Project Management According to Napoleon

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"Napoleon's genius for war lies not so much in the domain of tactics or even strategy as in administration, organization, attention to details, and his capacity for work." – Jay Luvaas

Introduction

It is evident by the increased adaptation of project management principles and practices in companies worldwide, and by the rapid rise in PMI membership, that recognition of the value of project management principles is reaching an all time high. However, project management is nothing new. Since the beginning of time, mankind has been managing projects of one kind or another, from building cities to conducting warfare, and there is much to be learned from the masters of such arts.

Napoleon Bonaparte was one of the great masters of project management in the field of warfare. One could argue his motives (and his ego is well known), but there were few greater at leading a group of men to accomplish such a vast amount of work with such a high rate of success. General George S. Patton recognized this. He was a passionate believer in Napoleon's methods, and his successes with the Third Army among seemingly impossible odds were no less outstanding than those of Napoleon himself (for more on Patton, read Alan Axelrod's superb book, **Patton on Leadership – Strategic Lessons For Corporate Warfare**).

It's also apparent that Jack Welch, former CEO of GE, was familiar with the methods of Patton, as GE's doctrine of Speed, Simplicity and Self-Confidence mirrored Patton's core principles of Speed, Simplicity and Boldness (which in turn were inspired by the philosophies of Napoleon). So, one could argue that the successes of GE are somewhat indebted to Napoleon.

The quotes from Napoleon included in this essay are taken from **Napoleon on the Art of War** (by Napoleon I, Emperor of the French – selected, edited and translated by Jay Luvaas) and **Military Maxims of Napoleon** (also by Napoleon I, Emperor of the French - translated by George C. D'Aguilar and revised by David G.Chandler).

In these quotes, you will get a feel for the principles that led to Napoleon's successes: exactitude, character and simplicity; and above all, an inherent belief in the value of planning.

As Jay Luvaas pointed out, in the words of F.M. Kircheisen, a Napoleonic scholar, "his principal military triumphs since 1800 must be ascribed not so much to the measures taken shortly before or during the course of fighting, as to his amazing talent for organization, and his perfect arrangements for the march."

Professional Ethics and Responsibility

The army must understand that discipline, wisdom, and the respect for property support its victories, that pillage and theft belong only to the cowardly, who are unworthy of remaining in the ranks… that they plot the loss of honor and that they have no goal other than to stain the laurels acquired by so much bravery and perseverance. Without discipline, there is no victory.

While seemingly at odds with his Machiavellian ruthlessness and savvy, Napoleon nevertheless placed great importance on values such as honor and integrity. Napoleon knew that gains, political or otherwise, could not be allowed to undermine these core values. On the contrary, lack of these core values could indeed undermine any gains achieved.

Napoleon was extremely harsh with any of his troops who were discovered pillaging, molesting or stealing property from invaded countries. Any troops caught in such acts were to be tried and, if found guilty, executed, illustrating the importance he placed on these values.

While I'm not condoning shooting anyone, and while I doubt there is much pillaging or theft in the realm of project management, we have our own code of professional ethics and conduct to uphold. It is such an important part of project management that the Project Management Institute has recently added a separate knowledge area to their Project Management Professional (PMP) certification exam called "Professional Responsibility".

Professional responsibilities for the project manager include such ethical requirements as: individual integrity and professionalism, balancing stakeholders' interests, avoiding conflict of interest situations, interacting in a professional and cooperative manner, and awareness of multi-cultural issues. Other areas of responsibility, not directly related to ethics but equally important, include the importance of contributing to the project management knowledge base and enhancing individual competence.

All of these routes are necessary to ease the burden upon the country. An immense movement could not operate along a single route without depleting the countryside.

Napoleon was not above altering his route in order to avoid undue hardship on a foreign country. You could argue that he could avoid even more hardship by not conquering these countries to begin with, but that is not the point. He did what he needed to accomplish the goal at hand without causing any more harm than is already caused by that goal.

When managing projects, the lesson here is to minimize the burden on the customer or end-users as much as possible, while still managing to accomplish your goal (which may be an unpopular one as it is). That may require going out of your way a bit.

Speed of Delivery and Removal of Barriers

During peace, war consists in furnishing nothing except through the required red tape; in time of war it consists in granting as much as possible without any formality except for the returns that help keep things accurate. Let me impress upon you the importance…of the damage that could result from a false sense of economy or inappropriate rigidity. There is always time later to put things in order.

This can be a touchy subject for those who are died-in-the-wool project methodology fanatics. Yes, it's important to plan and to have a consistent process (i.e. a project management framework), but there's a difference between process and bureaucracy.

The lesson here is that during wartime (or a project that faces a very tight deadline or target), the normal red tape must be dispensed with, other than what is absolutely crucial to success. As Napoleon says, there is always time to put things in order afterwards. For more on this, read Ed Yourdon's book, **Death March**.

The loss of time is irreparable in war. The commander in chief must remove all difficulties. Be of firm character and will. Remove all obstacles.

Napoleon recognized that one of the chief goals of a project manager (or any leader for that matter) is to be a "barrier remover". This could mean fighting political battles, assuring the proper training for your staff, fighting to dispense with the usual red tape, simplifying anything that is complex, in essence removing anything that could be considered a barrier to your team succeeding. In addition, it's important to remember not to be a barrier yourself. When scheduling meetings and asking for paperwork, you must continually ask yourself "am I wasting anyone's time?"

I'd caution that, while speed is critical, it's still important to plan effectively. Even Patton, who always stressed the importance of speed, still recognized the value of planning and warned not to confuse speed with haste. He defined haste as "speed without planning", and something that should be avoided at all costs. We'll discuss planning in more detail later.

Effective Communication

Reconnaissance memoranda should always be written in the simplest style and be purely descriptive. They should never stray from their objective by introducing extraneous ideas.

Simplicity is a key concept often mentioned by Napoleon, Patton and more recently Jack Welch, and is worth exploring in more detail. Simplicity is critical in communication. Think simplicity versus complexity. If something is complex, you must find a way to make it simple (i.e. through charts, analogies, eliminating extraneous thoughts, etc.). One element of simplicity is focus. Napoleon wanted his people to do write-ups of their

reconnaissance missions, by listing "just the facts". He didn't want them to include campaign ideas or strategy, merely a very detailed description of the environment.

Don't confuse simplicity with lack of detail. Napoleon still wanted detail - exhaustive detail. But the detail needed to be focused, descriptive and easy to understand, not using complex jargon that leaves room for error. The same applies to all project management documents, be it a scope definition, functional or technical specifications or the project plan itself.

The project plan is one of the most critical forms of communication that will be used throughout a project and therefore deserves special mention. It is used to communicate the status to stakeholders and to act as a roadmap for the project team. Because of this, while it's important to plan in exhaustive detail, it's equally important not to include all of that detail in the project plan. This is a subtle art, and can be accomplished with the use of work packages. Low-level tasks that do not need to be tracked individually can be rolled-up onto the plan as a high-level deliverable (which would be the lowest level tracked on the project plan).

For each such deliverable, a "work package" can be given to the individual or team that needs to accomplish the deliverable. This work package, which should be developed with the responsible team's input, is a document that indicates the objective or approach, each resource's time commitment, input requirements, output deliverables, risk assessment, and work estimates.

The responsible team could then break this down into an activity list, detailed task list or even their own work breakdown structure (which they would track independently). In this way the main project plan can be made simpler, which is critical as nobody will read a large, complex project plan and worse yet nobody will maintain it.

The conduct of generals is more delicate after battles than before because then, having been able to pursue only one course, they find themselves criticized by everybody who favored other alternatives. In military operations I consult nobody; in diplomatic operations I consult everybody.

By this, Napoleon is stressing the importance of soliciting all stakeholders' input early on. If this isn't done, you'll have a thousand critics once your project is complete.

He also points out that, while he consults everybody when it comes to diplomatic issues, when it comes to military operations he consults nobody. He was very much in favor of "management" leaving the operational tactics to him, not having them dictated by some higher-up who wasn't close enough to the action. Of course, when he became Emperor, he didn't need to worry as much about that.

I do not believe that I am bound to wait until the last moment to let you know the plan of campaign adopted by the Emperor. It is well that you are instructed fifteen days in advance so that, in the greatest silence, you can take all your measures, and when I will

have transmitted the Emperor's final orders to commence hostilities you will be prepared to play the important role that His Majesty has entrusted you in his vast plans…

It's important to give people enough notice to at least study the project goals and do some preliminary planning. Don't wait until you've attended all of the planning meetings and completed the entire project plan to share with your team what they will be faced with once the project gets under way. Give them an advance heads-up.

All combats must be fought according to the rules of war, that is to say, with your line of communication secure.

Although Napoleon is primarily addressing the issue of logistics (ensuring supply lines, replacement troops, etc.), which is also relevant to project management, the root of all this is to ensure that you can communicate when needed, and that the communication will be heard and understood. It's been said that 90% of a project manager's job is related to communications in some way, be it with the project team, stakeholders, contractors, the client, etc. To ensure adequate communication, it's critical to have a communication plan up front in your project, to determine in advance who needs to know what, when and how. Then it's equally important to maintain those lines of communication in accordance with the plan.

… He forgot about troops who were not under his command.

This is an excerpt from one of Napoleon's many critiques on various generals of the past. The point is that all too often we forget to include all of the stakeholders in our communications, using the "out of sight, out of mind" philosophy.

Rewards and Recognition

We must encourage soldiers by every method to remain with the colors: this will be accomplished by demonstrating great regard for veterans… It is a great injustice not to pay a veteran more than a recruit.

There are many forms of recognition. Napoleon here refers to one example, the recognition of veterans for length of service. It's equally important to recognize those who perform a great service through deed. Recognition of achievements motivates people to continue achieving and gives others a vision for the future, a goal to aim for, and someone to emulate.

Motivation

In war, everything is mental. There is nothing more contrary to military principals than to make known the strength of your army. When induced to reveal the strength of your

forces, you should exaggerate and present them as formidable… and when mentioning the enemy you should diminish his force by half or one third.

We need some creative interpretation to apply this maxim to corporate project management. When we cut to the meat of this message, it concerns the importance of presenting a positive picture, so as to maintain your team's morale and not to give adversaries too much "ammunition". Patton's method of accomplishing this was to minimize threats somewhat, as he felt people have a tendency to overestimate them.

I would caution against using this message as a means to blatantly lie to your team or to stakeholders. In project management, the message should be merely to avoid painting an unnecessarily negative picture, and to be aware that your statements could have potentially broad implications, both politically and to your team.

A leader is a dealer in hope.

This is one of Napoleon's oft quoted maxims. Again, I'd caution that there is a fine line between dealing hope and misleading your team. Hope implies not only optimistic anticipation, but expectation and trust as well. It's important to be honest to your team about the facts and not to deny obstacles; however, it's equally important to then convince them that the goals can be met (provided that you yourself have a reasonable idea that they can be met). If you think there's no way that the project can be met, then the project should be canceled or avoided at all costs. We'll discuss this in more detail later.

Like Napoleon, Patton also inspired hope, as evident in his numerous motivational speeches to his troops. The most famous of these was memorialized in the film **Patton**, in which he opened by stating in no uncertain terms what he needed them to do, followed it up by assuring his team that they'll live up to the challenge, and closed by crafting a vision of a safe and victorious future and by telling his troops how proud he is to serve with them. Throughout this speech, Patton's words are always slanted toward the strength of his troops and downplay the strength of the enemy, much in line with the previous maxim from Napoleon.

If there are tired men in these different columns, send them to a convalescent hospital… and leave them there for about a week. In this way you can save men and cut back on illness. You know the importance of that.

Napoleon was a strong proponent of operating with troops who are in good health, and not exhausted. Likewise, in project management, excessive overtime can not only demoralize a team, but in extreme cases, actually cause illness. Brief focused overtime, in order to overcome a major hurdle or raise a sense of urgency is OK. Continued excessive overtime is not, and has been proven to decrease productivity.

The Value of Historical Data

Something is lacking in a great state where the young studious male has no way of receiving good direction in what he wishes to study and is forced to grope his way and waste months and years of searching through useless readings for the real meat of instruction.

It's important to learn from history, and just as important to capture the meat of the learning, the real lesson, not just dates, events and irrelevant details. All too often, massive historical documentation is captured, but not in a way that enables it to be useful to others. Save people the trouble. Summarize key points. Gather the potential learnings from your project and organize them into a "lessons learned" document for others (or yourself) to use later.

My son should often read and meditate on history; it is the only real philosophy. And he should read and meditate on the campaigns of the Great Captains. This is the only way to learn the art of war.

All project managers should find a mentor and/or study at least some of the great leaders of the past and present, be they generals, CEOs, movie producers, or anyone who has successfully led teams to undertake a "temporary endeavor to achieve a unique product or service" (the definition of a project, according to the **Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge**). Be creative in your selection of "mentors". Read books on project management, leadership, or even biographies. Get ideas. Take what you like and leave the rest. Study the art.

By following what was done in the last war you will order what is to be established along this line.

Napoleon was well aware that the best things generated from history are those that can be reused on later projects. Why reinvent the wheel?

Responsibilities of the Project Manager

The government must place entire confidence in its general, allow him great latitude and put forward only the objective he is to fulfill. A commander is not protected by an order from a minister or a prince who is absent from the theater of operations and has little or no knowledge of the most recent turn of events.

The project manager needs to run the project as he or she sees fit, provided the general objectives from management are clear. It's up to the project manager to insure clear objectives from management, determine specific requirements from the customer, and then craft a solution (or multiple alternate solutions) to present for approval.

Once the project is underway, upper management should demonstrate faith and trust in the project manager by allowing him or her the leeway to manage the project accordingly. Of course budget or schedule constraints typically apply, but again it's up to the project manager to adhere to those constraints or negotiate as needed.

Every commander responsible for executing a plan that he considers bad or disastrous is criminal: he must point out the flaws, insist that it be changed, and at last resort resign rather than be the instrument of the destruction of his own men. Every commander who, as a result of superior orders, delivers a battle convinced that he will lose it is likewise criminal.

Napoleon is very clear on this. A project manager should never knowingly undertake a project that he or she knows does not have a chance of succeeding. Napoleon defines this as a project that has **less** than a 50% chance of success. This can be determined today with the use of project management software (for scheduling and cost budgeting), and risk qualification and quantification methods and tools. We will discuss project planning and risk management later in more detail.

In the world of corporate project management, the decision to undertake a project or not gets a little more complicated and has many variables, more than can be covered in this essay. The definitive book on this subject is **Death March,** by Ed Yourdon.

Yourdon defines a Death March project as one whose constraints exceed the normal parameters by over 50% (i.e. the project must be done in less than 50% of the time normally required for a project of that size; the project must be done with less than 50% of the people normally required for a project of that size; the project must provide more than 50% of the work that would normally be provide with the given time and resources, etc.). However, this doesn't automatically mean that the project should not be undertaken. It merely classifies the project as a "Death March" project, which means that there are some decisions to make (i.e. can the scope, time or resource constraints be negotiated and if not, should the project even be attempted) .

Often with such projects, scope cuts or different approaches such as time-boxing end up being the great equalizer. I'd caution against falling for the "let's throw more resources at it" ploy. As Frederick Brooks pointed out in his landmark book, **The Mythical Man Month**, you can easily reach a point of diminishing returns. Finally, the team may have various motivating factors that would encourage them to undertake a project that others wouldn't dare attempt.

Suffice it to say that after all negotiations have been made, and after having considered all influencing variables, a project that you are reasonably certain will not succeed is one that should be avoided at all costs rather than leading the team to certain failure. Your reputation is at stake, your team's reputation is at stake, and no long-term good can be gained by attempting a project that in all likelihood will fail (only short term glory that will fade when the project does fail).

It does not follow that a commander in chief must not obey a minister who orders him to give battle. On the contrary, he must do it every time that, in his judgment, the chances and probabilities are as much for as against him, for our observation only applies in the case where the chances appear to be entirely against him.

This is, in effect, Napoleon's disclaimer. The previous maxim only applies if the odds are clearly against you. If there's a least a 50% chance of success, then you still must do all in your power to achieve success. The many methods and tools for doing this are outside the scope of this essay, but some examples are: scope negotiation, fast tracking, crashing the schedule, and asking for a reasonable amount of overtime.

Again, I'd caution against assuming that more resources will be a quick fix. Sometimes it is, depending on the nature of the work, but often it has the opposite effect of adding communication channels, increasing errors, causing morale problems for the rest of the team, and ultimately delaying your project.

The foremost quality of a commander is to keep a cool head, to receive accurate impressions of what is happening, and never fret or be amazed or intoxicated by good news or bad.

Once you decide to undertake a project, there's something to be said for keeping a cool head. Many great leaders (and some well known sports coaches) have demonstrated this quality.

A leader must lead by example and motivate the team. A panicky, inconsistent or unpredictable leader motivates nobody. A leader who is predictable and appears calm in the face of danger provides great motivation to a team. Of course, blind calmness won't help either (like Nero fiddling while Rome burns). Therefore the project manager must also be knowledgeable by staying aware of events. This in combination with a calm and predictable attitude is the secret to success.

Planning and Risk Management

In war, nothing is accomplished except through calculation. Anything that is not profoundly meditated in details will produce no result. Matters are contemplated over a long period of time and, to attain success, you must devote several months to thinking about what might happen. If I take so many precautions it is because my habit is to leave nothing to chance.

The key to Napoleon's success, more than any other, is his strong focus on planning, including risk management. As is evident in his statements here, Napoleon left nothing to chance. Even his fondness and appreciation of "audacity" was in reality "planned audacity". There is a big difference between planned audacity and foolish risk. To do something that surprises everyone and appears bold, but in reality has been well thought out, is the trick.

Patton achieved this when, in his attempt to kick-start his troops and get them to cross a river at a point where nobody thought was possible, he reconnoitered it and crossed it himself to "test the waters".

… That is what happens to generals who are irresolute and act without principles and plans.
… still he was a poor general. He waged war without maps.

These are just two excerpts of Napoleon's numerous critiques of military leaders of his time and before. In many cases, he was critical of the leader's lack of planning.

You will function as a corps of observation that will contest the terrain but not conquer…

In this excerpt, Napoleon is emphasizing the importance of studying the terrain. In the context of project management, it's also valuable to study the terrain, for example by observing the end-users' current environment before undertaking a project that will impact or change it. In this way, many additional issues can be exposed before they become problems.

Intelligent and intrepid generals insure the success of actions. One must be slow in deliberation and quick in execution.

To be slow in deliberation and quick in execution is the foundation of Napoleon's philosophy. There are two messages here. First, plan effectively so that you will reduce execution time considerably and avoid costly mistakes. Second, once you've taken the time to plan effectively, and the plan is deemed ready, do whatever it takes to remove any barriers to quick execution.

At this point, it's worth mentioning that it's possible to take planning to the extreme, and never actually get to the execution phase (and thus increase the chances of your project being canceled and/or out of date). To avoid this, Harold Beckwith, in his book **Selling the Invisible**, states that the ideal is to plan to the "very good" level. He ranks plans in order of Very Good, Good, Best, Bad, and God-Awful. Note that "best" falls just above "bad".

Also, the issue of simplicity must be remembered. Although planning is done in detail, the project plan must be reduced to its simplest terms through the use of work packages wherever possible (as discussed previously). This is to avoid an overly complex project plan that will slow execution and not be followed or maintained.

Plans of campaign are modified to infinity, according to circumstances, the genius of the commander, the nature of the troops, and the topography.

Planning is not a one-time activity, and isn't forgotten about when execution begins. The execution must be continuously monitored against the plan, and the plan must be altered as situations change. This could be what Dwight D. Eisenhower meant when he said, "Plans are nothing, planning is everything".

As PMI states in the PMBOK guide, plans are "progressively elaborated", that is to say, they are revised as more details are known about the project. In fact, for extremely large projects, where little is known about later phases of the project, only the first phase is planned in detail and baselined. The other phases are planned only at a high level, and are planned in detail and baselined as the planning horizon approaches (i.e. the "rolling wave" approach).

Of course in the field of project management, we know that any changes to the original baseline (either as a result of a change requested by the customer or, for example, as a result of the current plan having evolved more than 15% from the original plan) must be assessed for impact, approved and documented per an agreed-upon change management process. There should be a documented history of each baseline revision.

The matter of hospitals is very sensitive…in an army many establishments are prepared, half of which must be useless, but this is in order to keep pace with events.

Napoleon was not above spending extra money as a risk contingency, especially when it came to insuring the health and safety of his troops. The same can be said for project management.

At the moment war is declared there is so much to do that it is wise to begin preparation several years in advance. I am in the habit of thinking three or four months in advance about what I must do, and to master the secrets of the art of war. I calculate on the basis of the worst possible case. If I take so many precautions it is because my custom is to leave nothing to chance.

While I doubt you would be very popular telling management "I need a few years to prepare for this project and to further master the art of project management", you get the idea. Again, the lesson is to plan effectively and always stay up on the art of project management. Of course, in Napoleon's day, they didn't have PERT (which could be used in cases where there is a great deal of uncertainty to consider the best, worst and most likely cases and come up with a weighted average toward "most likely"). Nor did they have the project management software (to enable speedy bottom-up estimates) or risk qualification and quantification software that we have today. So, for lack of the tools we have today, he always planned on the worst case.

In war it is necessary to have sound and precise ideas. It is with safe and well-conceived plans that we win wars. There is no man more pusillanimous than I when it comes to planning a campaign. I purposely exaggerate all the dangers and all the calamities that the circumstances make possible. I am in a thoroughly painful state of agitation. This

does not keep me from looking quite serene in front of my entourage. Once I have made up my mind, everything is forgotten except what leads to success.

 It is apparent by now that Napoleon's philosophy is to plan for risk to an exhaustive level, not a bad idea in general. The key point here is that once he's done his assessment and has put his plan together (with consideration for all known - and even accounting for unknown - risks), he can then relax somewhat and focus on delivery. I say somewhat because, just as planning does not end when execution begins, neither does risk management. The project must continuously be assessed for new risks, revisions to the old risks, changes in the environment, etc. With this in mind, it's a good idea to have a small time set aside at each project status meeting just to discuss risks (old and new).

 Do not be surprised at the attention I devote to details: I must pay attention to everything so as never to leave myself un-provided.

 At this point, some people may be wondering how Napoleon ever got anything done. However, the results speak for themselves, just as they spoke for Patton, who followed a similar philosophy. They both had an amazing capacity for analysis down to the minor details, whether it was related to weaponry, political climate or uniforms. Their analysis was as broad as it was deep; although Patton expressed caution not to let addiction to planning get in the way of execution (a fine line, and an art that is a key to successful leadership).

 Suffice it to say that attention to appropriate details up front can avoid potentially devastating problems later. Too often, the details are left to the execution phase when the potential impact of problems is much greater. Changes made early on to accommodate a minor detail are usually minor. The same changes made later can have much greater impact and cost.

 At the commencement of a campaign, the question whether to advance or not requires careful deliberation, but once you have undertaken the offensive, it should be maintained to the last extremity. A retreat, however skillful the maneuvers may be, will always produce an injurious moral effect on the army…

 The lesson, as it relates to project management, is to plan up front, then to the best of your ability, follow that plan. Once your plan has been thought out and the project is under way, avoid major changes to your approach. It'll only serve to demoralize your team and make your project one of the many that never see the light of day. Better to spend more time up front making sure your plan is the right one. Please note that this refers to major changes in approach, not minor changes to fit circumstances, or minor scope changes that can be documented, assessed, approved and included in the plan.

Post-Project Evaluation

To win is not enough: it is necessary to profit from success.

 In project management, the only way to know whether you've really been successful is to perform a post project evaluation. Analyze the impact of your project. Did it have the benefit that it was intended to have? Did it exceed the intended benefit in any way? Was anything lacking? Is there anything that proves you need to do something differently next time? This can be done through customer surveys and formal evaluations. Benefits that can be quantified are ideal. All too often, success is declared as soon as the product or service of the project is delivered.

The Importance of Milestones

 One of the most important things is to establish and secure one's line of operation, by which I mean your line of posts and halting places where the hospitals, help for the sick, munitions of war, and provisions are located and where the army can reorganize, make good its losses, and with a couple of days' rest recover its morale, which is sometimes lost by an unexpected accident.

 Milestones are most often associated with project summary reporting and progress tracking (either through Earned Value Analysis or some other method of tracking a project's status against schedule and/or budget). However they can also serve as a motivational tool, allowing the team to rejoice in incremental successes on the path to project completion, or as a stage gate checkpoint (to allow the team to regroup and decide whether and/or how to conduct the next phase). Finally, they can be used to identify and track the completion of deliverables.

 The phases of a project in combination with the project's milestones define the project's line of operation. Without a line of operation, including checkpoints where you can regroup and make decisions, your project plan will be difficult, if not impossible, to manage and track.

 Every five or six marches you must have a fortified city or entrenched position along the line of operation where you can assemble the magazines for victuals and military supplies, organize convoys, and which you can make the center of maneuver, a pivot mark that shortens the line of operation.

 Of course when it comes to project management, we don't actually list our milestones by the mile (unless your project is to build a highway or railroad). However, we do have our own general guidelines, thanks to PMI and the Project Management Body of Knowledge.

 It's generally considered good practice to have your milestones at regular intervals throughout your project. In general your project plan should ideally have 4 to 7 tasks per level, with each task being 8 to 80 hours in length. The plan should be no more than 3 levels deep and have a milestone at least at the end of each phase (ideally more frequently on a large project).

Managing Virtual and Global Teams

To operate upon lines remote from each other and without communications between them is a fault that ordinarily occasions a second. The detached column has orders only for the first day. Its operations for the second day depend on what has happened to the main body. Thus, according to circumstances, the column wastes its time waiting for orders or it acts at random.

Communications is a vital part of any project, but even more so when it comes to global or virtual teams. If any one branch of the project team begins to operate at random due to lack of communication, problems are bound to occur. It's critical to have frequent and regular communication (even more frequently with global teams than would be required for an entirely localized team). The right type of communication is critical as well.

For example, when it comes to multi-cultural teams, it's best to supplement verbal communication with written communication (and to consider the audience when writing). Also, there are many collaborative tools on the market that are invaluable for such teams (Webex for example).

There have been numerous books written on leading global and virtual teams, and on multi-cultural issues in particular. Today's project manager needs to be well versed in these matters.

An army should always be kept united, so that the enemy cannot thrust himself between them. When for any reason this maxim is departed from, the detached corps should be independent in their operations. They should move toward a fixed point at which they are to unite…

The important point here is that if the entire team cannot be together and united (i.e. if there is a part of the team that is detached – that is to say in a remote location and out of direct communication with the project management), then the best course of action is to have that team operate independently (but with clear objectives) and unite with the main team at some fixed point (i.e. when their work has been completed, or at a specific milestone). A good example of this is when certain parts of a project are contracted out.

The Emperor cannot give you positive orders, but only general instructions (objectives) because the distance is already considerable and will become greater still.

Napoleon recognized the difficulties of managing from afar. While it is important to take measures to ensure your entire team is operating from the same page, it is difficult and unnecessary to **micromanage,** especially from afar. Again, the best way to handle this is by giving clear objectives, and insuring that the scope definition (including constraints, assumptions) is clear and descriptive. Then let the remote team manage their efforts to your objectives until the agreed upon reporting period(s). It is a generally accepted best practice that objectives should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Agreed-Upon, Realistic and Time-Limited).

It is a violation of correct principles to cause corps to act separately, without communication with each other, in the face of a concentrated army with easy communications.

Even when branches of the team are remote, they should all be acting in accordance with one overall plan, and be in communication with the overall project team. That is not to say that elements can't be managed independently, but they must be in adherence to specific objectives, which are to be met in a specific timeframe, and the status must be communicated within the agreed-upon reporting periods and methods.

Nothing is more important in war than unity in command. When, therefore, you are carrying hostilities against a single power only, you have but one army acting on one line and led by one commander.

There is nothing more detrimental to morale and to project results in general than mixed messages to the team. There must be one project manager responsible for the outcome of the project. The customer, upper management, and other stakeholders may influence this project manager, but it is the project manager that needs to lead and direct the team. An orchestra can only have one conductor.

It is therefore essential, when one has fourteen armies, that each wages a kind of war relative to the overall plan for the war (strategy), and to the strength and circumstances – whether topographical or political – of the opposing state.

This statement stresses the importance of strategy and portfolio management. If there are multiple projects being undertaken for the same organization, it is essential that they be aligned with the overall corporate strategy (and of course tailored to meet the challenges specific to that project, be it a department-specific challenge, a cultural challenge or any other special circumstances that may need to be considered).

Making Use of all Resources

When you have it in contemplation to give battle, it is a general rule to collect all your strength and to leave none unemployed. One battalion sometimes decides the issue of the day.

All too often, key resources are consulted much too late in the game. There is a fine line between including all resources that may have valuable input, and wasting people's time. That is one of the trickiest arts in project management. The secret to success is to make it as painless as possible for the resources in question, yet to make sure to solicit their input. For example, it may be better to send them a write-up or summary of the project, or ask them specific questions than to include them in a project meeting, most of which isn't applicable to them.

Summary

You do not require spirit in war, but exactitude, character, and simplicity. The art of being sometimes audacious and sometimes very prudent is the secret of success.

In summarizing, Napoleon bases the key to success on three values: **exactitude** (through extensive planning, risk management, and study of historical data), **character** (including honor, integrity, and remaining calm and predictable at all times) and **simplicity** (making the complex simple, avoiding complex jargon that causes error and misunderstanding, and removing barriers that make a simple project complex).

On top of that, he values the art of knowing when to be audacious and when to be prudent. In project management, this applies to both knowing when your plan is at a good-enough level and knowing which risks are acceptable to take.

When it comes to planning, it would seem to be at odds with speed of delivery, and the art of balancing the two is the key to success. It is also important to remember that planning is not a one-time event, but must be progressively elaborated as more details are known and as circumstances change.

When it comes to risks, much depends upon the organization's tolerance for risk, the current environment, and the cost versus the benefit. There are many risk qualification and quantification tools and methods today to assist in making this decision.

Finally, with regard to spirit, I don't think Napoleon is saying that spirit isn't valuable (on the contrary, he spoke often about the importance of instilling hope); merely that it's not a requirement for success if the other elements are there. The paradox hidden in his statement is that high spirits are often a result of the success of the other components.

About the Author

Jerry Manas is President of the Marengo Group, and author of *Managing the Gray Areas* (RMC Publications, January 2008) and *Napoleon on Project Management* (Nelson Business, April 2006). Through the Marengo Group, Jerry helps project and virtual teams achieve high performance using techniques and practices that result in greater alignment, leaner processes, and more strategic use of technology. Jerry is a founding member of *The Creating We Institute* (www.creatingweinstitute.com) and co-founder of *PMThink!* (www.pmthink.com), a popular project management blog site. Visit his website at www.marengogroup.com.