

# **Personal Meaning Production** as a component of **Spiritual Intelligence**

David B. King, MSc Candidate  
Trent University, Peterborough, Canada

# Intelligence

## *Traditionally...*

- Mathematical abilities / Spatial reasoning
- Linguistic abilities / Reading Comprehension
- Logical Reasoning

## *More recently...*

- Bodily intelligence
- Musical Intelligence
- Social / Emotional intelligences

# The past decade...

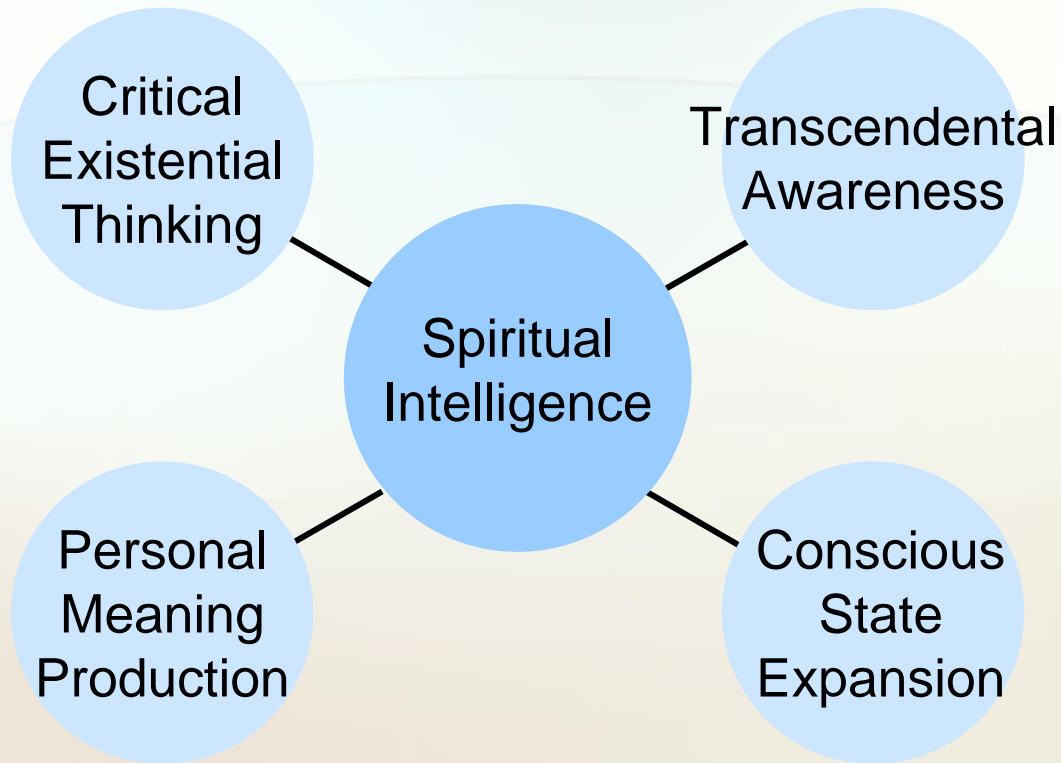
- **Influx of theories/models of spiritual intelligence** (e.g., Amram, 2007; Emmons, 2000; Nasel, 2004; Noble, 2000; Wolman, 2001).
- **Leading intelligence theorists** (e.g., Gardner, Mayer) **have rejected proposals of spiritual intelligence.**
- **Lack of distinction between mental ability and phenomenological experience.**
- **Theological and religious interpretations of the construct.**

# A Viable Model of SI

## Spiritual Intelligence...

- is a set of mental capacities which contribute to the **awareness, integration, and adaptive application** of the **nonmaterial** and **transcendent** aspects of one's existence.
- leads to such outcomes as deep existential reflection, enhancement of meaning, recognition of a transcendent self, and mastery of spiritual states.

# A Viable Model of SI



# Intelligence Criteria

According to leading theorists, an intelligence should:

- ✓ Involve an interrelated set of mental abilities distinct from experiences and behaviours.
- ✓ Facilitate adaptation & problem-solving.
- ✓ Develop over the lifespan.

# Measuring SI

- The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory (SISRI-24)
- 4-factor structure supports model (by EFA & CFA).
- Good internal reliability (.92).
- Preliminary support for construct & criterion-related validity, split-half & test-retest reliability.

**SISRI-24** Age? (in years) \_\_\_\_\_  
Sex? (male/female) Male Female

The Spiritual Intelligence Self-Report Inventory © 2008 © King

The following statements are designed to measure various behaviors, thought processes, and mental characteristics. Read each statement carefully and choose which one of the five possible responses best reflects you by circling the corresponding number. If you are not sure, or if a statement does not seem to apply to you, choose the answer that seems the best. Please answer honestly and make responses based on how you actually are rather than how you would like to be. The five possible responses are:

0 – Not at all true of me | 1 – Not very true of me | 2 – Somewhat true of me | 3 – Very true of me | 4 – Completely true of me

For each item, circle the one response that most accurately describes you.

1. I have often questioned or pondered the nature of reality.	0	1	2	3	4
2. I recognize aspects of myself that are deeper than my physical body.	0	1	2	3	4
3. I have spent time contemplating the purpose or reason for my existence.	0	1	2	3	4
4. I am able to enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	0	1	2	3	4
5. I am able to deeply contemplate what happens after death.	0	1	2	3	4
6. It is difficult for me to sense anything other than the physical and material.	0	1	2	3	4
7. My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.	0	1	2	3	4
8. I can control when I enter higher states of consciousness or awareness.	0	1	2	3	4
9. I have developed my own theories about such things as life, death, reality, and existence.	0	1	2	3	4
10. I am aware of a deeper connection between myself and other people.	0	1	2	3	4
11. I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.	0	1	2	3	4
12. I am able to move freely between levels of consciousness or awareness.	0	1	2	3	4
13. I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.	0	1	2	3	4
14. I define myself by my deeper, non-physical self.	0	1	2	3	4
15. When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.	0	1	2	3	4
16. I often see issues and choices more clearly while in higher states of consciousness/awareness.	0	1	2	3	4
17. I have often contemplated the relationship between human beings and the rest of the universe.	0	1	2	3	4
18. I am highly aware of the nonmaterial aspects of life.	0	1	2	3	4
19. I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.	0	1	2	3	4
20. I recognize qualities in people which are more meaningful than their body, personality, or emotions.	0	1	2	3	4
21. I have deeply contemplated whether or not there is some greater power or force (i.e., god, goddess, divine being, higher energy, etc.).	0	1	2	3	4
22. Recognizing the nonmaterial aspects of life helps me feel centered.	0	1	2	3	4
23. I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.	0	1	2	3	4
24. I have developed my own techniques for entering higher states of consciousness or awareness.	0	1	2	3	4

# **Personal Meaning Production (PMP)**



# Definition

- The ability to construct personal meaning and purpose in all physical and mental experiences.
- Includes the capacity to create and master a life purpose.
- Purpose – a critical aspect of personal meaning (Reker, 1997).
- Defining a life purpose – a form of meaning production.

# Rationale for Inclusion

- **Personal meaning a critical aspect of spirituality** (e.g., King, Speck, & Thomas, 2001; Koenig et al., 2000; Worthington & Sandage, 2001).
- **Personal meaning a critical aspect of many previous theories of spiritual intelligence** (e.g., Emmons, 2000; Nasel, 2004; Zohar & Marshall, 2000).

# Rationale for Inclusion

- Zohar & Marshall (2000): spiritual intelligence allows us to reconceptualize our experiences and create meaning.
- Nasel (2004): spiritual intelligence “involves contemplation of the symbolic meaning of personal events and circumstances, in order to find purpose and meaning in all life experiences” (p. 52).
- Emmons (2001): sanctification of everyday experiences = a form of meaning production?

# Cognitive Operations

- Wong (1989): defined personal meaning as “an individually constructed cognitive system, that is...capable of endowing life with personal significance and satisfaction” (p. 517).
- Meddin (1998): cognitive component of personal meaning as “an integrative organizing principle (or set of principles) which enables one to make sense (cognition) of one’s inner life and outer environment” (p. 164).

# Sources of Meaning

Seemingly infinite:

- **social roles** (McCall & Simmons, 1966)
- **relationships**
- **leisure activities**
- **personal achievement** (Reker & Wong, 1988)
- **reminiscence**
- **religiosity** (Wong, 1989)
- **work** (Thompson, 1992)
- **dreams** (States, 1992)
- **coincidence** (Jung, 1960)

# High End-State of PMP

- The ability to create meaning in ALL mental and physical experiences.
- Mastering a life purpose – inferring one's life purpose in ALL experiences.

# Adaptive Applications

PMP adaptive in:

- Decreasing depressive symptoms (Mascara & Rosen, 2005).
- Acting as a buffer against depression and hopelessness in terminally ill (e.g., Breitbart et al., 2000)
- Indicators of psychological & physical health (e.g., Fry, 2000; Reker, 1997; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987).
- Increased resilience.

Specific context: The existential crisis/vacuum.

# How?

When faced with a stressor, PMP acts as a coping method by allowing an individual to construct meaning and purpose within the stressful event thereby transforming the stressor and reducing its negative impact.

When faced with a dilemma, PMP can lead to a meaning-based solution and therefore act as a method of problem-solving as well.

Assigning purpose to decisions provides additional direction.



# PMP on the SISRI-24

5 items (rated on 5-point Likert scale):

1. I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.
2. I am able to define a purpose or reason for my life.
3. When I experience a failure, I am still able to find meaning in it.
4. I am able to make decisions according to my purpose in life.
5. My ability to find meaning and purpose in life helps me adapt to stressful situations.

# PMP on the SISRI-24

## Psychometric Properties:

- Cronbach's alpha = .78
- Inter-item correlation = .42
- Correlations with other subscales: correlated most highly with Transcendental Awareness (.67 & .59).
- Perhaps meaning can be considered a transcendent aspect of life?

# PMP on the SISRI-24

- Items measuring CONTEMPLATION of meaning/purpose loaded on Critical Existential Thinking (CET).

e.g., “I frequently contemplate the meaning of events in my life.”

- Items measuring ability to DERIVE/FIND meaning/purpose loaded on distinct factor: PMP.

e.g., “I am able to find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.”

# PMP on the SISRI-24

PMP & Meaning in Life (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006):

- Search for Meaning:  $r = .05$  (*ns*)
- Presence of Meaning:  $r = .65$  ( $p < .01$ )

Critical Existential Thinking & MLQ:

- Search for Meaning:  $r = .39$  ( $p < .001$ )
- Presence of Meaning:  $r = .10$  (*ns*)

# PMP on the SISRI-24

Other findings of interest:

- PMP & Age:  $r = .25$  ( $p < .001$ )
- PMP & Satisfaction with Life:  $r = .40$  ( $p < .001$ )
- PMP & Emotional Intelligence:  $r = .48$  ( $p < .001$ )
- PMP & Social Desirability:  $r_s = .23$  &  $.27$  ( $p < .001$ )

# Conclusion

- Personal Meaning Production is a valid component of Spiritual Intelligence, based on:
  - Past Theory
  - Current Research / Psychometric Findings
- Further validates meaning production as an adaptive component of human intelligence and mental capacity.



**Questions?**