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SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE IN ISLAM – A FRAMEWORK FOR
TOTAL EXCELLENCE

Mastura Ab. Wahab (a)*, Noorliza Karia (b)
*Corresponding author

(a) School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Penang, Malaysia; mastura.ab.wahab@usm.my

(b) School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM, Penang, Malaysia; noorliza@usm.my

Abstract

This paper discusses the Islamic concept of spiritual intelligence and the significant effects associated with having spiritual intelligence to believing individuals including employees at work and/or in live. The backbone of the Islamic concept of spiritual intelligence is Islam, Iman and Ihsan. The Islamic spiritual intelligence starts with believing in the existence of Allah, in the Unity (Oneness) of Allah (Tawhid). The key to spiritual intelligence in an Islamic connotation is the believers' quality of relationship with Allah and the love of Allah. Spiritual intelligence is not like mental intelligence (IQ) or emotional intelligence (EQ) advocated by the Western perspectives, which can be acquired directly. Spiritual intelligence is bestowed by Allah to the chosen believers who have established strong quality of relationship with Allah and have reached the salvation of ultimate love of Allah, above anything else in this world. This paper proposes that an Islamic spiritual intelligence is crucial for individual believers to realise and actualise their potential, above and beyond what they are capable of doing. Thus, it will directly affect the work performance of the believing employees. The significant impact of this paper is that it will guide believing employees to what is needed to achieve the spiritual intelligence in Islam. The spiritual intelligence in this paper will also produce a balance par excellence, in the employees between their pursuit of this world and the hereafter. This important for achieving the fitrah of human beings whose ultimate aim in their creation is to worship Allah.

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1. Introduction

Spiritual intelligence (SI) as a topic of research may not attract the interest of a wide group of researchers, especially among realistic and practical minds in the area of business and management. The mystical and subtle nature of SI may be the main reason it was avoided by most business and management people to venture into. However, whether they realise it or not, spiritual intelligence is the “one” that could transform and actualise the best potential in the employees. In organizations, employees perform their tasks mostly by utilising their mental intellect or intelligence quotient (IQ) and some of their emotional intelligence or emotional quotient (EQ). However, without spiritual intelligence, employees would not be able to achieve their highest potential, let alone to go above and beyond their potential. Employees can only achieve their highest potential of what they can be if they possess and utilise all three types of intelligence with the optimum effect is in the utilization of spiritual intelligence. The fully utilization of all the types of intelligence would enable them to reach their total intelligence or quantum intelligence.

1.1. Why and how did Muslims in the golden age of Islamic civilizations achieve their excellence?

This question has been asked quite frequently even among the Muslims themselves. The answer to this question may lie in the quality of their relationship with Allah that contributed to their SI. Muslims in the golden era of Islamic civilization were keeping the balance between par excellence in worldly (duniawi) matters and hereafter (ukhrawi). Many stories and biographies of the excellent Muslim scientists attributed their success to their strong relationship with Allah and pious adherence to Islamic teachings and practices (Wahab & Ismail, 2019). In contrast, many Muslims today are not able to assimilate their religious beliefs into their work practices, leading to their inability to reach the level of excellence as inspired by those Muslim scientists in the golden era of Islam. Therefore, it is important and imperative for Muslims to understand their relationship with Allah and to find out whether the quality of relationship with Allah and/or the love of Allah have strong connections with their excellence in their work practices, and whether the high quality relationship with Allah would lead them to improve their quality of work to enable them to achieve excellence in the work performance. Among the very obvious characteristics of the Muslim scientists in the golden era was excellence at work, in the relationship with Allah and among fellow human beings (hablul minallah wa hablulminannas), in their observance of Allah’s orders and His prohibitions (al-amr bil maruf wa nahy ‘anilmunkar) (Wahab & Ismail, 2019). This may be the answer to many shortcomings in the performance of Muslims successful stories today. SI cannot be viewed from the Western or disbelievers’ perspective as some have segregated spirituality from religiosity (Jain & Purohit, 2006) which directly reject the existence of the Unity of Allah which constitutes the essence of SI in Islam.

1.2.Literature Review

1.2.1. Definitions of Spirit (Ruh) from the Qur’an and Sunnah

In explaining the concept of SI used in Islam, it is important to first define the concept of spirit (ruh) in words and terminology as found in the Qur’an and the Sunnah. The definition of spirit (ruh) is

not straightforward. In the Qur'an, spirit is closely related to the creation of human beings, created by Allah from clay (body) and spirit (ruh). After Allah created Adam from clay, He then blew His Holy Spirit (Ruh) that gave life to Adam. Allah says clearly in the Qur'an, in surah Sajdah (32:9), that "Allah blew His Ruh and breathed into Adam His Spirit". And in surah Al-Tahrim (66:12), it is stated that "Allah breathed into Mariam, the daughter of Imran His Spirit." This indicates that ruh is not a material substance which can be seen or touched, yet it exists. The phrase that Allah blew into human did not mean that Allah shared His Ruh with human, instead it indicates that ruh of man is in the hands of Allah, and that He created man just by blowing His Holy Spirit, then man becomes alive (Qutb, 2001).

Ruh connects man, who was made from clay, the lowest of the low to Allah, the highest of the high, the Most Powerful, the Best Sustainer. In surah Al-Isra' (17:85), Allah said "They ask you (Muhammad) concerning the spirit, God warns that human knowledge is limited to understand the whole nature of spirit (ruh), but it is the secret of Allah." This verse indicates that as much as man wants to understand ruh in totality, his or her intellect is restricted to certain limitations. In surah Al-Mujadilah (58:22), ruh means righteousness, while in surah Al-Shu'ara (26:193), the word ruh is mentioned with the word al-amin which means "the trusted one," ruh as referring to Angel Jibrail. In surah Al-Shura (42:52), ruh in this verse means the revelation. In surah al-Nahl (16:2), ruh has a similar meaning as God's Holy Spirit which gives life to a body, while in surah Al-Shura (42:52), ruh means a revelation which makes the heart and the body alive. From these evidence (dalil), ruh can be said to refer to, first, a spirit which makes a body alive and second, it is a revelation which makes not only a body, but also a heart alive. Both spirit and revelation are important for man to further life.

1.2.2. Definitions of Spirit (Ruh) as Interpreted from the Qur'an and Sunnah by Prominent Islamic Scholars

Many Islamic scholars have attempted to define and explain the meaning of ruh. However, the most prominent and well-known details about ruh were written by Al-Ghazali in his writings in *Kitab Aja'ib al-Qalb* (The Book of the Mysteries of the Heart), *Kitab Riyadat an-nafs wa Tahdhib al-Akhlaq wa Mu'alijat Amrad al-Qalb* (Disciplining the Soul and Breaking the Two Desires) and also *Kitab al-'Ilm* (The Book of Knowledge) in his *Ihya Ulum al-Din* (Al-Ghazali, 1997; Mat Akhir, 2008). In these books, Al-Ghazali has associated ruh with al-qalb (heart), al-nafs (soul) and al-'aql (mind/intellect) (Al-Ghazali, 1979). Regarding al-qalb (heart), Al-Ghazali has attributed it into two types; physical heart (like a body organ) and spiritual heart (inner heart). Through inner heart, spiritual goals can be achieved. Regarding al-nafs, Al-Ghazali seemed to relate al-nafs with the dual compositions of human beings, that is, body and soul (spirit) (Al-'Akiti, 1997). According to Al-Ghazali, the Qur'an indicates three levels of nafs; first and the lowest, which is nafs ammarah (Qur'an, 12:52) which is prone to evil; second level is nafs lawammah (75:2), a self-reproaching spirit which feels conscious of evil and asks Allah's grace and pardon, and third, the highest level is nafs mutmainnah (89:2), a soul which achieves full rests and satisfaction. This definition of ruh, relates the connection between body and spirit; body which was made from clay may be prone to evil (nafs ammarah); but which may still reach the highest stage (nafs mutmainnah) as it has the Holy Spirit of Allah in it. This indicates the level of the ruh is contingent upon the act of the body. If the body is good, the spirit is also good. The body which obeys Allah commands leads to good spirit.

Regarding the concept of al-‘aql; both al-qalb and al-‘aql are interconnected (Al-Attas, 1990). Al-aql refers to the utilisation of the mind – a faculty of intellect or mental intelligence. Al-‘aql is a logical ruh (al-ruh al-fikri) that can only understand logic; however, the illogical truth which cannot be understood by reason; can only be comprehended by al-qalb (the inner heart). Al-qalb and al-‘aql are possessed by all human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims, believers and non-believers. However, this qalb (which belongs to non-believers) is not transcendental into eternal truth, as it clouded with hijab (veil) due to their sins and disbelief in the Oneness of God. God is the Almighty, possessing the Ultimate power, Allah says (83:14-15) “By no means! But on their hearts is the stain of the (ill) which they do! Verily from (the Light) of their Lord, that Day, will they be veiled.” These verses connote that committing a sin will veil the divine illumination (Nur Ilahi) from reaching their hearts. In a hadith reported by Abu Huraira, Rasulullah S.A.W. said, “Verily, when the servant commits a sin, a black mark appears upon his heart. If he abandons the sin, seeks forgiveness, and repents, then his heart will be polished. If he returns to the sin, the blackness will be increased until it overcomes his heart. It is the covering that Allah has mentioned: No, rather a covering is over their hearts from what they have earned” (Sunan al-Tirmidhī 3334). Therefore, the disbelievers and mufasiqqun (i.e., those who are committing sins), may not reach the level of spiritual intelligence or the spiritual conviction for whom Allah opens their hearts, minds and souls to feel the lights of truth (i.e., spiritual knowledge). Only believers who have unconditional love for Allah, will drive their actions, intentions and feelings fully for the sake of Allah and sincerely will have kashaf (the opening of the veil that blocked their heart and mind) to see the hidden knowledge (Al-Ghazali, 2015). When believers have this spiritual connection with Allah, they are willing to do over and above, beyond the imaginable, whether in terms of working, worships, and so forth, as their aim in doing anything is only for the sake of Allah, for the true love of Allah.

1.2.3. How to Reach the Level of Spiritual Intelligence in Islam?

When the hearts, actions, intentions are truly guided by the love of Allah, at this stage, the soul of the believer reaches complete satisfaction and is at rest (nafs mutmainnah) (Al-‘Akiti, 1997). Ibn Abbas, the cousin of Prophet S.A.W. regarded the believing soul or the soul that reaches the highest level as a soul in tranquility and at rest. To reach this stage and to feel ultimately in love with God unconditionally, believers need to have a clear path to reach this ultimate salvation – they need to clean their heart and actions, intentions from vile and abusive values (mazmumah) and traits, to purify their soul/spirit (tazkiyatul nafs) by believing and practising values of good quality (mahmudah) and traits. They also need to exemplify the actions, practices and attributes of the Prophet, S.A.W, friends of the prophet (sahabah), friends of the Prophet’s S.A.W. friends (tabi’un tabi’in), salaful soleh and the like. They need to obey Allah’s commands fully, doing what Allah encourages them to do (amar maaruf) and avoiding what Allah prohibits them from doing (wa nahi ‘an al-mungkar). In addition, they also need to establish good relationships with Allah and with other fellow human beings, Muslims and non-Muslims (hablul minallah wa hablul minannas). Also, they need to always be vigilant not to commit any sins; if they commit any sin, they need to quickly repent and ask Allah’s pardon and forgiveness. To increase their level of relationship with Allah, they need to avoid from doing anything that falls into grey areas (shubhah) that may exist in between sin and reward. Furthermore, they also need to be good observance

in performing the ritual in worshipping Allah (ibadah). They also need to always put Allah first in their mind (i.e., always God-conscious in their actions, intentions and attributes). When believers fulfil all these conditions with sincerity and pure heart, they are improving towards becoming closer to Allah; thus, their spiritual intelligence will potentially be achieved, and they can reach the salvation of the highest level of 'abid (faithful servants of Allah). Believers who reach this ultimate salvation to Allah will experience spiritual understanding or intelligence in which they receive direct knowledge from Allah in form of dhawq (taste or intuitive truth feeling/knowledge) and al-ilm al-laduniyyah (knowledge of the highest level) (Al-Ghazali, 1994).

Dhawq is defined as tasting – to taste means to experience spiritual knowledge and understanding personally and directly. According to Oxford Dictionary of Islam (2019), dhawq is a spiritual true intuition, in the form of direct knowledge of invisible realities or of God. In a general sense, a synonym for kashf (unveiling) and shuhud (witnessing, contemplation). According to Al-Qushayri, (2007), dhawq or taste is the beginning of ecstatic love of Allah. Generally, knowledge and understanding can be acquired by using mental mind or IQ, such as through reading, performing or observing. However, spiritual knowledge can only be felt through tasting (dhawq) – that is, spiritual knowledge directly from Allah, thus dhawq is a kind of emotional and spiritual intelligence (i.e., EQ and SQ) in Islamic connotations. Imam Malik when defining knowledge said, “Knowledge does not consist in narrating much, knowledge is but a light which Allah places in the heart” (Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 3:555).

Ladunni is another spiritual knowledge that comes directly from Allah (Al-Ghazali, 1994). Ladunni in Arabic means side or near, thus Ladunni means my side or from me. In the Qur'an in surah Al-Kahfi, (18:65), Allah says “...We had taught him knowledge from Our own presence,” the knowledge in this verse refers to the knowledge that directly comes from Allah into human hearts without them learning it (ladunni) – it was brought by Allah through kashaf (uncovering, revealing what is hidden) or in a direct way through Angel Jibrail such as the revelation (Mat Akhir, 2008). Ladunni can mean the revelations which were given specifically to the Prophet S.A.W.; ladunni also can refer to the knowledge given to wali (saints who are specifically chosen by Allah and endowed with exceptional gifts, due to their spiritual perfection) and ilham (inspiration or true intuitive). Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. said in one hadith, “Beware of inner vision (firasah) of the believer for he sees with the light of Allah” (Tirmidhi-Sahih authenticated by al-Haytami). This indicates that spiritual knowledge exists and can only be understood by individuals who have spiritual intelligence. However, regarding kashaf and ilham, Shaykh Abu Hasan Ash Shadhili said,

“If your spiritual unveilings (kashaf) contradicts the Book and the Sunna, act upon the Book and the Sunnah and leave off your unveiling (kashaf) and say to yourself, “Allah guaranteed infallibility in the Book and the Sunnah and has not guaranteed that in spiritual unveiling (kashaf) and inspiration (ilham)”.

1.2.4. Islamic spiritual intelligence - Islam, Iman and Ihsan

Spiritual intelligence in Islam is attained when believers have reached the highest level of relationship with Allah. Allah is pure and He loves purity. To reach the quality level that Allah will bestow the intelligence in terms of spiritual knowledge or known as SI, believers/'abid need to first and foremost believe in the Oneness of God (Tawhid) and do not associate Him with anyone or matter; and to believe and uphold the five pillars of Islam (prayer, fasting during Ramadhan, paying zakat, performing

pilgrim (hajj) for those who are afforded to do so) and also six pillars of Iman (i.e. believe with strong conviction in Allah, Angels, Prophets, Holy Books, Day of Judgement, and Qada' and Qadar) and Ihsan which is performing action as if Allah is watching them - good in conducts (akhlaq), purified the hearts from vile characters – purify the hearts from hypocrisy (riya'), boastful (takabbara), and other despicable traits and natures, obey Allah commands, avoid from committing sins whether small or big, always ask Allah's for repentance, always in the state of remembrance of Allah, always truthful, honest, sincere and other good values and traits. The first condition to receive the SI in Islam is to believe in the existence of Allah and the Oneness of Allah. SI is bestowed by Allah and it cannot be directly acquired like an IQ. Logically, how come individuals can receive SI when they do not believe in Allah or in the existence of the Oneness of Allah?

Believers who fulfil truthfully at least the three conditions summarised as Islam, Iman and Ihsan will reach the ultimate spiritual closeness to God and will be experiencing the love of Allah – Believers whose their actions, intentions and feelings are all for the sake of Allah, will receive the divine illumination (Nur Allah) and will experience mukasafah (the opening of the heart to the ecstatic knowledge of Allah) (Al-Ghazali, 1997). Thus, when divine illumination touches the hearts of the believers, the whole world is no longer matter except the love of Allah – just through the love of Allah, believers will feel complete satisfaction and eternal happiness). In other words, when the Iman (the strong conviction) guide the soul/ruh/spirit, indirectly and directly their actions in anything including work performance will excel in itself. The ultimate effects of achieving spiritual intelligence is believers will receive transcendence knowledge from Allah either through intuitive truth knowledge (or known as dhawq), the spiritual ability or intelligence to understand something intuitively through dhawq and to receive al-ilmu al-laduniyyah.

1.2.5. Do disbelievers experience spiritual intelligence?

Generally, disbelievers may experience some spiritualities as it is a nature (fitrah) in the creation of man. In Islam, every human being was created with a fitrah to need God. There was also a bind agreement between man and Allah in the Book of Decree (Lauh al-Mahfuz) which Allah asks all human ruh to testify that Allah is their God. Allah says in the Qur'an (7:172),

And (remember) when your Lord drew forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their seed and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)" They said: "Yes! We do testify," lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: Of this we were never mindful" Qur'an (7:172).

Furthermore, Allah has blown His spirit into human that gave him life, thus within man, there is always be a yearning to have a spiritual relationship with their Creator, their Master (i.e., Allah). However, they will not be able to reach the level of relationship with Allah that makes Him to bestow upon them with SI because the first connection (believe in the Oneness of Allah or Tawhid) with Allah is missing. Many loopholes are found in the disbelievers' connections with Allah; thus, they will not have the understanding or intelligence to comprehend the spiritual knowledge inspired by Allah. However, it is different with SI in the Western or non-Muslim perspectives, SI in Islam is related to the significant effects which is directly given by Allah due to the believers' quality of relationship with Allah. To reach

this level of relationship and to achieve the love of Allah, it starts will full observance of Islam, Iman and Ihsan, which are very essential, and can open the path to receive SI from Allah.

1.2.6. Islamic Spiritual Intelligence in the Workplace

Islamic SI can produce the highest achievement in the workplace as work is a means for believers to reach Allah's decree (redha) and Allah's love. Islam considers working as a worship, thus will be rewarded. Furthermore, employees have rights and responsibilities towards their employers that need to be fulfilled. For actions, and attitudes loved by Allah and for the believers to reach the level of highest spiritual connection with Allah, the believers must fulfil all the responsibilities entrusted including responsibilities towards their employers. The primary responsibility of man is towards Allah and Allah orders all responsibilities and trusts that are not harmful and not against Islamic teachings to be fulfilled (Wahab & Ismail, 2019).

2. Problem Statement

From the Islamic perspective, S1 has the potential to be attainable by believers or anyone who believe in the Oneness of Allah because spiritual understanding and feeling can only be grasped by the heart that believes in the Oneness of Allah and that Prophet Muhammad S.A.W. as the messenger of Allah. Thus, in Islam, to understand S1, first one needs to understand the existence of spirit (ruh) as explained in the Qur'an, Sunnah and writings of Muslim scholars. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is to throw light on the concept of SI in Islam using Islamic sources such as the Qur'an, Sunnah and writings of Muslim scholars. Writings on S1 are mostly conventional, while literatures about Islamic spiritual intelligence are scanty and explained it on the surface only. In short, the essence of spiritual intelligence in the Islamic sense has not been truly explained.

3. Research Questions

Therefore, this study specifically aims to answer the following research questions:

- What is the concept of spiritual intelligence in Islam?
- How significant is spiritual intelligence in Islam as compared to its non-Islamic spiritual intelligence
- How important is Islamic spiritual intelligence for achieving total excellence
- What is the framework for total excellence based on spiritual intelligence in Islam?

4. Purpose of the Study

Specifically, the research objectives of the study are set as the following:

- To review and synthesize the evidence from the Qur'an, Hadith and writings of Muslim scholars regarding the Islamic concept of spiritual intelligence
- To discuss the significance of spiritual intelligence in Islamic in terms of man's ability to reach their highest potential as compared to the concept of non-Islamic spiritual intelligence

- To review and synthesize the Islamic literature, the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the writings of Islamic scholars on the ultimate importance of Islamic spiritual intelligence to mankind (in life, at work in this world and hereafter).
- To develop a framework envisages from systematic review of the literature on Islamic spiritual intelligence in Islam

5. Research Methods

This is a conceptual paper. Thus, this paper uses a qualitative method of systematic literature research from the Qur'an, the Sunnah and also the writings of Islamic scholars to arrive at the meaning of what the spiritual intelligence in Islam is; this includes the significance of Islamic spiritual intelligence for man to reach their highest potential of total excellence. The qualitative method of systematic literature review and synthesis of the evidence from the Qur'an, Sunnah and the writings of Islamic scholars are very important for establishing the foundation of the study and the development of the study's framework.

6. Findings

From the literature search and the scrutiny of the evidence (dalil) from the Qur'an, Sunnah and writings of Islamic scholars, we come to the conclusion as summarised as in the framework in Figure 1. The framework illustrates the distinction between the level of work performance, man's level of potentiality and the types of intelligence, which consist of IQ (intelligence quotient), EQ (emotional quotient) and SQ (spiritual quotient). The level of performance is reflected in terms of work performance, while man's potential ranged from no potential to positively above and beyond normal. From the qualitative study (i.e., systematic literature syntheses), this study found that having just an IQ, man will not even reach their normal potential that was created for them. Although, human beings in general have been given a complete reasoning tool to use (al-'aql), sometimes they are still unable to utilize it fully to reach their normal potential. Thus, in this case their work performance is expected to be in the level between the average and the lowest level. Sometimes, they may be able to utilise their IQ effectively in performing their tasks, but in some instances, they are unable to cope with emotions. And, their inability to control other emotions leads them to be ineffective at work. However, despite having IQ and EQ, man can only minimally reach their normal potential, but by having SI, man can do more than normal, above their potential of what they can achieve. The use of total intelligence will drive man to go beyond normal, above and beyond their potentials to reach the highest level of performance. The framework in Figure 1 also summarises that to achieve SI, the believers need to fully observe and fulfil Allah's commands regarding Islam, Iman and Ihsan in order to be bestowed by Allah the SI which can be in the form of dhawq and 'ilm ladunni. Having SI, in addition to IQ and EQ will produce a complete intelligence or quantum quotient to become a perfect human being (insan kamil).

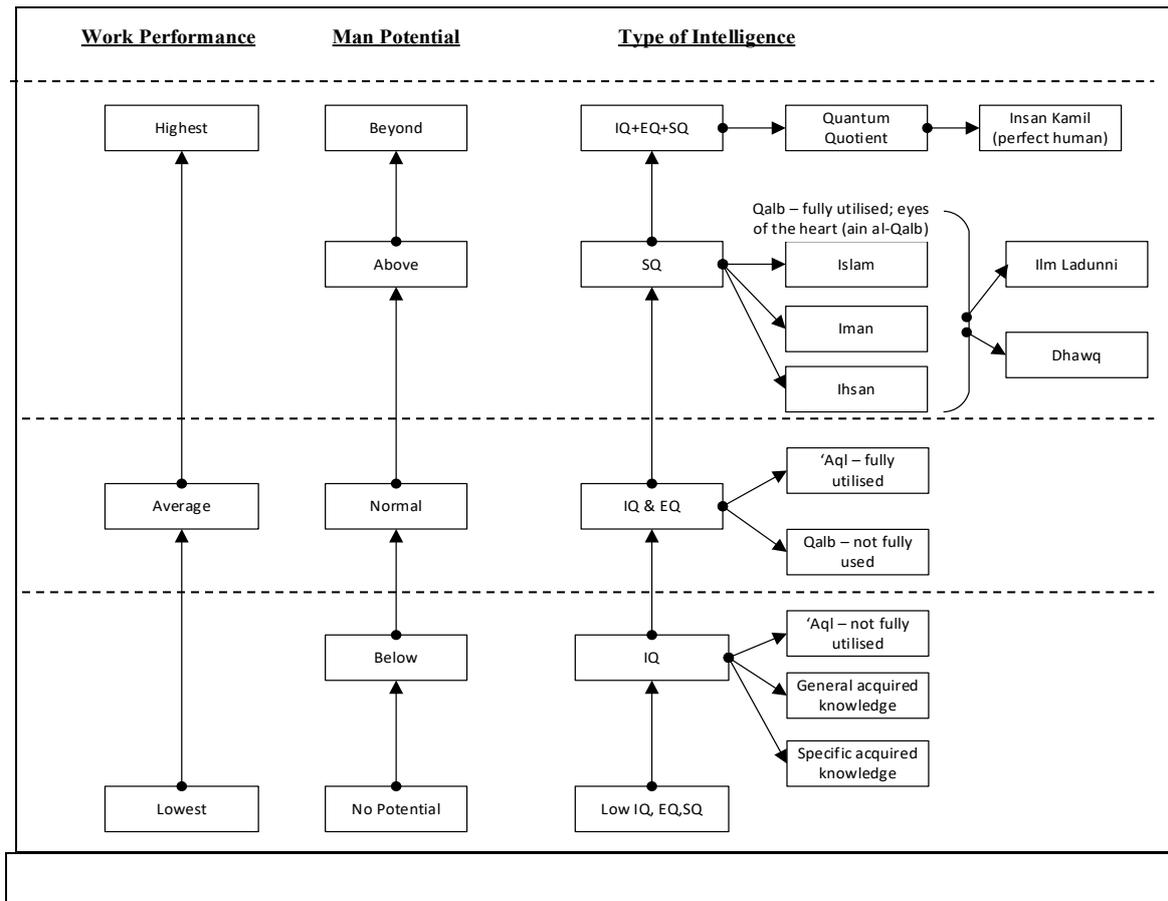


Figure 01. Spiritual intelligence and a framework for total excellence *in this world and in the hereafter (duniawi wa ukhrawi)*

7. Conclusion

The main and ultimate aim in the creation of man and placed in this world is to worship Allah. Allah says specifically in the Qur'an (51:57) that "And I have not created the Jinn and man but that they may worship Me". Therefore, working is just a means to achieve the highest quality of worship and to have a quality of relationship with Allah and not an end in itself. In accomplishing this ultimate aim, man was endowed with capabilities and intellect, useful to help him in achieving his ultimate aim. However, most of the time, man is swayed by material and temporary quests and benefits and they forget their ultimate aim in their way to attain the goal. Focusing on the temporary pursuits such as work performance, money, or temporary happiness using the acquired knowledge and experience through the utilisation of IQ will not lead man to reach his highest potential of his creation as material needs is the lowest in the man's hierarchy of motivation, even using many Western motivational theories such as Maslow, Alderfer, Herzberg, and so on. However, focusing on having a spiritual connection with Allah by full observance and strong conviction to Islam, Iman and Ihsan will bring man to the level of Allah endowing them with spiritual intelligence. SI can actualise and bring the individual believers above and beyond their normal potentials, which can also benefit the organisations if the believers are employees. The journey to reach the level of SI may be complicated and challenging, and sometimes believers may also get drowned in their own mishaps. However, if they repent and keep in istiqomah in their journey

towards Allah's decree and Allah's love, it will bring eternal happiness and pure satisfaction as it is the reason for the creation of man in the first place.

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