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# SPIRITUAL DETERMINANTS AND SITUATIONAL CONTINGENCIES OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

## ABSTRACT

*There is a strong evidence that transformational leadership gives rise to loftier motivation among the teaching staff, creative school innovation, enhanced learning results among students and critical openness to diversity in society. Little is known how school leaders can become better transformational leaders. Our research among school leaders of the Salesian schools in India seeks to verify if higher performance of transformational leadership is influenced by spiritual determinants (spiritual discernment, spiritual traits, spiritual capital, and spiritual experience), besides situational contingencies pertaining to personal profile and institutional features. The findings reveal that the prevalent leadership style in Salesian schools is transformational, and that it is strongly predicted by a combined spiritual trait of self-directed-cooperativeness and spiritual discernment, and moderately predicted by the situational contingencies of schools being private and having lesser student strength.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In a constantly changing global and interdependent world, leadership has become a crucial issue, soliciting a wide range of research findings, practice and skills (DuBrin 1995). This is true particularly with reference to the leadership

style of heads of educational institutions, as learning and socialisation in schools and colleges contribute to making the young, responsible citizens and competent leaders of tomorrow. In effect, Avolio (1994) confirms that experiences in schools do shape and predict leadership qualities in adult life. This explains the growing body of research findings concerning the effect of leadership style, specifically of transformational leadership, on uplifting the motivations of teaching staff, giving rise to creative school innovation, enhancing the learning outcomes of students, and favouring a critical approach to diversity in society. Taking stock of these assessments, the present research aims at investigating transformational leadership among the heads of Salesian schools from the less explored perspective of spiritual determinants and situational contingencies. In other words, our concern is to examine what makes the leader transformational. Can spirituality, particularly discernment, contribute to it? Is transformational leadership conditioned by situational contingencies of the educational context?

With this scope in mind, we first make a synthetic presentation of leadership styles and focus on transformational leadership's association with spiritual determinants of discernment, character traits, capital and experiences, as well as with situational contingencies of educational institutions (section 2). In the empirical phase, we specify the conceptual framework and some aspects of the research design (section 3), present the emerging results (section 4), and finally discuss the relevance of salient findings (section 5).

## 2. TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

According to the *Online Etymology Dictionary*, the term "lead" can be traced back to a Proto-Germanic *laidjanan*, source also of Old Saxon *lithan*, meaning "to go" or "to travel", from which the Old English word *lædan*. Etymologically then, "lead" means "cause to go along one's way". The etymological root (Scardigli & Gervasi 1980:199) in effect captures the essential nature of leadership as that of inspiring others with a vision to go along one's way. Recent developments in this regard view this journey as a transformational one.

In the context of the early Christian community, the key task of the leaders was one of meaning-making (D'Orsa & D'Orsa 2013:67-94).

The touchstone here seems to be that God transforms through the power of human aspiration, that is, through what people hope for, and thus one of the tasks of leadership is to raise the level of aspiration at the local level. In this sense Christian leadership is essentially transformative (D'Orsa & D'Orsa 2013:84).

In the Indian context, embodying his arguments with Hindu, Buddhist and Jain mythologies, Pattanaik (2016:119) differentiates the transformational function of the leader in these terms:

A manager is expected to adapt to changes in the organization.  
A leader is expected to change the circumstances, have greater vision. A follower does as told.

The review of leadership studies by Bryman (1996), as summed up by Heracleous (2003:56-63), brings to light four phases of development. The first that dominated up to the late 1940s was the *traits approach*. This was followed by the *leadership style approach* until the late 1960s. The third trend that was in vogue up to the early 1980s was the *contingency approach*. The current theory and research take to the *transformational* and *charismatic leadership approach*. Evidently, in the development of successive phases, the acquisitions of the previous ones were integrated with some shifts in emphasis.

Dissatisfied with the dominant leadership theories, Bass (1985a; 1985b), and successively together with Avolio (Bass & Avolio 1993), configured transformational leadership as part of the Multifactor Leadership theory. In the present research, we focus on this transformational approach, complementing it with relevant aspects of the preceding contingency approach.

## 2.1 Multifactor Leadership framework

The need to explore a broader range of leadership styles on account of the changing context led Avolio and Bass to evolve a new paradigm that takes into account the earlier paradigms in terms of transformational, transactional and passive/avoidant leadership styles. In this instance, we shall briefly sum up the theoretical framework underlying the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ), as given in the Manual (Avolio & Bass 2004:1-32).

*Transactional leaders* are associated with constructive and corrective transactions. The constructive transactions refer to contingent reward, whereas corrective transactions refer to management-by-exception. From a constructive perspective, transactional leadership defines expectations and offers encouragement to achieve these by discovering an individual's capabilities, besides specifying the compensation and rewards. From a corrective perspective, transactional leadership entails setting standards before intervening. In its passive form, it implies waiting for mistakes to occur before taking action. In its active form, it denotes closely monitoring for deviances, mistakes and errors, before taking corrective action. Accordingly, it has been found useful to consider *transactional leadership* to

comprise Contingent Reward (CR) and Management-by-Exception: Active (MBEA).

Instead, *passive/avoidant leadership* is understood to cover Management-by-Exception: Passive (MBEP) and *Laissez-faire* style (LF). The passive/avoidant leaders do not specify agreements, expectations, goals, or standards. Practically, they provide “no leadership”, just as those who follow the *laissez-faire* style (Avolio & Bass 2004:3, 95).

The notion of *transformational leadership* was introduced by Downton (1973) to distinguish between revolutionary, rebellious, reform and ordinary leaders. According to Avolio and Bass (2004:3), transformational or charismatic leaders are “inspirational, intellectually stimulating, challenging, visionary, development oriented, and determined to maximize performance”. Transformational leaders differ from transactional leaders in that the former not only recognise the associates’ needs, but also engage with the whole person and aim at contributing to their development, encouraging them to perform beyond standard expectations. Both transformational and transactional leaders focus on building trust, respect and move towards future goals. In different circumstances, both types of leadership may be exhibited by the same person (Avolio & Bass 2004:16). Transformational leadership seeks to produce a perceptual change among associates, namely a fundamental shift in perspectives and assumptions in dealing with a problem.

Transformational leadership can be thought of as a higher-order exchange process: not a simple transaction, but rather a fundamental shift in orientation, with both long and short term implications for development and performance. The shift is generally toward the longer-term implications and the impact on both process and outcomes (Avolio & Bass 2004:19).

Transformational leadership does not replace the transactional leadership; the latter also forms part of effective leadership, with the former augmenting the effect of the latter.

Empirical researches point to five essential features of transformational leadership: charisma or idealised influence (attributes and behaviours); inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass 1985b).

- *Idealised influence* linked to *attributes* (IA) denotes the impact that transformational leaders have over their associates who admire, respect and trust, identifying themselves with their leaders and their mission.

- *Idealised influence* linked to *behaviour* (IB) refers to the way in which transformational leaders promote greater sense of autonomy, achievement and performance among associates by their conduct based on ethics, principles and values.
- Transformational leaders offer *inspirational motivation* (IM), by proposing shared goals and mutual understanding of what is worthwhile. Leaders display enthusiasm and optimism and communicate to associates an attractive and achievable future vision.
- *Intellectual stimulation* (IS) by such leaders provides new perspectives on old problems. By encouraging the associates to question their own assumptions, beliefs and values, transformational leaders help them reframe problems and be creative and innovative. To do so, leaders themselves should be able to discern, comprehend, conceptualise, and articulate the opportunities and threats, strengths and weaknesses, and comparable advantages.
- Transformational leaders are also characterised by *individual consideration* (IC), namely considering each individual as unique, they seek to understand and share the associates' concerns and achievement needs, bringing the latter to their full potential by providing a supportive climate.
- Currently, it seems opportune to incorporate *trustworthiness* as a distinguishing mark of transformational leaders (Hermans & Koerts 2013).

Such features of transformational leaders, in the final analysis, contribute to making associates lead themselves, becoming responsible for their own actions, and gaining rewards through self-reinforcement. Transformational leaders emerge particularly in times of growth, change and crisis (Avolio & Bass 2004:26-30, 94-96; Antonakis *et al.* 2003:264).

The foregoing complex framework of leadership, comprising transformational, transactional and passive/avoidant leadership styles (together with their specific categories), is at the basis of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire used in our research.

## 2.2 Situational contingencies of transformational leadership

As mentioned earlier, the contingency approach to leadership, in vogue between the 1960s and the early 1980s, was a precursor to the transformational style. Although there is no strong empirical support, the contingency approach probes the extent to which the effectiveness of leadership style is determined by situational variables such as the nature

of the task, the personal traits of leaders and followers, and the disposition of the institutional environment. Amidst diverse contingency theories or models of leadership (Heracleous 2003:60-61; DuBrin 1995:121-141), our concern is to verify if the contingencies of the educational context have an effect on the school leadership.

The nature of the educational task seems to call for a transformational paradigm of leadership for greater teacher commitment and willingness for school reform (Geijsel *et al.* 2003). With specific reference to the heads of schools, Hallinger (2003) contends the change to be from the instructional type to the transformational type of leadership. Instead of viewing these two types of leadership as alternative, it would be best to integrate them for enhancing achievement (Boberg & Bourgeois 2016). The importance of combining instructional and transformational leadership for mediated effects of leadership on learning outcome and student achievement has been established in a growing body of research (Leithwood & Jantzi 2006; 2008; Leithwood & Sun 2012).

For this reason, we do not take up the instructional leadership that deals with the nature of the educational task. We rather focus on how school leadership can be influenced by contingencies of personal traits such as age, gender, religious identity, and institutional features such as the magnitude of the school structure with high or low student strength. Likewise, the educational level that the schools represent such as high school or higher secondary school, dealing with different age group of students, could condition the leadership style. Another situational contingency that can affect leadership style is the availability of finance. Government-aided schools that do not imply financial burden for the families are, however, limited in financial resources; instead, private schools frequented by students who can afford to pay for their education provide a greater margin of financial resource for the functioning and development of the school environment. It is our hunch that these situational contingencies, among others, can influence the transformational leadership in the educational context. To our knowledge, empirical research has not addressed specifically the impact of situational contingencies on school leadership.

### 2.3 Spiritual determinants of transformational leadership

Is transformational leadership influenced – besides the situational contingencies – by spirituality? Some authors, in fact, have started focusing on spirituality as a determinant of transformational leadership in the educational context (Fry 2003; Greenleaf 1970; Riaz 2012). In this vein, Fairholm

(1998) speaks of transactional, transformational, and transcendental leadership as a continuum ranging from managerial control to spiritual holism.

As an interdisciplinary area, spirituality has the experience of transcendence as an essential element, comprising both religious and non-religious experience of the ultimate (Waaajman 2010:5, 30-33). In this vein, lived spirituality encompasses both individual and communal perspectives; presupposes self-transcendence as an experience of being drawn beyond by something outside of one's self, being liberated from one's fixation on oneself (Joas 2008:8), and refers to a good life with, and for others and experiencing the fullness of life that emerges unexpectedly as a gift (see Hermans & Anthony 2020, in this journal).

Discernment can be considered the core aspect of lived spirituality, and the former, in its turn, can be understood to be influenced by spiritual character traits, spiritual capital, and spiritual experiences (see Hermans & Anthony 2020, in this journal). Why do we expect that lived spirituality should influence a higher degree of transformational leadership? The essence of transformational leadership consists in encouraging others to both develop and perform beyond standard expectations. Such school leaders raise the aspirations of their staff and

activate their higher order values (e.g., altruism) such that followers identify with the leader and his or her mission/vision, feel better about their work, and then work to perform beyond simple transactions and base expectations (Avolio et al. 2009:428).

Transformational leaders stimulate employees to embrace organisational goals and vision; they motivate them to take responsibility for good education (Kwan 2020:322). Transformational leadership engages in a kind of deliberation, where reasons for arriving at choices concerning how to act are informed by an inspiring vision and stimulate their staff to change perspectives on problems that arise (Hermans & Koerts 2013:206-207). Such behaviour is characteristic of the process of discernment, as described by Hermans and Anthony (2020, in this journal). Secondly, in this process of decision-making, transformational leaders involve the whole school community. For, there can be no discernment without confidence in others to reach good decisions based on a process of deliberation, grounded in the community of values (Hermans & Koerts 2013:206-207). Thirdly, discernment need not be informed by ego-motives. Transformational leaders should have self-knowledge, and the willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the sake of the higher good, the good life with, and for others (Shamir & Howell 1999:237).

Thus, our research is focused on spiritual discernment as a compass pointing to good life with, and for others, and on the three aspects that can contribute to it: first, spiritual traits of self-directedness, cooperativeness and self-transcendence; secondly, the spiritual capital of approaches to religious plurality, and thirdly, spiritual experiences, both mystical and extraordinary. As these aspects of lived spirituality have been spelled out in the interrelated contribution (see Hermans & Anthony 2020: in this journal), we do not elaborate further on them.

### 3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH DESIGN

In introducing the empirical phase of our research, we first describe the conceptual model and then go on to specify the research questions and hypotheses, the sampling and data-collection procedures, and the measuring instruments.

#### 3.1 Conceptual framework

In consonance with the scope of our research, the conceptual model focuses on transformational leadership as dependent variable. The aim is to ascertain if aspects of lived spirituality (independent variables) predict a higher level of transformational leadership. Discernment is the core of lived spirituality; it aims at distinguishing the good from the evil and acting on the basis of what is considered to be good (avoiding what is evil). We presume that discernment directly influences transformational leadership, that is, a head of school with a higher level of spiritual discernment will manifest a higher level of transformational leadership. In our conceptual model (Figure 1), this is the determinant that directly influences the level of transformational leadership.

Within our framework of lived spirituality, we presume that discernment, in its turn, is influenced by spiritual traits (self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence), spiritual capital (approaches to religious pluralism), and spiritual experiences (mystical and extraordinary experiences). In our conceptual model, these determinants (spiritual traits, capital, and experiences) are regarded as indirectly influencing transformational leadership through discernment. In other words, we presume no direct influence of these determinants on transformational leadership, but only indirect influences.

We also take into account the situational contingencies (personal profile and institutional features) of our respondents. Our intent is to verify if and to what extent these situational contingencies (background variables) directly or indirectly through the spiritual determinants (spiritual

discernment, traits, capital, and experiences) influence transformational leadership, as shown in the conceptual model.

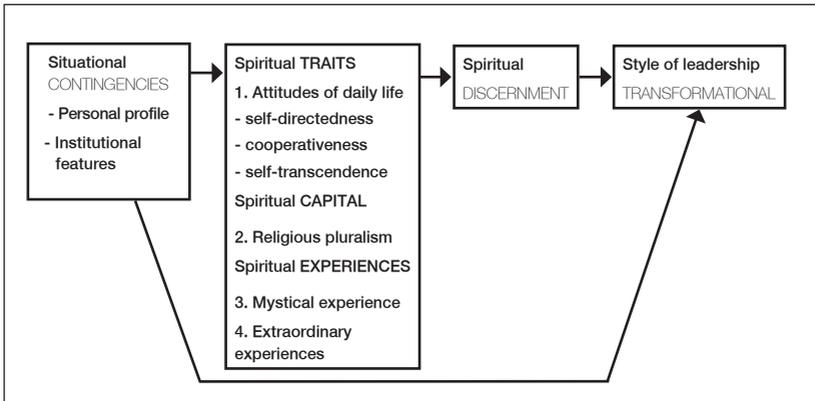


Figure 1: Conceptual model: Transformational leadership (dependent variable), spiritual discernment and spiritual traits, capital, and experiences (independent variables), and situational contingencies of personal profile and institutional features (background variables)

### 3.2 Research questions and hypotheses

On the basis of the theoretical framework of leadership styles, lived spirituality and situational contingencies, we formulate the following research questions:

- What understanding of transformational leadership emerges among the heads of schools?
- What level of involvement in transformational leadership do the heads of schools manifest?
- To what extent do spiritual discernment, traits, capital, and experiences predict higher level of transformational leadership, while controlling for situational contingencies?

As regards the first research question, we assume that the school leaders’ understanding of transformational leadership comprises all its dimensions, namely idealised attributes, idealised behaviour, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, besides trustworthiness.

Concerning the second research question, we can expect the school leaders to be strongly inclined towards transformational leadership, given that the latter is closely associated with the mission and vision of Salesian schools and with the leadership and management training provided to the heads of schools.

The third research question follows from the theoretical presumptions of our conceptual model (see above). We use a multiple regression analysis, in which we test three models of explanation for the level of transformational leadership. In the first model, we use only the situational contingencies (background variables) to explain the level of transformational leadership. In the second model, we add spiritual traits, capital, and experiences to situational contingencies. We expect that the second model has a higher level of explained variance of transformational leadership compared to the first model, and that the situational contingencies may be less significant. The third model includes all variables of our theoretical framework. In other words, spiritual discernment is inserted besides the other independent variables of spiritual traits, capital, and experiences, and the background variables of situational contingencies. Overall, we expect the level of explained variance to be greater than that of the second model and, more specifically, discernment to be the strongest predictor, and all other variables to have lesser or no significant impact.

### 3.3 Sample and data collection

It may be opportune to mention that the present study of spiritual determinants and situational contingencies of transformational leadership in the educational context is but a part of a wider project “Spirituality, education and leadership”, undertaken by the Salesian Pontifical University (Rome) and the Radboud University (Nijmegen), in close collaboration with Don Bosco Educational Society (Delhi).

The Salesians of Don Bosco have been involved in the education of the young for over a century, since their arrival in Thanjavur (Tamil Nadu) in 1906 and the opening of the first registered Don Bosco Night school in 1908. Currently, they run academic schools spread throughout India, with 47% of them located in rural areas catering to the poor and the marginalised youth. Technical schools, Polytechnic colleges, and Arts and Science colleges of higher learning also form part of their endeavour to educating the young Indians. There are 266 Don Bosco Schools catering to the education of 235,920 students with 19,778 teaching staff (of whom 528 are Salesians). Among these, 108 are high schools and 113 higher secondary schools, distributed in the urban, semi-urban and rural areas (All India Don Bosco Education Society 2017:12). Having stratified the

schools according to the 11 Salesian administrative provinces, levels of education (high and higher secondary), and their location (urban, semi-urban, and rural), 106 schools were chosen randomly. Three respondents from each of the selected schools were included in the sample: principal/headmaster, vice principal/assistant headmaster, and a key coordinating teacher (chosen by the school head).

The online questionnaire with link was made available to the 318 respondents, forming the sample for a period of three-and-a-half months (from 17 October 2016 to 31 January 2017), with few e-mail solicitations and telephone calls to ensure the reception of e-mails. As responding to the entire questionnaire could take roughly 40 minutes, it was made possible for the respondents to do so in more than one sitting, ensuring complete anonymity. Of the 207 responses received, nine were found to be incomplete. Thus, 198 formed our final sample of respondents, bringing the response rate to 62%, which is rather high in the case of an on-line survey.

Viewing the personal profile of our respondents, we find that three-fourths (73.2%) of them are men, the remaining one-fourth (26.8%), women. This is understandable as heads of Salesian schools are generally male. Analysis of their age reveals a rather well paced out range with 24.9% of the respondents belonging to the 22-35 age group, 39.6% to the 36-45 age group, and the remaining 35.5% to the 46-65 age group.

As the schools in our sample are Catholic, the religious identity of four-fifths (81.2%) of the respondents is Catholic; the remaining one-fifth (18.8%) belong to other Christian denominations. As the schools included in our research are under Salesian management, three-fifths (59.9%) of the respondents belong to the Salesian congregation, the Salesian Cooperators' Association, and the wider conglomeration of Salesian family. The remaining two-fifths (40.1%) are lay teachers employed in Salesian schools.

Analysis of the institutional features reveals that two-fifths (40.4%) of the respondents were principals/headmasters; one-fifth (18.7%), vice principals/assistant headmasters, and the remaining two-fifth (40.9%), teachers with key coordinating roles. The lesser proportion of response from vice principals/assistant headmasters may be due to the fact that they are generally taxed with varied tasks. Our sample is almost equally divided between respondents from high schools (44.4%) and higher secondary schools (55.6%). A little over four-fifths (82.3%) of these schools are private schools, whereas a little less than one-fifth (17.7%) are government-aided schools. This also explains the reason for English being the medium of instruction in 87.8% of the schools, and other languages

in 12.2% of the schools. We may conclude the institutional description with the detail that, in two-fifths (43.4%) of the schools in the sample, the student strength reaches a thousand, whereas in the remaining three-fifths (56.6%), the student strength is over a thousand.

### 3.4 Measuring instruments

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio & Bass 2004:94-96) used in our research contains four items for each dimension of leadership styles. In the case of *transformational* leadership, a set of four items each represented idealized attributes (IA), idealized behaviour (IB), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individual consideration (IC). To these 20 items were added three on trustworthiness. As for *transactional* leadership, four items each represented contingent reward (CR) and management-by-exception: Active (MBEA). The *passive/avoidant behaviour* was also represented by four items, each concerning management-by-exception: Passive (MBEP) and *laissez-faire* (LF). Thus 32 behaviour items and four attribute items form the nine components of the transformational, transactional and passive/avoidant leadership scales. As mentioned, in the transformational scale, three items representing trustworthiness were added, bringing the total to 39 items.

These items were proposed to the school leaders for self-rating, with the Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 5 (Frequently, if not always). The concrete formulation of 13 items – that have significant loadings on one factor – can be viewed in Table 1, together with their category codes. It must be mentioned that MLQ is utilised for research not only in the business and administrative sectors, but also in the educational and religious fields, namely among school heads and religious/pastoral ministers, respectively.

The composition of the determinants of lived spirituality (*i.e.* of spiritual discernment, spiritual traits [self-directedness, cooperativeness, and self-transcendence], spiritual capital [approaches to religious pluralism], and spiritual experiences [mystical experience and extraordinary experiences]) have been specified in the related publication (Hermans & Anthony 2020: present issue).

Situational contingencies (background variables) taken into account in the present research include the personal profile of gender, age, religious identity (Catholic or other denominations), and Salesian identity (or lay) of the heads of schools, as well as the institutional features of leadership position, level of school education, nature of school, and student strength.

## 4. RESULTS

As regards data-analysis procedures – after the initial descriptive analysis of each item not reported here – to answer the first research question, factor analysis of leadership items was undertaken, but we report mainly the transformational leadership factor. In order to respond to the second question, involvement in leadership tendencies was established in terms of means and standard deviations of factors. With the view to respond to the third research question, correlation and regression analyses were employed, although we report only the latter in three models. Taking up the research questions in order, we present the results related to transformational leadership, and the involvement tendency of respondents in leadership styles. We then explore to what extent spiritual discernment, traits, capital, and experiences predict higher level of transformational leadership while controlling for situational contingencies.

### 4.1 Research question 1: What understanding of transformational leadership emerges among the heads of schools?

As shown in Table 1, factor analysis (PAF) of the 39 items comprising the leadership scale gave rise to four reliable and meaningful factors, explaining 41.87% of the total variance: transformational leadership (F1, 13 items, Cronbach *alpha* .87); *laissez-faire* passive leadership (F2, six items, Cronbach *alpha* .78); active transactional leadership (F3, four items, Cronbach *alpha* .74), and intellectually stimulating trustworthy leadership (F4, four items, Cronbach *alpha* .70). However, we report only the main factor, namely transformational leadership.

The *transformational leadership* factor (F1) includes thirteen items. It is interesting to note that, as we hypothesised, all the dimensions of transformational leadership form part of the factor: idealised attributes (IA), idealised behaviour (IB), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individual consideration (IC). This means that our respondents have an integral understanding of transformational leadership.

The factor also includes the dimension of contingent reward (CR) that theoretically belongs to transactional leadership. Loading of transactional contingent reward items with transformational leadership can be justified for several reasons:

First, both transactional and transformational leadership represent active, positive forms of leadership. Second, leaders have been shown in repeated investigations to be both transactional and

transformational. Third, as Shamir (1995) argues, the consistent honouring of transactional agreements builds trust, dependability, and perceptions of consistency with leaders among followers, which are each a basis for transformational leadership (Avolio & Bass 2004:68; see 60).

In the educational context of encouraging excellence, transaction of contingent reward is understandable. We take up these findings for further discussion in the last section.

**Table 1:** Factor loadings of transformational leadership

Leadership style items	F1
39. IM4: Express confidence that goals will be achieved	.639
21. IA2: Go beyond self-interest for the good of the group	.624
16. IB2: Specify the importance of having a strong sense of purpose	.603
34. IC4: Help others develop their strengths	.601
10. IM1: Talk optimistically about the future	.589
38. CR4: Express satisfaction when others meet expectations	.584
37. IB4: Emphasise the importance of having a collective sense of mission	.582
15. IM2: Talk enthusiastically about what needs to be accomplished	.576
22. IC2: Treat others as individuals rather than simply a member of the group	.571
09. IS2: Seek differing perspectives when solving problems	.536
19. CR3: Make clear what one can expect to receive when performance goals are achieved	.529
35. IS4: Suggest new ways of looking at how to complete assignments	.515
01. CR1: Provide others with assistance in exchange for their efforts	.445

*Extraction method: Principal Axis Factoring.*

*Rotation method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.*

*Cronbach alpha .87.*

*Total explained variance of four factors 41.97%; N=198*

## 4.2 Research question 2: What level of involvement in transformational leadership do the heads of schools manifest?

As shown in Table 2, the overall tendency among the heads of schools is to engage in transformational leadership *nearly always* (mean 4.19). It is encouraging that, in the Salesian schools, the prevalent leadership style is transformational.

For the sake of comparison, it may be opportune to mention – although the analysis is not reported, in this instance – that our respondents also tend to engage *fairly often* in intellectually stimulating trustworthy leadership (mean 3.77) and in active transactional leadership (mean 3.66). Instead, the school heads tend to engage in *laissez-faire* passive leadership *once in a while* (mean 1.81). As mentioned in the theoretical phase, such a style implies waiting for mistakes to happen, practically providing no leadership. It is noteworthy that the Salesian schools do not suffer from such absence of leadership.

The overall tendency among the heads of Salesian schools is to engage *nearly always* in transformational leadership, *fairly often* in intellectually stimulating trustworthy leadership and active transactional leadership, and *rarely* in *laissez-faire* passive leadership. This suggests a rather consistent and positive situation. This will be discussed further in the final section.

**Table 2:** Descriptive statistics (mean & s.d.) of transformational leadership factor

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D.
Transformational leadership	198	2.00	5.00	4.19	.54

Legend: 1.00-1.80 = Not at all; 1.81-2.60 = Once in a while; 2.61-3.40 = Sometimes; 3.41-4.20 = fairly often; 4.21-5.00 = frequently/always

### 4.3 Research question 3: To what extent do spiritual discernment, traits, capital, and experiences predict higher level of transformational leadership, while controlling for the situational contingencies?

The scope of our research was to ascertain if lived spirituality (as we conceptualised it) predicts a higher level of transformational leadership. Discernment (*i.e.* aiming at distinguishing the good from the evil and acting on the basis of what is considered to be good is the core of lived spirituality. To what extent do discernment and the three other aspects of lived spirituality, namely the combined spiritual traits of self-directed-cooperativeness (Hermans & Anthony 2020: 34-59) and self-transcendence, spiritual capital (religious monism and religious pluralism), and spiritual experiences (mystical experiences and extraordinary experiences) determine transformational leadership? We also control for the situational contingencies (background variables) of personal profile and institutional features. At this explorative level, we include results significant at both

<.01 and <.05, knowing well that the former level of significance is more robust.

As shown in Table 3, the first model with only contextual contingencies explains 12.4% (see  $R^2$  adj.) of the variance of transformational leadership. We find three contingency variables with moderate significant impact: higher age of school leaders, higher secondary school, and lesser student strength. Insertion of the aspects of lived spirituality (except for discernment) in model 2 increases the total explained variance from 12.4% to 33.6%. In this model, besides some variations in the impact of contingency variables, we find, among lived spirituality, a very strong impact of self-directed-cooperativeness, and moderate impact of religious monism and self-transcendence, with mystical experience having lower significance.

The third model brings to light five factors of situational contingencies, namely age, leadership position, type of school (higher secondary school), nature of school (private) and strength of school (up to a thousand) induce higher levels of transformational leadership. However, the level of variance varies in the three models. This means that part of the influence of these situational contingencies is “incorporated” in the spiritual traits and capital, and particularly in discernment. For example, age (to be older) was the most influential variable explaining the variance of transformational leadership in model 1. Part of that influence of age “merges” with discernment in model three; that is, a growth of transformational leadership comes with “growing-in-discernment-with-age”.

When discernment is included in the regression, the spiritual traits of self-directed-cooperativeness and self-transcendence, the spiritual capital of religious monism, and mystical experience explain a lower level of variance of transformational leadership, when compared to model 2. The influence of mystical experiences is completely incorporated in discernment, as also part of the influence of self-directed-cooperativeness, self-transcendence, and religious monism. This is what we expected, because these elements of lived spirituality are determinants of discernment. Overall, a prediction of 37.5% of the level of transformational leadership is a substantial finding, in which discernment and the spiritual trait of self-directed-cooperativeness emerge as two strong determinants of such leadership. They are the only variables, among lived spirituality, with strong significance (>.01). This finding will be discussed in the next section.

**Table 3:** Linear regression analysis (method enter) of transformational leadership with spiritual determinants and situational contingencies (N=198)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender (female = ref., male)	-.075	-.035	-.050
Age-group (22-35, 36-45, 46-65 years)	.208**	.181**	.138*
Denomination (other Christian denom. = ref., Catholic)	-.089	-.060	-.071
Leadership position (principal/HM, vice principal/AHM, coordinator)	-.165	-.211*	-.191*
Type of school (Hr. Sec. school = ref., High school)	-.179**	-.136*	-.144*
Nature of school (Private = ref., Govt.-aided)	-.118	-.192**	-.179**
Strength of school (up to 1,000 = ref., over 1,000)	-.201**	-.169**	-.177**
Salesian identity (Lay = ref., Sal. family)	-.096	-.158	-.124
Self-directed-cooperativeness		.309**	.264**
Self-transcendence		.177*	.167*
Religious monism		.176**	.133*
Religious pluralism		.117	.009
Mystical experience		.161*	.105
Extraordinary experiences		-.081	-.101
Discernment			.250**
R2	.160	.384	.423
R2 adjusted	.124	.336	.375
R2 change		.212	.039

LEGEND: \*\* =  $p < .01$ ; \* =  $p < .05$ ;  $\beta$  up to .14 small predictive value;  $\beta$  from .15 up to .24 as moderate, and large than .25 as strong.

## 5. SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION ON THE SALIENT FINDINGS

Empirical research brings to light that the heads of Salesian schools are characterised by a fairly strong involvement in transformational leadership, comprising idealised attributes and behaviours, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, besides contingent reward. The emerging factor with all hypothesised dimensions reveals an

integral understanding of transformational leadership among the heads of schools. The inclusion of contingent reward, as we commented earlier, is compatible with transformational leadership insofar as the two styles of leadership are closely associated. This is particularly true in the educational field that constantly calls for the evaluation of student and teacher performance, encouraging it by rewarding the excellence manifested.

Our findings reveal that there are aspects of lived spirituality and situational contingencies that predictably contribute to transformational leadership in the educational context (Figure 2). With the view to highlighting the major contributions of the research to the theory and practice of transformational leadership, we focus particularly on the highly significant ( $p > .01$ ) moderate and strong impact factors.

First, the strong impact of discernment on transformational leadership was expected. It is significant that, among the spiritual determinants, discernment emerges as one of the two strongest predictors. In effect, discernment is the compass in the high sea of spirituality for navigating good life with, and for others. In other words, discernment is the core of lived spirituality, with which human beings learn to “sense” the emerging good life with, and for others, and to act and speak accordingly. One of the dimensions of transformational leadership, namely *intellectual stimulation*, implies providing new perspectives on old problems. By encouraging the associates to question their own assumptions, beliefs and values, transformational leaders help them reframe problems and be creative and innovative in finding solutions, besides generating a high degree of respect for them (Bycio *et al.* 1995). To do so, leaders themselves should be able to *discern*, comprehend, conceptualise and articulate the opportunities and threats, strengths and weaknesses, and comparable advantages. Hence, the identification of discernment as one of the strong predictors contributes to the enhancement of transformational leadership theory and practice. Moreover, in the Indian religious-cultural context, discernment or *viveka* has special resonance as the inner constitution of the individual in search of knowledge and truth, besides being a faculty employed in the day-to-day decision-making. At the deeper spiritual level, *viveka* refers to the capacity to discriminate between the real and the unreal, true and false, permanent and impermanent (Chinmayananda 1986).

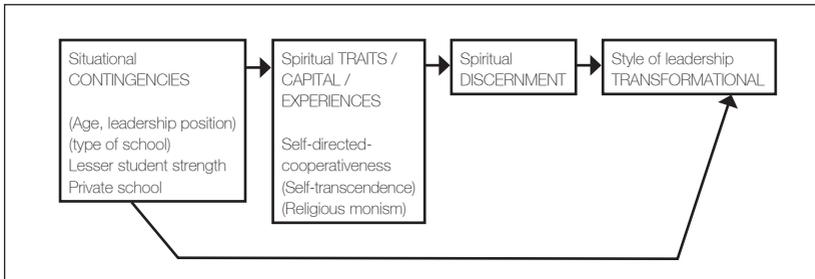


Figure 2: Spiritual determinants and situational contingencies of transformational leadership (variables indicated in brackets are of less significance)

Secondly, our research reveals the influence of other aspects of lived spirituality, besides discernment: spiritual traits, capital, and experiences. Obviously, some dimensions of transformational leadership are strongly associated with self-directedness, characterised by responsibility and purposefulness (versus blaming and aimlessness). Cooperativeness comprises the facets of compassion and social acceptance. Transformational leaders consider each individual as unique; they seek to understand and share the associates’ concerns and achievement needs, bringing the latter to their full potential by providing a supportive climate. We did not expect that the power of the combined character trait of self-directed-cooperativeness has the same level of impact as discernment. With the incorporation of discernment, its power of prediction hardly decreases (from beta .309 to .264). Contrary to our expectation, the character trait of self-directed-cooperativeness is a strong direct predictor of transformational leadership close to discernment. How are we to explain this? Character traits qualify the person of the school leader, specifically his/her idealised behaviour (virtuousness) and individual consideration. We know that this trait influences discernment, and discernment is a determinant of transformational leadership. However, what is new in this research is that we observed a direct influence from self-directed-cooperativeness on transformational leadership. The fact that spiritual trait of self-directed-cooperativeness emerges as an independent strong predictor of transformational leadership is a significant finding of our research. That is a new knowledge, which needs to be confirmed in further research. Evidently, the Indian religious-cultural context could have contributed to self-directedness; for, in real-life situations, if there is doubt with regard to what is to be done, individuals would intuitively rely first on their own conscience, then seek some model among good people, leaders, and elders; if the doubt persists, they would consult

books on *dharma* (righteousness) with the help of experts. Likewise, *dharma* obliges the individuals to act as social beings, as interlinked part of a larger whole (Menski 2007:5). This explains the significance of self-directed-cooperativeness.

Another spiritual trait, namely self-transcendence, emerges as moderately associated with transformational leadership. Self-transcendence as defined by intuitiveness, openness to unifying reality, and being self-forgetful (versus being conventional and sceptical) has a less significant and moderate effect on transformational leadership. As indicated in the article "On the high sea of spirituality" (Hemans & Anthony 2020, in this journal), there is a strong collinearity between self-transcendence and self-directed-cooperativeness. The traits have a generic component in common. Going beyond one's ego and perceiving a greater vision, with which to persuade others, is an aspect of transformational leadership (Conger & Kanungo 1987). The spiritual dimension of openness to the transcendent reality and going beyond one's self-interest certainly have their importance for the religious transformational leaders. However, our finding suggests that more research in this line is called for, in order to establish the impact of self-transcendence with regard to transformational leadership.

Likewise, among the spiritual capital, religious monism is found to have a small and less significant impact on transformational leadership. The spiritual capital of religious monism ranges from the exclusive affirmation of one's own religion as the only true religion (the replacement approach) to accepting some truth in other religions that would find their fulfilment in one's own religion possessing the complete truth. This finding has its significance insofar as we are dealing with leaders in Catholic schools, which, as minority educational institutions, are expected to nurture their religious tradition among the Catholic students.

Building on these findings concerning the determinants of transformational leadership, among the spiritual traits, it may be opportune to place greater emphasis on the sense of joy and optimism that the leader experiences and is able to spread among the collaborators. In fact, a few items among the spiritual traits and mystical experience refer to joy and happiness, and regarding the optimism of the leader. This is particularly relevant to the educational environment, insofar as sense of joy and optimism is considered an essential feature of educational relationship (Bordignon 2020). Moreover, the sense of joy, in religious traditions such as Christianity and Hinduism, is rooted in the transcendent reality of God. Hinduism defines the transcendent reality as *sat-cit-ananda*, respectively as pure existence (*sat*), pure consciousness (*cit*), and pure bliss/joy (*ananda*). In further exploring the spiritual traits as determinant

of transformational leadership, it would be fitting to incorporate *The joy of leadership* (Ben-Shahar & Ridgway 2017). In this vein, the individual consideration that forms part of the transformational leadership can be viewed as comprising the emotional support offered by the leader. In other words, emotional support provided to collaborators, as interdependent on one's own self, can be further explored as an integral aspect of spiritual traits (Goleman *et al.* 2002).

Thirdly, our findings bring to light two situational contingencies that have some impact: school leaders in smaller and private schools predictably manifest a higher level of transformational leadership. Both variables are situational contingencies that point to favourable settings, such as having less students and having more financial resources. Having less than a thousand students implies smaller structure with fewer teaching and non-teaching staff and hence better possibilities of organisation and management for school heads. Being heads of private schools implies having more financial resources that allow for the choice of more competent teachers and better facilities. It also demands greater accountability on the part of the school leaders, as parents bear the extra burden of paying the fees, which is not the case in government-aided schools. We may conclude that transformational leadership functions better in smaller and private schools with more financial resources. Although no clear findings emerge, as mentioned earlier, it would be opportune to further explore the effect of gender on leadership style in schools meant only for girls, where the heads are generally women. The educational context certainly needs to pay greater attention to the feminine dimension of transformational leadership.

With the view to further exploring the situational contingencies, given the rapidly changing sociocultural scenario that poses unexpected challenges to the educational process, it would be appropriate to place greater emphasis on *Leadership in times of crisis* (Orfali 2007). Transformational leaders, in fact, emerge particularly in times of growth, change and crisis (Avolio & Bass 2004). Their ability to handle a sudden crisis in the educational environment need to be investigated further. The present COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. The educational institutions at all levels and worldwide are suddenly challenged to find alternative ways of distance teaching and learning and engage in virtual exchange programmes.

Finally, in the multicultural, multilingual and multireligious Indian context, which is going global in the scientific and technological sphere, leadership at the political, social, economic, cultural and religious levels has to be undoubtedly transformational. In effect, intercultural and

interreligious dialogues have been, and continue to be a challenge and an opportunity for critically enriching each other through the inescapable reality of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. What is true in the societal sphere becomes particularly vital and urgent in the educational field (Anthony 2019; Anthony & Cimoso 2012; Anthony *et al.* 2015). Educational institutions are meant to promote the integral growth of the young for building up a better human society. In other words, the heads of schools as transformational leaders are to ensure an educational environment that is critically transformational. Constant and close contact with transformational educators throughout the school years can make the young generative (*i.e.* creative and transformational) and responsible (*i.e.* conscientious and altruistic) cosmopolitan citizens who are essential to India and the world at large (Anthony 2016). To this end, our research makes a vital contribution, by identifying the strong predictable impact of spiritual trait of self-directed-cooperativeness and spiritual discernment on transformational leadership. We may rightly affirm that these aspects of lived spirituality should characterise the transformational leaders in the educational field.

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