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ENHANCING NATIONAL RESILIENCE: STRATEGIC AND CRITICAL THINKING, AND THE WOGOS APPROACH IN MALAYSIA'S COVID-19 RESPONSE

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Abstract:

Strategic and critical thinking skills are important at times of crisis, and essential for fortifying and preserving national resilience, as they enable comprehensive analysis, proactive planning, and effective decision-making to safeguard a nation's interests, security, and long-term viability in an ever-evolving global landscape. This article addresses how Malaysia fought the COVID-19 outbreak with the Whole of Government, Whole of Society or WoGoS approach and, strategic and critical thinking skills. Using the recent COVID-19 pandemic as a case study, this article integrates coordination and collaboration frameworks to illustrate how the country utilised strategic and critical thinking skills in key decision-making processes during the crisis. It portrays the struggle of the country in the wake of the pandemic and gives testimony to the WoGoS approach. Malaysia's response revealed several notable findings, emphasising the significance of digitalisation, transparent communication, and preparedness for future similar events. Digitalisation and transparent communication are strongly linked to strategic and critical thinking, particularly in fostering coordination, collaboration, and innovation. By effectively incorporating strategic and critical thinking skills into both policymaking and contingency planning to address the challenge, and having public service agencies collaborate across different sectors, Malaysia was able to overcome the crisis and lay the foundation for long-term growth and development. It is evident that strategic and critical thinking skills are crucial in enhancing national power, but there is also the need to apply the WoGoS approach, not only during the crisis but in daily normal administration.

Keywords:

Strategic And Critical Thinking Skills, Wogos, National Resilience, COVID-19 Pandemic, Coordination, Collaboration

Introduction

The utilisation of strategic and critical thinking abilities is crucial in enhancing national power through the implementation of a comprehensive "Whole of Government, Whole of Society" (WoGoS) approach. The idea of WoGoS seeks to deal with complex emergencies that may emerge by creating effective communication, cohesion, coherence, and coordination (4Cs) mechanism among government departments and agencies as well as the public and private sectors, people, and patients (4Ps) (Yeo, 2022). Strategic and critical thinking skills are used in planning and making decisions to achieve long-term goals and the 4Ps approach aims to use these skills to the advantage of the country (Herbert & Marquette, 2021; Skodnik, 2020; Yamin, 2022). As mentioned, the inter-departmental approach and collaboration between authorities and social actors are emphasised during crisis management. In situations such as natural disasters or pandemics, Zartarian et al. (2022) and Junker and Mattsson (2021) acknowledged the importance of the Whole of Government aspect that focuses on the merging of varied government agency activities, departments, and governance levels to achieve a truly integrated and multifaceted response. Simultaneously, the Whole of Society dimension perceives that engaging and motivating the broader community including non-governmental organisations, businesspeople, academic institutions, and individual contributors make a crucial contribution towards the crisis management and recovery efforts (Benny et al., 2023; Parnas, 2022). Therefore, the WoGoS approach unites different government agencies and levels of governance for a coordinated response, highlighting the essential role of community involvement, including NGOs, businesses, academic institutions, and individuals, in managing and recovering from crises.

The primary objective of this research is to explore the methods and strategies employed by Malaysia to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study focuses on the utilisation of strategic and critical thinking skills, which are essential for effective decision-making and problem-solving in times of crisis. Additionally, it examines the implementation of the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach, a comprehensive and collaborative framework that involves coordinated efforts across various government sectors and societal groups. By analysing these components, the study aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of Malaysia's response to the outbreak and offer valuable lessons for managing future public health emergencies.

The speech by the former Health Director-General of Malaysia is taken as a case study because it offers expert insight into the strategic and critical decision-making processes employed during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a key figure directly involved in managing the crisis, his speech provides a unique perspective on the application of the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach, demonstrating how various sectors coordinated and collaborated to address the outbreak. This context-specific narrative not only articulates the policies and strategies used but also serves as official documentation, enabling researchers to analyse and learn from Malaysia's response. By examining this speech, the study aims to extract valuable lessons and best practices in crisis management and public health.

This research employs a case study on the recent pandemic, drawing from a speech by the former Health Director-General of Malaysia, to emphasise the importance of strategic and critical thinking skills, as well as the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach, in crisis situations. The research questions posed were as follows:

RQ1: How did strategic and critical thinking skills influence the decision-making and problem-solving processes in Malaysia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

RQ2: In what ways did the implementation of the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach enhance the effectiveness of Malaysia's efforts to manage and mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak?

Literature Review

The Significance of Strategic and Critical Thinking Skills

The WoGoS approach places great emphasis on the importance of strategic and critical thinking in which there are diverse justifications. First, it allows stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the various reasons that contribute to our country being in a difficult position. Namwambah (2020) stated that a nation's primary responsibility is to ensure security for its citizens in all forms. Achieving national security requires the most capable individuals in society, who excel in critical thinking, planning, policymaking, and programme implementation and evaluation. Critical thinking, which is a counterpart to strategic planning, made it possible to conduct thorough research, adopt smart decision-making processes, and quickly address emerging problems (Sulaiman, 2024). Additionally, Rieckmann (2011) claimed that critical thinking is an essential skill that is required of learners to be able to respond responsibly to social, economic, or environmental issues and to be able to make responsible decisions on how to positively impact development opportunities for a more sustainable future. Asobee (2021) and Smriti et al. (2021) stated that strategic thinking involves setting goals, identifying opportunities and challenges, and developing action plans, all of which require critical thinking skills to assess information, consider alternatives, and anticipate potential outcomes. By applying critical thinking, one can make more informed and effective strategic decisions (Papathanasiou et al., 2014; Turan et al., 2019). These points demonstrate that strategic and critical thinking are crucial for problem analysis and decision-making, as they complement each other in multiple ways. This is particularly important in the WoGoS approach, where coordination and collaboration are key. For example, strategic thinking aids in aligning the efforts of different sectors and organisations towards a common vision, ensuring that actions taken by various entities are synergistic and complementary, and critical thinking facilitates effective communication and understanding among diverse stakeholders by promoting logical reasoning and clear articulation of ideas.

Firstly, strategic thinking is the core for designing sound long-term strategies to strengthen the power of the nation. Strategic thoughts consist of where an organisation plans to be in the future to meet its objectives, and then what resources it needs to get there (Hrebiniak, 2013). The thinking element of strategic planning under the WoGoS approach is geared towards ensuring harmonious participation of the public sector, private sector, and civil society organisations in steering towards a common goal. The scope of perceptive thinking involves analysing internal and external factors to predict future events and avoid potential issues. Sherman (2019) posited that internal factors are associated with the organisation's operations, and with things that contribute to those operations, such as the company's culture, human resources, management approach, employees' skills, company's products and services, organisational effectiveness, financial condition, etc. Internal factors have a great impact on the formation of an organisation's identity and capabilities and on its ability to put strategically integrated strategies into practice (Haarhaus & Liening, 2020). On the other hand, external stimuli encompass the external environment organisations are in, including fashion creation trends, competition

levels, economic situation, law restrictions, technological progress, social change, demographics, and environmental problems (Liu et al., 2020) that these organisations are supposed to respond to. This may result with the country taking actions that protect its national interests. Malaysia's potential has been harnessed as leaders and staff effectively utilise strengths and opportunities while successfully addressing weaknesses and threats (Abdul Rani et al., 2018; Muhammad Nur Amir, 2021).

Furthermore, as argued by Ahlstrand et al. (2001), strategic thinking helps countries be better prepared for the volatile globalised environment through the application of integrated and thorough policies aimed at achieving collective goals. Under WoGoS, strategic planning of Malaysia uses its varied abundance of resources and skills, fosters innovation, and creativity, and encompasses fundamental issues such as ecology and cybersecurity (Seow, 2023). Malaysia demonstrates high-level planning through the 2050 National Transformation (TN50) programme. TN50 is a concerted effort to engage people from different backgrounds to work together and come up with a future for Malaysia and a plan for how to achieve it. These endeavours set forth enduring goals for economic development, social advancement, and governmental restructuring. They serve as a roadmap for continuous advancement, as highlighted by the Economic Planning Unit of Malaysia (2020). The Malaysian economy implemented WoGoS to navigate world economies amid unpredictability and acquire the conditions to attain long-term development and growth.

Secondly, Bennet and Turner (2024) in their book "Knowledge Capacities Igniting Whole Thought" claimed critical thinking plays a crucial role in enhancing the intellectual capacity, resilience, and strategic prowess of a nation, thereby contributing significantly to its national resilience and influence on the world stage. Namwambah's (2020) article explores the idea of national security and emphasises how critical thinking enhances the capability to fulfil national security responsibilities. He claimed that those responsible for national security instruments should be astute, intellectual, and possess strong critical thinking skills. At a more general level, the evaluation of gathered information for qualities such as clarity, accuracy, and relevance were recognised by Facione (1990 & 2011) as essential skills in critical thinking. These skills are considered vital for comprehending complex or intricate topics such as disasters or crises faced by a nation. Through WoGoS strategy, people with these skills explore socio-economic, political, and security aspects in detail, providing suitable means for other policymakers and citizens to analyse issues of concern comprehensively. Additionally, introducing critical thinking should be a priority since it supports making a transparent and accountable international government system. Critical thinking essentially leads to a better judgment of decision options, and it gives the initiatives and programmes credibility, by examining assumptions, identifying biases, and evaluating thoroughly the evidence (Ennis, 2015). In terms of applying WoGoS during the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's strategy began with governance that includes multiple key stakeholders and the use of critical thinking to guard against manipulation, misinformation, and corruption, particularly during significant decision-making processes. This approach has strengthened trust and credibility within the system which enhance public support. When citizens trust the government and its institutions, they are more likely to support policies and initiatives, leading to a more unified and cooperative society. This unity can bolster national resilience and stability (Kaim et al., 2024; Razi et al., 2024).

It can be asserted that Malaysia requires strategic and critical thinking skills to substantially improve virtually every aspect of the governance process, promote national interests, and strengthen the country's international influence. Mental qualities such as reliability, foresight, and cohesiveness are important for creating a strategy that is unified (all parts working together) and focused on achieving specific goals or outcomes (Ghobakhloo et al., 2024; Hussain et al., 2024; Sartori & Marinho, 2023). This way, the stakeholders become unified and together contribute to sustainable development and security in the growing global world. Attempts at the practical application of the WoGoS concept via teaching and other avenues will result in these major issues' success.

Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) Approach

The WoGoS approach, as mentioned earlier, aims to address complex emergencies by establishing an effective 4Cs mechanism: communication, cohesion, coherence, and coordination, among government departments and agencies, the public and private sectors, and individuals, including patients. The approach enforces cooperation, resilience, and inclusivity among all the stakeholder groups when addressing complex issues by fully integrating both approaches between the government departments and society (Haghighat et al., 2023; Määttä, 2021). It is achieved by having transparent goals, unwavering commitment from the leaders, and cooperation on common systems as well as chances to support the initiative. Within this idea of community resilience, the adaptation of strategic thinking, along with knowledge and other qualities of citizenship, the government and local authorities are demanded to be ready to deal with problems. The UK Government Risk and Resilience Guide mentions that a strategic plan which looks at data, measures results, and collaborates with external resources, is the key in dealing with crisis and not being distracted by any obstacles and proceeding with the necessary action (Wigell et al., 2021).

During a pandemic, it is essential to have models and interventions that effectively control or address the crisis while considering varying levels of risk and susceptibility to the disease. The complexity of the COVID-19 crisis, with its social, economic, and health aspects, highlights the need for a socio-ecological approach or understanding the pandemic through a socio-ecological lens (Mormina et al., 2024). This approach emphasises an understanding of health that begins with "the individuals" (not the disease) and recognises the contextual and multidimensional nature of well-being (Paul et al., 2020). The term "individuals" encompasses the interconnectedness of human-nature relationships, ecosystem performance, social inequities, and planetary boundaries. These elements intersect and mutually reinforce each other in promoting health and preventing disease in a globalised world (de Castaneda et al., 2023, Thoradeniya & Jayasinghe, 2021). Ortenzi et al. (2022) claimed that at an operational level, the pandemic requires a WoGoS or unified approach involving all branches of the government and the entire society to effectively manage the pandemic.

On the contrary, in any emergency such as the pandemic, the National Security Policy (NSP) will be consulted. The NSP is relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic as it provides a framework for guiding government responses to emergencies that threaten national health and stability. It may outline protocols for coordination among various agencies, allocation of resources, and strategies for managing public health crises such as the COVID-19. Despite the concept of the NSP being voiced as the main mechanism for dealing with complex and multifaceted security challenges, there is some degree of confusion on what details and operations, and the main strategies of the NSP. Even so, the NSP alone was not enough to manage the crisis as it was

reviewed in 2021, to ensure that all the primary strategies are suitable in confronting the current form of security threats of the COVID-19 pandemic (The Malay Mail, 2021). In the same report, Muhyiddin, who is also the chairman of the National Security Council (MKN), said the newly introduced approach encompasses of the concept of Comprehensive Security (COMSEC), which is a new doctrine that combines the elements of internal security, defence, public order, political, economic, social, public health, and environment. A comprehensive security plan employing a WoGoS approach integrates efforts across all governmental sectors and engages the entire population in safeguarding against various threats. This approach recognises that security challenges, such as pandemics, encompasses not only traditional defence measures but also health, economic, and social dimensions.

There are several examples of incidents that pointed to the urgent need for WoGoS approach. Malaysia's challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic ranged from weak communication strategies to the poor implementation of health protocols and vaccination schedules, which led to the escalated concern and distrust of the public. For example, the spread of inaccurate information and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 through social media and other channels led to confusion and mistrust in official guidance and public health measures. Additionally, the uncontrolled spreading of disinformation on social media made the fight against the disease and reducing its spread even harder. This case illustrates the need for Malaysia to promptly step up to rectify the deficiencies and seamless cooperation between the healthcare and other sectors to effectively contain COVID -19 (WHO, 2021).

Apart from the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia also faced other crises or disasters in the past such as the yearly flooding, tragedy of Highland Towers, and landslide incidents. These occasions have revealed the required introduction of the WoGoS approach as well as the significance of strategic and critical thinking in the successful dealing with such situations. This helps define the policy of public affairs and defence in the complex international system, preserve and increase national power and prestige, and motivate national resilience and sustainable development. This article analyses strategic and critical thinking competencies under the WoGoS approach for sustaining and securing national power according to systems thinking theory (Cabrera et al., 2008; Caldwell, 2012; Haynes et al., 2020) which helps in analysing how various government agencies, departments, and stakeholders interact and collaborate to achieve common goals.

Methodology
The case study method is chosen as a methodology for this research because it allows for an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena within their real-life context, providing rich qualitative data that can reveal nuances often overlooked in quantitative studies. This approach is particularly effective for examining specific instances, such as Malaysia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as it enables the researcher to analyse the interplay of strategic and critical thinking skills and the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) framework in a detailed manner. By focusing on a single case, the study can capture the unique dynamics and challenges faced during the crisis, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of how decisions were made and implemented. This methodology is well-suited to generate valuable insights and practical lessons that can inform future public health strategies and emergency management practices.

As mentioned above, the speech by the former Health Director-General of Malaysia is used as a case study in this research because it offers valuable expert insights into the strategic and critical decision-making processes during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a key figure actively involved in managing the crisis, his speech provides a unique perspective on the application of the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach, illustrating how various sectors collaborated to combat the outbreak. This context-specific narrative not only details the policies and strategies employed but also serves as official documentation, allowing researchers to analyse and learn from Malaysia's response. By studying this speech, the research aims to uncover valuable lessons and best practices in crisis management and public health.

Case Study

The Speech-Combatting the COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia
The speech underwent content analysis to identify and categorise its main themes by scrutinising the arguments and evidence it presented. It highlighted instances of coordination and collaboration among diverse government sectors and societal groups, and it was examined to understand how the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach was articulated and put into practice within the speech's context.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started with the new coronavirus (SARS-CoV2), was discovered in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, and it spread to all over the world quickly. Malaysia along with many other countries experienced real hard times in dealing with the pandemic when it first came out initially in January 2020. In this case study, Tan Sri Haji Dr. Noor Hisyam bin Abdullah shared his insights as the former Health Director-General of Malaysia when he addressed the Cohort 5/2024 National Resilience College (NRC) at the NRC Main Lecture Room, PUSPAHANAS, on the 13th of March 2024. In his speech, it was stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia, the government had to make several key decisions, including comprehensive surveillance and public health processes to manage and mitigate the spread of the virus, and implementing the Movement Control Orders (MCO) which is deciding when and how to enforce lockdowns, curfews, and restrictions on movement to control the spread of the virus. The key points and messages conveyed by the speaker are as follows.

The Malaysian approach to fighting against COVID-19 is powerful, multifaceted, and born from science in that its adherents are steeped in public health concepts and emergency response methods. Malaysia conducted the Joint External Evaluation Review (JEE) a mechanism to identify its capacities for dealing with all public health threats, whether they are natural or intentional. Through this, Malaysia could detect crucial things it needs to do to strengthen its readiness. The integrated planning and review process in Figure 1 shows the JEE key recommendation is comprised of plan, monitoring, evaluation, and revising.

Figure 1: Joint External Evaluation (JEE) Key Recommendation
Adapted from WHO (April 2019)

Malaysia's plan is mostly premised on surveillance and public health strategies that involve screening at public places and international routes, interim home surveillance orders, and movement restrictions. Active case detection, contact tracing, and targeted testing, focusing on the most vulnerable populations and outbreak areas have been a useful tool to keep the virus transmission at bay. Furthermore, it is by implementing evidence-based diagnostic and testing methods, such as Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction (RT-PCR) and antigen testing that Malaysia has significantly improved its laboratory capacity. This outcome has realised the appreciation of collaboration and cooperation between various industries and institutions.

Another crucial factor in controlling and containing the pandemic was the Movement Control Order (MCO) which consisted of a couple of levels of incremental restrictions as well as border controls to prevent further transmission of the virus. The government has taken communication risks seriously and emphasised clear and consistent communications as one of its priorities. These communications utilise diverse media channels and engage communities to combat misinformation. Malaysia has demonstrated strong leadership in the COVID-19 control strategy by quickly acting on the detection and control of COVID-19 clusters by utilising extensive contact tracing and surveillance, such as the Seri Petaling Cluster. There were about 14,500 indigenous and 1,500 foreigners who attended a religious gathering on March 9, 2020, as the flag-off date for the Seri Petaling Cluster of the pandemic. During the Seri Petaling cluster in Malaysia, several strategic and critical thinking processes were implemented to limit and contain the pandemic such as rapid contact tracing, isolation and quarantine, mass testing campaigns, data analysis and decision making, and collaboration across agencies. These

actions have led to precise efforts to find and follow the contacts of individual persons both within and among countries. The cluster was kept limited and successfully contained on July 8th, 2020 (Malaysia Ministry of Health, 2020).

With the acceptance of the new normal resulting from living with COVID-19, the focus was put on reaching a balance between economic revival and public health. Proper communication along with good direction and encouraging awards are the important parts that make the community more involved and confident, which obviously could not be achieved without the WoGoS approach nor the careful and precise planning through strategic and critical thinking. The preparedness for the phase of transition into the endemic stage is supported by various factors or elements, which entail standardised operating procedures (SOP), enhanced alert systems, and carried-out activities that include the automation of testing, tracing, and assistance using digital technologies. For instance, the implementation of SOP on cleaning and disinfection protocols to be maintained in public spaces, workplaces, and high-touch surfaces to maintain hygiene standards and prevent contamination would not be successful if there were no coordination and collaboration from all parties involved. Coordination and collaboration among stakeholders, from government agencies and businesses to individuals, underpin the effectiveness of SOPs for cleaning and disinfection. Without such cooperation, achieving and sustaining high standards of hygiene and contamination prevention in public spaces and workplaces would be challenging and less effective.

Malaysia attaches consideration to the use of mapping and coordination of multi-agency ecosystems which also improves health literacy and inter-sectoral collaboration. The problem has been effectively solved with the use of transformational leadership based on empathy, employee involvement, and communication. Even though there are no specific examples, skills such as strategic and critical thinking, active listening, proficient communication, and innovation made the process of decision-making and reaction quicker and more flexible.

The horizon of pandemic crisis inculcates traits such as digitalisation, efficiency in communication, creativity, determination, and adaptability to be a prerequisite of fighting the public health crisis. The Malaysian model demonstrates that an all-inclusive total approach that involves every branch of government and every society's section where even the disadvantaged people are served, and their basic rights ensured is an important part of this process. It insists on preparedness which tends to be a continuous process in health emergencies planning. It shows that the WoGoS approach is applicable in alleviating the difficulties of COVID-19 in Malaysia. Aside from that, Tan Sri Noor Hisyam Abdullah additionally urged all to use the WoGoS approach as a standard practice in present situation and not only during crisis times.

The adoption of a proactive, evidence-based approach by Malaysia in addressing COVID-19 is undoubtedly highlighting the underlying principles of public health and emergency preparedness measures. Malaysia dealt very well with the difficulties caused by the pandemic by practicing a control measures regime of continuous, targeted, and coordinated approach to save its people's health and lives. The ability of the nation to be consistently up to times with the changing mindset in the "new normal" of COVID-19 reflects the industry's flexibility, innovation, and collaboration in different sectors or industries. The comparison in using actual information from the real-life success acquired in the past helps Malaysia in arriving at the correct decision and this leads the growth of global health management. Unity, preparedness, and providing qualified healthcare to all nationals are the values that the country imprints

strongly. Therefore, Malaysia's experience could potentially serve as a valuable case study demonstrating the reinforcement of health systems and effective management of global health security concerns that may emerge in the future.

It could be summarised that Malaysia responded to the COVID-19 pandemic with a robust and science-driven approach, anchored in public health principles and emergency response strategies. The Joint External Evaluation (JEE) identified areas for enhancement in preparedness against health threats, guiding Malaysia's implementation of rigorous surveillance and public health measures at key points like public spaces and borders. Effective strategies such as active case detection, contact tracing, and targeted testing were pivotal in curbing virus transmission, bolstered by advanced diagnostic capabilities. The Movement Control Order (MCO) implemented phased restrictions and border controls to successfully mitigate further spread. Clear communication strategies were pivotal in combating misinformation, while proactive leadership and, **strategic and critical decision-making**, supported by **collaboration** across agencies, contained outbreaks like the Seri Petaling Cluster. Malaysia's adaptive transition to managing COVID-19 alongside economic recovery was underscored by the Whole of Government, Whole of Society (WoGoS) approach, emphasising standardised procedures, digital technologies, and inter-agency **coordination**. This comprehensive response highlights Malaysia's resilience, innovation, and commitment to inclusive health governance, offering valuable lessons for global health management and future pandemic preparedness.

Analysis and Discussion

Analysing National Power in Malaysia's WoGoS through coordination process
To effectively strengthen national power requires a comprehensive approach that integrates diplomatic, informational, military, and economic aspects. This viewpoint is illustrated by scholars like Joseph Nye, who introduced the soft power concept, and Hans Morgenthau, who is an advocate of realism (Gomichon, 2013; Keaney, 2006). Here, diplomacy becomes a main instrument in the management of international relations and the creation of alliances, in conjunction with strategic communication and public diplomacy which bring beneficial information influencing people's attitudes towards action. The militaristic element, in turn, secures the sovereignty and wards off enemies, while economic leverage aids prosperity and competitiveness. Malaysia utilises regional bodies like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote its diplomatic negotiations, information campaigns, military exercises, and economic connections to strengthen its position and influence on the world stage (Kılıçdaroğlu, 2020).

Confronting the matter during the crises of natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Malaysian Government demonstrated smart and strategic thinking due to the use of a comprehensive strategy that consisted of diplomatic, informational, military, and economic elements, including all sectors of government and society (Muzamil et al., 2022). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia employed appropriate organisations as a platform to organise response activities, allocate resources, and share know-how on the best practices. Malaysia is a part of ASEAN-led initiatives and cooperates with countries such as Singapore to build travel corridors and coordinate the transportation of vital products and people, which eventually diminishes the spread of the virus. The government devised a multimedia public information campaign utilising multiple channels of communication to efficiently impart

accurate data, combat misconceptions, and foster preparedness (Abdullah et al., 2021; House, 2022; Machete & Turpin, 2020). Proof of this can be seen through the introduction of the "COVID-19 Preparedness Kit" which explains to the public, preventive measures, symptoms, and available healthcare facilities. The purpose of this initiative is to boost public consciousness and adhere to health protocols.

The Malaysian Armed Forces (MAF) has acted as a strong supporter of civil authorities during the outbreak of the disease. MAF assistance such as medical logistics and field hospital installation has significantly contributed to the reduction of virus transmission. Furthermore, MAF designed and administered different testing and tracing for contact campaigns, and affected the movement restriction, if a specified area has high infection rates (Ministry of Defence Malaysia, 2020). Partnership work by non-governmental agencies and military agencies resulted in an escalation of the effectiveness and efficiency of the outbreak response. The government's reaction to the economic impact of the plague was similar as it issued a stimulus package meant to counter the socio-economic ramifications (Anthukorala & Narayanan, 2018). To ease the shock of the pandemic on the economy, as well as people and businesses, Malaysia introduced stimulus measures in the form of cash grants and subsidies. As an illustration, the Citizens Concerned Economic Stimulus Package is created to support the low-income and affected group of peoples with financial aid, premium payments to affected firms, and additional tax incentives to promote economic development. The purpose of this plan is to mitigate economic difficulties and propel economic developments, making them a response to the pandemic. As a result of strategic and critical thinking in implementing the health public crisis response, Malaysia was able to effectively overcome the crisis. The reaction demonstrated that officials, community organisations, and the private sector exhibited agility, tenacity, and teamwork despite calamities. To tackle this challenge, establishing national trust will depend on sustainable recovery and future preparedness, demonstrated by how coordination was managed during the crisis, as shown in Figure 2.
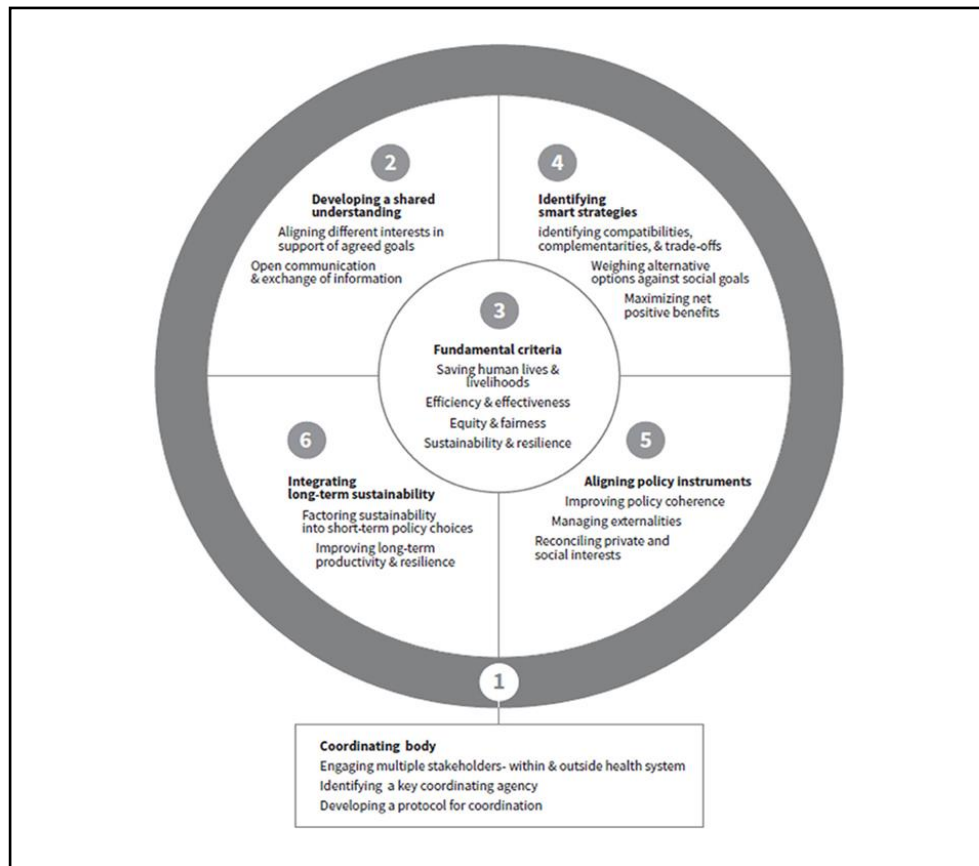
Figure 2: A Framework for Coordination

Source: Rasul (2020)

Coordination is considered vital during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic because it improves the efficiency, effectiveness, and impact of the response, ultimately saving lives and lessening the overall societal impact. The coordination framework employs a thorough and integrated approach, which has proven to be a successful strategy, as it is based on long-term feedback mechanisms that can be evaluated on a new level. Lai (2020) posited that coordination is an important factor that does two things at a time: saves time and effort of repetition work, smooths decision-making process, and stops inappropriate use of any resources so it makes better management. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's strategy demonstrated that this selective approach could effectively coordinate and integrate community efforts with government authority across diplomacy, information, military, and economic sectors, thereby operating cohesively as one team. The Malaysian government periodically and cautiously engaged in diplomatic initiatives, exchanged information, welcomed military support and economic assistance, and coordinated joint efforts to tackle the overarching problem. The country created a disaster plan that evolves alongside a recovery plan, making it an attractive and coordinated approach during the same period. While the pandemic was acknowledged as a major national issue requiring coordination among all stakeholders, including the society, to strengthen the country's unity, it is important to consider whether the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making has positive or negative consequences. In time of crisis, everything is thought-provoking in such detail, such as education suggests not only reflecting on national perspectives but also extends to countries learning from each other's experiences,

using them as a foundation for our actions and future preparedness. This coordination framework promotes the WoGoS approach and, enhances resilience and solidarity in facing unpredictable events of a similar nature in the future.

Analysing the National Power in Malaysia's WoGoS Through Collaboration Process

The implementation of Malaysia WoGoS necessarily demands the establishment of a collaborating network among the various government bodies as well as portions of society and other non-government stakeholders. This is essential to manage the diverse and complicated challenges and meet national goals. Its concept contains a multi-tiered strategy that integrates comprehensive principles for success. Hence, the appointed organisation from the government will be responsible for integrating many departments to achieve national ambitions and solve complex issues such as the Covid-19 outbreak. This means setting up bodies, task forces, or even cross-departmental working groups that require the involvement of multiple actors, such as international organisations, host states, defence authorities, governance specialists, police forces, and development actors (Ekhaugen, 2022; Sienkiewicz-malyjurek, 2022). This, therefore, leads to government coordination that would require the collaboration of activities from different departments and agencies in achieving national goals and finding solutions to complex problems. Keyton (2017) defined collaboration as a type of interaction used by organisations to reach a common goal and it is different from coordination (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020).

There is plenty of different strategies that can be used to have effective collaboration between the government and other organisations. Figure 3 explains the government's idea in handling the COVID-19 crisis. Establishing coordinating bodies at various government levels, such as national and subnational districts, would greatly enhance the formulation of a comprehensive strategy for orchestrating activities and coordinating the entire system, thereby fostering development. These coordinating bodies may consist of individuals from essential ministries, public agencies, and other key institutions tasked with providing leadership and support necessary for the government to implement policies aimed at overcoming and mitigating the current crisis. Additionally, creating inter-agency task forces or inter-departmental working groups dedicated to specific tasks or initiatives could have enhanced collaboration and improved the flow of relevant information across government offices. Task groups can use these policies to look at all the data from each department, pool resources, and schedule the tasks properly. When fostering this culture, inadvertently encourages teamwork and cooperation, subsequently impacting the performance of all government-driven initiatives.
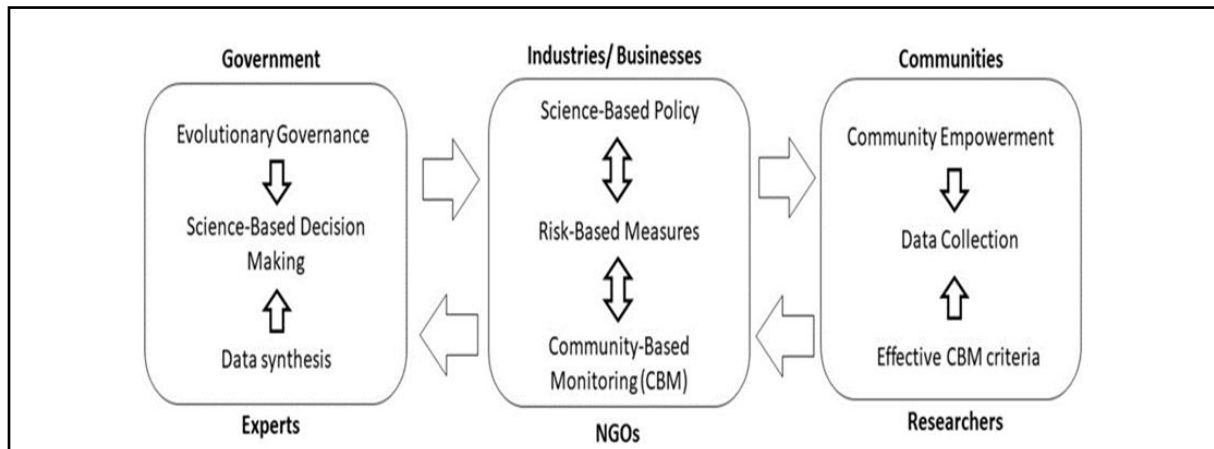
Figure 3: Collaboration in Developing Government Strategies amid COVID-19
Source: Khair et al. (2021)

As can be seen in Figure 3 above, collaboration among stakeholders such as government, industries, communities, researchers, non-governmental organisations, and experts aims for full commitment to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. To obtain these stakeholders' engagement is a paramount task. Different groups such as civil organisations, industry, academia, and community groups need to take an active part in the policy decision-making process (Kujala et al., 2022). The term stakeholders here refer to groups or individuals who have a substantial influence or interest in a certain type of subject or entity, for instance, business, industry, or project. This dedication is founded on the notion that incorporating numerous perspectives and resources, leads to the most effective formulation of decisions and development of policies. The inclusion of multiple stakeholders is important, since it is a complex matter of the combination of diverse expertise and resource allocation, to supplement decision-making and the attainment of intended results (Matsuoka & Gonzales Rocha, 2021). Throughout the pandemic, networks were formed to harness the strengths, capabilities, and dedication of national and local governments, alongside various non-governmental actors, fostering sustainable and impactful development. These organisations have served as facilitators, repositories of knowledge, collaborators, and influencers in decision-making, actively engaging in legislative processes through discussions, partnerships, and cooperation. Incorporating stakeholders in policymaking helps people feel like they are a part of solving an issue and for better or worse, their influence will reflect the outcome. Also, it ensures that policies made are fair and inclusive, and they build trust between the government and the governed. It ensures that there are policies in place that are well-informed, thorough whether needs vary, and of some benefits to the society. Collaboration between different stakeholders enhanced by strategic and critical thinking not only increases the likelihood of achieving shared goals but also strengthens relationships, fosters innovation, and promotes sustainable outcomes.

The strategic governance process depends on sound information exchange and collaboration mechanisms between the government departments and the non-government actors. In dynamic environments, strategic thinking helps collaborators anticipate changes and proactively adjust plans and strategies as needed. This flexibility is crucial for maintaining resilience and

achieving long-term success. The creation of digital platforms, networking events as well as joint projects would result in a culture of sharing of knowledge and transparency (Brown & Green, 2019). Furthermore, inter-governmental cooperation and exchange of information were made possible through the provision of efficient communication channels and systems. The application of digital platforms such as MySejahtera, a contact tracing application used for COVID-19 monitoring, health declaration, and check-ins at public places, and E-Commerce and Delivery Services such as Grab and Food Panda assist online shopping, food delivery, and essential goods distribution, facilitating contactless transactions during the pandemic. Dowell (2016) and Yurchenco (2022) pointed out that a proper communication channel and a designated contact person can improve swift decision-making and address problems and conflicts during the project implementation period.

Capacity-building programmes aim to build the knowledge, skills, and resilience of stakeholders across various sectors to effectively navigate and respond to pandemics such as the COVID-19. These programmes can also be termed as WoGoS activities and they include public health trainings (programmes that educate healthcare professionals and frontline workers on pandemic response protocols, infection control measures, and patient care strategies) and community engagement workshops (workshops that empower community leaders, educators, and volunteers with knowledge on public health guidelines, community outreach strategies, and crisis communication). The initiatives aim to build capacity among government agencies, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders by provisioning them with the needed competencies, information, and needed resources to undertake collaborative tasks. García and Martinez (2021) described capacity-building programmes as those which include training sessions, workshops, and sharing of resources. The programmes are crafted to suit the primary needs and worries of the stakeholders so that there is a more meaningful contribution to the regulation-making and project implementation processes. Capacity-building programmes not only increase individual competency but also contribute to building a cadre of skilled professionals capable of driving effective policy development and programme implementation in diverse sectors and contexts.

Moreover, providing training programmes is a necessity for becoming not only technically competent but also having expertise in the field of WoGoS methods management. Workshops provide stakeholders with a floor for a dialogue, which opens the discussion to enlightening ideas, best approaches, and practical solutions to real challenges. Also, giving the equipment such as toolkits, guidelines, and funding possibilities will help to bridge the gap between the stakeholders and shared activities. Capacity-building programmes also have a great role in preparing all stakeholders and their active involvement in Malaysia's World of Good Society attempts. Policymakers can potentially boost the involvement of local stakeholders by financing these projects, which, as a result, will lead to a more cooperative and enduring system of governance. An example of this initiative is the PRIHATIN Economic Stimulus Package which was introduced by the Malaysian government in response to COVID-19 where this package included financial aids, wage subsidies, and assistance for businesses affected by the pandemic.

Monitoring is a planned process that focuses on collecting data related to some key elements of project implementation such as its progress, inputs, activities, and outputs, and measures the scale of the results. This technique provides policymakers control over the project to get in line with the set plan and pinpoint any mismatches or blockades that can occur. Policymakers would

see that the resources are being effectively used and the goal is being achieved through project monitoring being done consistently. It is critical to make sure that the designed monitoring and evaluation systems are effective to assure the long-term efficiency and sustainability of the development of programmes. Lawmakers can act upon data and feedback, which can help them make the right decisions, consistency in their strategies, and promote continuous development (Davis et al., 2017). These systems bring together policymakers with the ability to collect input and data from the project implementation and outcomes phase. Consequently, such information allows quality decision making and be able to make the appropriate revisions. Evaluation is the consequent stage which involves the examination of the effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, and sustainability of the project. Therefore, there should be a project's success assessment of the set goals, appropriate evaluation of beneficiaries and stakeholders as well as lessons learned consolidation for future work. Policymakers thoroughly determine the efficiency of the project in dealing with the cause of the problem or in providing the needs and demands of a particular population through research-based evaluation.

Successfully implementing the Whole of Government, Whole of Society approach in Malaysia necessitates effective coordination, collaboration, stakeholder engagement, information sharing, capacity-building, and robust monitoring and evaluation processes. This approach aims to enhance governance comprehensively, and its goals cannot be attained without strategic and critical thinking during both the planning and implementation phases.

Conclusion

The example of Malaysia's action in solving the issues shows the imperative of an integrated solution which requires the coordination, collaboration, and cooperation of all government entities and all sectors of society commonly known as the WoGoS approach. The uncertainty of these events lies at the heart of management, specifically when it comes to problems that are impregnable such as the COVID-19 pandemic and other catastrophes. The WoGoS approach relies heavily on strategic and critical thinking abilities since they are powerful tools that aid in governing the state properly, resolving different problems, and promoting national resilience. In response to COVID-19, key skills like adaptability, prioritisation of public health, and carrying out specific actions, while ensuring fairness in access to health services were major subjects of Malaysia's response. This depicts the importance of these skills. COVID-19 combat shows the way forward as far as boosting health systems, ensuring emergency preparedness and food, and global health measures. Malaysia can address difficult situations of the future and ensure itself a leading global position through channelling cooperation, flexibility, and a concrete approach to decisions.

Malaysia may find effective ways to solve societal problems as complex as those of politics, governance, or society through launching coordination between the government and stakeholders, efficient monitoring measures, and the adoption of a broad approach to the problems. National power's superiority or strength application, using a double-edged sword indicates the stress of strategic and critical thinking skills in planning and policy implementation. Hence, Malaysia can efficiently handle global issues and endeavour to its authority. Malaysia, therefore, is obliged to give more emphasis on strategic connectivity, use information well, keep a strong defence force, and apply smart economic tools to secure its sustainable development and prosperity. Besides, educational campaigns and platforms form the backbone of these projects. Thus, these avenues will play a central role in achieving these undertakings.

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