

NAPOLEON'S USE/ABUSE
OF POWERS – AND HOW
ASPIRING LEADERS CAN
USE THE MODES

POWER MODE	HOW NAPOLEON USED	HOW NAPOLEON MISUSED / MADE ERRORS	HOW ASPIRING LEADERS CAN USE TO PROGRESS
<p>PATRONAGE</p>	<p>Napoleon was a beneficiary of patronage in his early life (the French colonial Governor of Corsica made it possible for him to go to a military academy in mainland France, which became the crucial start to his cosmopolitan career) and Napoleon later repaid that debt by supporting France against a Corsican independence movement. In so doing, he turned against the cause once championed by his father – demonstrating the long-term effectiveness of ‘debts of gratitude’.</p>	<p>Napoleon squandered his patronage on his family members. He didn’t have to give favours to his family to buy their loyalty, and he gained little by doing so – they were already on his side, and in any case they were ill-suited to the roles. When his power waned, most of them deserted him. A more sophisticated appreciation of patronage may have led him to distribute favours among those whose loyalty and participation was more reliable and competent. When carving up the German principalities and northern Italian city-states he ignored local identities, reneged on promises and constructed unstable client-states almost as gifts to his acolytes, thus ensuring future support – he thought.</p>	<p>Leaders need to use patronage carefully, strategically and sparingly. They need to accept patronage from reputable leaders – and give it to promising future leaders who will share and support their values and aims.</p> <p>But patronage follows from power and cannot be relied on when the balance of power shifts away from the leader – you.</p>

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<p>MERIT</p>	<p>Napoleon was the beneficiary of meritocracy from the moment he entered military academy. His progress was dependent on his educational achievements – his ability in mathematics and geometry qualified him for the technically advanced field of artillery. At the 1793 Siege of Toulon he showed exceptional courage in battle and talent as a commander: he became ‘one to watch’. His rapid promotion to General was due mainly to his proven merit as an inventive strategist as well as an inspiring leader on the battlefield and decisiveness in quelling rebellion. Soon he was able to demonstrate his ability to sustain long and complex campaigns, and to translate this reputation into the political sphere.</p>	<p>Merit is a function of each specific system of social and practical legitimacy. Qualities valued in one setting may not be so prized in another. Napoleon thrived in emergencies, and even in the few years of peace he approached civil life with urgency and vast organizational ability. In a carry-over from his military prowess, he made the assumption that he was better than anyone else at just about everything: he was tremendously gifted, and so many capable and ambitious people were killed in the revolution and the Terror that the talent pool was seriously depleted. But much as the ensuing chaos made France susceptible to autocratic militarism, and brilliant as many of her scientists, artists and philosophers were, too few were given the power that they merited.</p>	<p>Aspiring leaders need merit to get started in their careers, but often the talents that take them up the first few rungs are no surety at higher levels of leadership. They need to learn to work with other talented people, delegate to them, and enable them to succeed in the organization. Remember that performance management systems work by reinforcing shared values and identities: merit is always in the eye of the beholders.</p> <p>At higher levels, and in less hierarchical settings, other power modes become more important.</p>

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CHARISMA	<p>Patronage and merit alone were not enough to mark Napoleon out from a growing body of distinguished military officers. Heroic exploits, gorgeous uniforms, dramatic newspaper accounts: the anticipation must have been tremendous when Napoleon was expected on the scene. The Italian campaign was a brilliant opportunity for Napoleon to demonstrate his courage and bravery in the field, his campaigning genius and his exceptional good luck. At the Battle of Lodi he seemed to be inspired and protected beyond normal mortals, and made sure the story was repeated in accounts of the battle of Arcola too. He actively promoted a reputation for extraordinary feats, and managed his coronation, his court and his public appearances to maximize the grandeur and distance from anything ordinary.</p>	<p>Napoleon's charisma was later to turn to narcissism. He took personal credit for every win, and uncritically accepted the accolades heaped on him every day. Thus, he failed to face changing realities, rejected the need to change his plans and was unwilling to see the obvious. Observers at the time and later, saw him as a slave to his narcissism, resulting in a callous indifference to human life in the pursuit of his ambition to constantly expand his power.</p>	<p>Charisma goes beyond merit – it is exciting, attractive, a drug to followers. To some extent it can be generated by excellent acting skills and by speaking to peoples' highest ideals. When it works it is fantastic, but followers cannot live off dreams. And it may depend on the leader being personally present, and he or she can't be there all the time. Charisma <i>can</i> turn sour – from following a dream of a new world to following a dictator's fantasies. Aspiring leaders who are lucky enough to possess charisma must use it to achieve a value-adding vision and take themselves out of the equation – if they can...</p>

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SEIZING POWER	<p>As a soldier and general, Napoleon had decisively seized opportunities, carrying them through to their uncertain conclusions. He did the same in politics. The <i>coup d'état</i> of Brumaire (November, 1799) was not planned, yet was carried off with speed and determination. Having taken power, Napoleon and his few supporters quickly consolidated their position by all means available: control of the media, the police, and the legislature. This did not come out of the blue: Napoleon had engineered a build-up of the pro-Bonaparte lobby for months, positioning himself for an entry into politics.</p>	<p>Taking power means you are stuck with it, and then usually you want more, as in the case of Napoleon who was certainly not content with being one of three consuls. Inevitably the other two would be pushed aside. The act of 'putsch' or 'coup d'état' can be seen as just the start. It gives the successful 'seizer of power' the confidence to keep taking more and more – to be First Consul; First Consul for Life; Emperor; the founder of a dynasty – it is hard to stop.</p> <p>Napoleon maintained a constant watch on others intent on unseating him, yet he provided no legitimate process for succession.</p>	<p>As a leader, there may come a time when it is necessary to take an initiative to get to a higher level. This might mean volunteering for an assignment, applying for a promotion, or helping to get rid of an established leader. Sometimes the aspiring leader will stay forever in the lower ranks if he or she does not suddenly 'seize power'. But then it becomes a habit, more power is needed, and then the only way is down ...</p> <p>Boardroom coups are more frequent than might be thought, but all the way down in an organization, people compete for recognition, resources and reward. Leaders often have to seize the moment – and the opportunity – for themselves and their causes.</p>

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MANIPULATION	<p>The use of connivance and manipulation became a feature of Napoleon's way of operating. He had one police service spying on another; he sent rivals on long and troublesome missions around the world; and cooked up evidence of a crime if it served his purposes. Manipulation also helped ensure Napoleon's control over apparent and potential members of his inner sanctum of power; and he successfully sowed discord amongst the other European powers, holding off a workable alliance for 15 years.</p>	<p>Leading by manipulation is a classic mode to 'divide and rule'; it was necessary in the context of the new and insecure status of the Consulate and Empire and it would only work as long as Napoleon's enemies were disunited – but when they came together at the Congress of Vienna this tool of his no longer worked. By this point Napoleon had been outlawed by all, and no-one found him 'useful' any more. Arguably, Napoleon was actually manipulated by others far more than he realized.</p>	<p>Manipulation grows seamlessly out of normal competition for the 'Three Rs' of office politics (recognition, resources and rewards); but it becomes counterproductive when power becomes an end in itself, and winning every contest is more important than achieving organizational objectives. The higher up an organization one goes, the more 'political' it becomes; this is where a moral compass is most important, and a resolution never to use people – individually or collectively – as mere instruments of a leader's own ambition. Holding onto the intrinsic value of people and nature is vital: let go of that, and the leader risks long-term harm to him or herself, and others.</p>

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FEAR	<p>The use of fear to gain and keep power helped Napoleon manage any threats to his increasingly dominant position. His first step to political power was when he ordered the Paris regiment to shoot and kill over 200 royalist demonstrators protesting a constitutional change in the heady days of the late-eighteenth century. As newly appointed commander of this internal security force he showed his ruthless determination; he never forgot the lesson, nor did anyone else.</p> <p>As First Consul, he faced several assassination attempts. He dealt with 'pretenders to the throne' in a direct and uncompromising way, sending out a message of fear to any opponents. This also involved managing the media, to dissuade anyone from such attempts at seizing power for fear of the consequences.</p>	<p>Napoleon's use of fear starved his talented people of initiative. The observers in his era such as Chateaubriand and Stendhal remarked at how Napoleon had initially attracted great talents around him; some became rich and comfortable from patronage, but many were fearful of losing their gains. Others were frightened into exile by the utter intolerance of criticism. When Napoleon removed and assassinated the Duc d'Enghein, in a trumped-up trial many European observers (notably Beethoven) were forced to recognize him as a tyrant, and not the romantic hero of post-monarchical liberation.</p>	<p>Aspiring leaders may find themselves with the opportunity to use fear – coercive power – to reinforce their influence and benefits. It can creep up almost unawares, when a leader or middle manager uses privileged information or control of the performance management system to punish critics. This kind of behaviour is sometimes dismissed as 'one bad apple', but bullying is a cultural phenomenon too, and good leaders must be prepared to stand up for 'fair process', to foster constructive criticism, and to challenge institutional processes that disenfranchise people in the organization or its wider stakeholders.</p>

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ELECTION	<p>Napoleon used the power provided by popular election and popular acclaim to become Consul for life and then Emperor – he was voted to this specially invented hereditary title after a build-up of his celebrity status in 1804. He was able to appeal to the populace beyond the Paris elite by using the ‘plebiscite’ a device invented in the early revolutionary days and well suited to the needs of the populist hero. He was winning hearts among Frenchmen, however contrived this may have been on his part. He appeared to be popular, even though behind the scenes he was rooting out opponents and becoming more of a dictator. By demonstrating his popularity amongst the population he silenced opposition to his concentration of power; a perfect example of the turn from populism to tyranny.</p>	<p>The drawbacks of this mode are clear – it is a show of popularity, open to abuse and vote-rigging, masking more nefarious activities and often simplifying the issues to a choice between two options – ‘do you want me or chaos?’. There are limits to how much it can be used – when trying to gain support for a new constitutional reform when he made his comeback in early 1815, Napoleon was able to only get 1.5 million votes and had to pretend that he had millions more, but people began to see what he was doing. Napoleon used it to become a tyrant, to justify all his activities – and this was no longer convincing by 1815.</p>	<p>The aspiring leader can be ‘elected’ by popular support to lead a trade union, to represent a pressure group, etc. In democratic countries, this form of workplace democracy lends legitimacy especially if the election is fair and open. But popular acclaim can be short-lived; it is always worth asking ‘whose interests am I working for, and could I explain it to them in a way that would win their approval?’. This a fair test of a leader’s claims to be acting for a greater good. But often leaders are actually acting for the narrower interests of a few – the principal shareholders, or a political elite, for example. In these cases populism is a sham. Equally, popular acclaim is not always the best indicator of competence or merit: hence the value of ‘checks and balances’ on leaders in most stable democracies. And again, popular support can evaporate as quickly as it was drummed-up.</p>

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INHERITANCE	<p>Napoleon's first route to established power and legitimizing his succession was through military conquest. The second was through his strategic marriage alliance: he married the Austrian Archduchess Marie-Louise, daughter of the Emperor Francis I, and they had a son in 1811.</p> <p>Thirdly, he used the Bonaparte family – they received many titles and honours, both out of his sense of family obligation, and as part of his efforts to create a new European dynasty.</p>	<p>Napoleon's efforts to ensure the inheritance of his son were doomed to failure. He faced more and more military failures which undermined his credibility. His father-in-law, the Austrian Emperor, never really recognized him as 'family' despite Napoleon's marriage to his daughter. Napoleon's own family members were also greedy and opportunistic, and unimpressive as potential future leaders. It was obviously hopeless, but the revolution had succeeded in challenging dynastic monarchy – but had not established an alternative – so Napoleon fell back on the long-established norms – perhaps reinforced by Corsican value of the clan.</p>	<p>The power base achieved this way needs to be constantly reinforced, and consolidated, and this can often be an opportunity for a leader to abuse apparent popular power – and may lead to an easy removal from power.</p> <p>Very few aspirant leaders are able to create a 'dynasty', though some business families are remarkable in their ability to continue in both ownership and control, and the great US political dynasties of the Kennedys and Bushes are powerful evidence that inheritance still holds sway in the collective subconscious. As in Napoleon's case, few dynasties can guarantee continued quality and suitability over the generations. So <i>processes</i> of succession are crucial and every leader should pay attention to these, rather than the particulars.</p>

