

## Leadership and Management of the COVID-19 Pandemic Situation

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### Abstract:

In Thailand, people were affected by the COVID-19 epidemic every day from multiple clusters, increasing the number of cases in the thousands per day and also affecting the economy. Most of the infected were young, between the ages of 20-40. Young infected had mild or no severe symptoms, making them unaware that they were infected, which complicated significantly the spread control. The number of daily cases of COVID-19 soared due to the severity of the virus and its easy spread so quickly which led to a difficult situation in Thailand. Mistakes in solving the problem of the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the economy and society. The number of new cases and deaths was rising, affecting the capacity of Thailand's public health system beyond its ability to cope and reflecting the inefficiency of the leadership in managing the COVID-19 pandemic situation. This article proposes a guideline for solving this crisis. However, in the recent situation, the people also urged those in charge to expedite the resolution of the COVID-19 crisis to control the pandemic and the death of the people from serious contagious diseases in time, whether it is epidemic control, subsidies for entrepreneurs and people, stimulation of the economy, or recovery of Thailand. These are considered urgent approaches and the keys to effectively solving the COVID-19 pandemic at this time. The goal of this article is to serve as a guideline for leaders to apply it in effectively solving problems with the outbreak of new strains of germs and being ready to deal with various disaster problems that will occur in the future.

**Keywords:** leadership, management, pandemic, virus, COVID-19.

## 新冠肺炎大流行局势的领导和管理

### 摘要:

在泰国，人们每天都受到多个聚集性感染的新冠肺炎疫情的影响，病例数量每天增加数千人，也影响了经济。大多数感染者都是年轻人，年龄在20-40岁之间。年轻的感染者症状轻微或没有严重症状，使他们不知道自己被感染，这使得传播控制变得非常复杂。由于病毒的严重性和传播速度如此之快，新冠肺炎的每日病例数猛增，导致泰国陷入困境。解决新冠肺炎大流行问题的错误对经济和社会产生了负面影响。新增病例和死亡人数不断上升，影响了泰国公共卫生系统的能力，超出了其应对能力，并反映出领导层在管理新

冠肺炎大流行情况方面的低效。本文提出了解决这场危机的指导方针。不过，在最近的情况下，民众也呼吁负责人尽快解决新冠肺炎危机，及时控制疫情和严重传染病造成的人民死亡，无论是疫情控制，还是对企业家的补贴。和人民，刺激经济，或者泰国的复苏。这些被认为是当前有效解决新冠肺炎大流行的紧迫方法和关键。本文的目的是为领导者提供指导，以有效解决新菌株爆发的问题，并为应对未来可能发生的各种灾难问题做好准备。

**关键词：**领导力、管理、流行病、病毒、新冠肺炎。

## 1. Introduction

“Coronavirus” was first discovered in the 1960s, but the exact source is still unknown. This virus can infect both humans and animals. Up to now, a total of six strains of this virus have been discovered. The strain that is currently prevalent worldwide is a species that has never been found before, the seventh strain, which is why it is called the “Novel Coronavirus”. Later, it was officially named COVID-19. The currently prevalent COVID-19 virus is a contagious disease caused by a novel coronavirus that was last discovered in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (World Bank, 2020). Nowadays, the COVID-19 virus is spreading across the world and affecting many countries around the world. As of February 2021, 116 million people have been infected with COVID-19 worldwide (World Bank, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic situation has caused people to panic. Some countries have shut down countries to prevent the spread of the disease. Airports are required to suspend international flights. Tourist attractions and tourists are greatly reduced. Many businesses are directly and indirectly affected by the reduction of staff, layoffs, or closing down. If it is not necessary, people do not need to go out, do not stay in crowded places, and stay up to date with the latest news about the spread of COVID-19. The information received was both real and fake. Some of the information that we have used as guidelines for preventing infection may need to be adjusted according to the situation, for example, a risk of using a serving spoon. We have to change to eating hot food with our own spoons and always wash our hands thoroughly (Stories & Tips, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has made people around the world realize the importance of taking care of themselves to stay away from various diseases. Governments and businesses are also aware of the need to proactively adjust and adapt to sustainability to reduce the risk of spreading diseases in the future. For example, Taiwan, despite being close to China and having millions of citizens working in China, and many tourists from China coming to Taiwan, has the highest risk of COVID-19 cases in the world. However, Taiwan has a very low epidemic compared to many countries. Since the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the Taiwanese government has set up the National Health Commission Office (NHCO) as part of a disaster-focused response center to respond proactively to the outbreak. Technologies are used for management by using national health insurance databases combined with immigration and customs

databases to generate big data to analyze, alert, and effectively prevent epidemics. Taiwan is therefore able to respond quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic (Stories & Tips, 2021).

Thailand, which has also suffered from the COVID-19 epidemic, Thai people are very worried about its spread by wearing hygienic masks. In comparison, it is very different from the campaign to wear a protective helmet while riding a motorcycle, despite the fact that serious accidents can also cause death. However, Thailand has seen clear results from many deaths such as Italy, Spain, and the US as both the government and the people do not give importance to wearing masks and social distancing. The epidemic of COVID-19 in the early days caused the phenomenon of a shortage of masks that were not available in the market and were not enough for hospitals where medical personnel had to use them. However, what has been found to be highly intent on working is the general public health system and the Centre for the Administration of the Situation due to the Outbreak of the Communicable Disease Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). The relevant departments of public health have been monitoring this issue since January 13, 2020, after it detected the first Chinese traveler from Wuhan entering Thailand and set up all international checkpoints to screen travelers. Progress reports are from the Ministry of Public Health by the department and ministry executives, health care in various aspects by Dr. Taweetilp Witsanuyothin, a psychiatrist and ministry spokesperson who was later entrusted with the role of spokesperson for the Centre for the Administration of the Situation due to the Outbreak of the Communicable Disease Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19), is considered an important assignment that the delegate must be the one who conveys medical and nursing matters about the situation of COVID-19 pandemic to be easily understood by the general public.

Furthermore, the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected the economic sector of Thailand, but also has a widespread impact on the social dimension and people. In Thailand, low-income people are more likely to contract COVID-19 and die from it as poor families are more likely to live in crowded homes or buildings and work at risk of infection. In addition, low-income people might not have access to comprehensive health services because they do not have health insurance. Low-income people in the service sector are at risk of losing their jobs due to lockdowns and social distancing. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Thai society is due to economic issues,

whether it is the temporary cessation of business operations, layoffs, change of employment status or salary reduction, temporary closure of trading areas. All of these have a high impact on vulnerable, low-income groups and those who lack social protection and need urgent government subsidies.

Moreover, in the state of the country's facing the COVID-19 epidemic, the inequality that existed has become apparent. Therefore, society needs leaders who are ready to deal with unexpected changes in crises to lead an organization or society out of trouble rapidly with leaving no one behind. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to provide a system of social protection or various measures from the country's leaders to guide the management of the situation of COVID-19, including the development of social protection systems for the people to cover the fundamental rights of all people as stipulated by the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, e.g., fundamental rights, social services, social security, social assistance, official and informal protections covering the establishment of social protection for disadvantaged and poor people, and the social risk management, especially during the crisis of the COVID-19.

The conceptual framework of the research is shown in Figure 1.

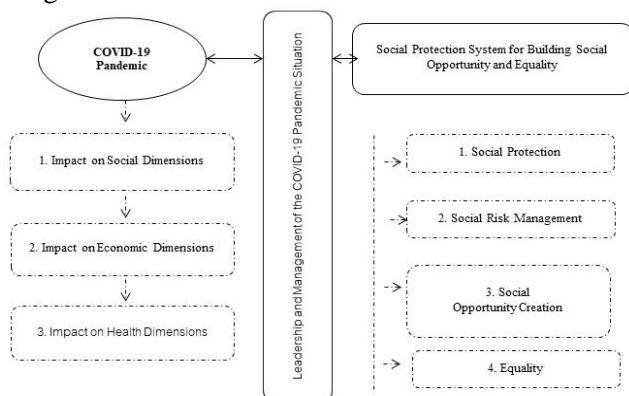


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

## 2. The Research Background

### 2.1. The COVID-19 Pandemic Situation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation, which has resulted in the lockdown in the past few months, it has caused economic, and most importantly, social impacts, namely, people who are unemployed. The measures have caused many residents to be affected by the sudden unemployment and resulted in subsequent problems, household debt problems, such as default on dormitory payments, vehicle defaults, and lack of social security. This leads to a deterioration in the quality and security of people's lives, including mental stress, boredom and anxiety, especially anxiety about family financial problems leading to family violence caused by physical and mental harm through verbal and physical abuse (Dechchawanakorn, 2020).

Tharathorn Rattananarumitsorn and Woradul Tularak (2020) identified eight groups of people affected for better understanding as follows:

1) Low-income groups who need to continue their careers under risk in the COVID-19 pandemic situation, e.g., drivers delivering food and customers, groups of people who lack readiness to comply with quarantine and social distancing, e.g., people in slums.

2) Informal sector workers, such as small traders, general contractors, domestic workers, service workers, agricultural workers who rely on daily income and lack social protection such as social insurance, including freelancers with uncertain income and who are not legally protected socially.

3) Insecure formal sectors such as day workers who are engaged in occupations that do not require high skills, factory workers who have been laid off, especially older workers who have worked for a long time without re-skilling as employers have to temporarily close the business. In some cases, employers avoid compliance with laws such as labor protection laws and social security laws.

4) Children and youth groups. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) released a survey in April 2020 that more than 8 in 10 youth (World Health Organization, 2013) were worried about family finances because their parents were unable to work normally as a result of the shutdown of the business, as well as the termination of employment. In addition, children faced problems with access to technology or internet connectivity, not being able to get enough nutritious food as they had received from the food or milk program from school or kindergarten, and young children cannot be replaced by online education.

5) Smallholder communities in remote and upland areas who rely on income from seasonal agricultural products by purchasers.

6) Homeless people who lack social protection, healthcare and miscellaneous income.

7) Women who might lose their jobs and be deceived to work in case of sexual harassment.

8) Migrant workers who have been laid off, such as construction and services, who face a lack of income for basic living, e.g., food, room rent, child support, and are unable to return to their country of origin.

In addition to the social impact of income or lifestyle changes, the COVID-19 epidemic is also affecting mental and emotional wellbeing: fear, stress, anxiety, isolation, and desperation due to unpredictability of the future (Thailand Future Foundation, 2020). The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic situation might also increase social inequality as almost all economic sectors experience acute and widespread unemployment. Furthermore, the informal sector and the rural economy contracted because of drought and therefore might not have sufficient capacity to cope with the problem of the number of unemployed people. The unpredictable economic recovery due to the COVID-19 pandemic has raised concerns that suicides might be exacerbated by social isolation from quarantine measures, fear, unemployment, and financial factors, including the problem of domestic violence (Rattananarumitsorn and Tularak, 2020). As a result, besides policies and

measures to reduce negative social impacts, recovery, subsidies based on at least these 8 groups with a deep understanding, thinking about the future to prevent social problems, government and related sectors should work together to enhance the positive energy of society to become another good new normal in Thai society.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *The Roles of Leaders in Social Inequality in the Age of COVID-19*

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic situation in Thailand affects a large number of people and causes problems such as public health, economic, and mental health. In addition, social problem is another issue that is becoming increasingly common, especially socially vulnerable groups, namely, children, women, handicapped people, elderly, homeless people, or even those infected with the COVID-19. Many agencies, i.e., public and private sectors have measures to monitor, prevent and solve problems to prevent severe epidemic, the situation caused by stigmatization and rejection of people who have been infected with the COVID-19 returning to the community or family of infected people who are banded by communities to live normal lives. This leads to concealment or refusal to undergo testing for COVID-19, making it more difficult to control the outbreak. In addition, the issue of death from COVID-19 infection has been used to ridicule or curse hated people in the social media, causing them to discredit. Many agencies have campaigns to educate people and communities about the COVID-19 for having knowledge about how to protect themselves. Furthermore, this recognition and understanding of the people infected with COVID-19 should occur to be able to coexist. Guidelines should be established to prevent and address social stigma. COVID-19 is a new disease and there are many things that people in society do not understand about it, so they are often afraid of the unknown. The expression of fear of others is easy and it is understandable that confusion, anxiety, and fear arise in society. These factors also spread dangerous stereotypes. Moreover, social stigma destroys social solidarity and leads to social isolation of people. For this reason, people in society should be aware of the use of speech, physical expression and opinions in society through social media or other communication channels.

When talking about social protection and dealing with the social risks arising from the COVID-19 outbreak, i.e., the consequences of domestic violence. From statistics around the world, for example, in France, complaints of domestic violence have increased since people were forced to stay at home. Paris reported a 36% increase. Other areas nationwide increased by 32%. In England, the England and Wales Anti-Home Violence Commission stated 65% of calls for help about domestic violence in early April 2020. In Thailand, according to data from the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Institute Operations Center, there were 154 cases in March 2020, up from

144 cases in February 2020. Violence tends to be repeated more frequently and also affects children being sexually abused. Due to quarantine, some kids are sexually abused by people living in the same houses.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation continues to affect the issue of the risk of contracting the virus among homeless people. Data from the Isarachon Foundation presents that in 2019, there were 4,392 people living in public places or the homeless in the Bangkok area, up to 363 people or 10% from 2018. This group of people do not have enough money to purchase protective equipment such as hygienic masks and do not have access to government welfare as some people do not have ID cards, making them more vulnerable to infection. Therefore, due to this situation, people are losing their jobs, lacking income, and tend to be homeless people to ask for food and stuff donations. In addition, children, elderly and people with disabilities lack proper care, especially those in fragile families. Family members are unable to work normally due to layoffs, resulting in unemployment, decreased income and insufficient household expenses, resulting in a decrease in quality of life (Kamthieng, 2020). These are what the government should development of a social protection system that can protect all population timely and sufficiently. Building social opportunities in various forms is a way to achieve social equality.

The COVID-19 virus has caused widespread transmission and there is no vaccine. Initially, the best protections are social distancing, home quarantine, wearing masks, and washing hands. At the same time, impacts such as public health, economic, mental health, and social problems require cooperation from government agencies, private sectors and civil society to monitor, care and heal those who affected in accordance with the problems and comprehensive needs to alleviate the suffering from the pandemic situation, for example, stigmatization and rejection of people who have been infected with COVID-19 returning to the community, or family of infected people who are banded by communities to live normal lives. In the event that a person has been violated or has been unfairly discriminated against, he/she can contact the Office of the National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, or have their rights violated or damaged through online media, they can complain to the Technology Crime Suppression Division, including the issue of domestic violence. Violent acts should not be ignored, but should be taken to the police station for prosecution or call to aid agencies, such as the Department of Women's Affairs and Family Development, Friends of Women Foundation, Foundation for Women, and emergency housing. Children who have been sexually abused could report or prosecute or call aid agencies to One Stop Crisis Center, the Foundation for the Protection of Children's Rights, and emergency housing.

Even though the COVID-19 virus has spread in almost every country around the world equally, both developed or developing countries, the impact of the

disease, especially on the economy, is unequal. This further clearly illustrated the disparity between the rich and the poor. The disparity between rich and poor continues to increase despite government efforts to redistribute income from the rich to the poor to mitigate the impact of the epidemic. The lasting effects of the pandemic are due to unemployment and other lack of income, such as less money sent by children to their parents and reduced employment opportunities. People with higher education were less affected, while employment for people with general education was significantly reduced. The disparity also arises as soon as the government announces lockdowns and the temporary closure of some businesses by allowing them to work from home as some company employees conform as soon as they have health insurance and vacations, and still being still paid, while front-line employees like those who work at restaurants or supermarkets cannot. Poor people working daily, without working means having no money for family and food expenses. This group of people have to choose whether they were more concerned with their health or well-being (Chiang Mai, 2021).

Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic situation has further reinforced the inequality as a chronic problem in Thailand to be more severe in all dimensions, especially the health impact on the poor people is more common than the rich people. The poor are generally inferior in health and nutrition, and access to medical services is more difficult. The people with sufficient resources have alternatives that can replace a visit to the doctor, while the poor cannot. A more disparate gap in human capital arises. Therefore, social protection is to encourage all people to have good health, access to quality treatment services. As Pakpoom Jatupitphonchan (2020) stated that social protection by promoting good health for all people, one option is to apply technologies to allow doctors for telemedicine, as well as the promotion of health knowledge to the people and the development of service quality of the government's medical welfare system.

### **3.2. Leadership Roles in Building Social Protection System**

In an analysis of the website, Michelson (2020) stated that lockdowns could actually help mitigate the spread of COVID-19; however, this measure must be at the cost of privacy rights and personal freedoms of the people. It would be evident from the COVID-19 outbreak that has disrupted the global economic situation, including Thailand. Despite the government launching more economic packages expected to mitigate the impact on the economy, Thailand's overall economy has been severely damaged and severely impacted on key industrial sectors, e.g., tourism, airlines, small and medium enterprises (SMEs). One of the economic measures is the approval of the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of Thailand to use more than 1.9 trillion baht in loans to heal those affected by the virus both economically and socially. A set of measures

to take care and remedy include low-interest loans, debt moratorium, and special tax payment extensions for entrepreneurs and SMEs, providing a 5,000-baht subsidy for three months to informal workers, employed, temporary workers, or freelancers, and giving money to the social security fund to heal laborers with the social security system.

At present, the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security has implemented the "Rao Mai Ting Kan" campaign, providing temporary accommodation and three meals for homeless people, and unemployed without any charge. Those who wish to join the campaign can contact the One Stop Crisis Center to help people during the pandemic. There are four accommodations prepared by the ministry, namely Baan Mitmaitri On Nut, Baan Mit Maitri Din Daeng, Baan Mitmaitri Thonburi, and Baan Sang O-kard Pathum Thani (Ministry of Public Health, 2020).

In addition, the "Rao Chana" scheme, "Khon La Khrueng" scheme, and "M.33" scheme are considered a government campaign to heal all groups of people, especially the minority, freelancers, or agriculturists by distributing money through the wallet application, e-wallets without an account book with Krung Thai Bank, but identity verification is required. The current e-wallet applications include True Money Wallet, Rabbit Line Pay, AirPay. Users are able to top up or withdraw money, but there might be some receiving compensation with the "State Welfare Card" or the "Poor Person Card" as a special case.

In addition, in the case of children, elderly, and people with disabilities who lack proper care as families affected by this situation, they can coordinate the Sub-District Administrative Organization (SAO) or the Institute of Community Organization Development to receive compensation according to the rules and regulations of various allowances, such as low-income family allowance and emergency allowance. After being considered by social workers, a compensation payment of not more than 2,000 baht per person will be provided. Furthermore, the Department of Promotion and Development of the Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities has measures to provide financial assistance for those with disabilities, divided into payments to help them to alleviate their suffering during the crisis. Only people with disabilities who have a disability identification card will receive 1,000 baht per person, only once in April 2020, and a moratorium on debt payments for them or caregivers who borrow money from the Fund for Promotion and Development of the Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities is available for a period of twelve months, from April 2020 to March 2021. Those with disabilities and their caregivers can borrow money from the Fund for Promotion and Development of the Quality of Life of Persons with Disabilities for occupation during the COVID-19 pandemic in the amount of no more than 10,000 baht per person without a guarantor, no interest, the installments can be returned within 5 years, and debt-free in the first year.

Since November 2020 until January 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic situation started to spread in the second phase and might continue to spread in the third and fourth phases as more and more infections within the country were becoming increasingly untraceable. It can be realized that the outbreak has spread to more regional areas in provinces. Socio-economic activities are suspended, as the number of infections continued to accelerate. Especially in regional areas spreading to provinces, infected people are still being found more and more throughout the country. The economic system and activities would have to be completely disrupted, including the closure of shopping centers, department stores, businesses, stalls, and unemployment. The break of the economic system is temporary, but it cannot proceed in the long term as people's finances are insufficient for their livelihoods. Daily workers need money to spend each month. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) claimed that the spread of the COVID-19 in Asia is still a long time coming. Screening measures, cluster protection, early treatment, social distancing, or lockdown can only save valuable time. It is all just to prepare for a massive infection. However, all measures do not mean the risk would run out as long as the disease continues to spread. The pandemic would end at least until a vaccine to prevent the disease is found.

The severe COVID-19 pandemic situation is something new for the whole world. In the past, many sectors tried to learn and coordinate to get the country out of this crisis, but there are still many points that can be improved, for example, the government should communicate with the people clearly. Previously, the Ministry of Public Health made a press conference every day, which is considered a good thing because progress can be always followed up. However, if various government communication channels are added, it would be better as all sectors would be able to communicate clearly with the same information. In this crisis, the government should make it clear what mass media and people should get from which agencies or who. Each problem might be communicated separately according to the responsibility of the agency, but the important thing is that the information of each point communicated must be clear and is the same information to serve the society in a timely manner without doubts. Furthermore, obtaining accurate and precise information would allow people to evaluate the situation correctly without anxiety. This clarity would also help to support the economy from impacts that would be more than the actual crisis (Chiang Mai, 2021). However, despite the situation of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. No matter how severe it is, at present it is found that every country around the world, including Thailand, has cooperated in developing research and producing new innovations to prevent and help COVID patients, making it possible to better solve the COVID situation. Various agencies, both public and private, in Thailand have produced and invented innovations such as Chulalongkorn University is

committed to developing research to create innovations to alleviate problems from COVID-19, both scientific and social science, not only answering health problems. but also helps take care of the mind along with increasing skills and knowledge that promote careers through innovation. For example, COVID-19 SCAN, -Shield+: Protecting Spray, Thailand Vaccine ChulaCov19, application of "Lung Care" Express Analysis Mobile Unit, including the application Doctor Ready by Ministry of Public Health, which is a new innovation developed to help solve various problems in this situation. Therefore, leaders should have a forward vision and prepare for changes that will occur in the future. There is not only a solution to the crisis in this COVID situation. Including supporting various policies such as personnel budgets development and research and creating new innovations related to solving other situations that will occur in the future as well.

Many people questioned that in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, what kind of leaders do people in the country need to cope with the challenges in the new world and the post-Covid? Nithinan Somboonwit (2021), Managing Director of Accenture Technology Business Group Thailand, said leaders are not only looking at adapting to the country's survival in this unsatisfactory state of affairs, but the aftermath as well. He believed that a country that can develop new things or innovations that meet the needs of population after the COVID-19 pandemic is what would also determine the future of the country.

#### 4. Conclusion

The spread of the COVID-19 is not only affecting people's health and lifestyle, but also creates a huge challenge for the country's leaders as they have to figure out a way to lead the nation through the crisis and survive sustainably.

In terms of the solution, in the recent situation, people also urged those in charge to urgently resolve this crisis and control the death of people from serious infectious diseases in a timely manner, for example, controlling the epidemic, supporting entrepreneurs and people, stimulating the economy, including reviving Thailand. These are considered urgent approaches and are the cornerstone of effectively solving the COVID-19 pandemic at this time. Leaders should use their hearts and brains to lead their organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic. They should be emotionally intelligent and show compassion for the people of the country, since during this time people wanted nothing more than safety and good health. Thus, the most important thing is to take care of the people of the country. In this regard, during the high uncertainty of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders should consolidate decision-making powers to ensure clarity, quickness, and timely decision-making. Furthermore, all decisions and actions should always be based on the primary goal of social protection for social equality.

The focus on speed is not perfection as emergencies happen all the time. Leaders must make brave and

timely decisions, and have contingency plans to deal with uncertain situations. More importantly, clear goals are factors encouraging leaders to make faster decisions in spite of lack complete information. Similar information might be used instead. Once the situation has returned to normal, reviews and improvements in the quality of information to be used in future crises should be undertaken, including building trust among all related persons. Trust during this time of crisis is extremely significant. Trust is achieved when three factors are combined: transparency or direct communication, a good relationship with stakeholders, and related persons believe that leaders and they would surely deliver on what they promised. Trust is a key factor driving all involved people to work together to overcome obstacles during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The limitations of this research are the expected fluctuations in government data such as the number of people infected with COVID-19. Impact on the economy Society which affects this research Therefore, from the point of view of government researchers, the disclosure of real information is useful in researching and solving problems correctly in the future.

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