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squares – Interview with Dr Achim Preuss: Identify who is going to cause problems

*Introducing squares – the first fair and valid integrity
test that really works!*

cut-e Group

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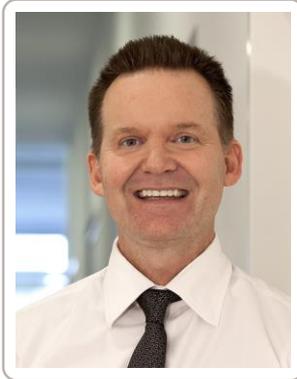
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squares – the new integrity test by cut-e. An interview with Dr Achim Preuss



In this interview, Dr Preuss co-founder and Product Director of the *cut-e* Group talks about the concept behind the *squares* questionnaire, how integrity can be measured by such an assessment, in what situations and roles this can be valuable and how candidates react to integrity testing.

Since beginning his career 1989 with a business psychology and doctorate in applied computing science, Dr Preuss has run successful HR consultancy and IT-development projects for companies like Beiersdorf, Credit Suisse, DaimlerChrysler, L'Oreal, 3M, and Siemens.

His main areas of expertise are job analysis, knowledge engineering, and e-HR with bespoke online assessment and development solutions.

Over the years, he has published a number of articles on knowledge engineering, prediction methodologies and e-HR.

At *cut-e*, Achim is responsible for IT systems and product development, infrastructure and the technology partner network. He also runs major Online Assessment projects for clients like Commerzbank, PwC, Siemens and Volkswagen.

Q. 1 Integrity is a tricky concept to describe – how do you define it and what does it mean?

Dr Preuss: Integrity is indeed a tricky term as it originally described a rather philosophical concept. It's about how trustworthy, and honest a person is. But it has become commonplace to talk about integrity testing by using questionnaires that assess how reliable or rather, how credible a person is.

A person's credibility is high if the probability of him or her displaying or demonstrating counterproductive work behaviour is low. We define counterproductive behaviour, in an occupational context, as behaviour that goes against the corporate goals or what is best for the organisation. Such counterproductive behaviour can range from illicit absence, theft or fraud to drug abuse or hazardous behaviour or indeed any form of abuse or malpractice and at any level within the company.

Q.2 How can you measure someone's integrity by a test?

Dr Preuss: Up until now, there was no real theory or understanding of how integrity and counterproductive behaviour related to each other. The groundbreaking research of Philip Zimbardo showed that everybody is capable of counterproductive behaviour if placed into the 'right' situation. However, people differ regarding the type of situation in which they are likely to be susceptible. This is exactly what the instrument *squares* assesses: it identifies the degree to which a person is vulnerable, in different situations, to behave counterproductively.

Q.3 Why would this be useful? In what situations and job roles?

Dr Preuss: The assessment of a person's trustworthiness or credibility is one of the most important variables in both our social and work-based interactions. So, in principle, such an assessment is relevant for all jobs. The benefit to a company that assesses its applicants' integrity early on in the recruitment process is great: the company is able to reduce potential damage caused by an employee through possible counterproductive behaviour.

Q. 4 Is this for initial recruitment or for use once someone has joined a company?

Dr Preuss: Of course there is an immediate benefit when used for recruiting into the company. Organisations tend to 'select in' the character traits they think will help a candidate to be successful in their company rather than 'selecting out' the behaviours that could cause problems. To add this information, particularly for jobs which where the potential damage from counterproductive behaviour is costly, is of tangible benefit. In addition, *squares* also offers very valuable information about the existing workforce as the results show managers and decision makers the situations which could be critical for a team to elicit the wrong behaviours. These situations can then be avoided or counterbalanced through targeted training or other interventions.

Q. 5 How does this fit alongside other assessments?

Dr Preuss: *squares* delivers reliable information about the probability of a person showing counterproductive behaviour. However, *squares* does not provide information on whether a person has the ability required to accomplish the given tasks. As in the saying: "Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity," we recommend strongly always assessing the relevant abilities alongside integrity.

Q. 6 How do candidates react to such a tool?

Dr Preuss: Candidates' responses to the test so far have been very positive. Candidates are able to answer each question with a continuous slider, which meets their desire to give as differentiated answers as possible. It's also quick to complete – on average only 7 minutes – and so there's a high level of acceptance of such a test.

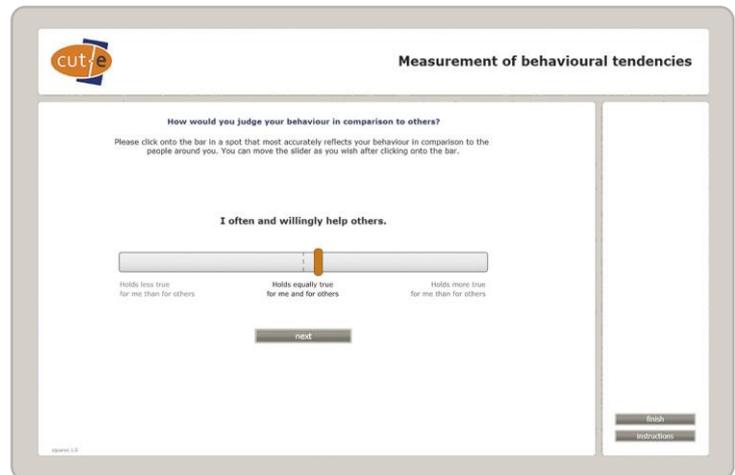
Q. 7 Does integrity change over time or would a score change with re-testing?

Dr Preuss: This is a very important aspect that was considered in design of *squares*. Traditional integrity tests are based on the assumption that integrity is a trait. This implies that participants who scored low on integrity will always score in this way and may be stigmatized. This contrasts starkly with the concept of, and research into, social rehabilitation. For that reason we designed *squares* in such a way that takes into account the assumption of certain dispositions. But also considering that the person's observable behaviour depends on the situation faced and experience and is therefore capable of being influenced through intervention. This means that *squares* delivers results which are a reliable momentary snapshot upon which predictions of someone's behaviour can be based, but which should be repeated should a person have experienced a critical or lifechanging event.

Q. 8 Can the answers be faked to give the socially acceptable view?

Dr Preuss: These kinds of instruments allow, to a certain extent, the candidate to give answers that are socially desirable. However, as our data shows, there is a cultural difference in what is being perceived as 'socially desirable'. Applying the most suitable norm group for each candidate can control this effect. It is important to note that in spite of the ability to present socially desirable responses; our data shows no ceiling effect. This means that in pre-selection situations where the reliability of the scores is high, social desirability has little impact on the overall score.

For more information and related documents about squares please refer to www.cut-e.com/integrity-test



cut-e is world leader in the design and implementation of innovative online tests and questionnaires for recruitment, selection and development. *cut-e* helps companies identify people with the right capabilities and cultural fit to deliver optimal business results. *cut-e* carries out over 4 million assessments per year in over 70 countries and 40 languages.