

Modern Socio-Psychological Approaches To The Study Of Spiritual Intelligence: Systematic-Structural And Axiological Analysis

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Abstract: This article presents a comprehensive analysis of contemporary socio-psychological approaches to the study of spiritual intelligence (SI), employing systematic-structural and axiological methodological frameworks. The paper examines the evolution of SI as a scientific construct from its emergence in the late 1990s to the present day, analyzing major theoretical models including those developed by Zohar and Marshall (2000), Emmons (2000), King and DeCicco (2009), Amram (2007), and Wigglesworth (2012). Through systematic analysis, the article identifies key structural components of SI across various conceptualizations, including critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion. The axiological dimension of SI is explored through its relationship to values, meaning-making, and ethical behavior. Empirical research findings demonstrating correlations between SI and mental health outcomes, resilience, life satisfaction, and professional effectiveness are synthesized. The article concludes with implications for psychological practice, education, and future research directions.

Keywords: Spiritual intelligence, socio-psychological approaches, systematic-structural analysis, axiology, mental health, meaning-making, transcendence.

Introduction: The concept of spiritual intelligence (SI) represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary psychology of intelligence. Since Howard Gardner's (1983) seminal work on multiple intelligences opened new pathways for understanding diverse human capabilities, researchers have increasingly sought to incorporate spiritual and existential dimensions into intelligence frameworks. Danah Zohar first introduced the term "spiritual intelligence" in 1997, proposing it as an aspect of intelligence that operates at the conscious level of meaning and purpose, situated above traditional measures of IQ and emotional intelligence (EI).

The proliferation of SI research reflects a broader recognition that neither cognitive intelligence nor emotional intelligence, separately or in combination, fully explains the complexity of human intelligence or the richness of the human soul and imagination. As contemporary society faces unprecedented challenges related to meaning, purpose, and ethical decision-making, understanding the psychological mechanisms

through which individuals access higher values and transcendent experiences has become increasingly relevant.

This article aims to provide a systematic-structural and axiological analysis of modern socio-psychological approaches to SI. The systematic-structural approach allows for the identification of common components and patterns across various theoretical models, while the axiological perspective illuminates the value-laden nature of SI and its relationship to meaning, purpose, and ethical behavior.

Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework

1. Historical Development of the SI Construct

The emergence of spiritual intelligence as a psychological construct can be traced to the convergence of several intellectual traditions: transpersonal psychology, the psychology of religion, positive psychology, and intelligence theory. While spirituality has been a domain of theological and philosophical inquiry for millennia, its systematic study within psychological science began to accelerate only

in the final decades of the twentieth century.

Gardner's (1983, 1999) theory of multiple intelligences provided crucial theoretical groundwork by demonstrating that human intelligence is multidimensional. Although Gardner himself chose not to include spiritual intelligence among his intelligences due to methodological challenges in quantification, he acknowledged the possibility of an existential intelligence involving sensitivity to questions about human existence. This opened the door for subsequent researchers to develop more specific conceptualizations of spiritually-oriented intelligence.

2. Defining Spiritual Intelligence: Key Conceptualizations

Contemporary researchers have proposed several influential definitions of spiritual intelligence, each emphasizing different aspects of this multifaceted construct. Zohar and Marshall (2000) defined SI as "our most fundamental intelligence," describing it as what we use to develop our capacity for meaning, vision, and value, and what allows us to dream and to strive. They argued that SI underlies the things we believe in and the role our beliefs and values play in our actions, positioning it as the foundation upon which both IQ and EQ operate.

Robert Emmons (2000) conceptualized spiritual intelligence as "a framework for identifying and organizing skills and abilities needed for the adaptive use of spirituality." His model initially proposed five components: (a) the capacity for transcendence; (b) the ability to enter into heightened spiritual states of consciousness; (c) the ability to invest everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred; (d) the ability to utilize spiritual resources to solve problems; and (e) the capacity to engage in virtuous behavior. Following scholarly debate, Emmons later refined this to four core components, removing virtuous behavior as it represents an outcome rather than an ability.

King and DeCicco (2009) provided perhaps the most empirically rigorous definition, describing SI as "a set of mental capacities which contribute to the awareness, integration, and adaptive application of the nonmaterial and transcendent aspects of one's existence, leading to such outcomes as deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent self, and mastery of spiritual states." Their four-factor model has become widely adopted in empirical research.

Yosi Amram (2007) defined SI as "the ability to apply and embody spiritual resources and qualities to enhance daily functioning and wellbeing." Based on interviews with seventy-one spiritual leaders across

diverse traditions, Amram identified seven major themes universal across spiritual traditions: Consciousness, Grace, Meaning, Transcendence, Truth, Serenity, and Inner-Directedness. Cindy Wigglesworth (2012) offered a practical, competency-based definition: "the ability to behave with wisdom and compassion while maintaining inner and outer peace regardless of the situation." Her model emphasizes SI as a developable skill set, analogous to how emotional intelligence can be cultivated through practice.

Systematic-Structural Analysis of SI Models

1. King and DeCicco's Four-Factor Model

The systematic analysis of SI models reveals several common structural elements despite variations in terminology and emphasis. King and DeCicco's (2009) four-factor model provides a particularly useful framework for understanding the core components of spiritual intelligence:

Critical Existential Thinking (CET): This component refers to the capacity to critically contemplate the nature of existence, reality, the universe, space, time, and other existential and metaphysical issues. It also includes the capacity to contemplate non-existential issues from an existential perspective. CET represents the cognitive dimension of SI, involving deep philosophical reflection and the willingness to engage with fundamental questions about life's meaning and purpose.

Personal Meaning Production (PMP): This ability involves deriving personal meaning and purpose from all physical and mental experiences, including the capacity to create and master a life purpose. PMP reflects the constructive aspect of SI, through which individuals actively generate significance from their experiences rather than passively receiving meaning from external sources.

Transcendental Awareness (TA): This capacity involves identifying transcendent dimensions and patterns of the self, of others, and of the physical world during normal states of consciousness. It includes the recognition of a transpersonal or transcendent self and the ability to perceive interconnections between oneself and the larger whole.

Conscious State Expansion (CSE): This refers to the ability to enter and exit higher states of consciousness at one's own discretion, such as states of pure consciousness, cosmic consciousness, or unity consciousness. CSE includes proficiency in contemplative practices such as meditation and prayer.

2. Amram's Integrated Model

Amram's (2007) ecumenical grounded theory approach identified seven universal themes of spiritual

intelligence based on interviews with spiritual leaders from diverse traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Non-duality, Earth-based traditions, and Taoism. The Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) developed from this research contains 22 subscales clustered into five domains: Consciousness, Grace, Meaning, Transcendence, and Truth.

The structural analysis reveals that Amram's model incorporates relational and ethical dimensions more explicitly than other models. The Grace domain, for example, encompasses qualities such as trust, gratitude, and alignment with the sacred, while the Truth domain includes acceptance, curiosity, and love for all creation. This broader conceptualization reflects the model's grounding in lived spiritual experience across traditions.

3. Wigglesworth's SQ21 Competency Model

Wigglesworth's (2012) model organizes 21 skills of spiritual intelligence into four quadrants, building upon Goleman's emotional intelligence framework: Higher Self/Ego Self Awareness, Universal Awareness, Higher Self/Ego Self Mastery, and Spiritual Presence/Social Mastery. This structure emphasizes the developmental trajectory of SI, from self-awareness through mastery to social application.

The SQ21 model's emphasis on competencies and skills makes it particularly applicable to organizational and leadership development contexts. Wigglesworth conceptualizes SI development as "spiritual weightlifting" — a process of shifting from ego-driven responses to behaviors guided by the Higher Self through deliberate practice.

4. Zohar's 12 Principles Model

Zohar's conceptualization identifies twelve principles underlying spiritual intelligence, derived from properties of complex adaptive systems: Self-awareness, Spontaneity, Being vision- and value-led, Holism, Compassion, Celebration of diversity, Field independence, Humility, Tendency to ask fundamental questions, Ability to reframe, Positive use of adversity, and Sense of vocation. This model uniquely connects SI to quantum physics and systems theory, proposing that SI operates through neural mechanisms associated with 40 Hz oscillations in the brain.

Axiological Analysis of Spiritual Intelligence

1. The Value Dimension of SI

Axiology, the philosophical study of value, provides a crucial lens for understanding spiritual intelligence. SI is fundamentally concerned with the apprehension, creation, and application of values in human life. Unlike cognitive intelligence, which operates primarily in the

realm of facts and logical relationships, spiritual intelligence engages directly with questions of worth, significance, and meaning.

The axiological dimension of SI manifests in several ways. First, SI involves the capacity to recognize and prioritize intrinsic values — those that are good in themselves rather than merely instrumentally useful. Spiritually intelligent individuals demonstrate heightened sensitivity to experiences of beauty, truth, goodness, and sacredness. Second, SI enables the integration of values into a coherent worldview and life purpose. This integration function distinguishes SI from mere values clarification; it involves the active synthesis of diverse value experiences into a meaningful whole.

2. SI and the Search for Meaning

Viktor Frankl's logotherapy established meaning as a fundamental human motivation. Contemporary SI research builds upon this foundation, conceptualizing SI as the intelligence through which meaning is sought, created, and realized. The personal meaning production component of King's model explicitly addresses this function, while Amram's Meaning domain encompasses purpose, service, and significance in daily activities.

Research has demonstrated positive correlations between SI and meaning in life measures. Individuals with higher SI scores report greater sense of purpose, more frequent experiences of significance, and stronger coherence in their understanding of life. These findings suggest that SI operates as a meaning-making capacity, enabling individuals to construct purposeful narratives from their experiences and to orient themselves toward valued goals.

3. SI and Ethical Behavior

The relationship between SI and ethical behavior represents a significant area of axiological inquiry. While Emmons originally included virtuous behavior as a component of SI, subsequent conceptualizations have treated ethical conduct more as an outcome than an intrinsic ability. Nevertheless, the connection between SI and prosocial, ethical behavior appears robust in empirical research.

Studies have shown that higher SI is associated with greater compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, and altruistic behavior. The transcendental awareness component of SI may facilitate ethical behavior by enabling individuals to perceive their interconnection with others, thereby motivating concern for collective wellbeing. Similarly, the meaning production capacity may support ethical behavior by enabling individuals to understand their actions within larger moral

frameworks.

Empirical Research Findings

1. SI and Mental Health Outcomes

A comprehensive scoping review conducted by researchers following the Joanna Briggs Institute methodology analyzed 69 manuscripts examining SI and mental health (published in Global Health Action, 2024). The review identified consistent patterns in the relationship between SI and psychological wellbeing. The most frequently identified positive correlations included: resilience (n=7 studies), general, mental, and spiritual health (n=6), emotional intelligence (n=5), and favorable social behaviors and communication strategies (n=5).

Equally significant were the negative correlations observed: burnout and perceived stress (n=5), and depression and anxiety (n=5). These findings suggest that SI may serve a protective function against psychological distress while promoting adaptive coping and positive mental states. The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) emerged as the predominant assessment instrument, used in 39 of the reviewed studies, indicating the measure's acceptance in the research community.

2. SI in Educational Settings

Research in educational contexts has demonstrated relationships between SI and academic-related outcomes. A systematic review and meta-analysis examining emotional intelligence, spiritual intelligence, and student achievement (BMC Medical Education, 2024) analyzed 27 articles with a total sample size of 5,781 students. The findings indicated that both emotional and spiritual intelligence contribute to educational achievement, though the mechanisms may differ across cultural contexts.

Educational settings represented the most frequent context for SI research, with studies involving 9,456 university students and 1,880 teachers. This concentration of research in educational environments reflects both practical access to participants and theoretical interest in the role of SI in learning and development.

3. SI in Healthcare and Professional Contexts

Healthcare settings represented the second most frequent research context for SI studies. Research has demonstrated that nurses with higher SI exhibit stronger professional self-concept and greater psychological ownership over their work. A meta-analysis of seven studies comprising 512 nurses and nursing students found that SI training interventions resulted in significantly higher communication skills, job satisfaction, and spiritual care competence, along

with significantly lower overall stress compared to control groups.

In organizational contexts, research has demonstrated that self-reported SI predicts leadership effectiveness ratings by outside observers, even when controlling for personality factors and emotional intelligence. Studies have also found SI to predict organizational financial performance, suggesting practical implications for leadership development and organizational culture.

4. Cross-Cultural Perspectives

A systematic literature review examining sociocultural perspectives on SI (published in Heliyon, 2024) identified four distinct perspectives: Western, Eastern, Islamic, and Hindu. In the Western perspective, an egocentric and utilitarian approach prevails. The Islamic perspective understands religion as the primary expression of SI. The Eastern perspective emphasizes the common good and connection with nature. The Hindu perspective positions knowledge as key to expanding spiritual awareness.

These findings indicate that researchers' cultural and philosophical perspectives significantly influence the conceptualization of SI and the interpretation of research results. This has important methodological implications for cross-cultural research and the development of culturally sensitive assessment instruments.

Measurement Instruments

Several validated instruments have been developed for assessing SI. The most widely used include:

The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24) developed by King and DeCicco (2009) is a 24-item self-report measure assessing four dimensions: Critical Existential Thinking, Personal Meaning Production, Transcendental Awareness, and Conscious State Expansion. The instrument has demonstrated excellent internal reliability, good fit to the proposed model, and has been validated across multiple cultural contexts including adaptations in Persian, Chinese, Turkish, and Polish.

The Integrated Spiritual Intelligence Scale (ISIS) developed by Amram and Dryer (2008) includes an 83-item long form and a 45-item short form, with 22 subscales grouped into five domains. The ISIS has demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = 0.97) and acceptable test-retest reliability (Pearson r = 0.77).

The SQ21 Assessment developed by Wigglesworth (2012) measures 21 skills of spiritual intelligence organized into four quadrants, providing both self-report and 360-degree assessment options. This competency-based instrument is particularly suited for

organizational and leadership development applications.

DISCUSSION

1. Theoretical Integration

The systematic-structural analysis reveals significant convergence across SI models despite terminological variations. Common structural elements include: (1) a cognitive-reflective dimension involving existential questioning and critical thinking about fundamental issues; (2) a meaning-constructive dimension through which individuals derive and create purpose; (3) a transcendence dimension involving awareness of realities beyond the material and egoic; and (4) a practical application dimension concerning the use of spiritual resources in daily functioning.

The axiological analysis highlights SI as fundamentally value-oriented intelligence. Unlike cognitive intelligence, which can be applied to any content regardless of its moral character, SI inherently involves engagement with values, meanings, and purposes. This value-laden nature distinguishes SI from other forms of intelligence and connects it to ethical and spiritual development traditions.

2. Practical Implications

Research findings suggest several practical implications. First, SI training may serve as a preventive health measure, with potential applications in educational curricula from early childhood through professional development. The evidence of SI's positive associations with mental health outcomes and negative associations with burnout and stress suggests value in incorporating SI development into wellness programs.

Second, the relationship between SI and leadership effectiveness suggests applications in leadership development and organizational culture. Leaders with developed SI may be better equipped to navigate complexity, maintain ethical standards, and inspire meaningful engagement among team members.

Third, healthcare contexts may particularly benefit from SI development among providers. The associations between SI and spiritual care competence, communication skills, and reduced stress suggest that SI training could enhance both provider wellbeing and patient care quality.

3. Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations warrant consideration. The predominance of cross-sectional and correlational research designs limits causal inference. Most studies have relied on self-report measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Additionally, the cultural specificity of SI conceptualizations raises questions about the universality of current models and

measures.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal designs to examine developmental trajectories and causal relationships. Cross-cultural validation studies are needed to refine culturally sensitive conceptualizations and measures. Investigation of neurobiological correlates may provide additional validity evidence and illuminate the mechanisms through which SI operates. Finally, intervention studies examining the effectiveness of SI training programs across various populations and settings would strengthen the evidence base for practical applications.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual intelligence has emerged as a significant construct in contemporary psychology, offering a framework for understanding how individuals engage with existential questions, create meaning, and access transcendent dimensions of experience. The systematic-structural analysis reveals substantial convergence across theoretical models, identifying core components related to existential thinking, meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion.

The axiological perspective illuminates SI as fundamentally value-oriented, concerned with the recognition, creation, and application of meaning and purpose in human life. This distinguishes SI from other forms of intelligence and connects it to broader philosophical and spiritual traditions concerned with human flourishing.

Empirical research supports the validity and utility of SI, demonstrating consistent associations with positive mental health outcomes and negative associations with psychological distress. As society continues to grapple with questions of meaning, purpose, and ethical behavior, spiritual intelligence offers a promising construct for both theoretical understanding and practical application in education, healthcare, organizational development, and psychological practice.

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