Methodological Positioning of the SEI in the Context of Scientific Psychodiagnostics

Not a Conventional Personality Assessment

Our lives and working careers are longer today than those of earlier generations, and our present-day living and working environments change more rapidly and profoundly within a single lifetime than they did over centuries in the past. “Tempora mutantur, nosque mutamur in illis” (“Times change, and we change with them”) was already a proverb in the Renaissance. All the more so in the twenty-first century, we should acknowledge that we are always a “work in progress”.

Presumably, there are indeed deeper-seated personality characteristics that remain stable over time—constants amid change, as it were. But to what extent can such characteristics actually be established on the basis of high test–retest reliability of personality scales? Might they be more readily identified through long-term biographical analyses? And might they be distinctly more individual (idiographic) and less universal (nomothetic) in nature—for example, a person’s particular sense of humour, style of speaking, or way of working?

The SEI do not capture personality traits set in stone, but rather intrapsychic structures that can change over time as a consequence of life experiences and, more importantly, of how those experiences have gradually been processed. Some of these structures are naturally more resistant to change, while others are more fluid. Yet describing an SEI as a mere “snapshot”, as is appropriate and intended for diagnostic procedures (such as adjective checklists) designed to assess a person’s current state (“state” versus “trait”), would be equally misleading. Each SEI conveys an intrapsychic picture of a person’s current life situation. It thus represents something akin to an assessment of where a person stands in the course of their biography.

Not Psychometric Tests

The SEI are not tests—in two senses. First, nobody is “tested” by these tools in the sense of being examined or judged. There are no “good” or “bad”, no “strong” or “weak” results. Second, the SEI are not psychometric tests in the sense of psychological test theory. Their assessment categories are not scales derived inductively through factor analysis; rather, they result from applying meta-models to the particular subject of an SEI. Unlike in conventional test construction, therefore, the SEI items were not the primary empirical material subsequently subjected to statistical analysis; instead, they were generated secondarily on a theoretical basis.

The meta-models originate in decades of my own research, bringing together contemporary approaches with principles of ancient Vedic and Ayurvedic psychology. A more in-depth introduction to the SEI meta-models can be found in Claudio Weiss’s trilogy on “Values Intelligence”: Volume 1: “Wie tickst Du? So steuern unterschiedliche Wertewelten unser

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Denken, Fühlen und Wollen." Volume 2: "Wie wählst Du weise? So machen wir guten Gebrauch von unserer Wahlfreiheit." Volume 3: "Wie bist Du wertvoll? So machen wir das Beste aus uns allen." (https://shop.tredition.com/search/Q2xhdWRpbyBXZWlzcw==)

All models used in the SEI share one feature: their structurally complementary categories always add up to 100 per cent. Users provide their input by selecting and/or weighting items. The approach is therefore ipsative, while nevertheless permitting both intra-individual and inter-individual comparisons of assessment patterns, as well as comparisons among several profiles of the same individual. Individual results are not compared with a normative population, nor is this envisaged for the future.

Quality Criteria*

Because the SEI are *not* tests, the usual quality criteria for tests apply here only to a limited extent and, in some cases, in modified form. The following *pragmatic, qualitative*—rather than *statistical, quantitative*—quality criteria can, however, be formulated and examined in practical application:

1. **Objectivity:** In the SEI, objectivity is ensured through standardisation of the procedures (online instructions, questions, items, handling, automated analyses and graphical presentations). While administration and scoring objectivity are fully assured, interpretation objectivity can, in principle, only ever be approximated. In the SEI it is supported by explanatory texts. The risk of arbitrary interpretation can also be counter-acted through CognoscoCoaching.

2. **Validity:** Validating the SEI against potential external biographical criteria would require time and financial resources. Cross-validation studies examining correlations between SEI results and other diagnostic procedures with which a substantive relationship might be expected are likewise still outstanding for the same reasons. At present (2026), high *diagnostic significance* and *practical relevance* can be identified as validity criteria: the graphical and verbal results resonate strongly with the people who encounter them and trigger "aha" moments. Individuals recognize themselves in the results, leading to deeper self-understanding, greater self-acceptance and stronger self-regulation. The increasingly frequent use of individual SEI in medical and psychotherapeutic settings to support healing may also be regarded as recurring case-based validation. In these contexts, the results prove to be a coherent complement to the respective symptom picture and reveal salutogenic resources.

3. **Reliability:** Conventional correlation-based reliability coefficients, such as measures of internal consistency (e.g. Cronbach's alpha) or the test–retest reliability of scales, can be set aside for a "non-test" such as an SEI. High test–retest reliability, in the sense of very similar assessment patterns obtained several days apart, has indeed been observed in individual cases. However, this probably says more about the memory performance of the individuals concerned than about the "measurement precision" of

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procedures administered repeatedly. To establish the short-term test–retest reliability of these tools, parallel forms would have to be created, effectively doubling the current number of items and entailing an enormous effort that cannot presently be justified on economic grounds. The following criteria can be identified as appropriate indicators of diagnostic reliability for the SEI:

- *Inter-individual variability:* If all the results of an SEI resembled one another, the SEI would simply be useless as an idiographic (!) diagnostic instrument. In practice, however, no two SEI results are alike. All components of the SEI show very high inter-individual variability, with the values of individual results distributed across their entire possible range. Every SEI profile is singular and unique. The essential reliability requirement for an idiographic diagnostic instrument is thus fully met.

- *Intra-individual long-term continuity and variability:* So far, repeated administrations several years apart have occurred only in isolated cases. They show both continuities and changes, each of which can be explained biographically.

- *Precautions in interpretation:* Differences between an individual's assessment patterns (profiles) are interpreted only when they are pronounced. Small differences in the values of results may be due to "measurement inaccuracies" and must therefore not be interpreted.

** References to past observations in the following discussion frequently concern earlier versions of the SEI, the awaremem® Motivatoren-Spiegel (in use since 2012), and the Berufungskompass für junge Menschen (BKJM; in use since 2015).*

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