty, fairness, and responsible judgment are taken seriously and are part of what is expected in the role.

This sends a clear message: ethical considerations matter, and they are evaluated explicitly rather than assumed implicitly. This signalling effect can influence both applicant self-selection and the psychological contract established during recruitment, reinforcing the organisation's ethical standards from the very first stages of the employment relationship.

As such, the value of an integrity-focused SJT lies not only in what it assesses, but also in the standards it visibly upholds.

## 3. The complementary role of personality assessment

A second, fundamentally different source of insight into honesty and integrity comes from personality assessment. Extensive research indicates that **certain personality domains are systematically linked to honesty-related behaviour** at the group level.

The strongest and most consistent associations are found for:

- **Conscientiousness** (higher levels relate to greater rule adherence and reliability)
- **Altruism** (higher levels relate to concern for others and fairness)
- To a lesser extent, **Emotional Stability** (higher levels relate to lower stress reactivity and less affect-driven responding)

Personality assessment does not measure ethical judgment or situational knowledge. Instead, it captures **stable motivational and dispositional tendencies** that influence how likely a person is, on average, to act in an honest or responsible way.

As with all indirect indicators, this information is probabilistic rather than deterministic. Highly conscientious and altruistic individuals are *more likely* — but never guaranteed — to behave with integrity, particularly when incentives or pressures shift. Conversely, individuals with lower scores on these dimensions tend to represent a higher behavioural risk profile.



The key strength lies in combining fundamentally different aspects of integrity: whether someone is generally motivated to act with integrity (personality questionnaire), and whether someone recognises and reasons adequately about ethical issues when they arise (SJT), are both necessary but non-interchangeable components of integrity-related behaviour.

## 4. Behavioural sampling through simulations

A third, powerful complement is a sample-based approach, such as **simulations or assessment centre exercises**. These methods place candidates in situations that have the potential to elicit dishonest or ethically questionable behaviour and allow assessors to observe how candidates actually respond.

While simulations are still artificial representations of reality, they come closest to capturing **observable behaviour** and therefore add incremental validity in predicting future conduct — especially when interpreted alongside SJT and personality questionnaire results.

## 5. Integration and responsible use

Integrity is not a “trait” to be measured, but a pattern to be inferred across methods, contexts and samples.

Therefore, the strongest approach to integrity-related assessment lies not in any single instrument, but in the **triangulation of methods**:

- **SJT** → ethical judgment and decision-making patterns
- **Personality assessment** → dispositional tendencies related to honesty
- **Simulations / interviews** → sampled behaviour in ethically relevant situations

Each contributes different information; none should be used in isolation.

It is important to fully understand that assessment outcomes, especially ones relating to honesty and integrity:

- Are indicative, not moral labels
- Must be interpreted in conjunction with organisational culture, incentives, leadership, and governance systems

In a world of increasing compliance pressure, reputational risk, and ethical fading, organisations benefit far more from insight into **ethical decision-making under pressure (using a multi-method approach)** than from scores derived from transparent self-report statements about honesty.



*Ethics is not about what people say about themselves, but about how they reason when values, pressure and ambiguity collide.*