

Prior Success, Asset or Poison?: Leadership Failure of Korea's CEO President, Lee Myung-bak

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Abstract: Lee Myung-Bak's CEO-style leadership made him an unpopular president. This article explores how his leadership style developed and was reinforced throughout his professional career. It examines his professional experiences, identifies key traits of his leadership, and analyzes how they were projected in his policy initiatives. Lee's leadership traits, developed in the private sector, made his term as mayor of Seoul successful and helped him win the presidency. But these same successes undermined his presidency. Because they led him to cling to his leadership style without modification, he failed to cope with the different environment surrounding the presidency.

Keywords: presidential leadership, Lee Myung-bak, psychological approach

INTRODUCTION: PRESIDENT LEE'S MISTAKES

Lee Myung-bak, whose term ended in February 2013, could be considered Korea's first chief executive officer (CEO) president. He was elected with the largest margin of the last 30 years; voters were attracted both by his success as a CEO at Hyundai Construction Company and by his achievements as mayor of Seoul.¹ People's expectations were extremely high at his inauguration. However, his five-year term of office was

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1. Lee received 23.6 percent more votes than the Democratic Party candidate. In the five elections since the popular vote system was introduced in 1987, the average margin between the winner and the nearest competitor had been 4.14 percent. His predecessors had been either military generals or politicians.

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marked by political gridlock and voter disappointment. Although he proclaimed his intention to revive the nation's economy during the presidential campaign, he failed to satisfy the citizenry in terms of either economics or politics.

In fact, President Lee's domestic policy initiatives were the object of frequent and severe criticism and a source of conflict in civil society as well as in the political arena. A series of controversies over personnel management and domestic policy significantly eroded his base of political support. As a result, even after the sinking of the Korean warship *Cheonan* in March 2010, the type of national security crisis during which support for a president often increases, he remained unpopular. During his term in office, he had to publicly apologize no less than six times, five for making hasty policy decisions and once for a bribery scandal involving his aides.

Lee had served in the National Assembly for seven years and as the elected mayor of Seoul Metropolitan City for four years, and had been CEO of Hyundai for 25 years before entering politics. He is the only Korean president who ever served as the head of a local government. Given his prior successes, including as mayor of Seoul, why was his leadership as president not as successful? More importantly, why did he make similar mistakes repeatedly? Despite the fact that bargaining and communication skills are key components of CEO leadership, why did he not, as a CEO-style leader, use bargaining power more effectively to promote his policy agenda?

In order to answer to these questions, it is necessary to understand the key elements of his leadership style and how they were reflected in his conduct as president. After reviewing other relevant presidential studies, this article examines how Lee's leadership style was developed and reinforced throughout his career and analyzes how the key traits of his leadership were projected into his major policy initiatives.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Presidential Leadership

Presidential leadership is a popular subject in presidency research. This is because a presidency is affected not just by the political context, but also by the president's personal leadership style and qualities. While some studies of presidential leadership have adopted an institutional perspective (Moe, 1993; Skowronek, 1993), many others have approached it from a personal psychological perspective (Barber, 1992; Greenstein, 2000; Neustadt, 1990). The latter are based on the belief that personality affects presidential performance through leadership style. Greenstein (1992, p. 116) argues that the study of personal background is important to understanding the behaviors of political

leaders because key background characteristics become part of an actor's personal makeup, "an element of the psyche."

Hargrove (1993) contends that presidential leadership style is one of the characteristic ways in which a political leader deals with recurring tasks of leadership, and that it develops through experience. Hargrove focuses on how characteristics of belief and values, cognitive style, and needs reinforce each other in shaping leadership style. Along the same line, Pika and Maltese (2005, pp. 131-132) argue that presidents bring to the job personality traits as well as attitudes toward and beliefs about a wide range of political structures, institutions, and relationships. According to them, these personal characteristics and attitudes are shaped within social contexts, and presidential leadership or performance is manifested when these individual traits interact with the situations the president confronts.

Fiske (1993, pp. 237-238), drawing on social cognition research and theory, suggests that two types of decision-making affect leadership style: category-based thinking, which is top-down, theory-driven, and expectancy-driven; and attribute-based thinking, which is a bottom-up, data-driven, incremental process. Category-based decision-makers look for patterns that fit prior knowledge and then apply the content, decisions, evaluations, rules, and patterns associated with that prior knowledge to the understanding of new information. As long as the fit is good enough, the decision maker has a ready-made set of responses to the new information, without having to overanalyze it.

Category-based thinking tends to be more rigid and authoritarian than attribute-based thinking. Furthermore, the dichotomy between in-group and out-group is a fundamental example of category-based thinking. According to Fiske (1993, pp. 243-254), category-based thinking also includes in-group favoritism in resource allocation and memory structure, maximizing between-group differences, minimizing within-group variability, viewing the out-group as homogeneous, having less conceptualization of out-group members, and evaluating them in extreme terms.

The most prominent study of the leadership style of a president is Barber's work on the typology of presidential character (1992, pp. 34-35). Based on three essential components of presidential personality (character, worldview, and style) and two environmental conditions (power position and climate of expectations), Barber attempts to develop broad character patterns that will predict general patterns of presidential conduct in office. Character, the most important of Barber's analytic constructs, is defined as "the way the President orients himself toward life—not for the moment, but enduringly." By combining these two factors, he presents a four-cell typology: active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive, and passive-negative.

Neustadt, who has greatly influenced students of the presidency in the United States for a long time, also emphasizes the importance of personal variables in politics.

His classic work includes both personal and institutional variables. However, over time he moved away from his original emphasis on institutional aspects and addressed more personality variables, particularly after the Johnson and Nixon presidencies. Neustadt (1990, p. 11) argues that “the presidential power is to persuade” because “constitutional powers are no guarantee of power” (p. 10). He maintains that “the power to persuade is the power to bargain” (p. 32) and that successful presidential leadership requires a combination of skill and will. For Neustadt, power is a function of personal politics rather than of formal authority or position. The key to strong presidential leadership is not formal power but the skills, temperament, and experience of the individual occupying the office and the ability to put these personal qualities to use in enhancing his or her reputation and prestige.

Greenstein (2000, pp. 5-6) suggests six qualities that relate to presidential job performance: proficiency as a public communicator, organizational capacity, political skill, capacity to harness the skill to a vision of public policy, cognitive style, and emotional intelligence. While there is no magic formula for successful presidential leadership, there is broad consensus among presidency scholars that a president’s leadership style has an enduring effect on his or her performance in office (Pika & Maltese, 2005, p. 132).

Links between Experience and Performance

It is also important to consider the relationship between professional experience and presidential job performance. A number of presidential scholars (Hargrove, 1993; Pika & Maltese, 2005, p. 131; Sinclair, 1993) agree that professional experiences prior to entering office, particularly as they relate to demands of the presidency, help shape a president’s personal style. Neustadt advocates electing an experienced politician to the presidency—“presidency is no place for amateurs” (Neustadt, 1991, p. 151)—and argues that “the quality of experience counts more than the quantity” (p. 205).

However, how successful experiences affect presidential performance is not clear. For some presidents, a successful career laid the foundation for a successful presidency. For example, Woodrow Wilson’s success as university president and governor helped him become a high-performing president. Both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton served as governor (of California and Arkansas, respectively), and this political and organizational management experience was a valuable asset during their presidencies.

On the other hand, Jimmy Carter, although successful in various endeavors before and after entering politics, has not been regarded as a successful president. According to Hargrove (1988), Carter’s confidence in his own intelligence was strengthened by his professional successes before and during his term as Georgia governor. Hargrove

argues that Carter's leadership style was characterized by a combination of mastery of problems, intelligence, and belief in progress and by reinforcement.

Rockman (1984, p. 212), on the other hand, concludes that experience is not related to good performance after conducting research on the relationship between professional experience and performance by comparing the performances of the top and bottom 10 presidents as ranked by an expert panel.

The Korean Presidency

Korea has maintained a presidential system since the establishment of the Republic of Korea in 1948. For the past 65 years of political development, controversies over the presidential system have arisen from time to time, and many people agree on the need to improve political democracy. While some people call for the current presidential system to be replaced by a parliamentary system, others suggest that reducing the power of the current "imperial presidency" is a better option than discarding the presidential system altogether.

In contrast to the frequent discussions in the political arena, however, only a few studies of the presidency have been conducted in the academic arena. Under the authoritarian regime, the incumbent president was regarded as a sacred political figure who could not be studied either by journalists or political scientists (Hahm, 1997). Accordingly, research on the presidency was risky and challenging. Although Korea has been democratized since the late 1980s, information about the Korean presidency is still quite limited.

Concerning the choice of a theoretical approach to the study of the Korean presidency, Hahm (1997) recommends the political psychological approach, both because Korea has a long tradition of authoritarian political culture and because a president's influence is much greater in Korea than in Western countries. His argument is persuasive, because Korean presidents are able to exert a decisive impact on political events.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

This study examines how Lee's professional experiences developed and reinforced his leadership traits and analyzes how they were expressed in the major policy initiatives of his presidency. The study extracts key leadership traits by reviewing the three phases of Lee's professional career prior to becoming president: 28 years at Hyundai, seven years as a representative in the National Assembly, and four years as mayor of Seoul. His two autobiographies (M. Lee 1995, 2007), his speeches, and media reports

were the sources of information for the analysis.

Key policy cases can be used as dependent variables of presidential leadership (Light, 1993). Lee's personnel management choices and three major policy agendas were selected for case analysis to assess the outcome of his leadership—his nomination of political appointees, the importation of US beef, the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project, and the revised plan for Sejong City. Lee clearly invested his energy and mobilized all possible resources to achieve the goals of those initiatives.

Based on Northouse's general definition of leadership (1997, p. 3), presidential leadership in this article is defined as a process whereby a president influences a group of people to achieve policy goals. This definition has several connotations. First, presidential leadership involves influence, meaning that leadership is concerned with how the president affects other people to move toward the achievement of his or her policy goals. For example, Newstadt's concept of the "power to persuade" is related to this point with its focus on influencing others. Second, presidential leadership takes place in a certain context. A leadership style that succeeds in one context may not succeed in another. Third, presidential leadership includes attention to goals. This means that the success or failure of presidential leadership can be judged by whether the president's policy agenda produced the intended outcome or not.

FORMATION OF PRESIDENT LEE MYUNG-BAK'S LEADERSHIP TRAITS

Before discussing the research question, it is necessary to briefly examine Lee's professional experience. (This article touches only briefly on private experiences such as family and education, for which information is lacking and which are not relevant to the analysis presented here.)

Lee was born into a poor family in the southeastern part of Korea in 1941, and graduated from Korea University with a BA in business management. He spent 28 years in several Hyundai companies, mainly in the construction area. While working at Hyundai Construction Company, he was nicknamed the Bulldozer, which helped him get elected as mayor of Seoul in 2002. He entered politics in 1992 as a proportional representative to the National Assembly and was reelected in an electoral district of Seoul in the next term. However, he lost the position by a court ruling that he had violated the Campaigns Law. Returning to the political arena as mayor of Seoul, he achieved fairly significant policy successes, including the restoration of Cheonggye Stream and the reform of public transportation. These two achievements gave him a reputation as a person who gets things done. Based on the image he established as

mayor of Seoul and CEO of Hyundai Construction Company, he was elected as the 17th president of Korea in 2008.

Lee had never experienced serious failure. Although he lost the representative seat, this did not much affect his later political moves. Not only was violation of the Campaigns Law not regarded as a serious crime in Korea, but he also quickly moved on to prepare for the 2002 Seoul mayoral election. He had been a suspect in the BBK fraud and stock manipulation case, but he was cleared by the special prosecutor just before the presidential election in December 2007.

Lee's experiences at Hyundai, in the legislature, and as mayor of Seoul had a profound influence on his beliefs, values, attitudes, and style, and helped to develop and reinforce the leadership traits he brought to the presidency.

Experience at Hyundai: A Self-Made CEO

Lee's experiences at Hyundai not only laid the foundation for his beliefs, values, and leadership style, but also imposed limitations on the conduct of his presidency. While the authoritarian political regime drove the export-oriented economic development policy from the 1960s to the early 1980s, most Korean corporations developed with the special favor from the government. This necessarily entailed serious corruption stemming from the "iron triangle" of business, government, and political parties. Under these circumstances, efficiency- and results-oriented business practices became the norm. Results rather than procedures were emphasized, along with speed and efficiency. Consequently, mistakes and illegal actions were ignored and sometimes even considered justified when they achieved a goal (Ahn, 1999).

Hyundai was no exception. It began as a construction company founded by Chung Ju-yung and became a world-class corporation involved in automobile manufacturing, construction, and other industries. Hyundai was famous for Chung's authoritarian leadership, especially from the 1960s to 1980s. Lee worked very hard and was eventually promoted to the position of vice-chairman. His 28 years of experience at Hyundai was critical to the formulation of his personal style and leadership traits.

Lee developed an authoritarian, results-centered, efficiency-orientated leadership style and a dualistic view of politics. At Hyundai, top-down communication and quick decision-making were considered the most efficient way of doing business. Leaders rarely welcomed different opinions or showed interest in staff members' views. Once a decision was made by the leader, all company employees had to follow it. Results were considered much more important than process. Goals had to be achieved in a given time regardless of the reason, and a good result commonly justified flaws or mistakes in the process. Politics were seen as a source of power on one hand and as

corrupt and inefficient on the other. When Chung ran for president in 1992, he said his reason for running was that he had had to give too many bribes to politicians. Lee expressed the same view in his autobiography (1995, pp. 165-197).

Representative in the National Assembly

When Chung proposed that Lee should join his new party, the Unification People's Party, he declined, instead joining the government party, the Democratic Liberal Party, in 1992. It is difficult to believe that Lee was an important and active player in the National Assembly. Although he was elected to the Assembly twice, first as a proportional representative and then as an elected member, he did not actively participate in party politics and the legislative process. So he did not achieve any impressive outcomes during his seven years in the Assembly. Because this position was not the final goal in his political career, he remained one step away from the center of legislative and party politics.

Mayor of Seoul

Lee's success as mayor of Seoul affected his future in two ways: it gave him a great deal of credibility as a presidential candidate, but it also gave him a seemingly misguided confidence in his own leadership style.

Since the introduction of the full-fledged self-government system in 1995, the mayorship of Seoul, as an elected public office, has been generally recognized as a stepping-stone to the presidency. This must have been the reason that Lee chose the office of Seoul mayor as his next goal after losing his Assembly seat.

His two major policy initiatives as mayor were the restoration of Cheonggye Stream and the reform of public transportation. The goal of the Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project was to remove an elevated highway and restore the stream, which had been left nearly dry under the highway for 30 years. The goal of the public transportation reform was to improve traffic in Seoul by establishing bus-only lanes, better connecting buses and subways, and inducing more people to use public transportation. This was welcomed by citizens because it reduced traveling time for public transportation users.

Some people were initially pessimistic about the feasibility of the two projects, arguing that they would cost a lot and could not be completed within Lee's term of office. However, Lee ignored the opposition and pushed the projects ahead using the same style of authoritarian leadership he had developed at Hyundai. Most officials worked until late at night, and all available resources were mobilized for the projects

(M. Lee, 2007, pp. 107-110). Under his leadership, Seoul city government held several seminars and carried out publicity activities to promote the two projects.

Lee was able to complete the two projects within his term as mayor. The Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project was a civil engineering task similar to those that he had carried out many times at Hyundai. These two achievements convinced many people that Lee was a man who can get things done. This impression contrasted with that of the incumbent president, Roh Moo-hyun, who was not popular at that time.

It is possible to draw some critical conclusions that Lee might have reached after his experience as mayor of Seoul. The success of his two key projects must have given him confidence in his own capacity as a CEO-type leader and in the notion that the top-down and authoritarian approach he developed in the business sector could work in government, too. He might also have gained an incorrect understanding of working with the legislature. When he was Seoul mayor, more than 80 percent of Seoul City Council seats were held by his party, and the Council had less power than the mayor under Korea's centralized political party system. Accordingly, Lee could easily handle the Council.

Similarly, Lee's experience as mayor with the media and NGOs seems to have led him to misunderstand the power and roles of those actors in national politics. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were divided in their response to the Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project, because the project officially stated that it aimed to make Seoul more environmentally friendly. Media attention was limited and even controlled by the Seoul city government.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND POLICY INITIATIVES

How Lee's leadership style affected his conduct as president can be examined by looking at major decisions and policy cases, four of which are discussed below.

Case 1: Personnel Management

Lee got into trouble early in his presidency, in February 2008, by nominating unqualified figures as cabinet members and close aides. Thirteen of his 15 cabinet nominees were accused of tax evasion or violation of real estate laws, and three had to withdraw before confirmation hearings by the National Assembly. Most of the nominees were wealthy landowners living in the Gangnam area, which symbolizes affluence in Korea. Many of those nominees and other political appointees went to the same church as Lee, had gone to the same university, or shared the same birthplace. Lee's

choice to nominate only those whom he knew well through these connections drew heavy criticism.

One Grand National Party (GNP) lawmaker who often met Lee remarked that he had “the CEO mindset that staying with the people he appointed is the right way to do things” regardless of their flaws (*Korea Joongang Daily*, 2008). He might have thought that they were competent people who could get things done and that although they had some flaws, they could do many things for the nation and no one is perfect. Controversies over nominations occurred again several times for the same reasons during his term of office, and five more candidates withdrew from consideration.

Lee’s personnel management was also criticized for “revolving-door” appointments in which a small number of appointees moved from one position to another by rotation. It is the general understanding that all of the problematic nominations were decided by the president himself without consultation. The lawmaker quoted above also said, “President Lee just won’t listen and picks some minor point to focus on” (*Korea Joongang Daily*, 2008).

Another leadership failure was Lee’s granting of special pardons to 55 people including two of his close associates, despite the fact that the president-elect criticized the granting of pardons as an abuse of presidential rights. The pardons ran squarely counter to popular sentiment.

Lee’s misguided personnel management steps decreased people’s trust in government by letting them think that “rather than serving the ordinary people, the President is taking care of his friends and aides, even those who violated laws” (Rockman & Hahm, 2012, pp. 8-9). Right after his inauguration, his job approval rate dropped to 57.4 percent, much lower than his predecessor’s 85 percent. He further eroded his political base by his handling of the US beef imports issue.

Case 2: US Beef Imports and the Candlelight Protests

The candlelight vigils protesting US beef imports during the mad-cow-disease scare in March 2008 drew many people. They ranged from professional antigovernment activists and civic groups to ordinary citizens, including students and even stroller-pushing housewives, who lit candles placed in paper cups and joined the rallies. To these people, the president had compromised his people’s health to cooperate with the Americans in order to support the free trade agreement between the two countries, which has yet to be proven to be in the national interest.

However, the problem was only partly about health concerns. A more important issue was the way in which the government had made a crucial decision closely related to citizens’ daily lives. Media reports revealed that it was immediately before he flew

to the United States for a summit with US President George W. Bush that Lee ordered government officials to change the policy guidelines for importing US beef.

After three months of demonstrations, Lee's job performance rating fell to 20 percent (*Joongang Ilbo*, 2008), the lowest in history for a president still in the "honeymoon" period. Lee himself had to publicly apologize twice for resuming imports of US beef, saying in a speech, "I humbly accept the criticism that I have been negligent in carefully reading the public's mind" (*Korea Joongang Daily*, 2008). He also said that he had regarded the decision as a shortcut to economic growth and "as the president, I did not want to miss this golden opportunity" (*Korea Herald*, 2008).

In his apology address, Lee said he believed that the free trade agreement between Korea and the United States would bring enormous economic benefits to Korea and that the probability of mad cow disease occurrence was very low. This reasoning showed his efficiency-oriented and result-centered way of thinking. He did not understand that it is necessary to communicate with the public in order to get their support for a policy (Graber, 2005, p. 12). Lee misunderstood or insufficiently valued the democratic policymaking process and concentrated only on the expected results of the decision.

The rapid erosion of political support that resulted from the unpopular nominations and the decision on US beef imports seriously damaged Lee's leadership, because people started to distrust his decisions and withdraw their support for his policy agenda.

Case 3: The Cross-Country Canal and Four Major Rivers Projects

Among Lee's most controversial campaign pledges was the proposal to connect the country's inland waterways into a grand cross-country canal—a project he said would drive economic development by creating jobs, boosting tourism, and reducing the nation's reliance on road transport. However, the plan was fiercely debated by water management specialists and environmental activists as well as the opposition party, due to its projected negative impact on the environment. In a series of discussions, opposition groups raised doubts about the practicality and economic effects of the project, which panelists representing the government's side were unable to refute. Confronting strong opposition both from civil society and politicians, Lee eventually announced that he would not push for the project again.

However, the Lee administration suddenly announced the government's plan for the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project, which it said would ease anticipated water shortages and enhance the water quality of more than 70 percent of the affected areas by 2012 for an investment of 22 trillion won (\$20.84 billion).

Opposition groups argued that this was merely a repackaging of the Cross-Country

Canal Project. They contended that it was impossible to conduct an environmental assessment of the 634-kilometer-long site within the allotted four months, and that the government's expectation that the project would generate 44 trillion won worth of economic benefits was based on false data and exaggerated. People also questioned whether the project was urgent enough to justify investing such a huge amount during a period of economic hardship. Despite the controversies and criticisms, the Lee administration speedily implemented the project. It transferred financial responsibility for the project to public corporations in order to avoid criticism for increasing government debt.

Although this project was recently completed, it remains unclear whether it will produce the intended outcomes. It was recently evaluated as a failure by the Board of Audit and Inspection. Responding to that report, responsible government ministries argued that the project had been well implemented without any major problems and that it had no structural problems (*Chosun Ilbo*, 2013). This project demonstrates another failure of Lee's leadership because he was not successful in securing support for it. In pursuing the project, he never talked to opposition party leaders and never explained to the people its value and rationale.

Case 4: The Revised Plan for Sejong City

Sejong City had been designed during the previous administration as an administrative town intended to house nine government ministries, reflecting then-President Roh's vision for balanced development. The GNP initially opposed the proposal, but endorsed it in the National Assembly in 2005, facing local elections in the following year. Lee had promised to implement the original Sejong City plan several times during and after his 2007 presidential campaign. However, he changed his position, aiming to make Sejong City a self-sustaining economic hub or a city of science and education, without consulting his own party (the GNP), let alone the opposition party. He thought that it would be inefficient to divide the administrative capital between two cities and believed that if he proposed a new plan that would bring more economic benefits to the Chungcheong region, the people would accept it. However, he did not seem to have carefully considered the political aspects of this move.

In opposition to the president's plan, GNP party leader Park Geun-hye said that trust is very important in politics, that the rationale for the plan had already been discussed at length both in and out of the GNP, and that despite some problems with the original plan, the GNP had declared several times its intention to push ahead with it in order to get votes from the people in the Chungcheong region, which had supported the party in most Korean elections.

Conflict over Sejong City continued for almost a year even within the GNP, which was split between two factions, one supporting then-Representative Park and one leaning closer to the president. Although Lee's revised plan required amendment of the law, he did not make an energetic effort to persuade opponents within his own party, let alone opposition party leaders. Prime Minister Chung played a key role in advocating for the plan, but Lee himself was not at the head of this effort (D. Lee 2012). He never met with Park and other opponents of the plan.

Another example of Lee's disregard for political bridge-building occurred in relation to the national security issue caused by the sinking of the warship *Cheonan*. The leader of the opposition Democratic Party criticized the government, saying that his party did not receive any information from the government, while the government handed over a 400-page report on the sinking to the United States.

Lee's lack of effort to communicate with voters and with rival party leaders was pointed out several times especially after the candlelight vigils. In response to these criticisms and to the results of the 2010 local elections, he promised to enhance the level of communication with the people. However, it is difficult to find evidence that Lee tried to keep this promise. His attempt to enact his revised Sejong City plan ended in failure, resulting in further damage to his authority.

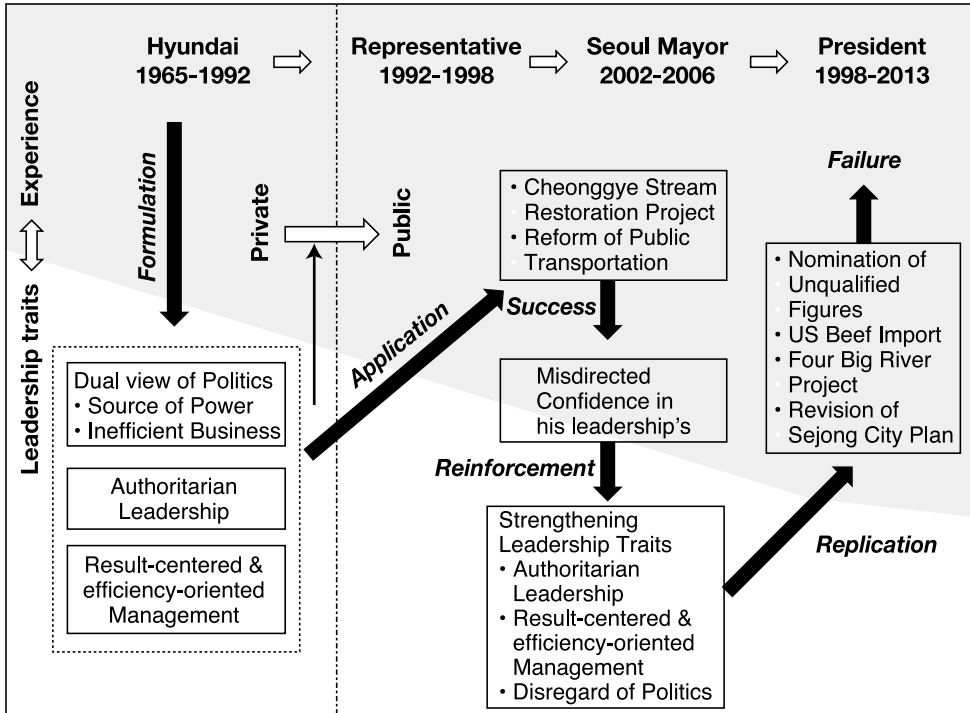
EXPLANATIONS FOR LEADERSHIP FAILURE

Lee's key leadership traits—authoritarianism, a focus on results and efficiency, and a dual view of politics—were developed during his long professional career in both the private sector and government. As illustrated in figure 1, Lee developed these traits during his time at Hyundai (M. Lee, 1995) and employed them as mayor of Seoul, where his success reinforced confidence in his leadership and helped him win the presidential election. As president, he replicated these leadership traits.

Success or failure of presidential leadership depends on the president's ability to mobilize public support for policy goals. In order to do this, the president should communicate with voters and key stakeholders. It is also critical to achieve policy wins, even small ones, within a relatively short time. When people understand their president's intentions and believe in the feasibility of the policy agenda and the president's capacity, they will support him or her.

In fact, President Lee failed from the outset to secure support. He promised morality, economic prosperity, and problem-solving in his inaugural address. However, his deeds did not match his words. His nomination of unqualified people as cabinet members and close aides and his hasty and careless decision on US beef imports tarnished his

Figure 1. Formation and Reinforcement of President Lee's Leadership Traits



The gray area summarizes Lee's experiences and major policy initiatives; the white area summarizes his leadership traits. The black arrows show the path of these leadership traits from formation through reinforcement to replication.

relationship with voters and politicians. His administration suffered political gridlock, and his policy agenda lost momentum during the precious first six months of his term. Lee's mistakes continued; his obstinate pursuit of engineering projects created issues that the subsequent administration will have to deal with. The attempt to revise the Sejong City plan without consulting with political leaders caused cleavages within the governing party and the National Assembly. Lee's reluctance to reach out to people in Sejong City and nearby areas increased people's distrust in him.

It is not yet known why Lee so persistently pursued this project despite the significant opposition. Perhaps he wished to leave a memorable legacy. He might have thought that the Four Major Rivers Restoration Project was similar to his successful Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project. The project's official justification, its nature as an engineering work, and the manner and speed of its implementation were almost the same as those of the Cheonggye project. He might have thought that once the first stages were implemented, people would come to support it. However, there was a key difference

that Lee apparently failed to take into account: a national government project, especially one initiated by a president, inevitably involves input from many actors, including potential political enemies—unlike Seoul, where he had almost total control.

How can these consecutive missteps be explained? Why did Lee so often break his promises to the people?

The category-based decision-making model may be useful in exploring these questions. On the whole, Lee is a category-based thinker rather than an attribute-based thinker. He does not favor organizational and process-oriented thinking (Hahm & Choi 2009, p. 627). Category-based decision-makers show in-group favoritism in resource allocation; Lee allocated public offices to people he knew well. Category-based decision-makers emphasize between-group differences; he divided people into two groups, opponents and non-opponents.

Category-based decision-makers seek patterns that fit their prior knowledge and then apply the content, decisions, evaluations, rules, and patterns associated with that prior knowledge to understanding new information. In such a way, Lee might have regarded the Four Major Rivers Project as an expanded model of the Cheonggye Stream Restoration Project. Since the fit was good enough, he did not need to deliberate further, because he already had a ready-made approach.

Category-based decision-makers are likely to be rigid and authoritarian; Lee could not change his negative perspective on politicians and the political process. As Hahm and Choi (2009, p. 625) point out, he does not like politicians. He defined his role as president as a commander, just as he had been in his past professional positions. He felt no need to negotiate or cooperate with other politicians.

Rather, he had a need for mastery of problem solving (Hahm & Choi, 2009, pp. 627-628), the category-based cognitive style of an engineer, and a belief in the usefulness of programmatic action. These characteristics reinforced each other throughout his career from the mid-1960s to the 1980s and resulted in authoritarian and results- and efficiency-oriented leadership. His leadership style as mayor emphasized all of these traits together, and the success of his mayorship solidified them.

Lee entered the presidency as a hero who won in a landslide based on his achievements as Seoul mayor. By sticking to the leadership style he had already developed, he was able to succeed as mayor. When he became president, however, the political and policy environment changed in ways he could not understand.

First, Seoul is a relatively small government compared with the national government of Korea. While the total number of public officials in Seoul City is about 12,000, that of the national government is about 630,000 officials, working in 15 ministries and more than 30 agencies. Managing the national government is quite complicated and requires systematic operating systems to achieve the presidential policy agenda. However, as

Hahm and Choi (2009, pp. 626-630) point out, one of Lee's greatest weaknesses as a public manager was that he did not care about the issues of organization and staffing in the Blue House. This seriously undermined his policy process.

Second, unlike in Seoul, organized opposition groups—such as the opposition party, ideologically committed leftist groups, NGOs, and civic movement groups—contest virtually every government decision at the national level.

Third, since Korea is a politically highly centralized society, media coverage of the president and the national government is broad and intense. This means that every action of the national government becomes the object of scrutiny by citizens and NGOs, not to mention the opposition party; nothing can be hidden. Although Lee was quite successful in dealing with the media as mayor, he was unable to establish good relationships with them as president.

These differences worked against Lee and made big differences in both the governing process and the performance of his presidency.

CONCLUSION: THE “POISONED CHALICE” OF SUCCESSFUL EXPERIENCE

Lee's experience at Hyundai formed his leadership traits, which were reinforced by his success as mayor of Seoul. But this very success became a “poisoned chalice” for his conduct as president. It enhanced his self-confidence and commitment to his leadership style and made it easier for him to apply the same approach to the presidency. Paradoxically, what brought him to the presidency led to its failure; he remained trapped in past glory.

This analysis has two implications for the study of presidential leadership. First, professional careers prior to the office of president affect the conduct of a presidency, and this effect can be negative or positive. In Lee's case, it was obviously negative. Second, this study confirms Rockman's (1984) argument that prior professional success does not guarantee presidential success.

However, questions remain. Is prior experience irrelevant to the success of a presidency? If not, what kind of professional experience is needed for a president to succeed? Although it may be impossible to answer these questions in a word, *quality* experience, as cited by Neustadt, could be a likely answer. What such quality experience entails is a question requiring further study and analysis.

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