

## Spiritual Leadership and Innovation Capacity in Indian Entrepreneurial Firms: the mediating role of Organizational Learning

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### Abstract

We interviewed the Entrepreneur/Leader of four entrepreneurial firms in India to explore the possible relationship between Spiritual Leadership and Innovation Capacity and examine whether Organizational Learning is a mediator in their relationships. Data collected through semi-structured interviews was examined using inductive analysis. These interviews give us insights into the possibility of a positive relationship between Spiritual Leadership and Innovation Capacity through the mediation of Organizational Learning. This study serves as a preliminary model and a guide to explain the correspondence between Transformational Leadership in the west and Spiritual Leadership in the east and how Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Learning can affect Innovation Capacity of a firm.

**Keywords:** Spiritual Leadership, Innovation Capacity, Organizational Learning, Transformational Leadership, Indian Entrepreneurial Firms

### Introduction

Innovation is a key source of competitive advantage (Prajogo and Ahmed, 2006). An important top management concern is improving the firm's Innovation Capacity (henceforth: IC) (Ragatz et al., 2003). The literature on innovation emphasizes that leaders greatly influence IC of a firm (Damanpour and Schneider, 2006; De Jong & Den Hartog, 2010; Bass, 1990). However, much of the research on innovation implies an indirect role for leaders through human resource management practices (Manafi and Devi Subramaniam, 2015). According to Waldman et al. (2006) an untapped area of research is an analysis of leadership influence on organizational IC and an important question to answer is: *Do the leader characteristics lead to increased IC?* In this study, we aim to answer this question. In particular, we focus on Spiritual Leadership style and its influence on IC of organizations in the context of Indian entrepreneurial firms.

Fry (2003) has tried to integrate spirituality at work at the individual level with his concept of Spiritual Leadership (henceforth: SL). The theory of SL examines leaders own ethics and integrity and determine if they are truly in line with the values professed (Fry, 2003). Leader attributes like values and ethics, charisma, determination, positive outlook, dependability, hopeful, inspiring, communicative, excellenceoriented, confident, honest, dynamic, team builder, and trustworthy are all associated with spirituality. SL is viewed as a necessary for organizations to be successful (Fry, 2003).

The organizational structure is another important factor for innovation. In an entrepreneurial organization achieving innovation requires leadership that embraces freedom of thought and freedom of expression; where co-operation and the sharing of knowledge is the norm; where the leaders throughout the organization articulate a guiding vision, empower people, and value creativity; and where teams are made up of people with complementary traits and skill sets who believe in each other and who are willing and able to challenge the current state of affairs (Robbins et al., 2017). Keeping this in mind, the Entrepreneurial Firms in India was the context for our research.

In the west, many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of transformational leadership (henceforth: TL) on IC (Howell and Higgins, 1990). Hsiao and Chang (2011) findings also provide evidence that organizational learning (henceforth: OL) mediates the relationship between TL and IC. TL seems more in harmony with SL (Reave, 2005) and according to Indian thought, the most important element of leadership has been spiritual values (Jain, 2010). We thus ask the following Research Questions: *Does SL style influence IC of organizations in the context of Indian entrepreneurial firms? and Does OL act as a mediator between their relationships?*

This study grew out of an inquiry into what factors could positively influence IC in Indian entrepreneurial firms. Owing to the nature of the research questions, which focus on understanding a process and aims to gain familiarity and acquire new insights into a less studied phenomenon, Qualitative Exploratory Research approach was used to gather information and suggest a hypotheses. To answer the research questions, we conduct an inductive case study. Our analysis is based on interviews with entrepreneur/leader of four highly innovative firms who are known for their product, process, and/or business model innovation. Our data reveal that SL style is critical to foster innovation and there are many ways a spiritual leader can directly and indirectly influence the IC of the organization. Moreover, we show how OL mediates the relation between SL and IC of a firm.

This study makes several contributions to research. Firstly, the findings of this study support the effect of SL on IC. Secondly, this study supports the mediator role of OL. This is the studies contribution to the existing literature. This study also contributes to the understanding of the correspondence between TL in the west and SL in the east and serves as a preliminary model and a guide to explain how SL and OL can affect a firms IC.

## Theoretical Background

### *Fry's SL theory*

Fry (2003) defines SL as comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviour that are necessary to intrinsically motivate oneself and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership. He describes the sense of calling as the experience of transcendence or how one makes a difference through service to others and, in doing so, derives meaning and purpose in life. Membership involves establishing a social/organizational culture based on altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others, thereby producing a sense of membership and a feeling of being understood and appreciated. Fry's SL theory can be seen as a response to the call for a more holistic leadership. In providing a view of SL, Reave (2005) indicates that SL is treated more as an observable phenomenon occurring when a person in a leadership position embodies spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility, creating the self as an example of someone who can be trusted, relied upon, and

admired. It is also demonstrated through behaviour, whether in individual reflective practice or in the ethical, compassionate, and respectful treatment of others. These spiritual values and practices allow leaders to achieve organizational goals such as increased productivity, lowered rates of turnover, greater sustainability, and improved employee health (Reave, 2005). Leaders who view their own work as a means of spiritual growth have also been shown to increase organizational performance (Hofmeyer et al., 2015)

#### *Relation between Leadership and IC*

A firm's IC is a complex ability in which new knowledge and ideas are continuously applied to commercial ends, that is, to change the offerings (product innovation) and the ways it creates and delivers those offerings (process innovation) in order to increase or sustain its effectiveness and competitiveness (Lander and Thorsteinsdottir, 2011). For managing innovative environments in organizations, the literature emphasizes the support of leaders and commitment for innovation as being vital for fruitful innovation (Baker et al., 1986). Leaders influence IC because they establish organizational culture, formulate strategy and control key resources. Leaders' favourable attitude towards innovation build feelings of confidence and support to the employees for proposing new ideas and implementing those ideas (Damanpour and Schneider, 2006). Leadership is even more important when innovation is concerned with radical change as it requires a level of learning and change that is often disruptive, risky, and costly (Prajogo and Ahmed, 2006). Visionary leaders aggressively exploit new technologies and design a 'fertile' environment to nurture innovation which advances the IC of the firm (Martensen, 1998).

#### *Relation between OL and IC*

According to Cohen and Levinthal (1989), IC is an outcome of OL. IC is the manifestation of internal learning capacity and the absorptive capacity (Zahra and George, 2002). Internal learning capacity occurs when members of the organization create and transfer new ideas and knowledge inside the firm boundaries (Bontis et al., 2002). Cohen and Levinthal (1989) define absorptive capacity of a firm as its ability to recognize the value of new external information, assimilate it and apply it to commercial ends. Internal learning capacity and absorptive capacity are two mutually dependent learning capabilities that have a combined influence on IC. There is evidence that a leaders commitment to OL positively influences IC of a firm (Prajogo and Ahmed, 2006).

#### *Relation between Leadership and OL*

Learning is strongly influenced by leadership behaviors (Bass, 1985). According to Bass (1985) leadership styles which inspire and motivate employees will better prepare teams to participate in learning tasks that ultimately improve organizational performance. Good and effective leadership is the key to OL (Jogulu, 2010). People through OL are encouraged with committed leaders at the strategic, empowered team, and personal levels that act as coaches who constantly strive to listen, experiment, improve, innovate, and create new leaders (Bass & Stogdill, 1990). According to Lahteenmaki et al. (2001), leaders are the guiding force behind OL.

#### **Relation between TL, OL, and IC as a basis to understand SLs influence on IC of a firm**

In the west, many studies have demonstrated the positive effects of TL on IC (Howell and Higgins, 1990; Gumusluoglu, 2009; Hsiao and Chang, 2011). Scholars found the relationship between TL and IC to be positive but influenced by a complex set of moderators and mediators (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Hsiao and Chang (2011) findings provide evidence that relation between TL and IC is mediated by OL. Does the

characteristics and effectiveness of a transformational leader in the western research apply equally to the Indian context? The investigation of leadership effectiveness in different cultural contexts is an important area of research for leaders who must lead and motivate different cultural groups and for researchers investigating differences between the leadership styles and its effectiveness across cultures. According to Indian thought, the most important element of leadership has been spiritual values (Jain, 2011). TL theory has focused in varying degrees on one or more aspects of the physical, mental, or emotional elements of human interaction in organizations and has overlooked the spiritual component. The elements of TL (Bass, 1985; Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999) is clearly important to SL. TL seems more in harmony with SL (Reave, 2005). Components like a leader's response to the individual needs of followers through behaviors as talking to them as friends, demonstrating patience with mistakes, including others in decisions, showing sensitivity to follower feelings, etc. (Kark And Shamir, 2002) are also included in Fry's SL theory. Concern for others, integrity, role modelling, ethical decision making, respect for others, individualized consideration are elements of both transformational and SL. Since TL behaviors include positive behaviors (Bass, 1985), the above view can be extended to suggest a likely correspondence between a leader's spirituality and the leader's positive behaviors or spiritual behaviors toward subordinates. A line of critique offered by Crossman (2010) highlights some of the synergies between spiritual and other forms of leadership theories. SL is closely linked to TL because of the same descriptors found in the inventory of SL are also found in literature concerned with TL. There are clear points of convergence between TL and SL theories. These arguments address the premise that SL and TL are comparable.

### Propositions

We propose a positive relationship between SL and IC.

**Proposition 1:** There is a relationship between SL and IC

We also examine whether OL is a mediator between their relationships. **Proposition**

**2:** OL is a mediator between their relationships

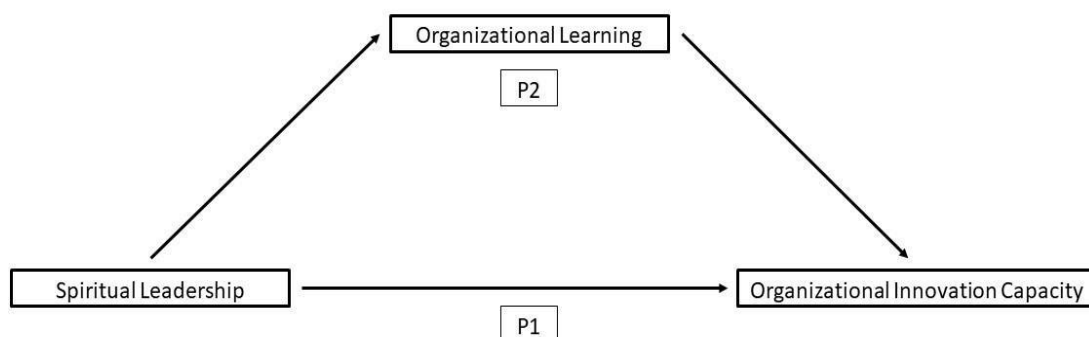


Fig1. The Conceptual Model.

This study is meant to serve as a preliminary model and a guide to explain how SL and OL can affect IC of a firm.

## Methods

### *Research Design*

The aim of this study was to gain familiarity and acquire new insights into a less studied phenomenon with paucity of literature on this problem. Qualitative Exploratory Research approach was used to gather information and suggest a hypotheses. We conducted an inductive, qualitative, multi-case study (Yin, 1994).

The context of this study is Indian entrepreneurial firms. The cases were chosen based on the following three criteria (a) Respondents included entrepreneur/leader of industries that had an entrepreneurial structure where the major decisions were made by the entrepreneur/leader. The advantage of this structure is (1) it is a simple structure (2) there is only one person taking the decisions (3) entrepreneur/leader has control over the workforce and all decisions within the organization leading to better goal congruence (b) The firms were Small and Medium Scale enterprises (SMEs). It has been researched previously by various scholars that it is important for SMEs to be innovative to survive in this competitive environment (O'Regan and Ghobadian, 2002) (c) All the four firms were known for their product, process, and/or business model innovation. There was publicly available information on how these companies were truly innovative.

These 3 shared attributes allowed us to compare the traits of the entrepreneur/leader and identify similarities, particularly regarding the leadership behaviour and OL. All the interviews were done by the second author. The author closely observed the respondents during the interviews and took notes. This is in line with the Salvato and Corbetta's (2013) approach. Drawing upon Locke's (2011) discovery-oriented interpretative approach, the first author adopted the role of devil's advocate, asserting for clarifications, interrogating the second author, and identifying themes with which the second author (dis)agreed and that sometimes required the second author to go back to the respondents with follow up questions.

The entrepreneurs were selected using purposeful sampling technique. Intended to achieve depth of understanding and to maximize efficiency and validity, purposeful sampling technique was considered most appropriate for this research. Keeping in mind the research questions, the samples were thoughtfully recruited. A few aspects that were considered while selecting the samples were (1) knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon being studied (Creswell et al., 2007), (2) availability (H Russell Bernard, 2018), and (3) willingness to participate (Palinkas, 2013).

### *Details of the Respondents*

Table 1 depicts the overview of the sample. The firms are referred to as Company A, B, C and D. Fictitious respondent names Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta are used to ensure anonymity. The inconsistency in the details is because the informants were not comfortable giving certain information.

Table 1. Overview of the Sample.

Firm	Respondent	Respondent Age (at the time of interview)	Respondent Place of Birth	Education	Industry	Location	Founded	2017 turnover
Company A	Alpha	60	Maharashtra	BE (Electrical Engineering) <sup>2</sup>	Electrical Engineering	Peenya Industrial Area, Bangalore, Karnataka	1995	3 crores
Company B	Beta	32	Karnataka	Diploma in Computer Science	Technology/Service	Kengeri, Bangalore, Karnataka	2009	NA <sup>1</sup>
Company C	Gamma	45	Kerala	B-Tech <sup>3</sup> and PGSEM <sup>4</sup>	Food/FMCG	Doddanakundi Industrial Estate, Mahadevapura, Bangalore, Karnataka	2005	182 crores
Company D	Delta	Middle aged <sup>7</sup>	Karnataka	MS, Corporate Training and Development <sup>5</sup> MS, Human Resource Education <sup>6</sup>	Technology/Service	Bannerghatta Main Road, Bangalore, Karnataka	2005	NA <sup>1</sup>

*Note. 1. NA = Not Available , 2. BE (Electrical Engineering) = Bachelor of Engineering, 3. B-Tech = Bachelor of Technology (1995) in Computer Science Engineering from National Institute of Technology, Calicut, 4. PGSEM = Post Graduate Programme in Management (2007) from Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, 5. MS, Corporate Training and Development from Northwestern University, 6. MS, Human Resource Education from Boston University, 7 = 50 – 55 years old Data Collection Method*

Semi structured interviews seemed likely to yield quality information relevant to the study. Data was collected from interviews with entrepreneur/leader from different industries. All the firms were located in Bangalore, India thereby mitigating problems of environmental variation (Eisenhardt, 1989). All the merits of the interview mode were thoughtfully evaluated in view of both the interviewer context and the respondent context. According to Kazmer and Xie (2008), interview method is the most direct, researchfocused interaction between researcher and the participant. It is also the best way to enter into the other person's perspective (Patton, 2002). The interviews were semi structured and open-ended. All interviews were face-to-face. According to Minichiello et al. (2008), respondents would be comfortable by conducting the interview in a location of their choosing. So, respondents had control over selecting the location and time for interview, everyone chose their office. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) describe the process of interviewing to include the steps of gathering a tape recorder, sitting down with the respondent, and taking notes on nonverbal cues as the interview progresses. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed. Also, notes were taken during the course of the interview.

Eisenhardt (1989) rules were followed, (1) detailed interview notes were developed within 24 hours, (2) the notes included all data from the interview, and (3) the interview notes were concluded with the researchers' overall impressions. Several actions were taken that enhanced the accuracy of the interviews. Informants were allowed to provide data freely rather than forcing them, allowing them to answer the questions that they wanted to and skip the ones they wanted to. Miller et al. (1997) documented improved accuracy of such data. The same questions were asked to all the participants. Considering the participant's time constraints, in few instances the number of questions had to be narrowed down with focus mainly on the most important questions. The respondents were also allowed to share any information they felt relevant. The interview questions were carefully designed. The goal was to get maximum relevant data from the interviews. McNamara et al. (2009) recommendations were followed (1) wordings were open-ended, (2)

the questions were neutral and did not influence the answers, (3) questions were easy to understand, and (4) they were asked one at a time.

Keeping in mind Creswell et al. (2007) assertion that respondents in an interview will not necessarily answer the question being asked, follow-up questions were prepared for optimal responses. All the questions were systematically arranged in a sequence to avoid confusions. All the interviews were conducted in English. The identified participants were sent a PowerPoint presentation and an email explaining the purpose of the interview and indicating how long the interview might take. This presentation and email gave an idea of the range of topics and not the actual questions so as not to lose the naturalness, get prepared answers, or lose the ability to ask new questions. None of the interview questions required preparation. The email also requested the contribution of the identified research participants to offer their views in face-to-face discussion. The respondents referred to as Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta for confidentiality reasons selected the location and time of interview. The interview recordings were safely transferred to Dropbox and were not accessed from any unsecured networks considering the threats of data security. Table 2 depicts the Date, Time, and Duration of the interviews.

Table 2. Date, Time, and Duration of the Interview.

<b>Entrepreneur/Owner</b>	<b>Alpha</b>	<b>Beta</b>	<b>Gamma</b>	<b>Delta</b>
<b>Requested to meet via email</b>	8-Jun-18	24-Jun-18	8-Jun-18	8-Jun-18
<b>Received Response on</b>	8-Jun-18	24-Jun-18	9-Jun-18	9-Jun-18
<b>Date of the Interview</b>	11-Jun-18	24-Jun-18	26-Jun-18	10-Aug-18
<b>Time of the Interview</b>	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	3:30 PM	3:00 PM
<b>Duration of the Interview</b>	1:14:06	0:57:04	0:31:15	0:38:10

### *Data Analysis*

Keeping in mind the overall research design a combination of inductive and deductive strategies (Langley & Abdallah, 2011) was used to systematically analyze and interpret data. Data Analysis and Data Interpretation was done in tandem to develop a meaningful understanding of the data collected. Also, the combination of inductive and deductive strategies allowed us to compare and recognize patterns within and across cases using the multiple case design (Eisenhardt, 1989). As advised by Chase (2003), the interpreted data is articulated with reasons and evidence is provided from the existing literature. As recommended by Kim (2016), the data is made comprehensible, engaging, and interesting to the reader by brushing off the rough edges of disconnected raw interview data. First, the interview transcripts were inductively coded and high level concepts were extracted (Bertschi-Michel et al., 2019). Later we compared our interpretations with the constructs of SL and OL theories. We could see a clear convergence between the theories and analyzed data. Once the concepts of SL and OL became clear from the data we coded these with IC of the firm. Both the authors were involved in data analysis process. The data was interpreted independently by the authors. When there were disagreements the authors met and discussed until they reached mutual agreement. The data obtained was analyzed within and across cases to find some of the commonalities,

generalities, and differences. For reliability of our analysis we triangulated the data by confronting first author's perspective with the second author's perspective.

## **Results**

For the reasons of space the results are presented deductively. First, to describe the leadership behaviors of the 4 entrepreneurs/leaders, we structure this section according to the four major activities by the interviewees that emerged from the data that support the argument that the qualities and practices exhibited by these four entrepreneur/leader have been endorsed as spiritual leader's traits and behaviors. We later describe how these four entrepreneurs/leaders influenced the IC of the firm and how it was mediated by OL and present the emerging hypothesis.

### *Calling*

As reported by Alpha, his driving force has always been solving a problem to the society.

For me my clients, my customers are the society and solving their problem is his way of contributing to the welfare of the society.

Gamma left his well-paid job in the U.S. and came back to India with the objective of creating employment for the people in his village.

I want to serve god by serving the needy.

Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) report that when work is seen as an opportunity to serve God, as a calling, work-related strivings take on new significance and meaning. Gamma wanted to help the kids in the villages. He wanted to serve the needy and that motivated him to start a company of his own.

Delta does a lot of activities to help the poor. She has adopted many schools in her native. She loves to help the people who are less privileged.

I have initiated a drive 'Education, Employment and Environment'. I want and love to help others. I have also started an initiative called the 'Swatcha Shale'<sup>1</sup> and have hired people to clean the village schools. I have built a shed in Bangalore where I conduct trainings for women to earn their livelihood. I am also supporting 50 kids in Andaman and conduct weekend programs on Environmental Education.

Fry (2003) refers to one of the essential dimensions of SL as 'Calling' and describes the sense of calling as 'the experience of transcendence or how one makes a difference through service to others and, in doing so, derives meaning and purpose in life'. Collins (2001) argues that truly exceptional leaders are able to subjugate their own needs to the greater ambition of something larger and more lasting than themselves, this sense of a greater purpose or work as a calling can inspire and sustain business leaders in difficult times.

Beta enjoys working. He considers being ethical as his biggest contribution to the society.

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1. Swatcha Shale means clean schools

I do not discriminate work as small or big. Whatever the work might be, I respect and enjoy it.

Leadership is a responsibility, responsibility of what I am leading. I work to educate my customers.



House et al. (1971) have stated that the term calling has long been used as one of the defining characteristics of a professional. Professionals in general have expertise in a specialized body of knowledge, they are ethics centered, on selfless service to clients/customers, an obligation to maintain quality standards within the profession, commitment to calling to their field, a dedication to their work, and a strong commitment to their careers. Calling is the quest for Spiritual Survival. It is trying to live in service to others (Fry, 2003). Kouzes and Posner (2011) consider calling as one of the essential leader characteristics and values that followers admire. It was clearly evident from the data that Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta consider their work as a true calling.

*Integrity, Honesty, Humility and Patience*

Alpha, when he started, offered his services at a very low rate. Even though he charged less, he did an amazing job.

I knew that I was underpaid, still I did a good job. Money making without hard work, without purpose and without contributing to the society is a sin. For me doing my job, doing it with ethics, honesty, and integrity is important. In life you have to do as you feel best without doing anything wrong. Life is difficult, but when you do the right things even in the difficult times that is when your net worth is judged. It is not how much wealth you gained or what position you are in that matters in life but what you did is what really matters.

According to Reave (2005), leadership success begins with personal integrity, which is then reflected in ethical behaviour.

Beta wants to build a big brand, a service brand which is ethically bonded.

The attribute of my company should be ethics. In that way I want to build my brand. Values has always been first for me. Values, ethics, honesty, integrity come first for me and the remaining things just follow. I believe in establishing a bond in trust worthiness. I consider my delivery as god and maintaining the sanctity of my deliverables as the biggest promoter of my business. For me the business model must be clear, transparent, acceptable, and trustful. My work should satisfy my soul and that is how I define a job well done. Considering wealth as the only motivation to work is not moral.

Spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility have been repeatedly found to be key elements of leadership success. SL is an observable phenomenon occurring when a person in a leadership position embodies spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility (Reave, 2005).

For Alpha honesty is the best policy because he will get repeated customers.

The feedback for my honesty is my customers and my suppliers. My website is filled with testimonials and certificates from my customers from the time I started. I give the best quality product.

Beta says that he is a little expensive than the people who offer similar services in the market.

When my customers ask me why, I say I don't want the same customer time and again. I want a different customer as a reference from my existing customers.

Though he is expensive, the service he provides is unparalleled. He creates systems that cannot be damaged and even if they are damaged, the customer himself can recover it and would not need Beta's help again.

Honesty was the most frequently mentioned value for business leaders in the survey by Fairholm and Fairholm (2000). Wagner-Marsh and Conley (1999) identified honesty with self and others as essential for maintaining a spiritually based corporate culture. Honesty is one of the universally endorsed leadership traits (House et al., 2002). It was clear from the data that Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta are honest individuals. Along with honesty and integrity, the presence of humility is another indicator of spiritual values in a leader (Reave, 2005). When Alpha quit his first job at BHEL<sup>2</sup>, he did not have a steady income. His next meal was not guaranteed, and he did not know where the money for his next meal would come from.

Getting a customer was very difficult as I was not famous and established. There were no phones, no social media, and other platforms to advertise and sell my services. I was on the street looking for opportunities. I had taken a very big risk. I was good at doing energy saving. I used to go to factories and tell their owners that I would do energy saving. I used the 'Low Price marketing strategy.' Because I offered my services at such a low cost, the companies would never say no to me. I gave a great service and did an amazing job at an amazingly low price. I did it for my survival. I never charged upfront. I promised my customers certain amount of energy savings and got the orders from them. I delivered, the customer would be happy with my delivery and would pay me. This is how I built trust among my customers.

Leadership position embodies spiritual values such as humility and creates the self as someone who can be trusted (Reave, 2005). His customers spread the word about how great his services are to their friends and families, and he started gaining loyal and new customers. The efforts paid off, his reference list kept building and one day he got his big break, an offer from HAL<sup>3</sup>.

It took me a long time to reach here.

The behaviour of patience is included in Fry's (2003) SL model.

Beta says that over the night you cannot become a big business, it will take time.

I do not stop when there is a peculiar problem. I respect the peculiarity and patiently approach the problem. Sometimes I spend 2-3 days understanding, analyzing, and finding a solution to the problem. I do not give up.

When Beta started in 2009, the first month he earned INR 2000. All his friends and family asked him to join a corporate job. But today he is gaining something and that is because of all the risk he took that day.

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2. BHEL (Bharath Heavy Electricals Limited) is one of the largest engineering and manufacturing companies in India owned by Indian Government

3. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited is an Indian Aerospace and Defense company

The journey was not easy. It has taken me nine years to reach this kind of a potential. I still have more to achieve. I watered my ideas for 9 years and now it has grown into a tree. It is only the last two years I have been growing drastically.

SL's move patiently, carefully, and incrementally. They are humble and modest. It was evident from the interviews that Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta in various situations have continually demonstrated spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, humility, and patience.

*Respectful treatment of others, appreciating others and showing care and concern*

According to Alpha leadership is not one person's responsibility, anyone can be a leader.

Even a lower-level employee can demonstrate great leadership. Leadership is not position; it is the work. A leader is somebody who is going to give space. He is not going to push people. A leader is not going to tell you what you have to become, he will not hold you tight rather he will give you space, hold you in affection, hold you in true spirit, encourage you and see what you become. When you push someone that means they don't love their job. A leader knows that when you push such people they will be more frustrated. As small companies like mine cannot give benefits like the big companies, I give freedom and respect to my employees to motivate them.

Alpha understands that if he is wrong then everything is going to go down and whatever his team does, nothing is going to work.

As a leader, if I do not give the correct road map, then my entire team is going to fail. Leadership is knowing what to do.

According to Reave (2005) an individual leader embodies the values and practices associated with spirituality such as demonstrating respect and caring for others. Even the spiritual teachings urge the practice of showing respect (Reave, 2005). SL is also demonstrated through respectful treatment of others (Reave, 2005).

Beta attributes his success to an old man who was also his mentor while working at a farm.

An old man's mentorship and advice helped me reach the heights that would be impossible alone. The insights gained from that old man made me think differently. The old man taught me to respect what I was doing and deliver from the heart.

Kouzes and Posner (2011) call this practice of recognizing others contributions for success as "encouraging the heart".

Before the interview, Gamma, took author two straight to the cafeteria and made him a cup of coffee. This behaviour is defined as altruistic love (Fry, 2003). Delta gives the credit of her success to her husband. Beta advises his employees to be ahead of him. Gamma reported that he does not care if an employee puts authentic efforts and fails to achieve the targets. Delta feels that the employees should not feel they are helpless and at someone else's mercy.

All my managers are very considerate people. All my managers and senior leaders are people friendly and are always trying to help the employees succeed. We always listen to our employees.

That is how we motivate them. We keep taking feedbacks from our employees, we have regular surveys, every year I sit with individual teams and take their feedback. I listen to my employees and try to provide a solution to all their problems. When an employee is not performing we counsel them. We spend a lot of time with people and guide them. We spend time talking one on one. We don't act against employees unless they commit a serious offense. We never fire employees unless there is a integrity issue. We give enough chances for the employees to improve. I am sure that the employees who do not perform in my company will go somewhere else and do very well.

Reave (2005) found that effective leaders counsel, train, and develop subordinates. Employees expect to be treated fairly and with compassion and respect (Reave, 2005). Similarly, listening responsively, coaching followers, and attending to individual needs is also classified as the traits of a spiritual leader. Listening to others means not only acknowledging their concerns, but also recognizing and respecting good ideas (Reave, 2005).

Delta says that it is alright if her employees give thoughtless ideas.

Some ideas may work for the current requirement and some ideas may not, but that doesn't mean that ideas are bad.

Kotter (1988) discovered the value of listening to employees' new ideas lead organizations to develop new products that dramatically improve performance in competitive markets. Gamma considers his professor Dr. DVRS as his prophet as he was responsible for Gamma's spiritual awakening.

I appreciate my professor's contribution to my life.

This collection of attributes shows that Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta demonstrate SL through respectful treatment of others, by appreciating others and by showing care and concern.

### *Engage in reflective practice*

Spiritual practice in daily life encompasses not only practicing kindness toward others, but also taking time for individual self-examination and communication with God: prayer, meditation, spiritual reading, and journaling (Neal, 2000).

For Gamma, spirituality is his connection with the almighty lord.

The lord is always guiding me, telling me what I have to do in life. I pray five times a day, irrespective of whether I am at office or at home, I do not miss my prayers. The prayers give me immense energy.

What would make Gamma happy on his death bed is if he is able to build a business without compromising on his values.

For me values are if I can tell what I did to my mother and she feels proud of me. That is my litmus test before doing anything. When I have to take tough decisions in life I do this litmus test and never compromise on my values. I should be proud to narrate my story to my grandchildren.

He considers the challenges and the constraints as an opportunity to prove himself, that others might give up and might not be able to stick to their values, but he is doing it.

Irrespective of whatever the situation is I don't compromise on my values.

He says spirituality is a journey and you can never say I have achieved 100%.

There is no end to the spiritual journey.

For Delta spirituality is very important. She is inclined towards spirituality since childhood.

If you are strong spiritually, then you are ready to face anything. I believe in the kindness of God. I feel everything happens for the best. No matter what the challenge is, I can work on it. I have this confidence because I know that God has a plan for me. Being spiritually inclined makes me stronger. I love life. I think life is wonderful. There is so much possibility, so much you can do, and you can learn. It's just how much you are going to allow yourself.

For her life is the most wonderful thing. She wants to take advantage of it to the full, whatever opportunities that come across she will take full advantage of it because she loves to experience new things. Research shows that the spiritual practices promote leader performance and resilience. Reflective practices improve performance by allowing leaders to gain a greater perspective to overcome crises and cope with stress (Reave, 2005).

Examining the leadership qualities of Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta, they all demonstrate spiritual values such as integrity, honesty, and humility. They show compassion and gratitude. They express care and concern, listen responsively, and appreciate the contributions of others. They view work as calling and also engage in reflective practice. The qualities and practices exhibited by these four entrepreneurs have been endorsed as spiritual leader's traits and behaviors and have been linked to SL.

### ***Respondents influence on the IC of the firm and mediation by OL***

Alpha and Gamma were confident that they will be able to get past all the obstacles and succeed because they had the capability of devising a product for the benefit of the society, a product that the society needs. They could innovate. Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta, all of them state that as an entrepreneur it is important to recognize what the society needs and devise a solution that is going to change the life of the people. Camisón and Forés (2011) state that an organization with increased organizational innovation capacity is less likely to miss the opportunities created by emerging market demands as it has the ability to understand and anticipate customer needs. For Damanpour and Gopalakrishnan (2001), IC is a firm's ability to provide better, differentiated, improved or new products and processes to meet customer's needs. We clearly identified from the interviews that Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta and their businesses are customer driven. These entrepreneurs consider innovation as a journey, as a continuous process. All of them stated that Innovation is teamwork. Keeping in mind the societies requirement they have designed their products and services. They have always expanded their business into new areas and have been exploring a wider range of opportunities for new growth. They have been very innovative in expanding their business. All four entrepreneurs consider Innovation is not what one person does but it is what an entire organization does. Kahn et al. (2012) state that teamwork facilitates IC as it allows the cross-fertilization of ideas and integration of knowledge which results in the development of new products and processes. According to Nonaka (1994), teamwork allows to share knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs among organizational members more easily and efficiently which facilitates innovation.

Innovation is identifying and solving a problem in the society. Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta identified a certain problem in the society that required a solution. According to Cohen and Levinthal (1989) product development is strongly influenced by problem solving. They say that problems allow people to think up new approaches which results in Innovation. All four entrepreneurs looked at the market and saw that there was a problem that needed a solution.

Alpha, Beta, Gamma and Delta encourage and reward their employees for being innovative. They give credit to their employees and support them to innovate. Camisón and Forés (2011) state that the structures and systems in the organization need to encourage employees, support initiatives and suggestions from the members of the organization and experiment with new ideas to develop and improve products and processes. All the four understand that failures are important for innovation.

These above findings lead to our first Hypotheses

*Hypotheses 1: Spiritual Leadership has a positive relation on Organizational Innovation Capacity*

Camisón and Forés (2011) note that to innovate, firms should combine different learning activities. According to Cohen and Levinthal (1989) IC is the outcome of OL. Alpha's customers keep changing, the requirements keep changing. He has to keep learning and has to be innovative to survive in his industry. Learning research suggests that unless organizations convert new knowledge to new products and processes, competitive advantage and superior performance will not be obtained (Camisón and Forés, 2011).

I give a lot of importance to learning. For me learning without a purpose is meaningless. Now I learn more than what I used to learn during my engineering days. For an entrepreneur continuous learning is important. Learning for me is behavioral too. I learn from customers, suppliers, employees, and many different sources.

For Beta, learning needs good guidance. He states learning is necessary as the outcome of learning is very important for innovation.

Learning is fundamental foundation for business, and it is never complete, it is always under way. Learning has no end; it has to be continuous. Learning has always been a part of my work. Rather learning itself is my work. Learning can be from anyone. I am thankful to all those who helped me learn. People will overtake me if I don't continuously learn.

Kessler et al. (2000) showed that learning is associated with innovation speed and competitive advantage generation. Zahra and George (2002) found that learning and innovation work together to establish the organization's competitive advantage. Beta loves learning irrespective of whether it is from his junior or a vendor or even from his kid who is just 3 years old. He considers google as one of his guru's. He respects knowledge.

Courvisanos (2011) observed that knowledge affects the rate of creation of new products and the firm's IC. As Beta's work deals with technology, he has to always be open to new ideas.

I should be wise enough to understand what is important for me. I am open to ideas only if they are necessary. I learn what the world needs. I don't accept things as failures, instead I consider it as learning. For me technology is manmade, and I should have patience to reach that man's mind.

Patience and knowledge are very important for any business. My success mantra is ‘keep enhancing your ideas, keep learning and believe that you are the best’.

Every day is learning for Gamma. He considers learning as important for innovation but cautions that it should not spoil the innovative mind.

My organization has always been learning. I consider continuous learning as essential for both the organization and for self. I learn by reading and attending programs. I have a mentor and a coach outside my company. I believe in learning from people and from real experiences.

Delta spends a lot of time and money on trainings and Competency Development. Her new employees are surprised because they have never seen any company that focuses so much on training.

Training employees makes them capable to achieve the vision of our company.

A firm’s internal learning capacity allows the generation of new knowledge, the developing of firm’s core competences, the control and understanding of the knowledge development process, and the obtaining of more difficult-to-imitate innovations. Learning can occur from sources within the organization and from external sources (Camisón and Forés, 2011). Delta reads to get inspired by what other people have done. She reads about the best practices of other companies to understand if it can be used in her own company as well.

I consider learning as very important for innovation because the fact that you are learning gives you many new ideas. So, the more you learn, the more ideas you come across.

New ideas and proposals represent the starting point of IC (Camisón and Forés, 2011). So, without learning and reading about what other people and companies are doing it is impossible to innovate. She learns from her driver, from the peon, it doesn't matter who it is. For her it is about what she is gaining, it does not matter from whom it is coming. She loves new ideas. It doesn't have to be her idea, it's just about what idea works, it doesn't matter whose idea.

The above discussion is summarized in Hypotheses 2.

*Hypotheses 2: Organization Learning is a mediator between Spiritual Leadership and Organizational Innovation Capacity*

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Our study is not without limitations but is a gateway to future research. First, the geographical distribution of the respondents was the limitation of the interview method. Due to the time constraints, all the interviews were limited to a local geographical area and the sample size was limited. Future research can be done to refine the dimensions of SL and can also look into other outcomes like sustainability, profitability, and performance. While the study has presented SL as a positive influence on OL and IC, even other forms of leadership may have similar influence. The negative influences of SL are not included in this study. This study provides researchers in SL, OL, and IC with a preliminary map of how these fields are related. This was an exploratory research. The hypotheses framed in this study can be further evaluated using a confirmatory research.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declare no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

### Supplemental Material

The interview recordings and transcripts are available online. Please send me an email at phani.bhattachar@gmail.com for the links. A confidentiality agreement has to be signed stating the data will not be shared publicly.

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