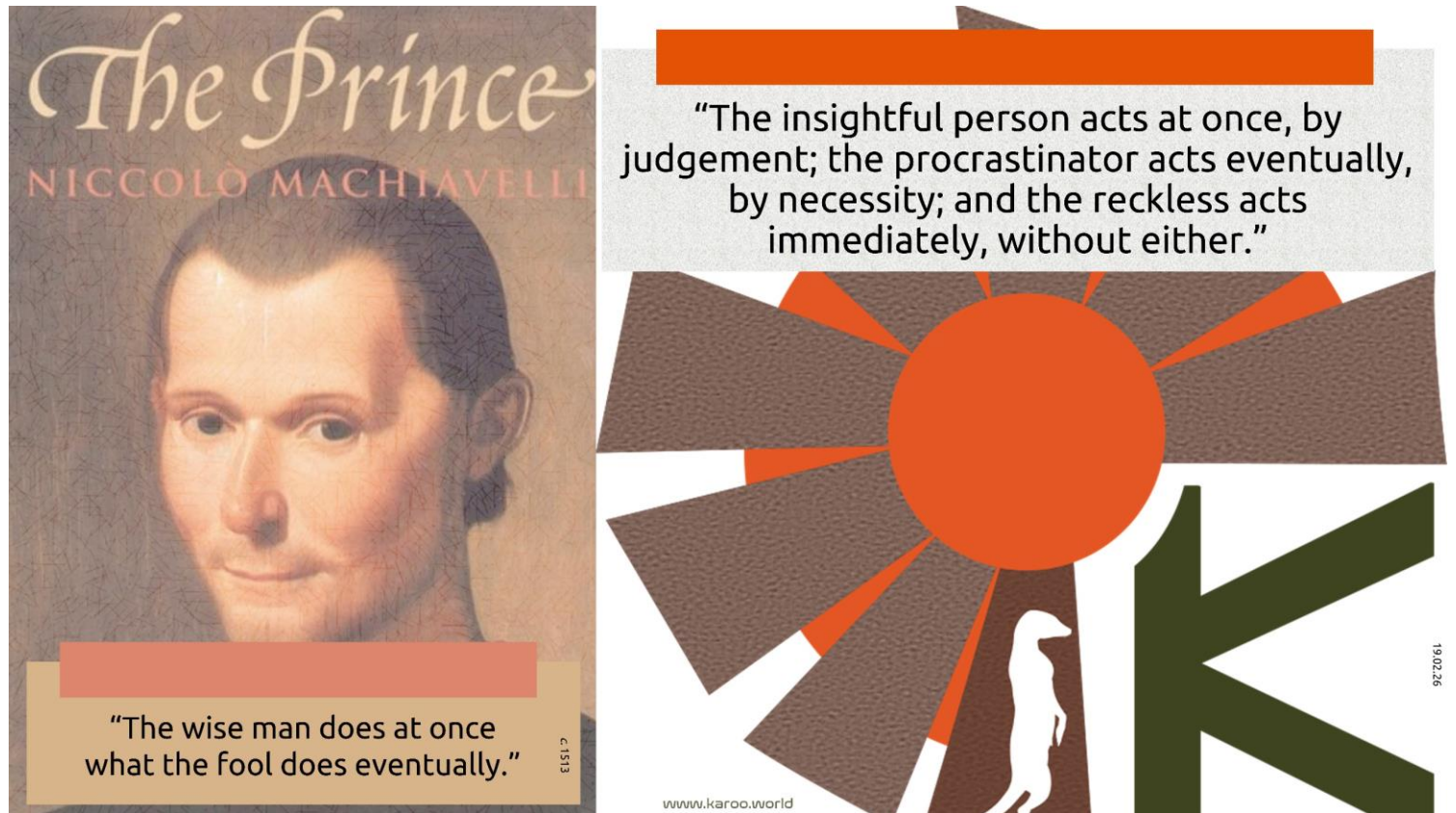


Timing. **Judgement.** Action. Consequence



Responsiveness: Neither Recklessness nor Reticence

The topic of the past three editions of *On Leadership*—contrasting leadership-based responses with unanchored reactions—has prompted thoughtful observations from readers.

One reader reminded me of a Niccolò Machiavelli maxim I often deploy: *"The wise man does at once what the fool does eventually,"* as reflected on the left in the above infographic.

The reader suggested that Machiavelli is emphasising the cost of delay—that hesitation (**thinking things through**) creates risk and vulnerability, and that time is of the essence. This reading is correct, to an extent. Decisive action matters, whether in minor or strategic Leadership Moments.

However, the issue is more complex—it is not speed alone that matters.

The essential question we face, is: **When is the right time to act with certainty and swiftness?**

Timing, **Judgement** and Action

Let us unpack Machiavelli's advisory.

Machiavelli refers to "The wise man [person]..."

A “wise person” would have consistent productive outcomes over time because, their:

- α judgement is almost always sound,
- α actions anticipate consequences early, and
- α foresight, restraint and timing are reliable.

So, wisdom is not a single event or decision—it is **judgement that has been refined, integrated, and stabilised through experience and practice.**

From Machiavelli to the Influential Leadership System: A Reinterpretation

Let us work Machiavelli’s “wise person” into the Influential Leadership System architecture.

While we previously considered two **modes of behaviour**, namely, **responding** and **reacting**, there is a third mode **reticence**—action that is both delayed **and** devoid of judgement: **procrastination**.

To **recap**, responding is founded on agency, which includes:

- α a grounded sense of self (the self-efficacy part),
- α a pause to gather information (some time, not forever, just enough),
- α reflection and insight (critical thinking),
- α sound judgement (smart choosing),
- α and then **deliberate, decisive action**.

So, while speed (**deliberate and decisive action**) is necessary—it cannot displace or sacrifice **judgement**. Speed alone is unproductive. For agency to be effective, **judgement and decisiveness must coexist**. The question is not whether to act quickly, but **when**.

The answer to the essential question is: **at once**—but, at the back end of agency—judgement involves a process.

So, that deals with responding and reacting, but what about our third mode of behaviour, **procrastinating**?

This mode is the worst of all worlds; it happens when there is **neither decisive action nor judgement**—which inevitably causes damage.

The iLS maxim below accommodates all three modes.

The insightful person acts at once, by judgement; the procrastinator acts eventually, by necessity; and the reckless acts immediately, without either.

The above reinterpretation of Machiavelli’s maxim accommodates the language of the iLS and the 21st century. It exposes how **intention, timing, judgement, and action** interact to produce outcomes (consequences) of a high-quality—or in their absence—ones of high-cost, or damaging.

The table below maps the three different modes of behaviour, which we shall explore next week.

Behaviour Mode	Relationship to Time	Relationship to Judgement	Outcome (Consequences)
Insightful	Acts <i>at once</i> , in response mode	Timing with judgement	Productive
Procrastinator	Acts <i>eventually</i> , in reactive mode	Delay without judgement	High cost
Reckless	Acts <i>immediately</i> , in reactive mode	Speed without judgement	Damage

The Leadership Insight

Machiavelli does not celebrate ruthlessness—he is naming a law of consequence:

- What must be done will be done.
- The question is whether it is done early, deliberately, and with judgement—or with undue haste at a cost, or eventually under pressure, resulting in damage.

It is not about speed. It is about nature of the consequence—timing informed by judgement.

Chat with us

It can be quite lonely on this side of the keyboard in the absence of your feedback. We are always delighted to receive your thoughts and ideas on leadership matters.

So, let’s chat about your interpretation of Machiavelli’s notion of “the wise man [person]”. What do you imagine he meant?

Let us know what you think.

Regards,
Colin

The Influential Leadership System™ — Lead, live better.
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