Instructions for the California Adult Q-sort (CAQ)

The CAQ Deck
The CAQ is a set of 100 descriptive personality statements typed on individual cards. To describe an individual’s personality, the “sorter” arranges the cards into groups ranging from statements which are least characteristic to statements which are most characteristic of the individual being described. The CAQ is not a personality test; there is no score which the person receives. Rather, the CAQ provides a systematic way of comparing different personality with one another.

The CAQ Items
The CAQ statements or items were originally meant to be sorted by professional psychologists and psychiatrists. We have found, however, that people without professional training can sort them quite well if some of the specialized vocabulary is explained or clarified. Many items state the same basic idea in several ways so that if a particular phrase or word is not clear, the meaning of the item can still be grasped from one of the alternative phrases. In some cases, additional rewordings or explanations have been placed in parentheses to further clarify the meaning of the item.

Example: 99. Is self-dramatizing; histrionic. (Theatrical; exaggerates emotions)

Other items contain explanation in the lower half of the card which clarify ambiguities or explain what the item would mean if it were placed at the low or uncharacteristic end of the sort.

Example: 3. Has a wide range of interests. Regardless of how deep or superficial the interests may be.
80. Interested in member of the opposite sex. Low placement implies only absence of such interest, not dislike of the opposite sex or homosexual interest.

The CAQ Task
Q-sorting is not easy, particularly the first time when the items are still unfamiliar. On the other hand, most people find the task rather enjoyable and report that they learn a lot by doing it. The first Q-sort takes about 40 minutes to complete; subsequent Qsorts go much faster, averaging 30 minutes or less for most sorters.

The value of the Q-sort method naturally depends upon the willingness of the sorter to give a thoughtful, candid, and accurate description, avoiding the temptation to present an overly favorable (or unfavorable) picture of the person being described. Saints and angels can perhaps be described by placing only favorable items in the characteristic end of the scale and only unfavorable items at the uncharacteristic end; real people cannot be. Remember, Qsorts are not tests; we do not score them for “saintliness.” What we need are honest and accurate descriptions of real people.

The Q-Sort Procedure
A completed CAQ has 9 groups or categories arranged from left to right as shown below. The higher the category number, the more characteristic the items in the category are of the person being described. Thus Category 1 on the far left contains the 5 items MOST UNCHARACTERISTIC of the person; Category 5 in the middle contains 18 items NEITHER CHARACTERISTIC NOR UNCHARACTERISTIC; and Category 9 on
the far right contains the 5 items MOST CHARACTERISTIC of the person. Each category must contain the number of cards designated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pile Number</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Cards in Pile

Most

Uncharacteristic

Most

Characteristic

Although you may proceed in any way you find most comfortable, many people find it easiest to proceed as follows:

1. Sort the cards into three piles. Place items that seem characteristic of the person on the right, those that seem uncharacteristic on the left, and all others in the middle. At this point there is no need to pay attention to how many go into each pile, but since half of the items will eventually go into the middle three categories, you can feel fairly free about putting items about which you are uncertain into the middle pile.

2. Next, sort the right hand pile (the “characteristic” group) into the high numbered categories, placing the most characteristic items into Category 9, the next most characteristic items into Category 8, and so forth until you have used up all the cards. In this step, you should pay attention to the actual number of cards required in each category. (Note: the order of the cards within a category is unimportant.)

3. Now sort the left hand pile into the low numbered categories, placing the most uncharacteristic items in Category 1. Follow the same procedure used in step 2.

4. Now sort the middle pile into the middle categories, making any adjustments needed with the cards already sorted into adjacent categories.

5. Check to make sure you have the correct number of cards in each category and make any final adjustments you wish. Record your CAQ results onto the record sheet provided.

Thank you.