

“THE PRINCE”

**A pragmatic approach to
programme management**

By Niccolo Machiavelli

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1. INTRODUCTION

Machiavelli was born in Florence in 1469. He was appointed Secretary and second Chancellor to the Florentine Republic. He wrote “The Prince” in 1514.

“The Prince”, which describes and defines the figure of the successful political leader, was a product of personal and national tragedy created, however in a spirit of hope.

During Machiavelli’s lifetime Italy suffered from incessant and often brutal warfare. The Italian states were crushed between the rival ambitions of foreign powers. In 1513 suspected of being involved in a political conspiracy, there followed a period of imprisonment and torture after which he was banished from public life. After his subsequent exoneration and release he continued to follow political affairs from afar, and denied the opportunity to participate he poured out his thoughts into this book and others containing the advice he wished the Medici (his political sponsors) to follow.

Beyond the conventional grounding and training what does it take to consistently succeed in the leadership of a team delivering a large and complex business programme? What does it take to successfully deal with the people and politics and deliver the programme on time? Many of the qualities outlined in “The Prince” are relevant and I have outlined a few of them in this document, but in summary the consistently successful business manager requires pragmatism, patience and persistence.

2. THE BUSINESS MANAGER

2.1 Your objectives

- “A prince, therefore, should have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organisation, and its discipline.”

3. REACHING YOUR OBJECTIVES

3.1 Know the capabilities of your bow

- “Men nearly always follow in the tracks made by others and proceed in their affairs by imitation, even though they cannot entirely keep to the tracks of others or emulate the prowess of their models. So a prudent man should always follow in the footsteps of great men and imitate those who have been outstanding. He should behave like those archers who, if they are skilful, when the target seems to distant, know the capabilities of their bow and aim a good deal higher than their objective, not in order to shoot so high but so that by aiming high they can reach the target.”

3.2 Use various methods

- “...it can be observed that men use various methods in pursuing their own personal objectives... and yet everyone, for all this diversity of method, can reach his objective.”

4. SELECTION OF THE MANAGEMENT TEAM

4.1 You are judged by the quality of your team

- “The first opinion that is formed of a ruler’s intelligence is based on the quality of the men he has around him. When they are competent and loyal he can always be considered wise, because he has been able to recognise their competence and to keep them loyal. But when they are otherwise, the prince is always open to adverse criticism; because his first mistake has been in the choice of his ministers.”

5. MORALE

5.1 Importance of good on site relationships with the customer

- “...always, no matter how powerful one’s armies, to enter a conquered territory one needs the goodwill of the inhabitants”

5.2 Importance of establishing good personal PR within your team

- “.it is obviously not easy to assault a town which has been made into a bastion by a prince who is not hated by the people.”
- “ One of the most powerful safeguards a prince can have against conspiracies is to avoid being hated by the populace.”

5.3 Motivating the team

- “Men always dislike enterprises where the snags are evident...”
- “... a powerful, courageous prince will always be able to overcome all such difficulties, inspiring his subjects now with the hope that the ills they are enduring will not last long, now with fear of the enemy’s cruelty, and taking effective measure against those who are too outspoken.”
- “The nature of man is such that people consider themselves put under an obligation as much by the benefits they confer as by those they receive.”

6. BUDGET & RESOURCES

6.1 When required, raid the risk budget

- “...those princes can stand alone who have sufficient manpower or money to assemble an army equal to an encounter with any aggressor.”

7. CHANGING ATTITUDES, CULTURES AND WORKING PRACTISES

7.1 The business manager as change agent

- “It should be borne in mind that there is nothing more difficult to arrange, more doubtful of success, and more dangerous to carry through than initiating a new order of things. The innovator makes enemies of all those prospered under the old order, and only lukewarm support is forthcoming from those who would prosper under the new... because men are generally incredulous, never really trusting new things unless they have tested them by experience. Whenever those who oppose the changes can do so, they attack vigorously, and the defence made by the others is only lukewarm.”

8. RESOURCING PROJECTS AND THE USE OF THIRD PARTIES & CONTRACTORS

8.1 Good staff and good working practises

- “The main foundations of every state ...are good laws and good arms; and because you cannot have good laws without good arms, and where there are good arms, good laws inevitably follow, I shall not discuss laws but give attention to arms.”
- “.the arms on which a prince bases the defence of his state are either his own, or mercenary...or composite.”

8.2 Typical contractor mentality

- “Mercenaries... are useless and dangerous. If a prince bases the defence of his state on mercenaries he will never achieve stability or security. For mercenaries are disunited, thirsty for power, undisciplined, and disloyal... they avoid defeat just so, long as they avoid battle...the reason for all this is that there is no loyalty or inducement to keep them on the field apart from the little they are paid, and this not enough to make want to die for you. Experience has shown that only princes and armed republics achieve solid success, and that mercenaries bring nothing but loss...”

9. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

9.1 *People form impressions on the basis of what they see*

- “Men in general judge by their eyes rather than by their hands; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close with you.”
- “A prince, therefore, need not necessarily have all the good qualities...but he should certainly appear to have them...he should appear to be compassionate, faithful to his word, guileless and devout. And indeed he should be so. But his disposition should be such that, if he needs to be the opposite, he knows how to.”

9.2 *Applying positive spin*

- “There is no doubt that a prince’s greatness depends on his triumphing over difficulties and opposition... when he has the chance, an able prince should cunningly foster some opposition to himself so that by overcoming it he can enhance his own stature.”

10. PRAGMATIC MANAGEMENT

10.1 *Exercising discernment*

- “The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous.”
- “...a prince should be so prudent that he knows how to escape the evil reputation attached to those vices which could cost him his state, and how to avoid those vices which are not so dangerous, if he possibly can; but, if he cannot, he need not worry so much about the latter.

And then, he must not flinch from being blamed for vices which are necessary for safeguarding the state. This is because, taking everything into account, he will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practises them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be wicked will bring him security and prosperity.”

10.2 *Firm management*

- “...a prince should not worry if he incurs reproach for his cruelty so long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal. By making an example or two he will prove more compassionate than those who, being to compassionate, allow disorders which lead to mutiny ...(which) nearly always harm the whole community, whereas executions ordered by a prince only affect individuals.”

Making and honouring commitments

- “Everyone realises how praiseworthy it is for a prince to honour his word and to be straightforward rather than crafty in his dealings; nonetheless contemporary experience shows that princes who have achieved great things have been those who have given their word lightly, who have known how to trick men with their cunning, and who, in the end, have overcome those abiding by honest principles. So it follows that a prudent ruler cannot, and should not honour his word when it places him at a disadvantage and the reasons for which he made his promise no longer exist.”

10.4 Flexibility

- “I also believe that the one who adapts his policies to the time prospers, and likewise that the one whose policy clashes with the demands of the times does not.”

11. PREPARATION AND FORESIGHT

11.1 Identifying project critical issues as they arise

- “The prince who does not detect evils the moment they appear is lacking in true wisdom; but few rulers have the wisdom to do so.”

11.2 Dealing with the unforeseen

- “You are bound to meet misfortune if you are unarmed because, among other things, people despise you, and this... is one of the infamies a prince should be on his guard against.”

12. CLARITY OF THOUGHT

12.1 *Better to be decisively wrong than indecisively right*

- “A prince also wins prestige for being a true friend or a true enemy, that is for revealing himself in favour of one side against another. This policy is always more advantageous than neutrality.”

13. KEEPING A FINGER ON THE PULSE

13.1 *Who do you listen to?*

- “...a shrewd prince should adopt a middle way, choosing wise men for his government and allowing only those the freedom to speak the truth to him, and then only concerning matters on which he asks their opinion and nothing else. But he should question them thoroughly and listen to what they say; then he should make up his own mind by himself. And his attitude towards his councils and towards each one of his advisers should be such that they will recognise that the more freely they speak out the more acceptable they will be. Apart from these, the prince should heed no one; he should put the policy agreed upon into effect straight away, and he should adhere to it rigidly.”

13.2 *When should you listen?*

- “A prince should, therefore, always seek advice. But he should do so when he wants to, not when others want him to; indeed he should discourage everyone from tendering advice about anything unless it is asked for. All the same he should be a constant questioner, and he should listen patiently to the truth regarding what he has enquired about.”

14. LUCK, OPPORTUNITY & SKILL

14.1 How to strengthen your position

- “... the less a man has relied on fortune the stronger he has made his position. And when we come to examine (great leaders) actions and lives, they do not seem to have had from fortune anything other than opportunity. Fortune as it were, provided the matter but they gave it its form; without opportunity their prowess would have been extinguished, and without such prowess the opportunity would have come in vain.”