The History of The Personality Assessment of Domestic Animals (PADA-ICofA)

Olsen, C. (2025)

The **Personality Assessment of Domestic Animals (PADA-ICofA)** is a scientifically grounded protocol designed to evaluate the innate personalities of domestic animals. Its development reflects a collaborative effort to create a standardized method for assessing animal behavior across various species. The PADA-ICofA framework serves as the overarching system, with specialized branches tailored to different animal categories: PADA-ICofA Canine, PADA-ICofA Feline, PADA-ICofA Equine, and PADA-ICofA Livestock. These subcategories are designed to address the unique traits and needs of each animal group while adhering to the core principles of the PADA-ICofA methodology.

Origins and Development

PADA-ICofA was initiated in 2004 as an independent enterprise, officially registered in the Norwegian Business Registry under number 987091002. Its primary focus was the systematic evaluation of animal personalities. By 2006, the test had been refined and established as a standard practice in Norway, primarily assessing whether canines were suitable for animal-assisted services (Fine, et al., 2024).

International Collaboration and Research

In 2020, PADA-ICofA Canine underwent some adaptations as part of an Erasmus+ project titled Preparation and Training of Human-Dog Teams in Dog Assisted Education and Therapy. This initiative involved collaboration with Hungarian researchers from the Family Dog Project, led by Professor Ádám Miklósi, a renowned expert in canine behavior research, and Stowarzyszenie Zwierzęta Ludziom. After the completion of the Erasmus+ project, The Personality Assessment of Domestic Animals (PADA-ICofA) was reestablished as a general assessment tool for describing animal personalities (Turner & Olsen, 2024)

Methodology

Personality, in this context, pertains to the consistent patterns that define an individual's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors across varying situations and time frames (Gosling, 2001). Research indicates that diverse animal species display consistent behavioral variances, which can be grouped into the personality dimensions: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (Gosling & John, 1999). These could encompass traits such as boldness, aggressiveness, sociability, exploration, and fearfulness (Svartberg, 2005). Such personality traits can shape an animal's reactions to various scenarios, including unfamiliar settings, potential hazards, and social engagements.

PADA-ICofA is anchored in rigorous animal welfare science. It incorporates methodologies such as The Human Approach Test, The Threatening Approach Test, The Novel Object Test, and The Open

Field Test. During a PADA-ICofA evaluation, an animal encounters diverse scenarios designed to gauge its psychological disposition, physical state, and the safety implications of its interactions. PADA-ICofA subjects animals to an array of situations, encompassing encounters with strangers (encompassing social interaction, greetings, and handling), play tests, as well as stimuli that might induce fear or aggression. Notably, the procedure specifically tailors these situations to resonate with contexts that human-animal interactions are likely to encounter. It's noteworthy that while there's a correlation between personality dimensions and emotional responses, the connection between an animal's personality and its emotions is multifaceted. Factors such as genetic predispositions, early-life experiences, previous encounters, individual learning trajectories, and environmental contexts can all influence this relationship.

- **The Human Approach Test:** The Human Approach Test evaluates human-animal interactions and is an instrumental tool in monitoring animal welfare (Vas, Topál, Gácsi, Miklósi, & Csányi, 2005).
- **The Threatening Approach Test:** The Threatening Approach Test is a widely used paradigm to study dogs' responsiveness to different human behavioural cues. It consists of exposing dogs to humans approaching them with different attitudes, for example, threatening or friendly/neutral (Vas, Topál, Gácsi, & Miklósi, 2008).
- **The Novel Object Test:** The Novel Object Test determines an animal's reaction to an unfamiliar object. It aims to quantify exploratory behavior, curiosity, and novelty preference (Corsetti et al., 2018).
- **The Open Field Test:** The Open Field Test is generally performed in an unfamiliar arena. The animal is placed in the arena for a certain amount of time, usually between 4 and 10 min, and the behavior of the animal is recorded. Behaviors categorized and scored include locomotion and exploration. This test primarily gauges anxiety levels, exploration tendencies, and locomotion (Perals, Griffin, Bartomeus, & Sol, 2017).

These tests are designed to observe and measure animals' reactions to various stimuli and situations, providing insights into traits like fearfulness, sociability, responsiveness to training, aggression tendencies, boldness, and activity levels. PADA-ICofA is specialized as an evaluation tool for species such as canines, cats, pigs, cows, goats, sheep, equines, and chickens. The PADA-ICofA Canine aims to assess many of the same traits as the Swedish DM test (Svartberg, 2005), as well as those evaluated in the Scandinavian mental test for police dogs (Goold, Vas, Olsen, & Newberry, 2016). While several subtests in PADA-ICofA Canine share similarities with the DM test and the Scandinavian mental test for police dogs, PADA-ICofA Canine is uniquely designed for indoor testing. This allows for a controlled environment with consistent conditions, ensuring more reliable assessments. The test evaluates how dogs respond to everyday situations by simulating real-life scenarios they are likely to encounter. It includes interactions with people, exposure to new surroundings, and common stimuli such as sudden noises, movements, or unexpected changes.

The PADA-ICofA team responsible for assessing individual animals has undergone rigorous training, and all tests are supervised by an experienced animal behaviorist with at least a B.Sc. in animal behavior. This ensures that the test is conducted to the highest standard in accordance with the protocol and that the team has excellent knowledge of animal behavior. This expertise allows them to immediately halt the test if any signs indicate that the animal's welfare may be compromised.

Global Implementation and Recognition

As of 2024, PADA-ICofA has been implemented in 13 countries, serving as a recognized system for assessing the personalities of various species, including canines, felines, equines, and livestock. The

test has been presented at numerous international conferences, highlighting its significance in the fields of animal behavior and welfare.

Ongoing Research and Development

Currently, a research team from the International Community of Anthrozoology (ICofA) and the University of North Florida is conducting studies to further validate and refine the PADA-ICofA protocol. Tech4Animals is working with AI to predict the outcomes of PADA-ICofA Canine. These efforts aim to ensure that the assessment remains a reliable and valuable tool for understanding and evaluating animal personalities across different contexts and cultures.

PADA-ICofA's evolution from a national assessment tool to an internationally recognized protocol underscores its importance in promoting animal welfare and enhancing human-animal interactions through an informed understanding of animal personalities (Turner, 2025).

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