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## SPEAKING THROUGH CRISIS: ANALYSING LEADERSHIP ATTRIBUTES IN KHAIRY JAMALUDDIN'S COVID-19 UPDATES

Azzieatul Syazwanie Azmi<sup>1</sup>, Anis Idayu Aziz<sup>2</sup>, Salwani Mohd Salleh<sup>3</sup> and Nazatul  
Shahreen Zainal Abidin<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1234</sup> Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara Cawangan Kelantan,  
Malaysia.

Corresponding Author's Email: <sup>1</sup>azzie168@uitm.edu.my

### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought global political leadership into sharp focus, highlighting how national leaders' policy and communication choices directly impact the effectiveness of crisis response. While extensive research has explored the political dynamics of leadership (Haslam et al., 2021), less attention has been given to the specific attributes that enable leaders to communicate effectively with the public during a global crisis. This study aims to examine the leadership attributes demonstrated by Khairy Jamaluddin in his COVID-19 daily update press conferences. Using discourse analysis and a qualitative approach, the study analyses three press conference videos to understand how he constructed and conveyed his leadership traits. The findings reveal that Khairy Jamaluddin consistently exhibited key leadership attributes in his speeches, which played a crucial role in fostering public trust.

**Keywords:** Leadership attributes, Crisis communication, Public health messaging

### INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role of political leadership in crisis response. Leaders' communication strategies directly impact public trust, shaping perceptions, behaviors, and confidence in government competence. The language and quality of public messaging influence compliance with measures like social distancing and mask-wearing. Global pandemic responses vary due to differences in leadership, preparedness, and severity. Political leaders use diverse communication techniques, underscoring the need for further research on how these approaches affect public health messaging and trust (Dada et al., 2021). Khairy Jamaluddin, known as KJ, served as Malaysia's Minister of Health and was recognized for his compelling speeches and ability to engage the public across political lines (Khairuddin, 2016). His approachable and less formal style fostered a sense of closeness with the public, enhancing his credibility. Farza (2018) noted that his political fandom contributed to his widespread appeal. This study explores Khairy Jamaluddin's leadership attributes in his COVID-19 daily update press conferences.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs discourse analysis and a qualitative approach to examine Khairy Jamaluddin's leadership traits in three COVID-19 press conferences. The videos, sourced from YouTube, were released on the 1st of September 2021, 9th of September 2021 and 15th of September 2021. Using John W. Gardner's (1989) leadership attributes framework, the study focuses on three key traits: intelligence and action-oriented judgment, understanding of followers' needs, and capacity to motivate. The speeches were transcribed verbatim and coded based on these attributes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Khairy Jamaluddin's press conference speeches on COVID-19 updates provide clear evidence of his leadership attributes. The following sections illustrate how these traits are reflected in his speeches.

### Attribute 1: Intelligence and Action-oriented Judgment

Date	Excerpts
1 September 2021	a) <i>We have set a ceiling price for rapid test kit; we have decided in cabinet today to set a ceiling price and Datuk Alexander Natta Linggi will be announcing that in very short</i>
1 September 2021	b) <i>As long as they have adopted the information, where they cannot complete the vaccination on medical grounds, they cannot be vaccinated, we will come out with a feature on MySejahtera, to show that you are somebody who are on medical grounds who cannot be vaccinated; and therefore, we will come out with the SOP that appropriate with the feature.</i>

To instill the people's trust, the leader is responsible for assisting people in believing that they can be effective, and their goals or actions are achievable. Therefore, a leader must always keep their promises to the people, as this is essential for gaining public confidence and trust. Besides, a leader must be intellectual and knowledgeable to make people believe that a better future is possible if they put forth the necessary effort. One of the characteristics of Khairy Jamaluddin's speech is action-oriented judgment. In other words, he communicates with proof and action. Khairy Jamaluddin can be viewed as a well informed and even-handed leader when he is delivering content or messages during press conference on COVID-19's daily updates. This is clearly stated in excerpt (a) where Khairy ensures not to burden his people with the high cost of rapid test kit. Instead, he took action to set a ceiling price so that it will be more affordable and more accessible for the people in need.

### Attribute 2: Understanding of Followers and Their Needs

Date	Excerpts
1 September 2021	a) <i>But what I want to do, I want to discuss with my team at MOH, in the event that there are still people who refuse to be vaccinated and not on medical grounds, but because they do not want to, by choice they cannot vaccinated. And we refuse and we do not go for federal mandate by law.</i>
1 September 2021	b) <i>So, we will come out with the policy, the National Testing policy, to hopefully take into account those who refuse to be vaccinated. But my preferred outcome is that if you have a no medical reason; any reason, not to be vaccinated, go and get vaccinated.</i>

Listening to and understanding the public's wants and needs is a significant trait of a good leader. Throughout the press conference, Khairy Jamaluddin engaged with the media by addressing questions related to COVID-19 updates in Malaysia. Moreover, he is a leader who consistently listens to and understands the public's actual needs and concerns. This is evident in excerpt (a), where he acknowledges the challenges faced by travelers returning to Malaysia. He repeatedly emphasized the complexity of the process and committed to improving it by upgrading the MySejahtera application, enabling travelers to obtain their MySejahtera certificate virtually.

### Attribute 3: Capacity to Motivate People

Date	Excerpts
1 September 2021	a) <i>Each country will see ups &amp; lows success in deliver Covid but I'm quite positive, cautiously optimistic...we'll pray to God in the next two months we will see light at the end of the tunnel.</i>
9 September 2021	b) <i>We are also extending our psychology services to our frontliners to ensure that they are given counseling so that they can manage their stress. But the key message daripada KP dan saya adalah we have seen light at the end of the tunnel. Dan kita harap bahawa mereka akan bertahan untuk beberapa minggu lagi.</i>

A leader is responsible for not only leading his people to achieve their objectives, but also for motivating them and the individuals involved. Above and beyond, a motivational leader is someone who can inspire others to focus their efforts on a specific goal. This attribute can be seen in his speech in the press conference on COVID-19 updates. In excerpt (a), he reassured Malaysians that despite challenges, the right measures could help the country overcome the pandemic. His clear and consistent communication was both sobering and soothing. Similarly, in excerpt (b), he urged frontliners not to lose hope, demonstrating his commitment to easing their burden. His ongoing support for their well-being played a crucial role in unifying and mobilizing the nation during the crisis.

### CONCLUSION

The coronavirus pandemic may be the most severe test of political leadership the world has ever seen. Khairy Jamaluddin has carved his own path in confronting this global catastrophe by effectively demonstrating his leadership attributes. Amid a crisis that tempts individuals to prioritize self-preservation, his leadership style remains clear and consistent. Based on his COVID-19 daily update press conferences, KJ demonstrates that he is a people-centric leader, making decisions solely for the public benefit. Moreover, he not only connects with the people on an emotional level but also influences them intellectually. It can be concluded that Khairy's speeches reflect key leadership attributes that foster public confidence and trust. While this study provides valuable insights into leadership traits, it focuses solely on Khairy Jamaluddin's speeches. Further research could explore additional leadership qualities and their impact on message delivery.

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