

Leadership and power dynamics in crisis management: implication for brain-drain behaviour – Singaporean government experience during Covid-19

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Abstract

Purpose – This study explored how the Singaporean government responded to the Covid-19 pandemic crisis from early January 2020 to the end of May of the same year. It evaluated the capability of Singapore's leadership management in a crisis during the peak and ravaging period of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach – The study utilised a systematic design analysis approach, analysing Singaporean cases on the Covid-19 crisis using a systematic and narrative approach to underscore the country's response to the pandemic attack from January 2020 to May 2020.

Findings – Against the backdrop of Singapore's peculiar political system of government dominated by the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) and culture of bureaucracy, the government has increasingly executed several control measures, including strict travel bans, contact tracing, the circuit breaker–lockdown, mask-wearing, social distancing orders as well as financial support to businesses and employees from top to the bottom in the country. However, the treatment and health issues of the migrant workers in the dormitories continue to be the major concern among academics and scholars. At the same time, policy inadequacies truncate the excellent measure of Singapore's response to Covid-19. The case point review concluded that the mortality rate in Singapore remains low compared to other nations of the world. Singapore's case points unveil fundamental learning that an excellent leadership-driven harmonised strategic model is essential for crisis management in any society. The finding of the analysis demonstrated that Singapore adopted a contingency and value-based leadership model to advance good governance and tackle the spread of the deadly coronavirus in its country.

Originality/value – The study has demonstrated a profound analysis that has not been conducted hitherto. Investigation of the Singapore case point is not a popular analysis among Nigerian scholars. Therefore, from Nigeria's perspective, the study has showcased the good and the wrong sides of a coin in Singapore's leadership and power dynamic in crisis management.

Keywords Leadership, Brain drain, Healthcare employees, Power dynamics, Healthcare migration, Crisis management, Covid-19, Singapore

Paper type Research paper



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1. Introduction

Crisis leadership in a time of pandemics is intricate and dynamic to endure. Globally, the recent Covid-19 challenge has taken an unparalleled influence on every facet of human endeavour. It has weakened political systems, derelict economic markets and raised colossal fatality rates across all world countries. The positive aspect of the crisis is that it triggered transnational teamwork and collaboration, behavioural modification and disruptive innovations to tackle the rate at which the virus spread among humans (Woo, 2020). Leaders who have an efficient track record of handling crises and emergency management in the past are finding themselves continuously at the forefront when privileged to lead during this current crisis. The present changing and universal disposition of the Covid-19 crisis, structural chaos, media concern and information distortion pervasive in the crisis necessitates exceptional leadership skills to rapidly develop a pandemic response to fight, alleviate and recuperate from the pandemic.

There is a growing concern for crisis leadership in governance. Among political leaders of the world, due to the frightening issues, the present Covid-19 pandemic has unlatched avenues for them to provide a contingency approach that would reinstate people back to normal life. Suggestions have included advice to always lead in the same way whether there is a crisis or not (Kraaijenbrink, 2020). They require leaders to be deliberately calm and decisive in response to the crisis. Indeed, notable scholars report a comprehensive selection of discourse concerning the competencies demanded to lead successfully during a crisis, and this can be advantageous to consider the suggestions for these competencies and the possible connections to past crisis leadership strategies (Ahmed, Zhao, & Faraz, 2020). Hence, the case point report was about leadership and power dynamics in Singapore during the Covid-19 crisis moment. It investigated how Singapore built resilience for the future in its leadership crisis management in response to the Covid-19 pandemic compared with other world giant nations. To synthesize this study succinctly, the following research questions stimulate the study:

- (1) How did Singapore tackle the Spread of the Covid-19 crisis in 2019 in the wake of 2020?
- (2) What were the leadership approach(es) employed by the Singaporean government in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic?

2. Literature review and theoretical lens

2.1 Contingency theory

This study is rooted in the contingency theory approach to effective leadership in society, especially with the management of the pandemic surge. Contingency theory is popularised by Fiedler (1951), and it is used as a theoretical lens in this study to advance the understanding of leadership qualities and strategies of governments and leaders of national economies during the Covid-19 crisis. The contingency theory of leadership presupposes that a leader's efficiency is dependent on whether an individual leadership style fits a certain situation. This theory stipulates that a person can be an effective leader in one situation, and become an ineffective leader in another situation (Ao, Mak, & Tsang, 2022). The theory prescribes a situational pattern approach to leadership in any situation that leaders and managers may find themselves in. In the advent of a global infection pandemic, drastic measures are required to tackle the spread of the pandemic across all the continents of the world. One of the assumptions of contingency theory is that there is no definite best way of managing people or situations; rather, it is situational and contingent upon the event available to the leader (Monehin & Diers-Lawson, 2022). Thus, it is important for the Singaporean government to

radically take this route to more proactively tackle the menace of Covid-19 in their society. To respond to developing and rapidly changing events (McMullin & Raggio, 2020), the government must bend and adapt its leadership strategies and governance structure to the situations on the ground, and not just communication patterns that will leave thousands of citizens vulnerable to Covid-19 attack daily. The theory underscores how leadership decisions and actions are contingent to internal and external predictors given the prevailing situations. Based on the unanticipated nature of the Covid-19 crisis, contingency theory provokes a framework that ventilates the responsive and flexible nature of the Singaporean government and leaders during the crisis (Childs, Turner, Sneed, & Berry, 2022).

2.2 Value-based leadership theory

Another germane model for leadership and power dynamic in the Covid-19 pandemic is the value-based leadership approach which, to a large extent, manifested in the Singaporean government and its team. This emphasizes a particular circumstance pervasive in line with the healthcare been developed and served as a compass in circumventing the spread of Covid-19 (von Eiff, von Eiff, & Ghanem, 2021). Value-driven leadership is the notion that leaders must attract to themselves and other values as well as those values recognised by the organisation and society, for possible motivation and directional purpose (Lin, Jhang, & Wang, 2022). At its core, the values-driven leadership model emphasizes that the masses are naturally influenced by values and live in line with these principles and beliefs. To the best of our knowledge, the Singaporean government possesses value-driven capability in managing the crisis; however, no matter how positive and effective leaders may be, there is a chance for a grey area or dark side of a leadership style. The idea of value-based leadership ideology was palpable during the pandemic in Singapore, and pertaining to the positive attitude that geared the masses to work under intense pressure, the understanding of purpose-driven governance, “the try-out of so far unknown working practices and types of inter-occupational teamwork bringing into Singaporean leadership model that is exceptional for the healthcare industry of Singapore is second to none (Lin *et al.*, 2022). It is paramount to establish that effective and efficient leaders are geared by the model of value-driven leadership during the pandemic and crises. It plays an essential and decisive orientation not only for managers but also for forward-looking governments in any socio-political philosophy. Specifically, it entails integrating the cultural and behavioural aspects of both organisation and national boundaries with organisation, country and decision-making formations that establish transparency, control mechanisms and proven leadership practices (Hendrikz & Engelbrecht, 2019). Leadership values and leadership action guidelines are so much important; however, genuine and solid instruments and leadership strategies that will create thriving leadership ability are fundamental (Hester, 2019). Porter and Kaplan (2017) claimed that leadership values are characterised by the design dimensions of meaning and purpose, responsibility, entrepreneurial thinking (“everyone is a solution provider”) and resource orientation.

3. Methods

To offer an in-depth analysis of the experience of the Singapore government and its team, this study utilises a qualitative approach to analyse the reports therein (Matthews, Blanchflower, & Childs, 2019). A meta-analysis and systematic research design analyses, utilising chronological evaluation (January–May 2020), were adopted to analyse the effectiveness of leadership in the study setting. This approach provides rich information to improve the understanding of the attributes and leadership capacity of the Singapore government. It further assists in shedding light on the study setting and is a notable methodology among social sciences when an unclear understanding regarding a phenomenon arises

(Rashid, Barnes, & Warnaby, 2016). Thus, this study explores a meta-analysis strategy to analyse how the pandemic crisis unfolds, and it accentuates the discovery of the Singapore government and its citizens' readiness for the crisis, and actions taken during the pandemic uncertainty. Exploring the commencement and early periods of the crisis, emerging data can support preparing for future and impending crises.

4. The Singaporean Covid-19 pandemic situation analysis

The incidence of the Covid-19 pandemic took a new turn in Singapore. Unlike the US environment, the virus hit their nation almost immediately with the eruption of coronavirus from the city of Wuhan, China. After the third month of the pandemic that tore apart the entire world, on 2 January 2020, the Singapore government issued advisory information that travellers from Wuhan should closely monitor their health status. The Ministry of Health (MOH) executed body temperature checks for travellers coming into Singapore airports from Hubei province, China. For those experiencing Covid-19-related symptoms, it quarantined them for 14 days before allowing them to move around the country (Goh, 2020a).

By 20 January 2020, the Singaporean government was more serious in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Screening of temperature at the airports was done for all travellers arriving from China. MOH teamed up with National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). It came up with clinical guidance in preparedness for domestic cases. Once any case is detected and confirmed, contact tracing was implemented on such individuals and strict adherence to quarantine order was ensured (Yong, 2020a). On 22 January 2020, the government took swift responsive action. The Singapore government established a multi-ministerial task force to curtail the spread of the Covid-19 attack. The multi-appointments included the Minister for National Development, the Minister for Health, the prime minister and the Minister for Finance (Goh, 2020b). Gan Kim Yong, health minister, addressed the citizens that the inaugurated task force would manage the affairs of various ministries to deal with the transmission of Covid-19 from travellers coming to the country. The health minister remarked that it is expected and unavoidable that imported cases of Covid-19 will emerge; instead, they should prepare ahead for the potential risk of the pandemic and mitigate the risk. Abu Baker (2020a) argued that putting in place a task force that would help the Singaporean government fight against the spread of the pandemic was a very prompt response that was in order.

On 23 January 2020, the first case of Covid-19 was confirmed in Singapore, man of 66 years- old, Chinese national coming from Wuhan. The MOH initiated a contact tracing of the Chinese national to identify those he had contact with during his journey into the country (Abdullah, 2020). The government embarked on an isolation centre priority to segregate those exposed to the virus and sent information to issue quarantine orders to mandate individuals in contact with the infected Chinese national to quarantine if necessary (Yong, 2020b). Managing communication during a communication crisis is critical. The Ministry Of Communications and Information started offering two to three updates daily through socio media concerning the Covid-19 pandemic and how the citizens should comply with Covid-19 protocols established by the government. Specifically, this was done through WhatsApp and enabled the Singapore government to be directly connected to its citizens and maintained the culture of first-hand information on the rapidly emerging incidence of Covid-19. The Ministry offered the latest news and statistics regarding the outbreak on its website, with personal details of all infected Singaporeans (Sagar, 2020). This helped the citizens to have information of the people who had the virus. It helped them to be beware of the infected individuals but not stigmatise them.

On 24 January 2020, the Singaporean borders were tightened and controlled improved given the first local case of Covid-19 was confirmed. Body temperature checks were increased

by the immigration and checkpoint authorities and the Singapore Maritime and Port Authority (Goh, 2020c). Another positive measure taken by the government was to compel schools to ask parents to make their travel itineraries and schedules known to the school management and constantly monitor their children's health status every moment. Government agencies utilised all forms of communication to disseminate information to their citizens. The Minister of Education, in a Facebook post, addressed the citizens that the schools had taken stringent measures to ensure the safety of the students after the 2003 SARS outbreak and confirmed that the Ministry of Education stands in a better position to activate and maintain such measures if required (Hwee Min, 2020).

The use of nose masks and other protective equipment was further strengthened among Singapore's citizens. The government was pushing on all fronts in its fight against the heinous transmission of the deadly coronavirus. At a point, Singapore started experiencing a paucity of nose masks in some retail outlets. Panic-buying became the order of the day, and merchants of nose masks began to hoard them. In a swift response to mitigate any hurdle that could prevent the fight against the deadly Covid-19 virus attack, in a press briefing, the Singapore government rolled out another message through its MOH, reassuring them that the government had more than enough masks and other protective equipment. He assured the members of the public not to panic in any way. There was an abundance of nose masks within Singapore, and a situation anticipating running out of stock should not be entertained. Even Members of their Parliament sent a picture illustrating a warehouse where the government stockpiled nose masks (Abu Baker, 2020a). This indicated that the government was prepared in all measures to curtail the spread of the inimical virus to human health and was ready to bring it down to its heels.

On 27 January 2020, Singaporeans were instructed to jettison unnecessary travelling to China (Teng, 2020). At the same time, citizens who had come back from Hubei province within the prior 14 days were mandated to proceed on leave of absence from work if they have had interactions with sensitive groups of the society like aged ones. After a while, in the same month of January 2020, the government pronounced a stimulus package of €65 per day for whoever was in isolation for 14 days. At this moment in the entire country, only 75 citizens were quarantined; they had contact with the first four confirmed patients in Singapore. More severe measures were initiated that extended the quarantine protocol to 2000 people who had recently gone to Hubei province. The Singaporean government announced a stringent penalty for whoever disobeyed the isolation restrictions order, with a penalty as high as €65,000, including six months of jail terms (Khalik, 2020a). This appeared that the Singapore government was providing leadership per excellence to the lives of her citizens and meant well for them so that they have a healthy living. This demonstrates responsive leadership interrogating the global realities of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Singapore response to the Covid-19 pandemic was positive and decisive in order. The Communication and Information Minister sent out another warning message that information connected to Covid-19 related may be abused to create panic. The government would improve its efforts to ensure that people were given undiluted and latest information as the outbreak manifested (Ai-Lien, 2020a).

Towards the end of January, precisely 30 January 2020, the government rolled out four free face masks to each family to stop a mad rush and panic that masks supplies had been exhausted. About 1.37m families were offered 5.2m mask covers (Khalik, 2020b). The government made a concerted effort in distributing through Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to those who were unable to collect. To ensure that there were sufficient masks for those in critical need, the MOH recommended that healthy citizens not bother to apply masks as it was mainly compulsory for those that needed to visit clinics as they were experiencing Covid-19 signs and symptoms. This appears to be the first blunder committed by the government of Health Ministry. They forgot that those who were in critical condition of the virus attack

needed to protect themselves and everyone in society. This news did not go down well with the citizens of Singapore, who called the health minister's attention to the warning issued by other government agencies/ministries advising the use of nose masks at all times. The majority feared that the government was no longer in possession of sufficient mask supply and was not keen to approve required protective control (Han, 2020b). This paucity of masks and other protective equipment portends that some retail outlets made abnormal profits from the masses. One unscrupulous entrepreneur from online sales was offering 30 masks for \$10,000. In another quick reaction, Trade Ministry summoned and queried the retailers selling masks at exorbitant costs, warning them that they would be punished under the price control act for overcharging the citizens on Covid-19 protective equipment (Khalik, 2020b).

By the end of the month of January 2020, Lawrence Wong, the National Development Minister, passed a piece of information that pointed out that all new visitors who had recent travel records to mainland China or who owned Chinese passports will be prevented from entry into Singapore (Chen *et al.*, 2020). In the same dimension, the Workforce Ministry pronounced Chinese nationals (Abu Baker, 2020b). The Chinese government called out the Singaporean ambassador to China, objecting to the new work restrictions. In response, Ng Eng Hen, the defence minister, required to confirm Singapore's friendship with their neighbour (China). He passed the information on his Facebook wall, reiterating that friends stand by each other through thick and thin. He addressed that their relationship with China would survive a difficult period and grow even more robust (Han, 2020a). The defence minister assured the Chinese government that it was not a nationality challenge in response to a query concerning restrictions. The justification was that the basis of the issue was the virus, and that was beyond Hubei province. The virus is now transmitting to several parts of China (Han, 2020a).

On 2 February 2020, the deputy prime minister approved a new stable and support stimulus package for the transportation and tourism sector, which lost business to the Covid-19 pandemic. Later, the Singapore tourism board forecasted a 25-30% reduction in visitors coming in the year 2020 due to coronavirus (Fumiko, 2020a). By 4 February 2020, Singapore authorities strengthened the Covid-19 virus investigations to establish people who had close contact with coronavirus patients. Gan Kim Yong, the minister for health, made a public briefing during a press conference and pointed out that in spite of Singapore's efforts against the spread of the virus, the country experienced the massive transmission of the virus within and outside the communities (Ai-Lien, 2020b). Likewise, MOH pronounced that all patients with symptoms of pneumonia in public health facilities would be investigated for coronavirus since pneumonia has Covid-19-related symptoms (Goh, 2020c). On 7 February 2020, after the sporadic spread of the novel coronavirus domestically, cases were confirmed. The Singapore government elevated the Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (DORSCON) level from yellow (low) to orange (moderate) and red alert (high). The code orange provoked several new measures from the government, including measuring temperature twice a day in every public office (Jun Sen, 2020). The next day, on 8 February 2020, in an official speech to the country, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong demonstrated his most profound concern regarding the massive spread of the virus in the domestic environment and pointed out that it may be difficult and become an effort in futility to maintain contact-tracing of infected people as it grew in geometrical progression in the locality. The Singapore government's disease control and preparedness pattern for the outbreak was anticipated, and it sustained SARS. The government clearly understands what to expect and its reactive measure. Most essentially, having defeated SARS then, the government remarked that it would survive coronavirus, too (Abdullah & Kim, 2020). The government also stressed that the facilities, amenities and strategies needed to fight the virus had hitherto been initiated.

By 11 February 2020, a videoconference was launched between Kin Yong, The Singapore health minister, and his counterpart from Malaysia. Dr Dzulkefy Ahmad collaborated and jointly set up a committee to tackle the outbreak. The Malaysian Health Minister, Dr Ahmad, acknowledged that they have a common causeway, noting that there are thousands of citizens moving across borders and boundaries every day to visit their family, for business purpose and some for leisure. This is a genuine reason to cooperate in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (Hassan, 2020). The joint committee was saddled with strengthening and maintaining the flow of goods and services between the two countries. On 17 February 2020, National Development Minister Wong, made another announcement of stay-at-home order for all the citizens of Singapore who had visited China in the last 14 days, mandating them not to leave their house even to purchase food items and other necessary things. This succeeded the leave of absence order that was previously in effect. Organisations' management was mandated to motivate their affected employees who were stay-at-home to provide them with necessities in their places of residence (Wong & Zhuo, 2020).

On 18 February 2020, the Ministry of Trade and Industry reduced its GDP prediction to 0.5% and 1.5% to meet Covid-19 impacts realities. The Deputy Prime Minister Swee Keat Heng expressed that the government must prepare for the worst economic impact than was anticipated (Goh, 2020c). The deputy prime minister communicated an economic guarantee stimulus package worth €4bn. The package was motivating and the first to be introduced among international economic responses to Covid-19 which included a direct wage credit scheme, corporate tax reimbursements and low interest on government-backed facilities. Every citizen of Singapore above 21 years of age received a one-off cash payment between €65 to €195. The stimulus relief scheme included an employment aid scheme that helped organisations' management retain their workforce through wage subsidies. The Singapore government paid 8%-75% of wages based on the industry. The tourism and aviation industries collected massive subsidies to compensate for failing returns (Funmiko, 2020b).

In guidance, dedication and direction to release the latest information for the citizens of Singapore, the government compelled Facebook to prevent a local website, The States Times Review, from promoting online fake news under the Protection of Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA). This enactment promulgated online platforms to prevent access to sources that spread false information. The State Times Review had allegedly claimed that Singapore was out of face masks. Facebook deleted the post, but the online platform expressed concern regarding inhibiting freedom of expression by the government. In a swift reaction, the Communication And Information Minister responded, denouncing the untrue perception of online platforms that there was a demand to debunk the false information made around the news regarding the Covid-19 pandemic to not provoke anxiety and fear or panic among the citizens. The Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing met with the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCCI) to partner with corporate sectors in fighting against Covid-19. The minister sincerely expressed the government's intention in collaborating with the industry leaders as part of the "Singapore Team" that fought against the coronavirus attack. The corporate institution supported the government in providing the required services and aiding the government in difficult decisions. On 21 February 2020, the Manpower Ministry cautioned organisations against forcing their personnel to take compulsory leave during the isolation procedure. There was an indication that some companies asked their employees to replace their vacation period with mandatory 14-day stay-at-home orders. The Ministry warned that it expected firms to act reasonably and adopt fair employment practices (Zhou, 2020c).

On 27 February 2020, a couple from Chinese who contracted Covid-19 was caught releasing false information regarding their movement during a contact-tracing investigation under the infectious Disease Act. The Ministry of Health had established the movements of the Chinese couple in the course of critical examination and reminded the citizens that giving

out fake information was a severe offence with the grave consequence that attracts severe punishment (Alkhatib, 2020). At the end of the month of February 2020, the president in the company of its prime minister and the political office holders slashed their one-month salary and used it to provide Covid-19 relief for all the frontline workers in Singapore as another means of motivating their workers. This showed solidarity with struggling Singaporeans and used it to recognise the efforts of their frontline personnel. The Deputy Prime Minister Heng addressed the Parliament by expressing his gratitude to the frontline healthcare personnel in the restructured hospitals (isolation centres) for outstanding commitment and courageousness. This is why the government diverted their one-month pay-cut and offered it to all frontline workers to show appreciation and support. In his address to the Parliament, the prime minister emphasised the responsibilities of the citizens as individuals during the Covid-19 and that together they will win the fight against the pandemic. He stressed that the government is not inhibiting bad news and has not run away from taking responsibility. The government has gone the extra mile to assist all the citizens to outlive the pandemic. He emphasised that this is why the citizens must strictly adhere to Covid-19 guidelines and protocols of using masks, following strict quarantine orders and going on with their everyday business lives. The essential basis is premised on honesty, trust and unity between the citizens and the Singaporean government. He reassured them that the country will survive the challenges in no time, but the masses must do their part to prevent the coronavirus (Fumiko, 2020c).

Extreme measures were initiated as the coronavirus spread in the world. On 3 March 2020, the government discouraged the citizens from travelling to Iran, Northern Italy, Japan and South Korea. There was a compulsory swab test for whoever came to the country with fever or symptoms of respiratory illness, and failure to comply attracted serious punishment (Kurohi & Goh, 2020). An indigenous company developed the swab test equipment in Singapore. It manufactured *in vitro* tests that confirmed time-sensitive clinical diagnoses with a 99% accuracy rate within a few hours of the test (Mohan, 2020). On 10 March 2020, Singapore encouraged travellers to arrive in their country and disembarked passengers from Costa Fortuna, an Italian cruise ship. The ship that contained 600 passengers was earlier denied entry into Malaysian and Thailand ports before going to Singapore. Every passenger was healthy, and most of them were allowed to move from the ship to the airport (Kieran, 2020). The Director-General of WHO, Tedros Adhanon, commended the Singaporean government's Covid-19 response and applauded the government's approaches to fight against the global pandemic. He Praised the government for its early aggressive response in the fight against coronavirus. He appreciated Prime Minister Loong's dedication to keeping citizens briefed on current developments and legislating top-down measures immediately after the pandemic commenced. The Director-General also applauded the contact-tracing approach of the Singaporean government (Teo, 2020).

On 12 March 2020, Loong delivered his second national speech on the pandemic. In spite of the increased concern, Loong maintained that Disease Outbreak Response System Condition (DORSCON) level would remain moderately low. In response to suspicions from citizens that the government was intentionally keeping the deck low to dispel the anxiety of the masses, Loong reassured that the pandemic would change, and it may last more than one year. In his address, Loong gave the citizens hope that the government had taken temporary control measures, but this was not different from the rest of the world. Singapore did not embark on a total lockdown of the cities like China and other countries of Europe. The government planned for stern measures, placed the model on trial and prepared its citizens as the situation demanded. The prime minister mentioned that given the rising figures of infected people, Singapore would no longer have the ability to quarantine every case. The 80% of the individuals who only experienced slight symptoms or were asymptomatic were no longer hospitalised and isolated in government clinics. He maintained that with the increased cases

of Covid-19, the rational move is to hospitalise only the more serious cases and encourage those that were with mild symptoms to consult their family physicians and stay at home, and self-isolate themselves. Singapore focused its resources on only seriously ill patients. This enabled the government to speed up Singapore's response rate and expectedly reduce the number of fatalities. However, Singapore made available space in intensive care for critical cases to meet an uprising tendency (Lai, 2020).

As the month rolled by, on 14 March, the Singaporean government called for its citizens to observe social distancing in all its public spaces, since lockdown was not entrenched. The health minister announced the roadmap of the government and said that some citizens were irresponsible socially, as they attended public events and activities with their ill-health condition (Hwee Min, 2020). On 18 March 2020, Singapore pronounced that all travellers entering the country are required to stay at home for 14 days. The masses were warned to suspend travel abroad to reduce imported cases of coronavirus. National Development Minister Wong commented that the government anticipated the number of cases to increase as Singaporeans returned home from foreign trips.

On 20 March 2020, to intensify the efforts of Singapore in its fight against coronavirus, the agency in charge of technology, the government technology (GovTech) agency, produced a smartphone application that improved contact-tracing of the government measure known as the “*Trace Together*” application. This smartphone application enabled citizens to take the initiative in the tracing procedure available to everyone using a smartphone (Sim, 2020a). The minister in charge of government technology, Dr Janil Puthuchear, remarked that tracing contacts commences with proactive recall, which is the application's primary function. This means poor memory will no longer challenge contact-tracing efforts. In the contact-tracing approach, time is crucial, and tracing the contacts of the infected was an essential part of Singapore's strategy to reduce the domestic spread of the coronavirus. The Singapore government adopted the app to establish between 25% and 50% of patients contacts through effective tracing. Before that moment, before the creation of the app, the government had reached out to well over 6,000 patient contacts through thorough tracing efforts (See Kit, 2020).

The first two Covid-19 deaths were established in Singapore on 21 March 2020 – one septuagenarian and one sexagenarian, respectively, that is a 75-year-old Singaporean woman and a 64-year-old Indonesian. The two had terrible pre-existing health challenges (Phua, 2020b). Manpower Ministry prohibited 89 employees from work passes as a penalty for violating access approval and stay-at-home order (Koh, 2020). Most of them were holders of work permits with travel histories to countries affected by the pandemic and had gained entry into Singapore without pre-approval. They were all permanently banned from working in Singapore. Minister of Manpower warned that the government had consistently enforced measures to sanction both employers and employees who violated the orders – revocation of their work permit and suspension of work permit privileges (Yeo, 2020).

On 22 March 2020, Singapore placed an embargo on all short-term visitors coming or moving through the city-states. Only frontline workers, healthcare personnel, transportation and other essential services were allowed free entry and exit into the country. The government expressed that these are difficult decisions necessary to survive the pandemic, especially for a small open economy like Singapore that connects to the world. Wong added that such a crisis has never been experienced in humanity's history, and the multi-ministerial task force had carefully deliberated its actions. This necessitated unprecedented measures to keep Singapore's borders safe and mitigate the figure of newly imported cases. Several citizens were frustrated as Singapore depended on Malaysian food supplies and Malaysian workers to offer essential services (Sim, 2020b). This is another form of migration of healthcare workers and brain-drain initiative from the Singapore government. Thus, the travel restrictions and work permit ban of some nationals became a severe challenge for

Singaporeans. Eventually, a committee comprised of Singapore and Malaysia unanimously decided to allow Malaysians with work permits to continue working in Singapore and temporarily housed Malaysian employees for the main time.

Persistently, Singapore was at its peak in a communication crisis. On 24 March 2020, the government pronounced that any citizen or individual residing in Singapore returning from America or the United Kingdom must undergo the necessary 14 days of self-isolated order in dedicated hotels rather than in their homes. This move resulted from an anticipated second wave of the virus, orchestrated by deported international students. Those returnees from the United States and the United Kingdom heightened the number of imported cases among students. The management of hotel businesses, formerly out of business, started collaborating with the government to offer accommodation on 14-day quarantine notices in a dedicated hotel. Thus, for months, the government embarked on a hotel quarantine order that extended to all Singaporeans and foreigners coming from abroad (Hwee Min, 2020). However, the Singaporeans defied government order, and they continued travelling. This made Gan Kim Yong, minister for health, address the media in a press conference, notifying the public that thousands of Singapore residents travel to foreign countries every day. In its usual response against the coronavirus, the Ministry of Health declared that those who had travelled would have to bear total hospital costs when they were admitted for Covid-19 treatment within 14 days of coming back. Also, it unleashed severe punishment on those who defied travel restrictions by preventing them from using government health insurance. All Singaporeans were comprehensively covered for Covid-19 treatments.

On 26 March 2020, strict regulations were further initiated to check the outbreak. The government informed all entertainment and event centres to shut down their activities and businesses. Gatherings not related to work and school purposes were restricted to 10 individuals. Public places like train stations and shopping malls were demanded to stem the crowd population. The government prolonged and jacked up its relief incentive package with a new package, up to the tune of €30bn. It contained a 25% wages subvention for businesses, and it was ceiled at €2980 per employee for another nine months. Minister Heng also announced that measures worth over €31.2bn in resilience budget to curb the prevailing situation have been provided decisively. Later, the government launched an aggressive fiscal response to the pandemic. The measure increased the Singapore budget deficit for the 2020 financial year to an exceptional 7.9% of GDP. On all fronts, the government tried in its leadership response to manage the Covid-19 crisis in Singapore. Economically, the Singapore government strengthened and reinforced its economic power. Another pay slash was implemented among all the political office holders in Singapore for another three months (Sim, 2020). On 29 March 2020, the Checkpoints Authority and Immigration repealed the passport of citizens who defied stay-at-home orders, and this measure precluded them from travelling out of the country (Phua, 2020c). In irresponsible conduct, one erring citizen had crossed illegally out of the country and returned between Singapore and Indonesia. This action was executed for the first time and met with zero tolerance for whoever violated the government instruction (Zhuo, 2020a).

In spite of the serious measures in Singapore's response to provide excellent leadership for the citizens in the fight against the coronavirus, the cases still increased. Against the backdrop of rising challenges, National Development Minister Wong justified the government's choice not to lock down the cities of Singapore. A few masses were agitated for just a two-week lockdown trial and reopened the cities after that. Wong explained that two weeks of lockdown were not enough to fight the spread, but the drastic measures executed were in the right direction. There is no such magic solution as a two-week lockdown, and then free from the coronavirus. This is why the government decided to implement reasonable measures for over one year to reduce the pandemic. On 3 April 2020, given the spread of the virus, the government made another pronouncement that additional measures would be

entrenched for about 30 days. Loong described the lockdown measures as “*circuit breakers*”. Every non-essential workplace was shut down, and schools were asked to proceed to home-based learning. At the beginning of the month of April, the government ordered that all citizens should use masks, and not only those at risk or those who were ill. This notice contradicted the previous promulgation that healthy people should not wear masks. The new order came in reaction to the news that asymptomatic individuals also infect others (Mohan & Ang Hwee, 2020).

By 5 April 2020, foreigners working in Singapore, the majority of whom were Malaysian nationals, isolated when the cases rose in their workspace. The Ministry of Health established 120 fresh Covid-19 positive cases in and among Malaysians working in Singapore. Two foreign employees’ dormitories comprised of about 20,000 workers were assigned a quarantine environment. Loong maintained that lockdown enforcement kickstarted the next day (circuit breakers), including all the employees working in the dormitories (Wong & Zhuo, 2020). A couple of days later, the government established a parallel task force under Brigadier-General Seet Ueei Lim to tackle the upsurge incidence in the dormitories. Videos and pictures were shared online, demonstrating that immigrant employees were forced to live in a congested and unhygienic environment. The MOM pointed out that the government was working earnestly to enhance such a situation. The government deployed physicians from Army Medical Services and the police to offer core healthcare services on the site; however, there was a full-fledged outburst in the dorms (Asokan, 2020).

On 6 April 2020, the government broadcast yet another relief stimulus package. In readiness for additional fresh measures designed to tackle Covid-19, the solidarity budget included the closure of the economy. The package provided unswerving aid to the business industry and citizens to the tune of €3.2bn. On 7 April 2020, the government cancelled all private gatherings and closed public premises. It lasted up to a year (Min Zhang, 2020). Again, on 9 April 2020, another regulation demonstrated that every traveller coming to Singapore must compulsorily observe their 14-day stay-at-home order in devoted facilities rather than their homes irrespective of their nationality. On 11 April 2020, Ho Ching, Prime Minister Loong’s wife, provoked an argument on social media when she disseminated information about Taiwan’s face mask donation to Singapore and made sarcastic remarks, showing an attitude of non-appreciation. This was connected to frustrations that the Taiwanese apprehended masks mean well for Singapore in January. The next day, 12 April 2020, Chia Shi-Lu, Minister of Parliament, sent a post on social media regarding their recent trip to supply masks at a community centre. The media condemned him for the move as it appeared to be part of his campaign for his political agenda and contravened the social-distance order. The Minister of Parliament denounced the critics and claimed it was an effort to clear the public members on the need to wear masks. Yet his party, the People Action Party (PAP), made it known to suspend all in-person engagement events. This shows that his party was more concerned with their general elections than ensuring the virus did not spread (Thomas Vadaketh, 2020).

Another press conference was conducted on 14 April 2020. The multi-ministry task force declared that applying nose masks in public was now a critical and compulsory issue. Individuals seen violating the order were penalised €195 if they were the first offender, and a €650 on the second offence. Wong announced that the government was delighted that several citizens and residents were cooperating, carrying on with their responsibility and adhering to the government measures. The majority of them were doing the right thing; only a few people failed to comply, and they were dealt with severely (Ang Hwee, 2020). On 21 April 2020, the lockdown measures (circuit breaker) were extended to 1 June 2020. Loong reiterated that current control measures were strengthened until early May 2020. These comprised of reduced lists of essential services, freed to maintain operations and denied entry to peculiar transmission and trouble spots. Employers in the migrant dormitories where the outbreak had increased were not allowed to work for a few weeks. The fiscal measures

declared as part of Singapore's solidarity budget received were higher than €2.5bn. In a communication crisis, the government took a serious stand. On 23 April 2020, the government arrested a civil servant divulging Covid-19 case figures and statistics from the government databases on social media before it was officially released. On 26 April 2020, the Malaysian government declared that Malaysians preparing to return home from Singapore must obtain approval from the Malaysian High Commission. Yet only 400 approvals were granted each day, which provoked concerns from several Malaysian residents in Singapore.

On 1 May 2020, the Singapore government stimulated the management of organisations to save jobs irrespective of the financial hardship that it brought about. Loong declared that retaining employees will assist the country's businesses to recover gradually from the economic shock orchestrated by the pandemic and employees. Employees should be exposed to enduring salary slashes to keep their job. On 3 May 2020, amid the current news that lockdown measures were being extended, anxiety and agitation rose concerning Singapore's shocking economic situation. As trade and foreign investment are the engines of the Singaporean economy, reopening to the international community was essential to Singapore's economic growth. Wong reacted that the government considered a tactical approach before proceeding on lockdown (circuit breaker) and extended it for another month. After seven months of the spread of the crisis, the Singapore government decided to introduce circuit breaker model lockdown measures, which were too late to commence. The coronavirus had already transmitted into the cities of Singapore before lockdown was implemented, and it opened its economy to foreign investors and commercial activities. This is a fundamental mistake the multi-ministry task force committed in response to the Covid-19 surge. Minister Wong responded that the government needed to deal with fog-of-war decision-making in a crisis period. Declaring that the government made consequential decisions within very little time at its disposal, with as little data and information available within government purview. These are crucial decisions that affect citizens' lives, and shutting down the economy was critical (Tan, 2020a, b).

At the same time, politics was in top gear among the political office holders and aspirants. They were rather concerned about their re-election bid rather than the safe health of the citizens. A bill was passed in Parliament to enable patients with the Covid-19 attacks who were quarantined to exercise their voting franchise from home in the upcoming general elections. Trade and Industry Minister Chan suggested to the Parliament that Covid-19 may not likely vanish from society soon. The situation may last for months, and the chance of second waves of the infection is high across the entire world. Hence, the government planned a situational approach to conducting the next general elections. Criticisms came up that this move will prevent some Singaporeans from exercising their voting right and entrench the ruling party, PAP, as opposition parties will be unable to conduct physical campaigns and rally in the disguise of Covid-19 or second wave. On 5 May 2020, Wong warned that the government would maintain communicating the rising figures of fresh Covid-19 cases due to extensive testing taken among migrant employees in the dormitories. Eventually, the government announced that they are still finding many Covid-19 cases from among dormitory workers. The dormitory outbreak had become dire over the past months. Migrant employees accounted for around 87.6% of Singapore's total 19,410 confirmed cases. Wong condemned their communal lifestyle for rising cases and assured the citizens that the government was addressing the issue (Lee, 2020). The dormitory crisis caused dissatisfaction with foreign employees' mistreatment and cheap labour. Another concern was the act of social irresponsibility of the government of Singapore in giving them an adequate welfare package for a deserved well-being by the dormitory employees (Ting Pei, 2020).

On 8 May 2020, the transmission of novel coronavirus snowballed in the aged population, and the government quickly moved to conduct a series of tests in 80 care homes. They tested about 16,000 residents and 9,000 care facility personnel and transferred the majority of them

to devoted hotels for quarantine measures to curb the further spread in the society. The majority of care facility workers tested positive for coronavirus which led to another health risk to patients being provided health care attention (Abu Baker, 2020c). On 10 May 2020, the Finance Ministry declared that 32 organisations returned the job aid scheme pay-out as part of the solidarity budget – the most current relief incentive package worth €22 million, aimed at providing succor to organisations and businesses. The businesses and organisations that benefitted were excited and appreciated the efforts of the government. They promised not to accept future payments, and pledged to maintain the stimulus relief fund taken by the government. This triggered the positive response for Deputy Prime Minister Heng, who remarked on the high sense of responsibility and shared community initiative of the organisations (Phua, 2020a). On 13 May, news spread around concerning the massive mobilisation of Singaporeans on law enforcement efforts to stimulate compliance to Covid-19 protocols and measures laid down by the government. Local security and neighbourhood watch most times took video shots of those who did not adhere to Covid-19 measures without their consent, which led to fights. They instilled panic among Singaporeans about being apprehended for disregarding government regulations as anybody is responsible to whistle blow deviant and disobedient behaviour in society.

5. Singapore response inadequacies to Covid-19 pandemic crisis

(1) *Mask-wearing discouragement*

The structural elements that have assisted Singapore to nurture a robust response in its initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic fight may also establish its weaknesses or vulnerable points. Singapore has demonstrated exceptional leadership in its response to curtail the spread of the Covid-19 attack. However, from the beginning of April 2020, Singapore experienced rapid growth in the number of Covid-19 infection cases, especially among the migrant employees from the dormitories in the city-states. The first challenge where Singapore got it wrong was the pronouncement of not wearing masks for all its citizens. Initially, wearing masks was only recommended for affected citizens, and not for all citizens. Later, at the beginning of the month of April 2020, the government ordered that all citizens should use masks, and not only those at risk or those who were ill. This notice contradicted the previous promulgation that healthy people should not wear masks. The new order came in reaction to the news that asymptomatic individuals also infect others (Mohan & Ang Hwee, 2020). This was the mistake in Singapore's response to Covid-19. Those who tested positive infected those who were not affected. That was how the spread of Covid-19 was soaring higher in Singapore. This is one of the colossal policy failures that Singapore made (Daud & Wong, 2020).

(2) *Encouraging the deported and rejected travellers into the shore of singapore*

Structurally, the second policy failure of Singapore was its encouragement of 600 travellers and passengers from Costa Fortuna, an Italian cruise ship that disembarked on its shore. These people were denied entry into Malaysian and Thailand ports before Singapore allowed them access. The 600 passengers geometrically increased the imported cases of Covid-19 into Singapore, and the government was naïve about its decision on this.

(3) *Failure to promote lockdown on time – circuit breaker*

The third vocal policy response error committed by the Singaporean government was that it failed to timely embark on a total lockdown of the cities like China and other countries of the world. The government planned some tough measures and placed the model on trial, and prepare its citizens as the situation demands. The prime minister mentioned that given the

rising figures of infected people, Singapore will no longer have the ability to quarantine every case. The 80% of the individuals who only experienced slight symptoms or were asymptomatic were no longer hospitalised and isolated in government clinics. He maintained that with the increased cases of Covid-19, the rational move is to hospitalise only serious cases and encourage those that were with mild symptoms to consult their family physicians, stay at home and self-isolate themselves. Singapore focused its resources on only seriously ill patients. This enabled the government to speed up Singapore's response rate, and expectedly reduce the number of fatalities. These are fatal errors in the fight against Covid-19. Why hospitalise only serious cases and leave those with mild issues of Covid-19 to seek assistance in a family clinic or naturally left them vulnerable? This also negates the fight against the attack and spread of the virus. Opening of the cities to foreign investment and commercial trade freely during the heat of the pandemic portends serious failure of Singapore's policy response during the crisis.

(4) *Ineptitude social distance protocol and overdependence on neighbouring country*

Non-observation of social distance from the beginning of Singapore's response to Covid-19 was another major policy failure that dealt a critical blow to the government of Singapore in its concerted efforts to reduce the spread of the virus attack. Coronavirus spreads through droplets or sneezing, and distancing in public spaces needed to be maintained in line with the directives of the World Health Organization director-general. However, this was later announced on the fall-out of rising cases of Covid-19. In another dimension, heavily relying on food supply from Malaysia was another huge blunder that Singapore committed. The country is supposed to have prepared for indigenous means of food supply for such a crisis moment. This frustrated the Singaporeans when the government later announced restrictions and work permits for foreigners, especially Malaysians. Thus, Singapore massively depended on Malaysian food supplies and Malaysian workers to offer essential services (Sim, 2020). This is another form of migration of healthcare workers and brain-drain/brain-gain initiative from the Singapore government. Thus, some nationals' travel restrictions and work permit bans became a serious challenge for Singaporeans (Abdullah & Kim, 2020). There should be scenario planning regarding food items for Singapore. However, there was no record of such, which brought hardship to the Singaporeans. Accommodating Malaysian employees who temporarily offered essential services to Singapore during the restriction order is another policy somersault for Singapore. Even the Malaysian government restrained foreigners from coming into its country; however, Singapore allowed Malaysians at the expense of its citizens in the wake of the crisis.

(5) *Opening of Singapore economy to foreign investors and commercial trade activities*

The lockdown measure was another terrible issue that marred Singapore's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. The government had opened its economy to all and sundry, and it never believed in closing the city-states down. The government failed in its response to introduce what it called "**circuit breaker**" – lockdown control. It did not immediately enforce a national lockdown until the second wave of the coronavirus attack struck, which was reported to be imported from South-Eastern Asia after six months of the novel coronavirus. Singapore's minister for health confirmed the justification to impose a national lockdown order that was intentionally delayed for a long time to reduce the burden of a prolonged lockdown before the pandemic was under check (Kwok, 2020). However, in assessing the severity of the virus, radical measures like lockdown were not considered as quickly as in other nations. Neighbouring countries like Malaysia implemented its lockdown measure or transnational movement restriction order earlier. Meanwhile, Singapore circuit breaker –lockdown mandate was deliberately prolonged under the disguise of easing pressure on the

citizens. Even the lockdown measure imposed was not as effective initially until it was gradually tightened.

(6) *Prejudiced political and power dynamics at play*

Political and power dynamics were another reason for policy inadequacy in response to the covid pandemic crisis in Singapore. Political office holders and those in control used their political offices' to campaign in their favour even when the Covid-19 cases were rising in Singapore city-states. At some point, the government and politicians were more concerned about their re-election bid than the rising cases of the pandemic in Singapore. Also, there was bureaucratic nature in handling some Covid-19 measures by the government and evidence of prejudice in its Covid-19 strategies. The interaction between the Singaporean government and bureaucracy guaranteed the seamless initiation of Covid-19 policies in general. The government conducted decisions on contact-tracing and testing in line with contributions from public health officials, and there was no indication that political permutations were emphasised at the expense of health officials, advice and warning. However, complaints abound from the medical professionals, who were considered essential service providers, that instructions were too mechanical and there was no thorough communication of the thought processes for government decisions. Their policy was marred with conflict of interest given that the middle of the year 2020 was Singapore's re-election period. The ruling party (PAP) was struggling, by all means, to grab power back in Singapore.

6. Conclusion

Singapore has performed very well in providing a transformational leadership model to its citizens during the crisis. The country's essential measure, which was a unique decision in response to Covid-19, was business continuity during the pandemic. This was achieved through a multi-strategic approach. Singapore embarked on several methods, one of them being the importance of an up-to-date crisis management roadmap through continuous communication with the citizens. Crisis communication was done via all means of available communications: social media, print and press briefing. A well-prepared crisis management design ahead severely helped to mitigate the adverse reputational impact of the crisis. The government initiated and built resilience around the entire phases of life in the country. The first thing was to appoint leaders and launch a multi-ministerial task force who were experienced and experts in tackling the menace of the pandemic. The task force led the blueprint, establishing a guiding committee to monitor resource allocation and funding. Singapore ensured that the government reviewed the crisis management structure periodically to align its plan with the roadmap and policy measures. Aside from Malaysian dormitory employees, the government ensured that its employees' safety and well-being are its priority.

Another germane point is the rise of infectious clusters among the construction industry migrant community, which raised dust regarding Singapore's response. In consonance with the contingency approach employed by the government and associated priorities put in place by the multi-ministry task force (such as mass testing, quick quarantine of dormitories workers and strict isolation orders for workers), Singapore has energetically disseminated and communicated information associated with public health via local news media in a prompt manner. This approach appeared to play a minor role in allaying citizens' fears and the burden of the ongoing pandemic efficiently, even at the lockdown order. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the latest updated financial and institutional aid provided by the Singaporean government and constant monitoring by essential services healthcare experts will serve as a major driver to stability in the current public health crisis. From the foregoing, considering the joint efforts, one early inspiring and motivating sign is that rate of mortality

in Singapore remains low compared to that of several other countries of the world like the USA. However, Singapore is geographically not a large city with a high population density.

7. Practical implication

The study has succinctly shown implications for practice concerning leadership dimensions to crisis management and power dynamics in the fight against the spread of Covid-19 in Singapore. Practically, the study has demonstrated that the Singaporean government established a situational leadership attitude to governance and management of the pandemic. The attitude and style adopted by the Singaporean government has not been met by the majority of the leaders of the world. The curtailing of the spread of Covid-19 was decisive early enough by the government, and that is the trend the government used to improve on even after the post-pandemic. It was evident that this leadership style of Singapore during the crisis has drastically lessened the death and mortality rate in Singapore. The study enabled the migrant workers to help in the fight against the coronavirus surge. This is essential for countries to emulate the good idea entrenched by the government. At the same pace, the government also provided a value-based leadership approach to the citizens. This provides value offering to members of the public to benefit in the political space of Singapore.

8. Suggestions for future research

The study has evaluated the leadership and power dynamics in crisis management, using Singapore as a case point report analysis. It established positive sides of the sides of the government, as well as the dark side, highlighted areas that the government failed. However, further study can investigate leadership personality and power dynamics in crises situation by comparing two or more countries in the analysis.

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