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The six critical tasks of strategic leaders during crisis. Ensuring safety of stakeholders during COVID-19 pandemic in Poland

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Abstract

The authors' purpose in this article is to present the way in which strategic leaders may use analytical tools to operate during crisis. Their actions is based on the idea of six main tasks, the so-called "Six Makings", that they have to accomplish. The idea of "critical tasks during crisis was presented on the basis of the COVID-19 situation in Poland and the activities carried out by the Polish government and the Polish Health-care System (Strategic Leaders) to neutralize the negative effects of the pandemic, protect the health and lives of citizens, and care for the economic situation.

Qualitative data analysis techniques were used in the research process. The authors concluded that in times of crisis, citizens rely on their leaders and believe that they will ensure their security and a swift return to customary. Strategic leaders must guarantee that the organizations and stakeholders they lead are prepared to counter the future challenges — foreseen and unforeseen alike. The “Six Makings” analytical tool, properly used, could significantly improve the accuracy of decisions made and increase the effectiveness of actions taken.

Keywords: safety, pandemic, crisis situation, strategic leaders, crisis management

Introduction

Strategic leaders are responsible for managing the state, governmental organizations, and other institutions, that have an overall impact on functioning of both, the state and its citizens. Their action in crisis is crucial for quick neutralization of threats and recurrence of normality. When managing crisis, leaders need suitable analytical tools to support them in the process of collecting information, making decisions, activating crisis management procedures and mechanisms, informing and instructing stakeholders, and finally, ending the crisis and gaining experience from it for the future. One of the most useful may be the “Six Makings” framework.

The purpose of this article is to present how strategic leaders can use analytical tools to operate during crisis. The process of their actions is based on the idea of six main tasks that they have to accomplish, the so-called “Six Makings”. This logical structure allows for a comprehensive approach to a crisis situation by strategic leaders, detailing all the tasks they need to accomplish during crisis to ensure safety of stakeholders and draw conclusions for the future. The idea of “Six Makings” was presented on the basis of the COVID19 situation in Poland and the activities carried out by the Polish government and the Polish Health-care System (Strategic Leaders) to neutralize the negative effects of the pandemic, protect the health and lives of citizens, and care for the economic situation.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned goal of the thesis, the authors formulated the following research problem: How can strategic leaders use the “Six Makings” analytical tool to stop the crisis, limit its destructive consequences and ensure the safety of stakeholders? As part of a methodical

review of the scientific bibliography and formal government documents, text was analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques. The definition of crisis based on the threat of human core values was introduced to underline the role of the strategic leader dealing with crises and ensuring safety of stakeholders. Afterward, the structure and main assumptions of the “Six Makings” are presented in order to introduce possible actions of the Polish government and the Polish Health Service (PHS) – playing here roles of strategic leaders – during the COVID-19 crisis. On this basis, the possibilities of using the “Six Makings” during crisis were presented in order to quickly neutralize it and, above all, ensure the safety of Polish society (Stakeholders).

Strategic leaders and crisis management

Strategic leaders are those who stand at the top of organizations and have primary responsibility for charting the course and achieving positive short and long term results for their various constituencies and who play a crucial role in crisis situations (*Strategic leadership...*, 2023, p. 35).

There is no unequivocal definition of a crisis, because a crisis is discussed in relation to various areas of life, areas of activity or forces affecting man and society (Walas-Trębacz, Ziarko, 2011, p. 19). For the purpose of this article the authors assumed that crisis can be a state of feeling, people may consider different situations as crises (Boin, Ekengren, Rhinard, 2021, p. 5). For most of human beings a situation is a **crisis** when central actors perceive that:

- Fundamental/core values are threatened,
- There is limited time to act, and
- The situation is marked by uncertainty (*Strategic leadership...*, 2023, p. 32).

Crisis definition encompasses a wide variety of manifestations of acute adversity: natural and industrial disasters, financial meltdowns, terrorist attacks, critical infrastructure breakdowns, major riots, and pandemics. Crises may come in many forms and there have been developed many sorts of its typologies. They are based on time and differentiates between “flash crises” (emerging and ending quickly) and protracted crises. The second type may develop slowly (“creeping crises”) and may have long-term consequences (“long-shadow crises”) (Boin, Hart, 2022, p. 14). The COVID-19 pandemic

took this form and had enormous social and economic consequences for the entire world. Regardless of the form, in times of crisis, communities and members of organizations expect their leaders to **minimize the impact** and **ensure the safety!**

Identifying **core values** and determining, if they are being threatened, is one of the most important tasks of strategic leaders. One factor determining that an event is a crisis is when the core values are at stake. Thus, one must first identify who the stakeholders are and what values they have and if they perceive their core values are being threatened. Some examples of core values:

- Life, casualties, injuries,
- Public health,
- Personal safety,
- Civil liberties,
- Economic,
- Critical infrastructure,
- National security, national integrity,
- Governance, government structures, legislation,
- Trust in state institutions and authorities,
- Law enforcement, police, judicial sector (courts) (*Strategic leadership...*, 2023, p. 34).

If at least one of the above-mentioned or other core values is at risk, strategic leaders must take into account the rapidly approaching crisis.

One of the most important factors working against crisis recognition is the limited time available to strategic leaders for considering, debating, and deciding upon policy issues (Boin et al., 2017, p. 30). A crisis may be characterized by surprise, sudden breakdown, increased tension, loss of control over current activities (Mroczko, 2012, p. 191). All this is associated with a rapid change in the security situation and the emergence of threats to stakeholders. Strategic leaders have very little time to sense-making and take the right decision aimed at quickly limiting the effects of a crisis event and neutralizing threats, as a result.

To determine the time situation, the strategic leaders must check if there is significant time pressure over and beyond, what is considered to be an acceptable amount of time. The following questions may help them understand the time dynamics of the approaching crisis:

- How much time is available?
- Do we have enough time to collect information, make the necessary decisions and act?
- Do those we cooperate with have the same concept of time as my organization?
- Or are they operating with different time parameters?

If there is definitely time pressure, strategic leaders must determine how much time they need and if it is possible “to buy” more? Furthermore, they need to determine if their current actions will affect more long-term issues (for example, protecting jobs or property rights vs protecting longer-term environmental concerns) (*Strategic leadership...*, 2023, p. 35).

The last factor in determining if an event is a crisis is to define the amount of uncertainty. In crisis the level of uncertainty must be seen as much over or below normal state. Strategic leaders should answer two fundamental questions in this circumstances:

- Do we know what is happening and what or who is activating the events?
- Do we know how the course of actions will evolve?

When face with increased uncertainty, strategic leaders may need to call in experts or counter measures to reduce some of the uncertainty. Likewise, considering all potential developments of the current scenario (best, most likely and worst case) may also help them conceptualize how the current situation could develop or unfold. Cognitive short cuts (for example historical analogies) can be helpful but they can also be detrimental since every crisis is unique (*Strategic leadership...*, 2023, p. 35).

In crisis management, strategic leaders should use all available tools that will help them effectively visualize the situation and make appropriate decisions. The authors assumed that one of the most effective may be the “Six Makings” framework, presented later in the article. According to this analysis, strategic leaders have six main tasks to accomplish during crisis.

The “Six Makings” as a Crisis Management Tool

The “Six Makings” is an analytical tools used in crisis which has been developed by Boin, P. Hart, E. Stern and B. Sundelius, researchers from the US

and Swedish universities (Boin et al., 2013, p. 15). It enables the leader to cover the entire issue of crisis management, early limit the negative effects of the crisis, make the right decision, adopt the optimal course of action and ensure the safety of stakeholders. According to the above mentioned academics during a crisis, strategic leaders have six main tasks to accomplish. These are as follows:

1. Sense-making,
2. Decision-making,
3. Meaning-making,
4. Ending,
5. Learning and reforming,
6. Preparing.

Sense making is a task that aims to collect and process information that will help crisis managers to detect an emerging crisis and understand the significance of what is going on as well as identify the main threats. The critical questions during this part of crisis are as follows:

- Who is being affected by this situation and in what ways?
- What information do we have? What information do we lack? What information do we need and who can we get it from?
- What core values are at stake (gender equality, human lives, health, economy, human rights, environment, national security/sovereignty)?

Decision making is about making critical calls on strategic dilemmas and orchestrating a coherent response to implement those decisions. The main questions to answer in this task are:

- Who has the responsibility, mandate, and legitimacy/public trust to make the necessary decisions?
- How do we ensure a decision-making process so we can maintain public trust, legitimacy and credibility among our citizens, strategic partners and others?

Meaning making is a task in which the leaders offer a situational definition and narrative that is convincing, helpful, and inspiring to citizens and responders. It is also an explanation in a public forum what was done to prevent and manage the crisis and why. Leaders must answer here following questions:

- How do we want to frame the situation? What are our main messages?

- How can and should we communicate our actions and decisions? To whom? Via what channels/actors?
- In what way do we need to communicate in order to uphold trust, legitimacy and credibility?

Ending is a task related to extinguishing crisis. Crisis ends when the response network is deactivated because it is no longer needed. Strategically, a crisis reaches closure when crisis-related issues no longer dominate public, political, and policy agendas. Some fundamental questions to answer in this task:

- At what point can we say that the crisis and/or conflict is over for us? For our partners? For others? When and how can we go back to our new/normal activities?
- What kind of analysis do we need to do about the current state?

Learning and reforming – determining the causes of a crisis, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the responses to it, and undertaking remedial action based on this understanding.

- When should we start the evaluation process and who should conduct it? How do we ensure an impartial and inclusive evaluation process?
- What mistakes did we make along the way? Were we able to correct these errors during our crisis management or do we need to reform our organization/system/structure?

A key tool for learning and reforming is After Action Review (AAR) which should be highly institutionalized in security organizations. While doing the AAR strategic leaders could for example answer the questions what they should do less or more, what they should stop or start doing and what they should continue doing.

Preparing is the last, but not least important task of strategic leadership. Although the five strategic leadership tasks outlined above are helpful in understanding the core challenges for leaders confronted with crises, there should be taken all further measures and undertakings to prepare an organization for the next crisis situation. Preparing consists of several subtasks, which are discussed in turn next. These are Organizing and Selecting; Planning; Educating, Training, and Exercising; Cultivating Vigilance; and Protecting Preparedness (Stern, 2013, p. 52–53).

There must be developed appropriate crisis plans and standard operating procedures. Drawing upon on lessons identified, learned and implemented, what kinds of strategies, policies, legislation, structures, measures and so on can and should be considered for strengthening resilience in order to be better prepared to mitigate/deter future crises?

The Six Makings framework enables strategic leaders to maintain a holistic view of the crisis and focus on its most important aspects. It also indicates individual actions that leaders must take to understand the nature of the crisis, take appropriate measures to stop it and limit its negative effects, and, above all, to ensure the safety of stakeholders. Therefore, in the further part of the article, the authors presented an example this procedure possibly used hypothetically by the government and PHS to struggle the COVID-19 crisis in Poland.

The Six Makings analytical tool use on the base of COVID-19 pandemics crisis in Poland

Creeping crises, like COVID-19 pandemics — developing slowly and arriving in plain sight — prompt existential questions about the rules and practices that are supposed to guard society against precisely those types of threats (Boin, Ekengren, Rhinard, 2020, p. 116–138). It was important to determine examples of needs, interests, and priorities which were critical for the government (Strategic Leaders, Strategic Leadership) and the stakeholders (Polish People) at the beginning the COVID-19 pandemics crisis in Poland. The examples of needs could have been for the Polish government the information on how to limit the pandemic without putting the economy at risk of collapse. Information on how to introduce pandemic restrictions and maintain the proper and safe functioning of society at the same time was also the priority. The main interest for the Polish government was to stop the pandemic as soon as possible and implement such preventive measures that will not adversely affect the ability of society to function (*Strategia...*, 2020, p. 2).

The Polish government adopted a strategy of isolating the society and limiting its activity in the social, cultural, sports and other spheres. In the education system distance learning was forcibly introduced. Kindergartens

and nurseries have been closed. At the same time, in industry and business, employers were encouraged to organize remote work whenever possible. However, efforts were made to preserve the supply chain as much as possible to avoid social dissatisfaction. The degree of restrictions was smoothly adjusted to the current pandemic situation, i.e. the daily number of infections (Kacprowska, 2022, p. 48–50; Kowalczyk, Zamorska, 2022, p. 159–162).

According to the later researches health policy during a pandemic should be conducted in such a way as to enable the efficient functioning of the economy, while maintaining the necessary security measures (Kacprowska, 2022, p. 49). Many people had to stay at their homes, either unable to work or working virtually to stop the virus. However the ‘essential’ workers continued their jobs on the frontline of the pandemic. This group included workers in the health and care sector, victim support services, education, supermarkets, pharmacies and banks. Women were over-represented in many of these sectors, what was important from the gender equality perspective (Krause, 2021, p. 170–172).

The widespread use of disinfectants was encouraged in the field of pandemic prevention, and work began on obtaining more breathing apparatus, medicines, tests and a vaccine. When tests were obtained, in the second phase of the pandemic, the public was tested massively in order to quickly detect the disease. However, after the vaccine was obtained, a mass vaccination system was organized and rules of social coexistence were established to encourage people to be vaccinated (*Strategia...*, 2020, p. 10).

1. Sense-making

The COVID-19 pandemic began in China in the fall of 2019 and before it spread around the world, the authorities of European countries, including Poland, had the opportunity to prepare. Therefore, it was not a crisis that appeared in Poland suddenly and without warning. The first case of infection with this coronavirus was diagnosed on March 4, 2020 in a hospital in Zielona Góra (western Poland), where a 66-year-old man who arrived by bus from Germany was diagnosed. Only after this fact did the Polish authorities begin to implement measures to limit the transmission of the virus in the country. According to the “Six Makings” framework at the beginning the Polish government should have had to determine the needs, interests and

priorities. The authors provided two examples of those determinants for the Polish government and the Polish Healthcare System (PHS) in the table 1.

Table 1. Examples of needs, interests and priorities for the Polish government and Polish Health-Care System during sense-making in COVID-19 pandemic

Organization	Needs	Interests	Priorities
Polish government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information on how to limit the pandemic without putting the economy at risk of collapse 2. Information on how to introduce pandemic restrictions and maintain the proper and safe functioning of society at the same time 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To stop the pandemic as soon as possible. 2. Implementation of such preventive measures that will not adversely affect the ability of society to function. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get means and tools to limit the pandemic 2. Prepare a protective shield for companies and employees losing money due to restrictions
Polish Healthcare System (PHS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. More detailed information on the spread of the COVID-19 virus. 2. Answer the question which social groups are most vulnerable to its impact? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Get the public to follow the rules of behavior during the pandemic and vaccination. 2. Raise additional funds and equipment to fight the pandemic. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Obtaining the vaccine as soon as it's possible. 4. Creating new places in hospitals and acquiring ventilators.

Source: Authors' own work

Polish authorities and PHS tried to find a way to function properly and carry out their tasks during the pandemic. They also tried to ensure the relative safety of people. There were no major differences in terms of needs and interests between the listed organizations. PHS wanted to maintain the ability to fight the pandemic but also treat other diseases at the same time to protect people. The Polish government, on the other hand, was most interested in maintaining the normal functioning of the economy and relative social satisfaction (*Przegląd strategii...*, 2023). Both organizations had to find a happy medium to maintain a balance between the developing pandemic and the ability to carry out statutory tasks.

2. Decision-making

The COVID-19 pandemics confronted the Polish government and PHS with the issue they do not face during their daily routine. The needs and problems triggered by the crisis were so great that some of the resources available had to be prioritized. Polish strategic leaders had to weigh policy, political, organizational, ethical, and sometimes personal ramifications, tradeoffs, risks, and opportunities (Boin et al., 2017, p. 16). The main object of decision-making task for the Polish authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic was to make strategic decisions with the purpose of maintaining public trust, legitimacy and credibility with others (such as the general public, minority and ethnic groups, strategic partners, and so on). Some examples of good decisions as well as poor ones, are listed in the table 2.

Table 2. Examples of strategic decisions made by the Polish authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic with the purpose of maintaining public trust, legitimacy and credibility

Decisions made	Examples of a good decisions	Examples of a poor or less effective decisions
Polish government	Participation in research, ordering and purchasing a vaccine.	Too early decision to conduct remote elections and purchase envelopes and paper forms, which led to the wasting of public money.
Polish Healthcare System (PHS)	Vaccinate the public as soon as possible, starting with the groups most at risk of severe illness and death.	A hasty decision to purchase ventilators from an unreliable source, which resulted in the loss of some of the money allocated for it.

Source: Authors' own work

By deciding to vaccinate as soon as possible, the government had opened up opportunities for PHS, as well as other organizations and companies, to make efforts to obtain and work on a vaccine. This immediately improved the public mood and increased public confidence in the authorities. The long-term consequence of this decision was likely to be a reduction in the number of critically ill and fatal patients and allowed the PHS to function reasonably well during pandemic.

By deciding prematurely on remote elections, which were then postponed and then carried out in the normal mode, the government wasted public money and lowered the trust of the public, especially of those voters who hesitated or wanted to vote for the opposition.

3. Meaning-making

Meaning-making refers to the fact that leaders must attend not only to the operational challenges associated with crisis, but also to the ways in which various stakeholders perceive and understand it (Stern, 2013, p. 51–52). During meaning-making strategic leaders are expected to reduce uncertainty by providing an authoritative information about crisis, why it is happening, and what needs to be done (Boin et al., 2017, p. 17). Citizens look to their governments for charting pathways back to normality and minimizing community impacts of crisis. Crisis communication with the stakeholders is critical in this task. Extremely important are operational and symbolic aspects of crisis communication, thus every information from the Polish authorities could influence negatively or positively on the crisis effects and the situation of the Polish society.

Framing was a problem for the Polish government. The stakeholders could have had some difficulties with finding the main message from the government. Unfortunately, it often changed the plans about pandemic restrictions and their impact on the economy. Finally, it was decided to find a happy medium and, on the one hand, the society was encouraged to isolate, emphasizing that the pandemic was very dangerous and full restrictions were periodically introduced, and on the other hand, attempts were made to highlight that the situation was normalizing and one could, for example, go to the elections without fear. According to the authors' analysis each crisis frame must be adapted while new evidence came to light and with each shift of the crisis dynamics, but Poland didn't provide clear and adapted meaning making and people could have complained about it in result.

PHS quickly adopted an appropriate strategy to limit the spread of the virus and acquire the suitable resources to combat it. It was also emphasized all the time that they would try to maintain the PHS's ability to carry out all tasks at all costs (Strategia..., 2020). The Polish health minister correctly used the means of strategic communication to inform the public about the current situation and the actions taken.

In the table 3 the authors listed how the Polish authorities framed the COVID-19 pandemic when it first hit (end of 2019 to beginning of 2020) and in the next phases of the pandemic.

The authors identified some major differences or strategic dilemmas in listed above framings. Both institutions tried to maintain the ability to make a quick and smooth transition to pandemic functioning, but there are some differences. PHS unlike as the government continued to maintain extensive pandemic restrictions across its institutions.

Strategic communication is extremely important in meaning making. The stakeholders must be kept informed at all times about the current situation and the measures taken. The main message (course of action) should be communicated continuously. The safety of people is an absolute priority. If measures are taken that drastically restrict people's normal lives, the positive results they can produce must be made clear and their use stopped as soon as possible (Bolt et al., 2023).

Table 3. Examples of framing made by the Polish authorities during different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic

Framing	Examples of framing in the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic	Examples of framing during further phases of the COVID-19 pandemic
Polish government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Isolation as the main way to limit spread of the virus, – Emphasizing that the pandemic was very dangerous and full restrictions were periodically introduced, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Emphasizing that the situation was normalizing and one could, for example, go to the elections without fear, – Informing about readiness to quickly and effectively counteract the returning pandemic.
Polish Healthcare System (PHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Information about the strategy to limit the spread of the virus and acquire the suitable resources to combat it, – Information about the PHS's ability to carry out all tasks at all costs, – Regular use of means of strategic communication to inform the public about the current situation and the actions taken. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Continued warning against the threat of pandemic and maintaining constant readiness to actively combat it.

Source: Authors' own work

Ending

Crisis may last long. After the intensive phase, the situation usually improves and stakeholders expect the leaders to bring the state of emergency to end. “The task of crisis leadership, then, is to restore a sense of normalcy: end hostilities, extinguish the fire, treat the wounded, reaffirm public trust in institutions” (Boin et al., 2017, p. 103). It is also important to correctly determine when the end of the crisis occurs, which is not easy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the basic criterion of the intensity of the crisis for the Polish government was the daily number of people infected with the virus. The number of cases depended on the season and weather. Viruses naturally spread better in periods of autumn and winter cold, so subsequent peaks of the pandemic in Poland occurred from November to March 2020 and 2021. In Poland, the peak of the disease in the 4th wave occurred in the second half of November. In the 48th week of 2021, the highest incidence was recorded in Poland at 861 cases per 100,000 inhabitants of Poland, and then a gradual decline to the level of 436 cases in the 52nd week of 2021 (ECDC Data..., 2021). This did not mean, however, that in the spring and summer periods, when the number of cases decreased, the pandemic ended and the crisis was over.

Based on the definition of a crisis presented at the beginning of the article, it can be concluded that it ends when the leaders and stakeholders perceive that:

- Fundamental/core values are not threatened,
- There are no sudden changes in the security situation,
- The security situation is clear and predictable.

In the table 4 the authors listed criteria and considerations presented by the Polish authorities for establishing when the COVID-19 pandemic can be considered over.

Poland has not set a clear condition for ending the pandemic crisis. The Polish government was afraid of the virus spreading again and its negative impact on the security of citizens, and therefore it was difficult for it to unequivocally state that the pandemic has come to an end. Strategically the COVID-19 crisis in Poland reached closure when the Ukrainian war started by Russian Federation on 24 February 2022 and the crisis-related issues in Poland no longer dominated public political agendas.

Table 4. Examples criteria and considerations presented by the Polish authorities for establishing when the COVID-19 pandemic could be considered over

Ending	Two criteria or considerations for determining when the COVID-19 pandemic is over
Poland	<p>The Polish Government potential criteria for ending the COVID-19 pandemic crisis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- The life and health of stakeholders are not at risk, - The pandemic situation in low intense, clear and predictable. <p>Poland has not developed clear criteria for ending the pandemic. For the government, more serious political and economic problems meant that the pandemic was no longer a priority. Human life is still threatened by COVID-19 or other diseases that cannot be effectively treated due to the pandemic. The situation is still uncertain because it is not known how COVID-19 will develop. The crises can be considered ended when the two mentioned factors are eliminated.</p>
Polish Healthcare System (PHS)	<p>PHS communicated to the public about the upcoming waves of the pandemic, but had no information on how many more such waves could arise and how dangerous they would be. The end of the pandemic wave was announced when the infection rate of the virus was less than one. Still, PHS has not determined whether the pandemic crisis was over.</p>

Source: Authors' own work

Nevertheless, it is still very important to constantly monitor the COVID-19 security situation in Poland and react quickly to changes. The criteria for ending the crisis should had been clearly defined. Poland had not done so and in fact Poland had a situation of uncertainty for a long time. A gender analysis should be carried out to ensure that the crisis does not still have a negative impact on some genders or certain social groups. The public should also know exactly the conditions for ending the crisis.

Learning and reforming

Crisis usually hits a system that is outdated, inadequate to new threats and inflexible. Consequently, learning lessons and implementing reforms are the key tasks of strategic leadership. Crisis can be a source of potential lessons for contingency planning, organizational reform, policy adaptation, and training for future (Boin et al., 2017, p. 19). It may be an opportunity to improve the functioning of the organization, increase its effectiveness

and the level of security of stakeholders. After lessons learned the strategic leaders should provide recommendations that can be used for future decision-making.

The process of evaluating actions during the crisis should be initiated by the government and PHS as soon as possible. Both institutions should establish special teams consisting of specialists from organizations most involved in crisis operations. The impartiality and independence of evaluation committees can be ensured through the participation of scientists and non-governmental organizations.

It is very important to identify and analyze the mistakes made during the crisis. In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, both institutions made quite a lot of mistakes, and they can now be subject to in-depth analysis in order to draw conclusions for the future. According to the Supreme Audit Office (Najwyższa Izba Kontroli) the biggest mistakes made by the Polish government were the lack of early response to the symptoms of the virus development in the world and the possibility of its dissemination into Poland, as well as the failure to develop appropriate operational plans and procedures for the purchase of medical equipment (*Covid-19...*, 2023).

Though, for the first six months after the first case of SARS-CoV-2 was detected in Poland, PHS did not convene the ministerial Crisis Management Team and did not prepare the health care sector for the outbreak of the epidemic. PHS did not implement the plan to create temporary hospitals, and later did not coordinate their launch and did not ensure the correlation of the number of COVID beds with the needs resulting from the course of the epidemic, as a result of which too many of them were prepared and public funds were wasted. There were also no adequate resources of medical supplies and equipment (*Covid-19...*, 2023).

Both institutions could correct these errors during crisis management or even reform their organization. But the period of decline in the number of infections and hospitalizations between May and September 2020 was not used to develop reliable (realistic) principles of operation for the health care sector for the time of the recurrence of the epidemic expected in autumn, no training or exercises were carried out in hospitals, and no plan was prepared to expand the base of hospital beds for COVID-19 patients

(*Covid-19...*, 2023). These actions could significantly limit the effects of subsequent pandemic waves.

In the meantime PHS should stop stockpiling drugs and vaccines as they might expire before the next wave of the pandemic hits. It should stop producing excessive amounts of COVID-19 documents and procedures, as it takes away the energy and time of employees needed to carry out major tasks. PHS should receive more resources to diagnose infections, which would allow monitoring the presence of the pandemic in the community.

The PHS should focus less on creating pandemic bans and restrictions. This would let it to function normally, while maintaining the ability to quickly counteract the pandemic. PHS should continue prevention programs, as raising public awareness of the threat of a pandemic can prevent another wave.

Preparing

Strategic Leaders must prepare themselves as well as their organizations. The basic strategy for all organizations should be to use all measures that preventively limit the possibility of another crisis. Such measures include prevention programs, information campaigns in the media, staff training, etc. In order to increase the flexibility and resilience of individual organizations and institutions in the country, they should be able to maintain freedom of action in times of crisis, applying the mission command principles, that is, to indicate the purpose of action, not to impose a method of action. A logistics system should be prepared for the rapid acquisition and supply of the country with the necessary medicines, vaccines and medical equipment. To this end, tendering and purchasing procedures in government institutions should be simplified.

While preparing for the next pandemic the Polish government should clearly define the criteria for the outbreak and end of the crisis and develop several acceptable courses of action, along with their economic implications, considering that, there may be limited time to act, and the situation marked by uncertainty (Organizing and Selecting). According to the Supreme Audit Office the Polish government should develop a national epidemic operational plan (Planning). Counteracting the epidemic threat on a national

scale must be coordinated with Provincial Operational Plans in the Event of an Epidemic, which must form coherent wholes and contain current data on available medical staff, location of isolation rooms and quarantine places. Moreover, realistic operating principles must be developed for the health care sector (PHS) in case of the recurrence of the epidemic, as well as training and exercises conducted in hospitals (Training and Exercising). It is also important to develop a plan to expand the base of hospital beds for COVID-19 patients, ensure supplies of medicines and vaccines as well as the necessary medical equipment (Cultivating Vigilance) (*Covid-19...*, 2023). PHS should start developing a preventive program to make the public aware of the importance of vaccination, the use of hygiene measures, and the use of social distancing in justified cases (Educating). According to the authors' observations and analysis during the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland the Polish government should make low and economic conditions to prevent the virus spreading in the future. A strategy of preventing and fighting more virus spreads should be developed on the base of experiences from COVID-19 (Protecting Preparedness).

Conclusions

In times of crisis, citizens rely on their leaders and believe that they will ensure their security and a swift return to customary. Strategic leaders must guarantee that the organizations and stakeholders they lead are prepared to counter the future challenges – foreseen and unforeseen alike. They have a responsibility to properly terminate crises and ensure that their organizations learn from major actions. Crises bring threats, but also opportunities to learn and reform. Strategic leaders should treat the crisis as an opportunity to implement reforms in their organizations that will increase their resilience and flexibility. The fundamental task of leaders during a crisis is to ensure the safety of their stakeholders.

Appropriate analytical tools should be selected to help strategic leaders carry out tasks at every stage crisis. The “Six Makings” are critical tasks that enable them to make the accurate decision, limit the effects of the crisis and ensure the safety of the stakeholders. They may be constructed as a template with questions which strategic leaders must answer in appropriate order

while struggling with successive phases of crisis. This framework allows leaders to look holistically at problems emerging during a crisis and focus on their strategic aspects.

The COVID-19 pandemic has turned out to be a crisis on a global scale, but no common strategy to struggle it has been developed. Individual countries, including members of the European Union, chose their own strategy, based on national circumstances and the scale of pandemic threats. Poland did not draw suitable conclusions from the virus crisis that was spreading across Europe at the beginning of 2020 and took countermeasures too late. Both the Polish government and PHS had difficulties in choosing an appropriate strategy to fight the pandemic and planning subsequent crisis management activities. Their activities were rather a reaction to existing threats than prevention against them. The government tried to keep national economy in good conditions while the PHS continuously observed the availability of healthcare services for patients and responded to any symptoms of irregularities or limitations of this availability. The “Six Makings” analytical tool, properly used, could significantly improve the accuracy of decisions made and increase the effectiveness of actions taken. The pandemic continues with new mutations of the virus. Even at this stage of the crisis, although it is not as intense as in previous years, strategic leaders still are forced to make decisions that will be of key importance for the future of the country and public, so the part of the “Six Makings” framework, connected to last tasks, such as learning and reforming along with preparing, should be still considered for use.

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