



Appreciative Inquiry: An Operating System for SOAR

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INTRODUCTION

Our current research involves testing the hypothesis that AI (Appreciative Inquiry) is a predictor of SOAR (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspiration, Results). The theoretical premise of this study is that AI is the operating system to SOAR. We tested our hypothesis using structural equation modeling (SEM) on self-report data obtained from the SOAR Profile, our original rapid assessment instrument to measure AI and SOAR.

The SOAR Profile measures an individual's SOAR-based capacity and capabilities. The purpose of the SOAR Profile is to help individuals understand how they most naturally approach strategic thinking, planning, and leading in order to help improve both individual and team performance.¹ Reliability and validity of the SOAR Profile have been demonstrated in multiple samples published in multiple peer-reviewed journals.²⁻⁴

METHODS

The SOAR Profile was administered to 372 professionals working via SurveyMonkey.com and SurveyGizmo.com. The sample was evenly matched between males and females. In addition to measuring AI and SOAR using survey items scored along a 10-point Likert scale, ranging from "Never" to "Always", the SOAR Profile obtained demographic information such as age, ethnicity, gender, education level, and industry.

Study constructs measured by the SOAR Profile include Strengths (STR), Opportunities (OPP), Aspirations (ASP), Results (RES), Whole System (WHSYS) and Solution (SOL). We tested our hypothesis that AI predicts SOAR using structural equation modeling conducted in the statistical application Mplus 7.3. This is first study to quantitatively measure AI and SOAR, and to test AI as a predictor of SOAR.

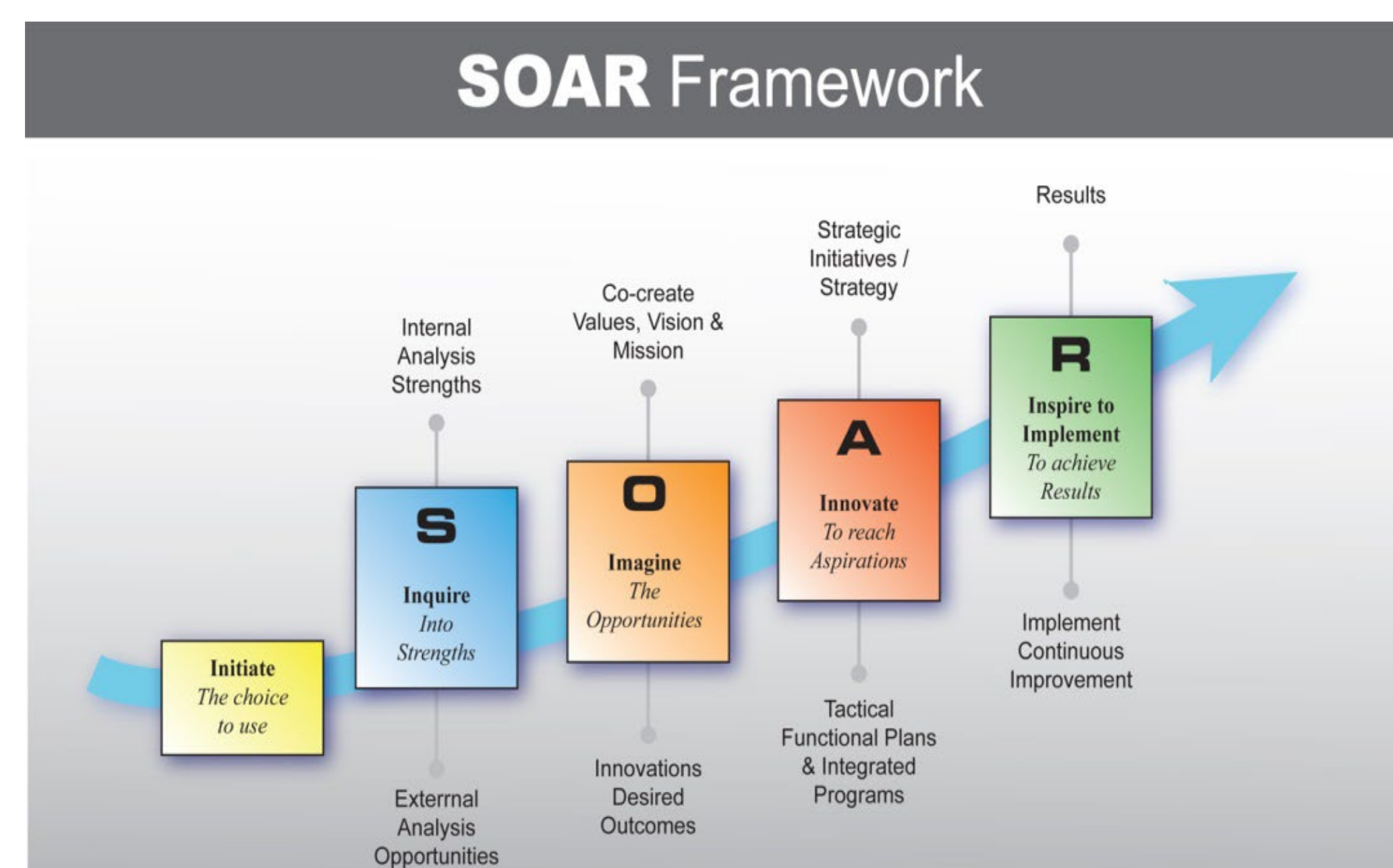
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LITERATURE REVIEW

AI is based on the assumptions that in every organization something works well, what we focus on becomes real, reality is constructed in the moment, asking questions influences the organization, and the language we use creates reality.⁵ AI assumes that by taking a whole system approach "we excel only by amplifying strengths, never by simply fixing weaknesses" (p. 73).⁶ AI has demonstrated its ability to create change across a variety of organizational settings. Despite its applied success, there is minimal empirical evidence using quantitative measures.

SOAR integrates the principles of AI with a dialogue-based approach and strategy to create a framework for strategic thinking, leading, and planning. SOAR is an acronym for strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results and "can best be understood as a strengths-based framework with a participatory approach to strategic thinking that allows an organization's stakeholders to co-construct and execute its future through collaboration, shared understanding, and a commitment to action" (p. 826).⁷



SOAR Framework. Reprinted with permission from <http://www.soar-strategy.com>

RESULTS

Reliability and Validity of SOAR

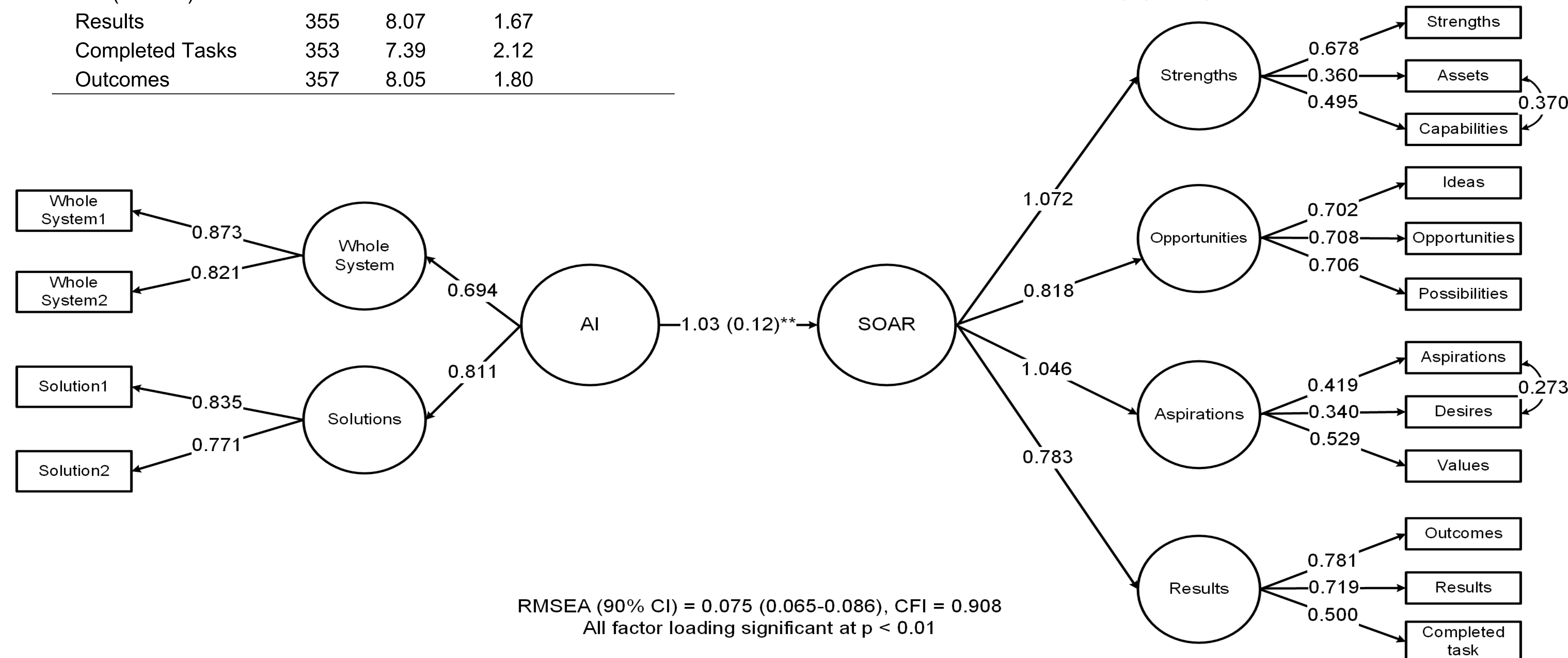
Construct and Items	N	Mean ¹	SD ²	Alpha ³
SOAR (12-items)	358	7.87	1.09	0.91
STR (3-items)	357	7.84	1.27	0.75
Strengths	354	8.25	1.64	
Assets	355	7.24	1.85	
Capabilities	357	8.03	1.62	
OPP (3-items)	355	8.26	1.27	0.85
Opportunities	355	8.25	1.62	
Ideas	355	8.39	1.44	
Possibilities	354	8.14	1.60	
ASP (3-items)	358	7.59	1.38	0.69
Aspirations	356	7.40	1.98	
Desires	355	7.47	1.81	
Values	355	7.94	1.86	
RES (3-items)	358	7.83	1.49	0.82
Results	355	8.07	1.67	
Completed Tasks	353	7.39	2.12	
Outcomes	357	8.05	1.80	

Correlation Matrix of SOAR vs AI

	AI	WHSYS	SOL	SOAR	STR	OPP	ASP	RES
AI	0.87							
WHSYS	0.88	0.91						
SOL	0.79	0.41	0.88					
SOAR	0.71	0.55	0.66	0.90				
STR	0.58	0.45	0.54	0.82	0.75			
OPP	0.55	0.43	0.49	0.81	0.54	0.85		
ASP	0.54	0.48	0.43	0.80	0.57	0.58	0.69	
RES	0.58	0.40	0.60	0.76	0.53	0.45	0.37	0.82

¹Mean of items within scale. ²Standard deviation. ³Cronbach's alpha reliability measure of internal consistency adjusted via the *Spearman-Brown prophecy formula*. Note. Numbers in bold-italics are Cronbach's alpha; all correlations are significant at $p < 0.01$

Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) to test construct validity



RMSEA (90% CI) = 0.075 (0.065-0.086), CFI = 0.908
All factor loading significant at $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

The results suggest that about half of the variance in SOAR is accounted for by AI (refer to large effect size in the fitted line plot, R-square = 50.8%).

We began the next phase of our research on SOAR from a dialogical perspective. Our current research involves administering the SOAR Profile to LinkedIn groups in order to obtain a larger and more heterogeneous sample from industry. We will investigate if a person's natural SOAR-based strategic thinking has an impact on their organization's effectiveness.

To this end, we have added a new section of questions to the SOAR Profile that asks respondent's to identify if they are currently using any aspects of SOAR in their strategic thinking, planning, or leading. Next, we ask them to rate the extent to which organizational performance has improved during the past 12 months.

