

Personal Intelligence in the Age of AI:

Building on John D. Mayer's Foundational Theory

Kate Parker

Founder & CEO, House of Reawaken Ltd.

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John D. Mayer provided the theoretical foundation for Personal Intelligence. Advances in artificial intelligence now create opportunities to investigate, support, and study that theory in ways that were not previously possible.

1. Introduction

In 2008, psychologist John D. Mayer introduced the concept of Personal Intelligence, proposing that individuals differ in their ability to reason about personality—their own and that of others. Building upon earlier work in intelligence theory and personality psychology, Mayer argued that personality itself constitutes a form of information that can be recognised, understood, and applied to guide judgement and life decisions. His work established Personal Intelligence as a distinct psychological construct and provided an important theoretical foundation for understanding how people make sense of themselves and those around them. (Mayer, 2008, 2009).

Although Personal Intelligence has been examined within psychological research, it has remained comparatively underexplored outside academic settings. Unlike related constructs such as Emotional Intelligence, which achieved widespread public recognition and practical application, Personal Intelligence has largely remained the subject of scholarly investigation. Yet the central questions Mayer raised concerning self-understanding, personality reasoning, and human judgement have arguably become even more relevant in the years since his original publications. (Mayer, 2014; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

The purpose of this paper is not to redefine Personal Intelligence, nor to argue that Mayer's theoretical framework was incomplete. Rather, it proposes that the technological landscape in which the theory now exists has fundamentally changed.

When Mayer first articulated Personal Intelligence, artificial intelligence was in its infancy. Contemporary large language models, persistent conversational memory, natural language understanding, and the capacity to analyse longitudinal reflective data over extended periods did not exist. Consequently, many of the practical and empirical

questions that can now be asked about Personal Intelligence were simply beyond the reach of the technologies available at the time. (Bommasani et al., 2021; OpenAI, 2023).

Today, advances in artificial intelligence create new opportunities to investigate how individuals reflect upon themselves, recognise recurring psychological patterns, and construct increasingly coherent understandings of their own personalities over time. Importantly, these developments do not suggest that artificial intelligence should replace human judgement or become an authority on identity. Rather, they invite consideration of whether AI may serve as an ethical cognitive partner—supporting reflection, pattern recognition, and longitudinal observation while leaving interpretation, meaning, and personal agency firmly with the individual.

This paper argues that the emergence of these technologies makes it timely to revisit Mayer's foundational theory. By examining Personal Intelligence through the lens of contemporary artificial intelligence, it explores how recent technological advances may expand opportunities for research, measurement, and practical application without altering the theoretical foundations upon which the construct was originally established.

The discussion that follows therefore proceeds in two stages. It first revisits Mayer's conceptualisation of Personal Intelligence as the foundation for the field. It then considers how advances in artificial intelligence create new possibilities for investigating, supporting, and extending research into Personal Intelligence in ways that were not previously possible.

2. Mayer's Foundation of Personal Intelligence

John D. Mayer introduced Personal Intelligence as a distinct psychological construct describing an individual's ability to reason about personality. Building upon established theories of intelligence and personality psychology, he proposed that people differ not only in their personalities but also in their capacity to understand personality in themselves and others. Rather than replacing existing personality theories, Personal Intelligence provides a framework for reasoning about personality and applying that understanding to everyday life. (Mayer, 2008, 2009).

Central to Mayer's theory is the proposition that personality constitutes meaningful psychological information. Just as people may reason about mathematical, linguistic or emotional information, they may also reason about personality. Personal Intelligence therefore concerns the recognition, interpretation and application of personality-relevant information, enabling individuals to develop increasingly accurate understandings of themselves and those around them. (Mayer, 2008).

Mayer organised this process into four interrelated branches. The first involves recognising personality-relevant information through observation and introspection. The second concerns organising that information into coherent mental models of personality. The third focuses on applying those models to guide judgement and decision-making, while the fourth extends this reasoning to the organisation of longer-term goals, plans and life direction. Together, these branches describe a cumulative framework through which personality information is recognised, understood and used. (Mayer, 2008).

Importantly, Personal Intelligence is not presented as a theory of personality itself, nor as a therapeutic model or programme for self-improvement. Rather, it is a theory of reasoning. It seeks to explain how individuals acquire, organise and apply knowledge about personality, providing a cognitive framework for understanding ourselves and others. (Mayer, 2009).

3. What Has Changed Since 2008?

When John D. Mayer introduced Personal Intelligence, the technological landscape was fundamentally different. Artificial intelligence existed primarily within research environments, natural language processing remained relatively limited, and the concept of maintaining meaningful, long-term conversational relationships with AI systems was largely theoretical. While Personal Intelligence provided a compelling framework for understanding how individuals reason about personality, there were few practical means of observing that reasoning longitudinally or supporting it in real time.

Over the past two decades, this landscape has changed dramatically. Advances in machine learning, large language models, natural language understanding, and persistent memory have created new opportunities for engaging with reflective human data at a scale and depth that was previously unattainable. These technologies do not alter the theoretical foundations of Personal Intelligence; rather, they expand the range of questions that researchers are now able to investigate. (Bommasani et al., 2021; OpenAI, 2023).

One of the most significant developments is the ability to work with unstructured natural language. Reflective writing, once confined to journals, therapy notes, or qualitative research interviews, can now be analysed across months or even years while preserving the narrative continuity of an individual's experiences. Rather than viewing reflections as isolated moments, it becomes possible to examine evolving themes, recurring tensions, changing values, and shifts in self-perception over time. (McAdams, 2001; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

Persistent memory represents a further shift. Historically, both researchers and individuals have been constrained by the practical limitations of human memory. Previous reflections are forgotten, patterns become difficult to recognise, and long-term personal development is often reconstructed retrospectively. AI systems capable of maintaining ethically governed longitudinal records create the possibility of supporting individuals in recognising connections that emerge gradually across extended periods of reflection. (Packer et al., 2023).

Importantly, these developments do not imply that artificial intelligence should determine identity, personality, or life direction. Human interpretation, judgement, and personal agency remain central. Instead, AI may serve as a cognitive partner capable of organising information, identifying recurring patterns, and presenting observations that individuals may choose to explore, question, or reject. In this sense, artificial intelligence augments reflective practice rather than replacing it. (Clark & Chalmers, 1998; Floridi & Cowls, 2019).

Collectively, these technological advances suggest that Personal Intelligence may now be investigated in ways that were not previously feasible. Rather than relying primarily upon cross-sectional assessment or retrospective self-report, researchers can begin exploring how self-understanding develops longitudinally, how reflective narratives evolve over time, and whether sustained engagement with structured reflection influences the cultivation of Personal Intelligence itself. (Mayer, Caruso, & Panter, 2012; Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006).

4. New Research Possibilities

If Personal Intelligence provides a framework for reasoning about personality, advances in artificial intelligence invite consideration of an important question: **what new forms of inquiry are now possible?** Rather than proposing definitive answers, this paper suggests that contemporary AI technologies create opportunities to investigate Personal Intelligence in ways that were previously impractical or impossible. These opportunities extend beyond the development of new applications; they open the possibility of expanding research itself.

One such question concerns whether Personal Intelligence develops over time. While Mayer established Personal Intelligence as a measurable construct, advances in longitudinal reflective technologies may now allow researchers to examine how it evolves across months or years. Rather than relying solely on cross-sectional assessment, future studies may be able to investigate the processes through which individuals acquire increasingly sophisticated ways of reasoning about themselves and others. (Mayer, Caruso, & Panter, 2012, 2014; Roberts et al., 2006).

A related opportunity lies in the study of reflective practice. Journaling, structured self-reflection and narrative writing have long been associated with psychological insight and wellbeing. AI systems capable of organising and synthesising these reflections over extended periods may provide researchers with new ways of examining whether sustained reflective practice influences the development of Personal Intelligence and, if so, through what mechanisms. (Frattaroli, 2006; Pennebaker & Smyth, 2016).

Artificial intelligence also raises important questions regarding the relationship between human judgement and computational assistance. Rather than positioning AI as an authority on identity or personality, future research may explore whether AI can ethically support recognition by identifying recurring themes, patterns and inconsistencies that individuals themselves may not readily perceive. In this model, AI functions not as an interpreter of the self, but as a facilitator of deeper human reflection.

Longitudinal reflective data further creates opportunities to investigate the emergence of identity across time. Researchers may be able to examine how values evolve, how recurring narratives shift, how periods of transition influence self-understanding, and whether identifiable developmental patterns emerge through sustained engagement with reflective practice. Such investigations raise important methodological and ethical questions regarding privacy, consent, data governance and participant autonomy, all of which will require careful consideration as this field develops. (McAdams, 2001; McAdams & Pals, 2006).

The emergence of AI also invites reconsideration of how Personal Intelligence might be measured. Existing assessment instruments provide valuable insight into the construct as originally conceived, yet longitudinal behavioural data may enable complementary approaches that examine change over time rather than single-point measurement. Future research may explore whether reflective language, behavioural narratives, or other longitudinal indicators provide additional evidence for understanding the cultivation of Personal Intelligence. (Mayer, Caruso, & Panter, 2012, 2014).

Finally, the increasing availability of longitudinal human data raises the possibility that Personal Intelligence may have implications beyond the individual. While Mayer's original work focuses primarily on reasoning about persons, future research may investigate how Personal Intelligence operates within families, organisations, communities and broader social systems. Questions concerning collective reflection, organisational learning, leadership, education and community wellbeing may represent important directions for extending the theory into contexts that have yet to be fully explored.

Taken together, these questions suggest that artificial intelligence should not be viewed as replacing Personal Intelligence, but as creating an unprecedented opportunity to investigate it. By enabling ethical, longitudinal observation of reflective practice, AI

provides researchers with new methods through which one of psychology's most compelling theories may continue to evolve. The challenge now is not simply to develop more capable technologies, but to establish the interdisciplinary collaborations required to explore these questions responsibly.

5. House of Reawaken as a Research Platform

The opportunities outlined in this paper require more than theoretical discussion. Investigating Personal Intelligence longitudinally demands environments in which reflective practice can occur ethically, consistently, and over extended periods of time. Such environments must balance technological capability with participant autonomy, informed consent, privacy, and rigorous research governance. (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2023; UNESCO, 2021).

House of Reawaken represents one possible implementation through which these research questions may be explored. Established as a New Zealand-based Personal Intelligence company, its purpose is not to redefine Mayer's theory, but to investigate how contemporary artificial intelligence may support ethical reflective practice while generating new opportunities for interdisciplinary research.

Its first platform, *Midlife Renaissance*, has been designed as a longitudinal reflective environment rather than a diagnostic or therapeutic system. Participants voluntarily engage in structured reflection over time, creating rich narrative data that remains under their control and is used only with explicit consent. Artificial intelligence is employed to organise information, identify recurring themes, and support pattern recognition across extended periods of reflection, while interpretation and decision-making remain the responsibility of the individual.

From a research perspective, such environments provide an opportunity to observe reflective practice in ways that have historically been difficult to study. With appropriate ethical oversight, they may enable investigation into questions concerning the development of Personal Intelligence, the emergence of identity across time, the evolution of values and goals, and the relationship between sustained reflection and psychological wellbeing.

Importantly, House of Reawaken should not be viewed as evidence for the propositions advanced in this paper. Rather, it demonstrates one possible research infrastructure through which these propositions may be explored empirically. The platform does not seek to validate Personal Intelligence in isolation, nor to position artificial intelligence as an authority on human identity. Instead, it provides a practical environment in which psychologists, behavioural scientists, cognitive researchers, computer scientists, and

ethicists may collaborate to investigate questions that have become newly accessible through advances in artificial intelligence.

As technologies capable of supporting ethical, longitudinal reflection continue to evolve, the significance of such platforms may extend beyond any single implementation. The broader contribution lies in demonstrating that Personal Intelligence can move beyond a purely theoretical construct and become the focus of sustained empirical investigation through carefully designed human-centred research environments.

6. Conclusion

John D. Mayer's introduction of Personal Intelligence represented an important contribution to psychological science by proposing that individuals differ in their capacity to reason about personality. His work established a coherent theoretical framework for understanding how people recognise, organise and apply personality-relevant information in making sense of themselves and others. That foundation remains both conceptually robust and highly relevant.

What has changed is not the theory, but the technological environment in which it now exists.

Advances in artificial intelligence, natural language understanding, persistent memory and longitudinal data analysis have created opportunities that were simply unavailable when Personal Intelligence was first proposed. These technologies do not redefine Personal Intelligence, nor do they diminish the central role of human judgement, interpretation or agency. Rather, they provide new methods through which researchers may investigate how Personal Intelligence develops, how reflective practice influences self-understanding, and how longitudinal patterns of human experience may contribute to a richer understanding of personality across time.

The emergence of these capabilities presents an opportunity to revisit Personal Intelligence from a contemporary perspective. Questions that were once difficult to examine empirically may now become accessible through carefully designed, ethically governed research environments that combine psychological theory with advances in artificial intelligence. Such work will necessarily require collaboration across disciplines, bringing together psychologists, cognitive scientists, behavioural researchers, computer scientists, ethicists and educators to explore the possibilities and limitations of these new approaches. (Floridi & Cowls, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

This paper has argued that the most significant contribution of artificial intelligence is not that it replaces Personal Intelligence, nor that it defines it, but that it expands the scope of what may now be observed, investigated and understood. In doing so, AI

creates an opportunity to build upon Mayer's foundational theory through new forms of empirical research rather than theoretical revision.

As artificial intelligence continues to evolve, the challenge for researchers is not simply to develop more capable technologies, but to ensure those technologies deepen rather than diminish our understanding of what it means to be human. If approached with scientific rigour, ethical responsibility and interdisciplinary collaboration, the age of AI may represent not the end of Personal Intelligence, but the beginning of its next chapter.

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