SUMMARISING NAPOLEONIC LEADERSHIP

1. As a supporter of the Revolution, Napoleon was seen as modern, new worldly, anti-feudal, anti-aristocratic – but ahead of his time, and he over-estimated the popularity of new ideas.
2. He was ambitious, even to the extent of going to the very top.
3. He had an underprivileged start in life and then obsessively tried to compensate for it.
4. His action was speedy, rapid, flexible, urgent, to the extent of pushing hard to overcome any resistance, and not always listening to warnings.
5. Napoleon was hands-on, even controlling.
6. Hard-working, energetic, ever present, involved in all aspects of lead­ership and management.
7. Well-prepared, precise and exact, to the extent of managing every­thing in front of as well as behind the scenes.
8. Egotistical, even narcissistic.
9. Practical, straightforward, calm and unsentimental, even to the point of being callous about human and personal issues.
10. Surprisingly naïve, to the extent of over-simplicity and overconfidence that everything is possible.
11. Eager to be liked, even to the extent of rewarding flattery and loyalty more than competence.
12. Critical of others and with an attitude of superiority, demanding respect but not willing to give it to others.
13. Wanting praise to the extent of being intolerant of criticism and not realizing the damage caused by an absence of feedback.
14. Obsessed with the need for the constant demonstration of ability, even to the detriment of the organization.

Napoleon’s approach to leadership provides colourful examples of how to gain and use power on the battlefield, in domestic politics and in the international scene – and in the workplace. He provides examples that are applicable to our own less turbulent times, because the demands on leaders are just as complex and multifaceted. Strengths of Napoleonic leadership can include brilliance in a chosen field, charisma, fearless­ness, adventurousness, confidence, energy, determination, passion, being visionary, and having excellent planning and organizing skills. But these can have a shadow side, such as his need for constant acclaim, demanding adulation, callously wasting resources, being too egotistical and narcissistic, being overly-controlling and autocratic, manipulative, obsessive, naïve, assuming constant success and support and focusing on self-preserving behaviours. But more important than these per­sonal traits are the ideologies that he and others turned to in order to legitimize his power: patronage, meritocracy, charisma, opportunism, manipulation, coercion, popularity and succession – and this has been our focus here.