

Leadership Insight – Napoleon Bonaparte

Greg Whateley

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When considering the all-important area of ‘leadership’ (and to some degree management) it is most useful to consider some of the big names in leadership history and undertake an analysis of the style and approach accordingly. For this purpose, a consideration of – Napoleon – provides valuable lessons and insights. Rizvi (2024) outlines much about his character and leadership style.

See - <https://hidayatrizvi.com/napoleon-leadership-qualities/>

Napoleon was, and remains, an iconic historical figure and serves as an example of effective leadership. Using the three fundamental leadership style categories – autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire – Napoleon was autocratic, which on reflection was the most appropriate for the time and context. His leadership style can be captured under by way of selected key headings –

Strategic Agility

This aspect is about being able to adapt and seize opportunity as it arose. Good leadership understands the importance of both aspects – often referred to as ‘strategic thinking’. Without a clear direction – little can be achieved. A clear strategic intent and strategic plan is vital.

See - [Strategic Thinking Definition, Skills, Examples, and Steps - Digital Leadership](#)

Clear vision and direction

Setting goals (strategic planning) and establishing a pathway to achieving these goals is a vital aspect of any leadership model. Closely linked with strategic planning – the development of a ‘clear’ vision and a ‘clear’ methodology to achieve that vision is paramount in any organization and is best developed by the leader (ideally with key personnel in the process).

See - [Strategic Planning: 5 Planning Steps, Process Guide \[2024\] • Asana](#)

Inspiration and motivation

A key aspect of good and sustainable leadership is the ability to inspire and motivate – and this is an ongoing challenge. It requires enthusiasm and commitment, in order to motivate and inspire teams and individuals within an organization – and this needs to be sustained and reinforced dutifully.

See - [Motivation vs. Inspiration: The Perfect Combination for Success \(betterup.com\)](#)

Courage and decisiveness

Believe it or not – *courage* is an essential quality of leadership and if combined with decisiveness can be a highly successful combination. Risk taking and decision making can also be a powerful combination – well thought through and informed of course.

See - [Full article: Principles of risk decision-making \(tandfonline.com\)](#)

Adaptability and flexibility

This aspect is about being able to adapt to changing circumstances – and helping those inside the organization deal with the necessary changes required in new circumstances. Change can be difficult if not managed appropriately.

See - [Flexibility vs Adaptability: Understanding Differences - Culture Partners](#)

The essentials of the Napoleonic approach to leadership include - never 'losing your cool' no matter what the circumstances; make decisions quickly and decisively, focus on team morale; always treat people with respect and - communicate, communicate, communicate. A study of Napoleon and his leadership style is a most useful exercise and is well worth the effort.

Emeritus Professor Greg Whateley has recently retired from the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor (UBSS) and Chief Executive (GCA). He celebrates 50 years in academia in 2024.