Working Paper

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Moral Character and Stewardship: Explaining the Role of Enlightened Self-Interest

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Abstract:

Stewardship theory has proven influential in enhancing our understanding of responsible leadership. At the same time, much less is known about what the dimensions of stewardship are or why certain leaders tend to act as stewards of their organizations. Limited empirical research on stewardship, characterized by contentious findings, has led some scholars to question the utility of stewardship theory. In this conceptual article, we develop a framework that can explain how organizations can foster the development of responsible leaders, i.e. stewards. We elucidate the dimensions of stewardship and argue that stewardship is promoted through a state of “enlightened self-interest”, which is a consequence of moral character. Overall, we aim to advance our understanding of the usefulness of stewardship theory in promoting responsible leadership.

Keywords: Stewardship, moral character, responsible leadership, enlightened self-interest