Fundamental Moral Orientations: Implications for Values-Based Leadership

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Values-based leadership means different things to different people. Indeed, the concept borders on meaning anything to anyone, such that it ends up meaning nothing to no one. This article proposes a way out of this conceptual morass — a way that is based on a framework linking Fundamental Moral Orientations, stewardship decisions and actions, and personal and community outcomes. Within this framework, values-based leadership is conceptualized as the leadership path wherein the Fundamental Moral Orientation of self-fullness leads to complete stewardship decisions and actions, which in turn results in many beneficial personal and community outcomes. Using this conceptual framework, values-based leadership is also differentiated from self-serving leadership and servant leadership.

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A Context for Values-Based Leadership

"To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts straight."   — *Confucius, BC 551-479*

"As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world — that is the myth of the atomic age — as in being able to remake ourselves."   — *Mahatma Gandhi, 1869-1948*

"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
                                  — *Mahatma Gandhi, 1869-1948*

"The whole course of human history may depend on a change of heart in one solitary and even humble individual — for it is in the solitary mind and soul of the individual that the battle between good and evil is waged and ultimately won or lost."   — *M. Scott Peck, 1936-2005*

Collectively, these four quotes — three from world luminaries, one from a notable American author — emphasize that human change in this world ultimately depends on individual effort and initiative, and that for change to have a powerful, positive impact, individual effort and initiative must ardently embrace that which is good, fair, right, and just. Put in a more abstract way, both changing oneself and leading change in the broader communities of which one is a member depend upon one's Fundamental Moral Orientation and the decisions and actions resulting therefrom. Every person's approach to living life and changing life is very much rooted in his or her moral orientation of pursuing self-interest versus serving others. Consistent with this notion, this article explores the concept of Fundamental Moral Orientations (FMOs), how FMOs affect the decisions people make and the actions they take in living their lives and in exercising leadership roles, and the expected impacts on the individual actors themselves as well as on the broader community.

Values-Based Living and Values-Based Leadership: Elusive Concepts

Values-based is a very elusive term and concept, seemingly commonly understood but perhaps not adequately or accurately. In the political dialogue and public discourse of the past several years, Americans have been inundated with the concept of values — and have been exhorted to live their lives (and to vote) according to a set of values that presumably reflects that which is good, fair, right, and just. Unfortunately, however, such a set of values often reflects a narrowly defined set of moral issues (*e.g.*, abortion, gay rights, and traditional marriage) while discounting or outright ignoring other moral issues (*e.g.*, poverty, healthcare, and decimation of the environment). Some people subscribe to conservative social values; others endorse liberal social values. Which set of values should serve as the foundation for values-based living? Moreover, if people do not subscribe to any of the aforementioned values (or similar ones), does this mean they are living a life devoid of values? Or does it mean that they are living their lives according to a set of values that differs from that of a majority, or even significant minority, of the population?

The prominent ethical scandals of the past several years — including, but not limited to Enron, Arthur Andersen, WorldCom, Tyco, and Adelphia — have brought values to the forefront of the business world. Did these ethical failures reflect a lack of values on the part of the leaders of these organizations? Or did these leaders pursue a set of values that were at odds with most of society? Were they self-serving at the expense of others within their respective organizations and their various external communities?

Values and *values-based* seems to have the assumed quality of something that is desirable — that is good, right, fair, and just. But that is not necessarily true! Values are not just positive in nature and uplifting of humanity. Values can reflect a negative orientation and be destructive of humanity, or some segment thereof. To say, for example, that the leaders of Enron who were found guilty of various crimes had no values is to negate the value they placed on greed. Or to say that terrorists have no values is to deny their fundamental beliefs and that which drives their decisions and

actions. We may disagree with terrorists' values — and justifiably so, but we cannot deny the existence of those values as being destructive for humanity in general.

The *Oxford English Reference Dictionary* defines values as "one's principles or standards; one's judgment of what is valuable or important in life" (Pearsall and Trumble, 2003, p. 1595). One's principles and standards need not reflect that which is good, right, fair, and just. What is important in one's life may be quite the opposite. In the seminal work, *The Nature of Human Values*, Milton Rokeach (1973, p. 5) defined a value as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence." A mode of conduct or an end-state of existence that is *personally or socially preferable* does not ensure that moral means and ends will be pursued. Witness, for instance, the nature of organized crime — where the values that govern criminals' decisions and actions are anathema to the general population but are preferable to the criminals as individuals and within the organized crime network of which they are members (Davis, 1993; Raab, 2005; Repetto, 2004).

Thus, the concepts of values and values-based are somewhat murky and indistinct. They lack sufficient precision for clear understanding and meaningful application. Further definitive clarification of the concepts is needed, especially when values and values-based are linked with leadership.

The concept of *values-based leadership* (or the lack thereof) seems to have infiltrated nearly every nook and cranny of many business organizations, governmental agencies, educational institutions, and nonprofit organizations in the past several years. Yet, all too often, *values-based leadership* seems to have all of the definitive shape and form of the "free-floating, full-torso, vaporous apparition" described by the character Dr. Raymond Stantz, played by the actor Dan Aykroyd, in the 1984 movie, *Ghostbusters*. Like *values* and *values-based*, *values-based leadership* is a much discussed but elusive concept. An Internet search through Google, for instance, produced 29,700 hits on *values-based leadership* while a search on Google Scholar generated 449 hits (search conducted on January 19, 2008). A contemporaneous search of ABI/INFORM, an electronic database of various academic business periodicals, identified 104 documents on the topic of *values-based leadership*. A casual perusal of the titles of the Web pages and documents of these various searches reveals a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, thus indicating at least some degree of equivocation in the concept.

Being mindful of the imprecision inherent in the concepts *values*, *values-based*, and *values-based leadership*, I will offer a more precise conceptualization of *values-based leadership* that reflects the moral foundation underlying the stewardship decisions and actions of human beings. In previous work exploring the linkages among Fundamental Moral Orientations (FMOs), stewardship, and personal and organizational outcomes, I argued that stewardship is a behavioral manifestation of a person's moral orientation (McCuddy, 2005). In other words, people's decisions and actions about wisely and effectively using, developing, and preserving the resources

entrusted to their care reflect the moral orientation they choose to pursue in their personal and professional lives. Thus, a person's moral orientation provides a foundation for and is a precursor of his/her stewardship decisions and actions. Although the above argument was made in developing a model that helps explain stewardship decisions and actions, it is a logical argument that can be applied to decisions and actions in all domains of human endeavor (McCuddy, Pinar, Birkan, and Kozak, 2008) — including leadership. Indeed, stewardship is an important part of leadership, as we shall see presently — but first we will explore the FMOs that underlie human decisions and actions.

Fundamental Moral Orientations

Three moral orientations — selfishness, selflessness, and self-fullness — underlie people's decisions and actions (McCuddy, 2005). This assertion can be applied to people's decisions and actions in their personal or professional lives, to decisions and actions regarding stewardship, to decisions and actions regarding leadership, or to decisions and actions in any other arena of human endeavor.

The moral orientation of *selfishness* involves pursuing one's self-interest and seeking to maximize one's utility. Selfishness exists in a variety of degrees. In the most extreme form of selfishness, self-interest is pursued to the exclusion of others' interests. This extreme form of selfishness brings about the unbridled pursuit of greed and the uncaring exploitation of other individuals, communities, institutions, and natural resources. In its less extreme forms, selfishness involves making decisions and taking actions that provide a person with satisfaction, joy, and happiness in the conduct of one's life. Selfishness, as a moral orientation, also involves people's efforts to fully develop the talents and capabilities with which they are endowed. Another socially acceptable form of selfishness involves decisions and actions that are intended to ensure one's personal physical survival.

The moral alternative of *selflessness* is the polar opposite of selfishness; it involves sharing for the common good. Like selfishness, selflessness exists in varying degrees, ranging from helping other individuals in small ways, to contributions to or involvement in volunteer or community organizations, to substantial contributions to or involvement in charitable organizations and community/public activism, to total dedication to serving others. Selflessness, in its most extreme form, would be purely altruistic (McCuddy, 2006), and could include sacrificing one's own life to save the life of another human being.

Self-fullness occupies the middle range between selfishness and selflessness; it involves the simultaneous pursuit of reasonable self-interest and reasonable concern for the common good. Self-fullness can be characterized as completely utilizing one's talents in fulfilling one's personal needs/desires and, relatively simultaneously, effectively serving the various communities of which one is a part. As such, it reflects the pursuit of one's self-interest in the service of others, and it is a moral alternative that reconciles selfishness with selflessness. It realistically recognizes the needs of human beings to make decisions and take actions that reflect both self-interest and

service to others, rather than one or the other exclusively. Self-fullness is a "both/and" moral orientation rather than an "either/or" moral orientation.

Stewardship

Stewardship, an increasingly important element of business practice, reflects the wise use, development, and appropriate conservation of resources that have been entrusted to the care of human beings. Business people who act as agents for others must be effective stewards of the assets entrusted to them. Entrepreneurs must be effective stewards of the assets they own, control, or use.

Stewardship is an ancient concept that is enjoying a modern resurrection. One might argue that stewardship has been an element of human existence since perhaps the very beginning of humankind. Stewardship is essential to ensuring survival. Stewardship reflects a protective restraint that humans impose on themselves. Stewardship reflects a duty of care for and conservation of property (Newton, 1997, p. 606); it involves taking care of resources through nurturing and thrifty management of their use (Leopold, 1998, p. 228).

Although the wise use of resources has long been an important element of human existence, it all too often has been ignored or relegated to little more than a background condition with regard to people's daily decisions and actions. Discounting stewardship responsibilities poses significant threats to the quality of human life, if not, as some people would argue, to human existence itself. Exploitation of human beings, depletion of natural resources, decimation of the environment, and the wastrel squandering of financial resources are some of the major ways in which stewardship failures pose threats to human civilization. Given the potential impact of these and other threats, stewardship is gaining increasing prominence in guiding how people conduct their personal and professional lives in the contemporary world.

Stewardship reflects the wise and effective utilization of the resources for which people have personal responsibility. These resources may be categorized as human resources, economic resources, and natural/environmental resources (this categorization is a simplified version of the framework reported in McCuddy and Pirie, 2007). *Stewardship of human resources* involves utilizing the full potential of one's abilities and helping others to realize their full potential in making positive contributions to society, thereby benefiting the current generation as well as contributing to the rich base of knowledge and insights upon which future generations can draw. *Stewardship of economic resources* involves utilizing financial assets, physical facilities, products and services, systems, and processes to benefit the current generation while preserving the potential for meeting the needs of future generations. *Stewardship of natural/environmental resources* involves utilizing natural resources to benefit the current generation while preserving those resources and the environment in order to meet the needs of future generations.

In the workplace, employees obviously have an obligation to wisely and effectively use, grow, and preserve the resources that the employer entrusts to their care.

Indeed, this stewardship perspective is a key element of agency theory; it reflects the accountability of corporate officers and employees to the shareholders for preserving and enhancing the value of the company's assets (Newton, 1997, pp. 606-607). Self-employed individuals or entrepreneurs also must wisely and effectively use, grow, and preserve their assets. To do anything less is to increase the likelihood of business failure and non-fulfillment of the entrepreneurs' obligations to their stakeholders. Whether acting as agents or entrepreneurs, people who practice stewardship will wisely and effectively utilize, grow, preserve, and care for all resources, and they do so within the context of naturally occurring limits.

Stewardship is not limited to the workplace, however. Stewardship occurs in life outside the workplace and in the various other communities of which people are members — nuclear and extended families, volunteer organizations, the cities, towns, and villages where we live, and so forth.

From the perspective of personal life, we can look to the original roots of the stewardship concept. Stewardship has its roots in religious thinking and doctrine. People commonly think of stewardship in terms of time, talent and treasure. As indicated in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (Gove, 1976, p. 2240), stewardship concerns "… the individual's responsibility for sharing systematically and proportionately his time, talent, and material possessions in the service of God and for the benefit of all mankind." A life of stewardship means sharing — sharing of our time, talent, and treasure with others to improve and strengthen the human community of which we are part. Sharing through stewardship should contribute to elevating humanity — both now and in the future. Building for the future — tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, a month later, a year later, a decade later, or more — is an especially important part of stewardship.

Sharing of our time, talent, and treasure as well as the wise use, development, and preservation of resources entrusted to our care, is crucial to the success and survival of the various organized communities in which people hold membership. Stewardship must be exercised in families in order to meet the present and future needs of family members. Charitable organizations are heavily dependent on individuals' personal stewardship decisions and actions, and on the wise use and preservation of resources that are deployed to achieve specific charitable objectives. Stewardship should be — but all too often isn't — an important element of the decisions and actions of any governmental unit. Each of these communities, indeed all communities, depends in some way on people's stewardship decisions and actions.

Personal and Community Outcomes
The foregoing discussion demonstrates that stewardship has implications for oneself and for others. A leader's decisions and actions with respect to human resources, economic resources, and natural/environmental resources will have a significant impact on the outcomes that are realized. These outcomes may be beneficial or detrimental, and they may pertain to the leader or the community being led.

In a business context, positive personal outcomes for leaders would typically include contributions to the organization and society, personal growth and development, job and career success, satisfaction, etc. Negative personal outcomes for business leaders encompass financial and job losses, loss of status and respect, and even criminal investigations, indictments, and convictions. Positive community outcomes, again in a business context, include but are not limited to organizational effectiveness, organizational efficiency, equity, justice, profitability, wealth creation, social responsibility, and sustainability. Negative community outcomes for businesses could include poor product or service quality, deteriorating relationships with suppliers and customers, compromised employee relations, financial losses, and business failure, among others. Many of these positive and negative outcomes apply to non-business communities as well. However, other outcomes would also come into play depending on the particular community. Clearly, some distinctive community outcomes will exist for governmental agencies, charitable organizations, educational institutions, and other non-business entities. Moreover, personal outcomes may differ depending on the type of community being led.

What Managers and Leaders Do

The terms manager and leader are frequently, but inappropriately, used interchangeably. This is particularly true when viewed from the perspective of the activities in which managers and leaders engage. According to Warren Bennis (1996), a noted scholar and organizational consultant, managers administer, maintain, control, have a short-term view, ask how and when, imitate, and accept the status quo. Bennis further asserts that leaders innovate, develop, inspire, have a long-term view, ask what and why, originate, and challenge the status quo. Edgar Schein (1997, p. 5), another noted management scholar and organizational consultant, argues that leaders create and change organizational cultures, whereas managers and administrators live within existing cultures.

A central theme of this distinction between managers and leaders is the fostering of change. Leadership is about change — change of different human communities. And as the quotes from Confucius, Mahatma Gandhi, and M. Scott Peck at the beginning of this article state, change must start with the individual. For leaders to foster change in the communities they lead, they must first focus on changing themselves. A crucial part of changing oneself is examining one's Fundamental Moral Orientation and then altering it, if necessary. Based on (a) the notion of changing oneself as the first step in fostering change in others, and (b) the argument that an FMO that balances self-interest and community interests rather than pursuing one at the expense of the other, I would assert that (c) the preferable individual change would be toward the self-fullness moral orientation.

Fundamental Moral Orientations, Stewardship and Outcomes: Implications for Different Leadership Approaches

In an earlier work, I proposed that each of the Fundamental Moral Orientations leads to predictable stewardship decisions and actions regarding the use, development, and conservation of human, economic, and natural or environmental resources
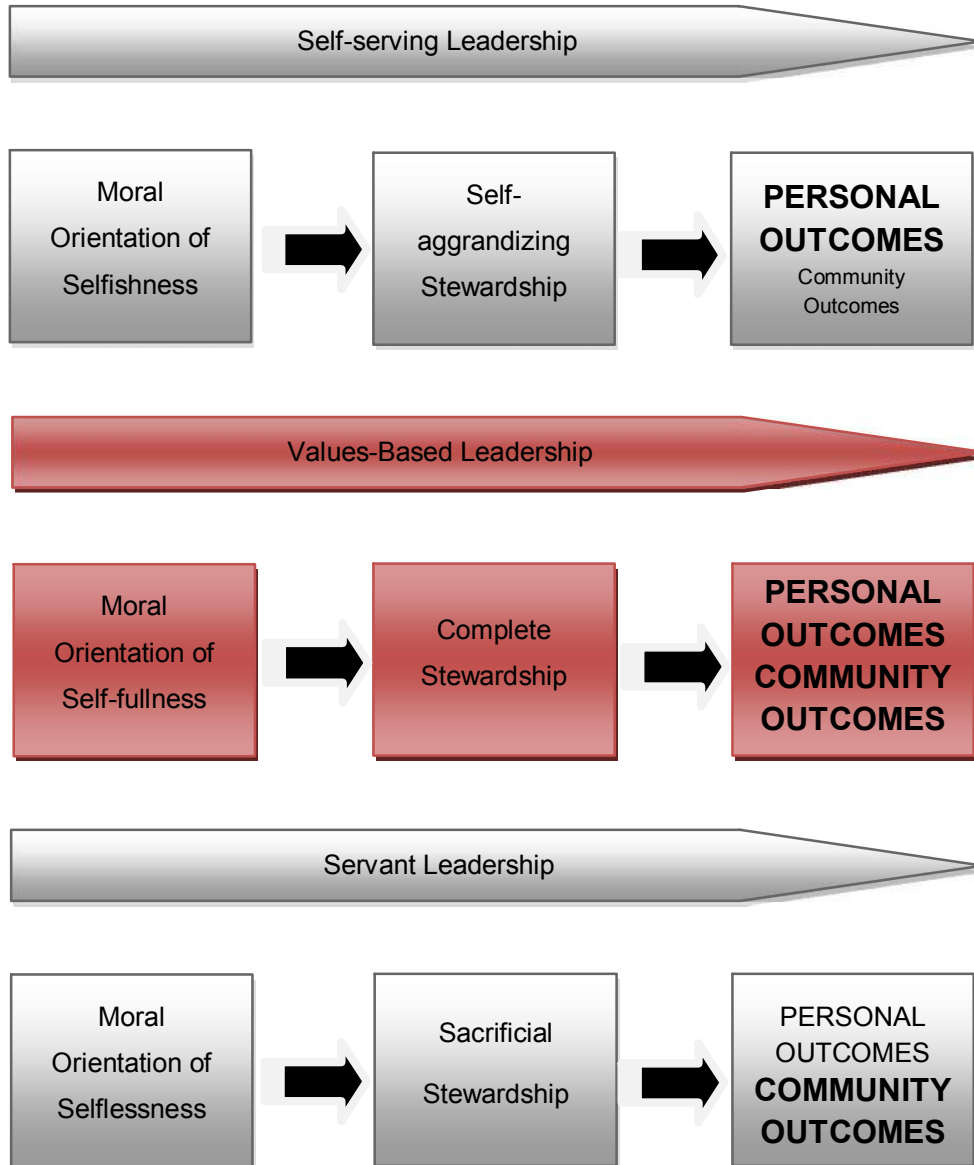
(McCuddy, 2005). In the same work I also proposed specific personal and organizational outcomes in the business context. In this article, however, I wish to generalize beyond the workplace to think about other kinds of communities as well. Most importantly, I wish to link this conceptual framework to leadership approaches — with a special emphasis on articulating my vision of values-based leadership.

As shown in the top third of Figure 1, the moral alternative of *selfishness* predictably leads to *self-aggrandizing stewardship*, wherein human, economic, and natural/environmental resources are utilized to further one's own interests. There is little, if any, concern for using, developing, or conserving resources so that others may benefit, either now or in the future. In a sense, one might consider this form of stewardship to be false (or pseudo) stewardship since resources entrusted to the person's care are used only to further self-interest. However, using one's personal talents and abilities to solely serve one's self-interest still reflects the use and development of personal resources. Thus, it can legitimately be labeled stewardship, even though the actions do not necessarily reflect the common or socially acceptable conception of stewardship. People who embrace the FMO of selfishness are expected to pursue self-aggrandizing stewardship decisions. Self-aggrandizing stewardship, in turn, is expected to result in many beneficial personal outcomes (represented in the figure by the capitalized, bold, larger font) but virtually no beneficial community outcomes (represented in the figure by the lower case, non-bold, smaller font).

The selfishness, self-aggrandizing stewardship, outcome sequence represents a leadership approach that I shall call *self-serving leadership*. Self-serving leadership exploits others in order to fulfill personal needs and aspirations; little, if any, concern exists for the community being led. In its vilest incarnation, others' lives are sacrificed to further personal ambition. In its less virulent forms, self-serving leadership takes advantage of others' assets and talents to satisfy personal ambition. Any expressed concern for others is likely a subterfuge for the self-serving leader's exploitative intentions. Moreover, self-serving leaders are not particularly inclined to change themselves toward a moral orientation that genuinely embraces the needs and aspirations of others.

Unfortunately, examples of self-serving leaders come to mind far too easily. Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin quickly come to mind for their bloodthirsty destruction of human lives in the pursuit of their personal and political ambitions. With relatively little effort, we could identify numerous other examples of self-serving leadership in both the historical and contemporary political arenas. The convictions of Kenneth Lay and Bernard Ebbers for their respective roles in the Enron and WorldCom ethical scandals of 2001-2002 amply illustrate the self-serving nature of their leadership. Numerous other examples of self-serving leadership can be found in most, if not all, arenas of organized human endeavor.

Figure 1
Different Leadership Approaches as Representations of
Different FMO, Stewardship, and Outcome Sequences

Self-serving Leadership

| Moral Orientation of Selfishness | → | Self-aggrandizing Stewardship | → | **PERSONAL OUTCOMES** Community Outcomes |

Values-Based Leadership

| Moral Orientation of Self-fullness | → | Complete Stewardship | → | **PERSONAL OUTCOMES COMMUNITY OUTCOMES** |

Servant Leadership

| Moral Orientation of Selflessness | → | Sacrificial Stewardship | → | PERSONAL OUTCOMES **COMMUNITY OUTCOMES** |

When the moral alternative of *selflessness* is pursued, the resulting form of stewardship is *sacrificial stewardship* (see the bottom third of Figure 1). The person sacrifices his/her time, talent, and treasure for the benefit of the community. Human, economic, and natural/environmental resources are utilized, developed, and conserved for the benefit of others' — or the community's — interests, both now and in the future. People who embrace the FMO of selflessness will likely pursue sacrificial stewardship decisions and actions that may result in some beneficial personal outcomes but will certainly result in many beneficial community outcomes. In the workplace, for instance, employees will put organizational interests before personal interests, and in extreme cases may sacrifice themselves for the organization. Again, these predicted differential outcome effects are visually represented in Figure 1 through the font size, capitalization, and bolding of the labels. Workaholism and job burnout could be negative personal manifestations of extreme sacrificial stewardship in the workplace; although the individual may have benefitted at some point, the employing organization is the more substantial beneficiary.

The <u>selflessness, sacrificial stewardship, outcome sequence</u> represents a leadership approach that could be called "other-directed leadership" or *servant leadership*. Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) is not completely distinct from other leadership approaches; characteristics such as honesty, integrity, listening, trust, and building community (Russell and Stone, 2002) are found in other leadership conceptualizations as well. So what makes servant leadership unique? Russell (2001) suggests that the essence of servant leadership is found in the values of humility and respect for others. <u>Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) cite Patterson's seven defining characteristics of servant leadership: agapoa love, acts of humility, altruism, being visionary for followers, trusting, serving, and empowering followers. Although the characteristics cited by Russell (2001) and Dennis and Bocarnea (2005) give further definition to servant leadership, there is still partial commonality with other forms of leadership. Perhaps the most definitive and distinctive description of servant leadership is that</u> "servant leaders give up personal rights to find greatness in service to others" (Wilkes, 1996, p. 15). In other words, servant leaders sacrifice themselves for others.

Joan of Arc and Mother Teresa are examples of servant leaders. In the early 1400s Joan of Arc led her countrymen in efforts to regain French lands from the English, only to be burned at the stake for her deeds. In the 20th century, Mother Teresa, who founded *The Missionaries of Charity*, cared for "the poorest of the poor" in many locations throughout the world.

The moral alternative of *self-fullness* leads to decisions and actions that constitute *complete stewardship* (see the middle third of Figure 1). With this form of stewardship, decisions and actions focus on using, developing, and conserving human, economic, and natural/environmental resources to benefit both oneself and others. The practice of complete stewardship reflects the recognition that both self and community are important, and that each is compatible with the other. Indeed, I argue that the most viable chance for significant, enduring advancement of the

general human condition is for people to give appropriately balanced attention to self-interests and community interests. Although some form of stewardship is essential for the long-term success and survival of the human species and its various communities, complete stewardship seems to be the most promising approach. People who embrace the FMO of self-fullness will pursue complete stewardship decisions and actions. Since these decisions and actions seek to attain reasonable balance between one's own interests and others' interests, many beneficial personal outcomes and many beneficial community outcomes are expected to result (both of which are visually reflected in Figure 1 through the capitalized, bold, larger font labels).

The self-fullness, complete stewardship, outcome sequence represents the clarifying conception of *values-based leadership* that I promised the reader earlier in this article. Values-based leadership focuses on guiding, inspiring, and promoting change among others but, unlike servant leadership, without sacrificing one's own needs and aspirations on the altar of the community. Likewise, values-based leaders constrain their pursuit of self-interest; unlike self-serving leaders, they do not see unbridled greed, hubris, narcissism, and vanity as viable for effective leadership. Values-based leaders recognize that satisfying their own needs and aspirations is legitimate and worthy, and that helping others to satisfy their needs and aspirations is also legitimate and worthy. The values-based leader seeks balance between pursuing self-interest and serving the broader community. Values-based leaders recognize that they must take care of themselves if they are to have the capacity and energy to take care of others. And this entire perspective is quite consistent with the Biblical admonition to "love one another as you love yourself" — not to love oneself instead of others, nor to love others instead of oneself.

Oprah Winfrey, Warren Buffet, and Bill Gates illustrate the concept of values-based leaders. These people have achieved phenomenal success in their own right, yet they have engaged in exceptional acts of charity. They have parlayed their wealth and expertise into extraordinary acts of charity that have changed and will continue to change numerous human communities throughout the world. Winfrey, Buffet, and Gates are not only serving others, they are benefiting themselves.

Concluding Observation

I have argued elsewhere that the Fundamental Moral Orientation of *self-fullness* and its resultant *complete stewardship* represent the most promising approach for creating sustainable business organizations (McCuddy, 2005). Herein, I extend this argument to all types of human communities. Self-fullness and complete stewardship — not selfishness and self-aggrandizing stewardship nor selflessness and sacrificial stewardship — hold the greatest promise for creating sustainable communities. Values-based leadership, as conceptualized in this article, articulates a path for existing and would-be leaders to follow in helping communities to survive and prosper over the long term, and in seeking their own personal and professional fulfillment.

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