

Research Article

## Moon Jae In: A Contemporary Strategic and Visionary Leader

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**Abstract:** Leadership, as a social phenomenon, has emerged in any society regardless of geography, culture and nationality. Antique China and Greek philosophers were respected as leaders whose advices were valuable and famous authors like Homer and Machiavelli authenticated leaders' smart and masterly strategies. As for today's global world, leaders have to display various roles in order to cope with the changing external and internal environments and direct their followers by focusing on general and strategic problems so as to create a vision that will shape the future. Developing strategies and creating a clear vision is not only a need for the organizations, but also a crucial need for the nations to have peaceful and safe ties and connections in terms of international relations. In this sense, the president of South Korea Moon Jae In, seem to display visionary and strategic leadership roles, in the context of his being the first South Korean leader that have melted the ice between North Korea since the Korean War. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the leadership traits of Moon Jae In, in the frame of visionary and strategic leadership styles. With this purpose a literature review has been performed in the context of leadership styles, the personal and political lives of Moon Jae In have been researched and the leadership traits of South Korean leader have tried to be examined in order to prove that he carries strategic and visionary leadership traits. According to the evaluations, Moon Jae In carries almost all characteristics of both strategic and visionary leadership styles.

**Keywords:** Moon Jae In, South Korea, North Korea, Strategic Leadership, Visionary Leadership

### Originality of the Study

In the frame of the purpose of the study, the literature have been scrutinized. Although there are numerous studies and researches on leadership styles, including strategic and visionary leadership, there are no studies that examines the leadership styles of South Korean Leader Moon Jae In. In this sense, this study constitutes originality and it is expected to shed light for future researchers in terms of examining the leadership styles of Asian leaders in order to draw a frame of the continent in the context of leadership.

### Limitations

As afore mentioned, because of the fact that there are no studies or researches that examine the leadership traits of South Korean leader Moon Jae In, have constituted an obstacle in the process of literature review. Therefore, a limited number of sources have been reached and the examination have been conducted via these resources.

### 1. Introduction

History, has generally been recorded via famous leaders lives (Howell and Costley 2006). Some questions related to leadership have caused speculation for a long time; but with the beginning of the 20th century leadership concept has started to be an important subject to scientific researches (Yukl, 2002).

The date that leadership was started to be considered as an effective factor in organizations, goes back to 1970's. Before that era, organizations' external environments were accepted as the defining factors of organizational behaviour and

organizational success. With the beginning of 1970's, on the other hand, organizational success was started to be related with leadership. John Child, who is a famous organizational theorist, in his research dated 1972 related organizational success with leaders' decision-making authority, rather than environmental factors. This theory of Child is accepted as a mile stone for the role of leaders in organizations in terms of leaders' strategic role. Especially from 1980's on, leadership have started to be evaluated in strategic process perception, rather than being evaluated only in organizational leadership perception (Elma, 2010). Nowadays, there is a more expanded strategic leadership perception; because of the fact that globalization have caused chaos and the environment is changing constantly. In this sense, national leaders constitute great importance in terms of their traits and behaviours, which affect a whole nation. The purpose of this study is to examine Moon Jae In's leadership traits in the context of strategic and visionary leadership styles. In this sense, the characteristic traits and leadership traits of Moon have been examined, strategic leadership and visionary leadership have been scrutinized and it has been tried to put forward the fact that Moon carries strategic and visionary leadership traits. (Besler, 2004).

### 2. A Leader Who Reshapes the Destiny of A Nation: Moon Jae In

Moon Jae-In was born on a small island called Geoje, in South Korea on January 24, 1953, at the end of the Korean War. His childhood years passed in poverty. His parents, who had fled the North Korean communist regime, struggled to keep the

family out of poverty. Despite the hard conditions of his life, Moon proved to be a bright and smart child and he was accepted into the prestigious Gyeongnam Middle School in Busan. His activist tendencies were sparked when he was a student at Kyungnam High School and he led protests against President Park Chung-hee while he was a student of law faculty at Kyung Hee University. He even got arrested at one of his protests. Being a successful student Moon maintained his academic excellence through the Judicial Research and Training Institute and graduated with second degree in 1982. Nevertheless, he was disqualified from becoming a judge due to his extensive involvement with anti-government protests. Around this time Moon met Roh Moo-hyun, another lawyer who shared many of his values. They teamed up to run a Busan law firm that specialized in human rights, often taking on cases for students and low-wage laborers ([www.biography.com/people/moon-jae-in](http://www.biography.com/people/moon-jae-in)).

Moon continued running the law firm after Roh left to continue a successful political career in 1987. In 2002, after Roh was elected South Korea's president, Moon joined his old friend as senior secretary for civic affairs. In 2004, he contributed in the opening of Kaesong Industrial Park, which is a joint economic project between the North and South Korean governments and in 2007, he was appointed to Roh's chief of staff and became the chairperson of the promotion committee for a summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong-il. In 2012, Moon was elected as a national assemblyman out of the Sasang-gu District in Busan. That year he also ran for president against Park Geun-hye, the daughter of his old antagonist, Park Chung-hee. In 2015, he became the chairperson of the New Politics Alliance for Democracy, which soon became the Democratic Party of Korea. In late 2016, Moon was at the forefront of the protests calling for the president's ouster, leading to her impeachment and formal removal from office on March 10, 2017. Moon was the leading candidate for the presidency. He promised firm but patient dealings with the increasingly aggressive tactics of North Korea, expressing hope in a reunified peninsula, and pledged to enact a stimulus plan to combat a rising unemployment rate. On May 9, 2017, he almost doubled the vote of his closest rival and won the 19th South Korean presidential election ([www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)).

At that time, the president faced with the problem of North Korea leader Kim Jong-Un's attempts to develop nuclear weapons program. While discussing on the issue with U.S. President Donald Trump, Moon demonstrated that he would have a firm say in matters of negotiation and military strategy: In June 2017, he halted the activation of the U.S.-installed Terminal High Altitude Air Defense system (THAAD), pending an environmental review. A few months later, during his state of the nation address at the National Assembly, the president reaffirmed his goal of eliminating nuclear weapons on the peninsula and he added that North Korea's nuclear state cannot be accepted because of the joint agreement between the two Koreas on denuclearization ([www.cnnturk.com](http://www.cnnturk.com)).

2018 started in progress in terms of the mentioned issue. In January, representatives from North and South Korea met at the border truce village of Panmunjom, resulting in an agreement to have their athletes march under the banner of a unified Korea at the 2018 Winter Olympics, held the following month in Pyeong Chang, South Korea. Moreover, the North Korean leader sent his sister Kim Yo-jong as an emissary to the Games. The lines of communication remained open even after the conclusion of the Olympics, with some of President Moon's top aides traveling to Pyongyang for the first visit by South Korean officials since Kim took power in 2011. The aides also relayed Kim's willingness to talk with U.S. officials to their counterparts in Washington, D.C., setting the stage for a historic summit on that front ([www.cnnturk.com](http://www.cnnturk.com))

On April 27, thanks to his willingness to reach out his southern neighbours, Kim became the first North Korean leader to cross the border into South Korea, for a meeting with Moon in Panmunjom. The partly broadcasted event represented warm embraces and symbolic flourishes, as well as discussions on the important issues facing the two countries: Along with announcing that they wanted a formal end to the Korean War, which wound down with a truce but not an armistice in 1953, the two leaders also signed a statement in which they confirmed the common goal of realizing, through complete denuclearization, a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula ([www.biography.com](http://www.biography.com)).

It is also worth to mention that during his visit to Singapore, Moon evaluated his meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un and pointed out the fact that Kim Jong-Un would be happy to get rid of the ideological conflicts and make North Korea a normal country. He also added that it was compulsory to create a chance for North Korea, in order to make the country display her role as a responsible member of international society. Here, it is also valuable to point out that Moon is the first South Korean leader that paid a formal visit to Singapore, after 15 years (<https://tr.sputniknews.com>).

### 3. Strategic Leadership

The word strategy, is composed of two Greek words; "stratos", meaning human society and "egy", meaning to direct (Adair, 2004). In 1960's and in the beginning of 1970's top managers were persuaded that they had very little effect on decision making and the environmental conditions that the organizations are in were accepted as the most effective factors on organizational behaviour and organizational outcomes, and the changes on the organizations' economical performance were explained via various analysis (Besler, 2004).

According to Drucker (1993), strategy is the factor that makes an organization opportunist in terms of its aims. He also puts forward that in the fast changing and ambiguous world, strategy can be founded on specific bases:

1. The descending ratio of birth in the developed world
2. The changes in usable income distribution
3. Re-definition of performance
4. Global race

5. The increasing incompatibility between economical globalization and political secessions.

As for strategic leadership, the theory was first developed by Hambrick and Mason (1984) as the top expertise of dominant coalition effects of organizational outcomes, in one of their studies.

Strategic leadership, builds a bridge among past, today and future by verifying the core value and identity in order to provide sustainability and integrity. Strategic leadership focuses on organizational sources such as human, structure and social capital and tries to develop them in the context of facing with opportunities and threats. In this frame strategic leadership provides a vision and a route map that develop and innovate the organization by defining the meaning of environmental ambiguity and chaos (Boal and Schultz, 2007).

According to Sullivan, strategic leadership is to manage and control organization's core activities such as aim, culture, strategy and main identities (Besler, 2004). According to Davies, the key findings of strategic leadership are effective managerial board, shared strategic direction and a powerful strategic management process. In this sense, the qualities of a strategic leader can be defined as strategic perception, decision making ability, evaluating others and gaining success via risk, flexibility, integrity and independency. In this sense strategic leadership is to shape the vision that structures organizations' target and quality, deciding on the strategy that consists decision makers, including shareholders and developing shareholders' values (Ho, 2005; Akgemci, 2008).

In an environment that strategic management is accepted as a function of top management, leadership acts as an important definer in creating strategy especially in order not to fall behind the rivals in the global competitive environment. Therefore, leaders are the main actors that define strategies, apply strategies and manage the strategic management process (Odabaş, 2004).

According to some scholars strategic leaders are characters that possess roles, which requires more than one leadership style. According to these kind of definitions strategic leader is the person that creates vision, acts as an entrepreneur, develops strategy, applies strategy, performs as CEO, structures culture and motivate followers (Besler, 2004). Strategic leaders both empowers the organization by their effect and decisions and create superiority on rivals (Elma, 2010).

As it can be understood strategic leadership is to predict and design the changes, to provide flexibility in transition process and to empower others in this process. A strategic leader, who is multi-functioned, creates the potential of providing change via others, include the whole organization in change process and exceed the functional horizons. In today's fast changing technological and social environment strategic leaders have to know how to cope with human nature (Taş, 2009).

In this sense, the qualities that strategic leaders should possess can be defined as follows (Ülgen and Mirze, 2004; Thompson, 1990):

- Creating vision
- Pioneering the application of the strategy

- Taking precautions in terms of applying the strategy and increasing the strategical performance
- Providing the strategic and effective use of strategy
- Affecting others' feelings, thoughts and behaviours in a positive way
- Coping with the ambiguity
- Creating a sense of duty
- Making brave decisions suitable for environmental conditions
- Learning from experiences
- Being flexible
- Providing ethical standards
- Predicting future
- Managing human resources effectively
- Gaining trusts of subordinates
- Questioning and developing own paradigms and competencies
- Responding changing conditions, recognising new opportunities and supporting innovative ideas
- Sustaining good relations with shareholders
- Structuring consensus in strategy formulation and application and controlling power struggles
- Gathering information during the strategy application process (stratejikliderlik2)

To sum up, visionary leaders are entrepreneurs, strategists, chiefs of managerial board, strategy applicers, process integrators, coaches, mentors, conflict dealers, masters, speakers, representators, motivators and policy definers. They are the characters that can integrate and display a number of these roles when it is necessary (Besler, 2004).

#### 4. Visionary Leadership

Although the concept of vision is old in terms of its origin, it can be considered as new in terms of its usage in organizations. The word "Visio", which was derived from Latin verb "videre" that have various different meanings, is being alert and understanding. Visionary people, on the other hand, are defined as dreamers (Erçetin, 2000). In this sense, vision has an individual characteristic that is discussed about its meaning and cannot be reached a consensus. However, in today's global world there is need for a clear and comprehensive vision in order to achieve the targets (Papatya, 1998).

Vision is creating your own future. When individuals believe in shaping their own future via thoughts and actions, vision gains power (Özden, 2002). Vision is not just predicting the future but also making decisions related to future. It is the expression that puts forward organization's prospective targets and a route map in terms of how to achieve these targets (Kılıç, 2010). Vision is the messenger of the desired world (Hamedoğlu, 2001).

Although it is not known exactly when the concept "vision" was accepted in management literature, it has been started to be used widely in 1990's. Since the pioneer studies of Burns (1978), Bennis (1983), Bass (1985) and Tichy and Devanna (1986), the researches in the literature have expanded and

questions like “What should be the new era’s leadership approach?”, “What is the main power of success?” have been put forward via various disciplines and researches. Conger (1999) defines vision as definite targets that will provide success in the future and according to Boal and Bryson (1988) vision is the picture of future and it puts forward all targets clearly (Strange and Mumford, 2002).

As for visionary leadership, this kind of leaders can foresee the future with a new perspective and they can analyse the new perspective via superior ability and competency. Visionary leaders can convey vision to all units of the organization. They do not only possess power but also can affect the followers via thoughts (Bennis, 1996)

Visionary leadership, is the ability of developing and conveying visions that will affect and urge people; because people do not follow people but visions (Brenghelmann, 1995). Becoming a visionary leader requires some core qualities (Çelik, 1997):

*a. Seeing the way:* For visionary leadership, seeing the way constitutes great importance. Way, is the future image and the target that needs to be achieved. Visionary leaders have to see the most appropriate way among all ways and this requires a sense of intuition. Visionary leaders open the mystical curtains of future via intuition power and shed light to the future. They frame the map of the future, which is accepted as vision.

*b. Walking on the way:* The success of visionary leader is not only limited with seeing the way. There are a lot of leaders who see the way but do not walk on the way. Visionary leaders, on the other hand, are the ones who succeed in walking on the way. Walking on the way points out the determination of the leader. Via walking on the way, the vision can be reached. If the way that is seen and the way that is walked on are different, vision cannot be reached.

*c. Being the way:* Another important role of visionary leaders is being the way; because of the fact that they are the pioneers who lead others and open new ways via the new strategies that they produce. Followers try to walk on the way that the leaders open for them. Being the way requires serious sacrifices. Visionary leaders can put his way and shoulder a serious responsibility, or they can even lose their lives while trying to realise a vision. Therefore visionary leaders try to find a new way in order to realise their vision. The way that is structured by the integration of intuition and thoughts, provides the vision to be reached.

Synder and Graves, define visionary leadership similarly as directing the energy and sources of the leader and the followers to a definite target and structure an image (Hackett and Spurgeon, 1996). Gaining success in global competition, depends on vision that carries future to today. In organizational context, on the other hand, vision is designing, developing and sharing the future that is wished for the organization. The definition of Senge, supports this description: “Vision is defining the aims of the organization related to the future”. Vision, helps organizations to structure the aims via shaping and directing the future of the organization. Vision declaration shows the point that is required to be reached and the position when that point is

reached (Senge, et. al., 1994).

To sum up, visionary leadership is the ability to create a vision that is reliable and attractive for the organization. If this vision can be selected and applied in an appropriate way, it empowers all the sources including employees’ abilities and competencies. A visionary leader is the person who creates the vision and who has the ability to explain and convey this vision to the others. The way to be followed and the targets to be achieved have to be defined and they have to be conveyed to the followers in a clear communication way. The activities should also be defined clearly in order to make the vision applicable in different conditions. A visionary leader do not only convey the vision to the followers by word of mouth but also reflects the vision via behaviours (Robbins, 2000). In today’s global world visionary leaders have to predict the future, have to create a vision with the followers that will take the organization to success and follow the way to success by structuring powerful strategies that will transfer threats into opportunities, which is a proactive approach. Visionary leaders should follow the innovations and developments and believe in the necessity of training and education in order to create a learning organization. They should inspire their followers, delegate authority and include the followers in the processes (Tekin and Ehtiyar, 2011).

### Conclusion

The emergence of leadership is as old as humanity history. Humanbeings, cannot perform some activities on their own. There is need for collaboration in order to achieve the aims and to be successful and effective. Therefore, there is a need for a leader that will provide this collaboration and make the followers work towards certain aims in harmony and joy (Ceylan, 1997).

In the context of national leaders, leadership traits constitute much more importance in terms of the effect on a whole nation and on international relations. In this sense, in this study it is tried to examine the leadership traits of Moon Jae In, the leader of South Korea, in the frame of strategic leadership and visionary leadership. The fact that he is the only leader since the Korean War who melted the ice between two Koreas, is the emergence point of this study.

Strategic leadership, as it is afore mentioned, builds a bridge among past, today and future by verifying the core value and identity in order to provide sustainability and integrity. In this frame strategic leaders provide a vision and a route map that will help to get rid of the environmental ambiguity and chaos. Therefore, the qualities of a strategic leader are *strategic perception, decision making ability, evaluating others and gaining success via risk, flexibility, integrity and independency*.

As for visionary leadership, they can predict the future with a new perspective and they can analyse the new perspective via superior ability and competency. They do not only possess power but also can affect the followers via thoughts. Visionary leadership, is the ability of developing and conveying visions that will affect and urge people; because people do not follow people but visions. The core qualities of visionary leadership

are *seeing the way, walking on the way and being the way*.

Moon Jae In, as it is tried to be explained in the first section of this study, has built a bridge between past, today and future of South Korea in the sense that he has stopped the conflicts that have been going on since past eras between two Koreas. Therefore, the relationships have become mild for today, which means that this situation is very likely to continue in the future as well. He has structured a route map, has developed strategic decisions, has taken risks and thus achieved his target, which is having good relations with North Korea. In this sense, it can easily be understood that he has the superior ability of predicting the future and thus, creating a vision. As a national leader *he has seen the way*, which constitutes taking steps for melting the ice between two Koreas; *he has walked on the way*, which constitutes his attempts to start a new and clean era in terms of the relationships with North Korea and *he has acted as the way*. Here, it is worthless to mention again the fact that *people do not follow people but visions*. In this sense, it is obvious that Moon Jae In has a great positive impact on his followers, which are South Korean citizens, and he has the ability to urge them to move with him on the way that is defined via the vision.

To sum up, South Korean leader Moon Jae In obviously displays the qualities and traits of both strategic and visionary leadership styles. This constitutes great value for the country in the sense that the country has had a long term tense relations with North Korea, which has caused difficulties in every aspect. Therefore it seems that from now on the two Koreas will have positive relations thanks to both Moon Jae In's strategies and strong visions and Kim Jung-On's willingness to melt the ice.

For future researches, it would be valuable for the literature to examine the Asian leaders in terms of their leadership traits and to draw a frame of the continent, which will contribute in analysing the international relationships among both the Asian countries and among other countries.

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