

# Spiritual Intelligence as a Predictor of Organizational Sustainability: Mediating Role of Academic Optimism

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** Recent assertions and ideas have emphasized that mind is not a thing but a process, the process of cognition, which is identified with the process of life. The brain has a specific structure through which this process operates. Unlike Intelligence Quotient (I.Q.), which computers have, and Emotional Quotient (E.Q.) which exists in higher mammals, Spiritual Quotient (S.Q.) is uniquely human and the most fundamental of the SQ, EQ & IQ. It is linked to humanity's need for meaning. Attempts to understand SQ (measure of Spiritual Intelligence, SI) is of paramount importance in the new millennium. Spiritual intelligence is a way of thinking which enables longing capacity for meaning, vision and value. To explore it more, this study aims to analyze the predictability of spiritual Intelligence on organizational sustainability through the mediating role of academic optimism i.e., an integrated term comprising academic emphasis, collective efficacy and trust. **Methodology:** Data for the study will be collected from faculty and their immediate leaders working in private education institutions operating in Pune and Mumbai, India. Based on the random sampling, respondents will be selected and questionnaire method will be used to collect the data. To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality, the questionnaires will be coded and collected in person by the investigator. **Findings:** The findings indicate that spiritual intelligence enhances the academic optimism i.e. efficacy levels (collective efficacy), trust levels (faculty trust towards students and their parents) and commitment towards academic achievement (academic emphasis) in an effective manner to stimulate organizational sustainability in the long run. **Implications:** Findings from this study would create awareness and interest about the significance of spiritual intelligence and further studies can be developed to identify the extent of managerial intervention that may cater to the spiritual capabilities of the employees. It would also create awareness and interest among HRD officials in terms of recruitment and selection of people with these capabilities in educational sector. Employees would be more concerned about the appropriate usage and control of their spiritual awareness during the job-related interactions with other people. It would also help in enhancing the productivity of the employees, increasing the employee's commitment to job, and building strong interpersonal engagement among employees in the organization. It would add to the literature on the study of spiritual intelligence and sustainability. Finally, the study may be potentially conducive to improving people lives and the planet's health and equilibrium.

**Keywords:** Academic Optimism, Educational Institution, Spirituality, Spiritual Intelligence, Sustainability

## 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, psychologists discovered ways and means to measure intelligence. In this line, Aristotle's defined man as 'a rational animal', developed into an obsession with Intelligence Quotients

(IQ)., Daniel Goleman. In the mid-1990s, popularized Emotional Intelligence (EQ) as a basic requirement for the appropriate use of IQ. By the end of the twentieth century, there was enough collective evidence from psychology, neurology, anthropology and cognitive science to show us that there is a third quotient, 'SQ', or Spiritual Intelligence.

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Zohar, D. (2012), The pursuit of spirituality, expressed as the desire and ability to seek an existence outside of oneself” (Spiritual Intelligence: Emma Bucher, Sue-Mei Slogar, & Amy Voltmer). “Spirituality is... how people make meaning through experiences with wholeness, a perceived higher power, or higher purpose” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 47).

Sustainable development implies that development should be pursued in a manner whereby the needs of the present will be met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is a global call for action and all institutions, especially educational institutions, have a key role to play in this grand scheme. **They can take a “holistic” approach to education for a sustainable future.** Students are key stakeholders when it comes to achieving the sustainable development goals, and as present and future decision makers in society they need knowledge and skills to be able to contribute to building the World We Want. No organisation is better positioned to fill this gap than educational institutions.

Academic optimism has emerged in recent years as a model that combines academic emphasis, collective efficacy, and faculty trust into an organizational construct that can affect student achievement (Eren, 2012; Hoy, Tarter & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; Malloy, 2012). In the last decade “academic optimism has constantly been confirmed to be a potent force that can foster high student achievement regardless of student population and nationality” (Wu & Sheu, 2015, p. 663) or socio-economic status (Hoy & Miskel, 2012).

This paper tries to examine if there is any relationship between Spiritual Intelligence (SI) and organizational sustainability. In this study researchers attempt to analyse the relationship between Spiritual Intelligence, Academic Optimism, and Organizational sustainability through an integrated model.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Spiritual Intelligence

Different researchers have interpreted ‘Spiritual intelligence’ in different ways. Commonly, it can be understood as a way of thinking which enables longing capacity for meaning, vision and value. In this line, Wolman (2001) defined ‘Spiritual Intelligence’ as “*the human capacity to ask ultimate questions about the meaning of life, and to simultaneously experience the seamless connection*

*between each of us and the world in which we live*” (pp.84-85). Considering ‘Spiritual Intelligence’ as “*the ground on which morality stands*” (p.115), he specified SI as the basis of moral choices and problem-solving decision making. SI comprises 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. The major components of spiritual intelligence are critical existential thinking, personal meaning production, transcendental awareness, and conscious state expansion - King, DiCicco viable model and self-report measure of spiritual intelligence. International Journal of Transpersonal Studies. 2009 Jun 1; 28(1).

### 2.2 Organizational Sustainability

Sustainability in higher education is increasing in importance internationally, and becoming more critical for higher education institutions. ‘Sustainable development’ is the ethically founded response which not only protects private and economic interests, but also shapes the profile of educated young people (Altner & Michelsen, 2005). “Against the background of globalization and increasing complexity, higher Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) aims at enabling people to not only acquire and generate knowledge, but also to reflect on further effects and the complexity of behavior and decisions in a future-oriented and global perspective of responsibility. Higher Education for Sustainable Development has to participate in the discussion about sustainable ways of living and working. Acquiring relevant competencies within and by academic work cannot be a private concern of faculty, staff or administration. Absolutely essential is a new learning culture which does not confirm academic tradition but examines its potential for a sustainable future, in an open-minded and participative process. It has to be related to one’s own sphere of influence and desires. Ideally, individual and societal learning should be related, for sustainable development. Within this perspective, it seems vital to consider the universities and institutions as a learning and life world. In general, these are seen as formal educational institutions. When discussing the role of academia for competence development the focus is mostly on study programs and courses-formal learning settings. But they also offer opportunities for learning in

informal settings, such as volunteering in student groups. The potential of the different settings is different". (Barth, Godemann, Rieckmann, Stoltenberg, 2007).

### 2.3 Academic Optimism

Academic optimism is separate from educational optimism and involves academic self-efficacy, trust, and academic significance on an individual and organization level (Hoy & Tarter, 2011). It is the relationship between academic optimism and student achievement that "represents a powerful force to be used in school reform since the overall construct of academic optimism is grounded in the framework of positive psychology" (Ruyle, 2014, p. 35). Academic optimism can impact the norms in a school (Guvercin, 2013; Smith & Hoy, 2007), therefore "leaders may be able to replicate success by facilitating beliefs in student excellence and the resilience to persevere through setbacks" (Ruyle, 2014, p. 35). "Academic optimism emphasizes the potential of schools to overcome the power of socioeconomic factors that impair student achievement" (Straková & Simonová, 2015, p.55). Academic optimism is a collective construct involving behavioral, affective, and cognitive constituents" (Narenjithani, Youzbashi, Alami, & Ahmadzadeh, 2015, p. 161).

Academic optimism is defined as positive beliefs that a teacher can make changes in the academic performance of students. Academic optimism is a construct that evolves from the general work of positive psychology, which goes beyond focusing on illness and pathology to look at areas of the human experience including well-being, hope, and fulfillment; meaning academic optimism is rooted in humanistic psychology (Beard & Hoy, 2010). Schools with high academic optimism define a culture in which the faculty believes it can make a difference, that students can learn, and academic performance can be achieved [sic] (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). Academic optimism is a collective set of beliefs about the strengths and capabilities in schools in which optimism is the overarching theme uniting efficacy and trust with academic emphasis. Schools with high academic optimism can define a culture of optimism. Positive behaviours can sideline the negative effects of the environment and can stimulate individuals to perform well. Individual behaviours can be framed in accordance with environmental factors and internal motivation. Because teachers are a role model for students, optimism in their behaviour can encourage students to perform better (Srivastava and Dhar, 2016b).

### 2.4 Spiritual Intelligence Academic Optimism and Organizational Sustainability

Meeting the challenge of sustainability in higher education is culturally embedded and is linked to institutional academic history and curricular tradition. Success on the journey toward sustainable development requires an approach to education that strengthens the application of values, especially integrity and fairness and the awareness that people share a common destiny. These times call for the broad application of the 'Precautionary Principle.' This principle warns that precautionary measures should be taken whenever there appear to be threats to human or environmental health, and when the impact of human interventions cannot be fully anticipated or calculated scientifically (Wals et al., 2004, p. 348). The complexity of sustainability as a concept makes it a problem or issue which cannot be solved through rational means alone. It rigorously needs a solution through higher level of self-awareness which includes faculties of higher order like empathy, faith, trust, foresightedness, compassion, interconnectedness, holistic and optimistic approach. Schumacher opines to mobilize these higher faculties or forces, to have them available not simply as occasional impulses but permanently, requires a higher level of self-awareness. Sustainability without Spirituality is a difficult proposition. In view of Zohar and Marshall, Spirituality, the meaning giving Centre, is required in order to be flexible, foresighted and spontaneous.

"Education throughout life is based on four pillars: Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and Learning to be". Indian culture provides true meaning to these pillars by putting 'Learning to know' as 'Gyanyog' 'Learning to do' as 'Karmayog', 'Learning to live together' as 'Sahyog' and 'Learning to be' as 'Atmasakshatkar' i.e. self-realization which is the ultimate goal of human life (Agrawal, Saraswati and Agrawal, Nisha, 2000:298). It is precisely said that the destiny of a nation is formed in her classrooms. This vocation influencing is chiefly the duty of the teachers. The techno Guru A.P.J. Abdul kalam in his own inimitable style remarked that 'if you are a teacher in whatever capacity, you have a very special role to play, because more than anybody else you are shaping generations' (Kalam, A.P.J. & Rajan, Y.S., 1998:293). Teachers' academic wisdom, their mastery on teaching practices and their emotional intelligence related abilities all are essential for the satisfactory fulfilment of this duty. God equivalent position was given to the teachers not only

because of their developed academic accomplishments but also on the basis of their being spiritually awakened individuals.

## 2.5 Hypothesis

H1: There is a positive and significant relation between Spiritual Intelligence and organizational sustainability.

H2: Spiritual Intelligence has a positive relationship with academic optimism.

H3: Academic Optimism mediates the relationship.

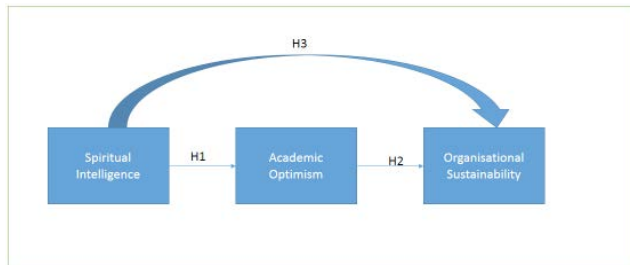


Figure 1. Hypothesized model.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Sample Selection and Data Collection

The data was collected using random sampling technique from educational institutions operating in different regions of Pune, Maharashtra. In total 153 faculty members participated in this study. Questionnaire method was used to collect data. Filled up forms were collected personally by the investigator. After screening for outliers and missing values, 127 responses were selected for the further study. Majority of the faculty members were female (73%) and most of them were within the age range of 30-38 years.

### 3.2 Measures

Spiritual Intelligence was evaluated on 23-item authentic leadership questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.946$ ). Academic optimism was examined on modified 26 item scale initially developed by Hoy, Tarter and Hoy (2006). It constituted three dimensions of teachers - sense of collective efficacy (10 item;  $\alpha = 0.971$ ), academic emphasis (9 item;  $\alpha = 0.968$ ) and trust on parents and students (7 item;  $\alpha = 0.946$ ). All the measures were examined on 5 point scale ranging from 1= *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

## 3.3 Analytic Approach

The hypothesised model (see Figure 1) was initially examined through confirmatory factor analysis, followed by hierarchical regression analysis. The validity, reliability, internal consistency and correlation of each of the construct of the hypothesised model were also examined.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The mean value of spiritual intelligence, academic optimism, and organizational sustainability was below 3, which indicated that respondent rated all these construct at lower levels in their institutions.

The confirmatory factor analysis conducted to confirm the good fit of the hypothesized model. The results for each CFA indices surpassed the minimum criteria of  $GFI > 0.8$ ,  $AGFI > 0.8$ ,  $NFI$  &  $CFI > 0.9$  and  $RMSEA > 0.07$  (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006; Scott, 1994; Seyal, Rahman & Rahim, 2002). The results confirmed the good model fit. In addition, the factor loading for all three variables under the hypothesized model were below 0.40, and average variance explained was above 0.50 which indicated the convergent validity of each measure.

The second order analysis of academic optimism indicated academic optimism as second order construct comprising three first order constructs namely collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust. The correlation estimates were then compared to square root estimates for AVE. As squared root estimates of AVE were higher than correlation estimate of those respective rows and columns, they indicated the discriminant validity of the measures used under the study (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Common method bias in collection of data was checked through Harman's single factor test. Result for Harman factor revealed 40.74% of variance being defined by a single factor which passed the minimum criteria of 50% (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986).

### 4.2 Hypothesis Testing

The hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to identify the intensity of relation between spiritual intelligence, academic optimism, and organizational sustainability, controlling the impact of age, gender, and experience. Consistent with our expectation for hypothesis 1, the regression analysis revealed a positive

and significant relation between Spiritual Intelligence and Organizational Sustainability via mediating role of academic optimism. This result indicated that when faculty members in institutions have higher sense of spiritual intelligence, it helps the institution to sustain for a longer time, defeating their rivalries and maintaining their image in the society. The mediating role of academic optimism indicate that spiritual intelligence cause positive effect on academic emphasis, collective efficacy and faculty trust levels, to encourage them benefit the institutions. Such support builds a strong base for organizational sustainability.

## 5. Discussion and Limitations

### 5.1 Positive and Significant Relation between Spiritual Intelligence and Organizational Sustainability

For sustainable change the two elements that are essential is science and spirit, the spirit inspired by science gives hope for sustainable change. Which facilitates taking steps from policy making to realizing sustainable change. Lack of spiritual intelligence might lead to gap in transitioning to sustainability, encompassing higher level of thinking, developing ethical values, meaning and hope. Science helps in understanding physical world, matter, universe, time but truth and consciousness can be understood only by practice of spirituality. SQ of the person if high helps them to have deeper connection with their own self, find meaning and purpose in their life for them it is easy to contemplate and give up materialistic approach, their choices are wise and they are more grounded and connected to the world as they are hopeful and trust the goodness in and around them. Spiritual Intelligence helps in knowing about self, connecting with higher self and ultimately resulting in wisdom to connect with community, the interconnectedness leads to inclusive and holistic view that helps in fostering Sustainability. According to Zohar and Marshall, "SQ is the intelligence that rests in that deep part of the self that is connected to wisdom from beyond the ego, or conscious mind, it is the intelligence with which we not only recognize existing values but with which we creatively discover new values. Value driven culture in organization where foresighted thinking of the leader with empathy, compassion and solidarity works in cooperation with people in the organization would ultimately on its own achieve the

long-term goal of sustainability It is worth seeing that more devotion to spirituality might be exactly what is needed to catalyze global spiritual representation of ethical values and meaning, and the will to undertake sustainable change.

### 5.2 Positive and Significant Relation between Spiritual Intelligence and Academic Optimism

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is being realized that it is imperative to study mind, consciousness, emotions and spirituality so that humans may understand 'Human Nature' more properly. The people around the world have realized that the respective education system of all the nations must evolve in such a manner so that these may be ingrained in their own particular cultures and remain devoted to progress. In order to fulfil this, dream all countries need teachers who are spiritually awakened, emotionally intelligent and academically brilliant.

While IQ allows us to think and EQ helps us relate, SQ allows us to do both these things during times of rapid change. IQ & EQ were sufficient in a relatively static world. SQ provides the linkage in times of paradigm shift and chaos "There is an urgent need to educate youth in universities, colleges and schools to understand the ethos of "Service before Self" to bring sense of inter connectedness and emphasize the importance of "Spirituality in action". In other words, to nurture the spirit of empathy and trust, to give up materialistic approach and develop Optimism and faith so that they lead a purposeful life and find meaning in what they do that would in turn help in attaining the ultimate goal of sustainability.

### 5.3 Positive and Significant Relation between Academic Optimism and Organizational Sustainability

Creating a positive environment to learn is what helps the faculty to bring out the best in their students who are optimist try to achieve high standards, the empathy and trust helps the teachers to develop an open culture that nurture the spirit of students and they don't despair even in the face of difficult situations. Developing the sense of faith and respecting others views and caring for them brings them together which helps to establish a bond that's foundation of a strong institution. The wisdom and foresightedness of the principal which gives confidence

to the faculty members results in churning out future generation who are able to connect with their own self, with fellow members as well as with the larger community.

As our world becomes progressively globalized and associated, social and environmental changes in one place cascade across scales and link distant areas together in astonishing ways. This signifies basically a new reality. Conservative resolutions for how we manage resources, respond to change and develop our societies will not be enough to tackle the sustainability challenges that we face today. Instead we need methods that actively involve with the complexity around us and help steer forward in contexts of deep uncertainty.

In the new millennium humans as Anthropocene are the dominant force that are responsible for the changes and rapid developments in economic, social and technological fields still we come across many problems like poverty, inequity, challenges of global warming, pressure on natural resources. In order to save the planet, it's important to bring sustainable change and create safe and just future for everyone. Academic Optimism as catalyst can foster and help in contributing to the build a structure which would support sustainable development. As we notice Organizational effectiveness is constitutively defined as "the extent to which any organization as a social system, given certain resources and means, fulfills its objectives without incapacitating its means and resources and without placing undue strain upon its members" (Hoy & Ferguson, 1985, p. 122). The CIPD (2012) also emphasizes the importance of organizational culture in seeking to understand organizational sustainability, referring to "the creation of meaningful values that shape strategic decision-making and building a culture that reinforces desirable behavior". The role of academic optimism as we see is immense in leading to a society where future generation see purpose and meaning in their lives which would definitely contribute in forming a nation of huge opportunities and possibilities. The holistic approach certainly helps teachers in developing students who are of the mind set where they achieve more and at the same time care for the community, and try be solutions to problems.

From the present study, an individual(s), leader(s) from the institutes under consideration, are found to have embodied many of the values and practices associated with spirituality such as demonstrating respect and caring for others (students, staff, parents and other stake holders), but never consider themselves as 'spiritual'. Spiritual

values such as integrity, honesty and humility have been repeatedly found to be key elements of success for these individual and leaders. Personal integrity has been most important aspect of success. Treating other with love and compassion: showing respect, demonstrating fairness, expressing caring, listening attentively, and appreciating others are the other spiritual virtues which will make these institutes sustainable.

This study is a novel study to examine the relationship between hypothesized constructs. Spiritual intelligence is emerging fast in the evolution of collective consciousness. As per the knowledge of authors, the study is innovative and requires more research to explore more mediators and moderators in the process. Larger sample size is required to understand the relationship and reasons behind such association.

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