

Original research

## Framing Public Sector Capacity For Effective Public-Private Partnerships In Malaysia: A Typological Assessment

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**Abstract:** Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have remained a cornerstone of Malaysia's development strategy since the New Economic Policy of the 1970s, with private sector participation consistently embedded in national planning. Analysing how PPPs are positioned within long-term policy frameworks is crucial for understanding the evolving priorities underpinning public-private coordination. Yet, existing scholarship offers limited insight into how these policies address capacity development within the public sector, leaving gaps in evaluating institutional coherence and adaptive capability over time. This study addresses that gap by constructing a typology of Malaysia's PPP initiatives and their alignment with public sector capacity development, based on a qualitative content analysis of 352 excerpts drawn from the First to Twelfth Malaysia Plans. Seven strategic categories and 26 thematic domains were identified, illustrating a shift from broad, idealized models toward more targeted, organizational, and empowerment-oriented strategies. While public sector human capital and private sector participation remain central, recent plans show increased attention to project-based competencies and logistical functions within the public service. However, misalignments persist, particularly in integrating sector-specific capacity requirements across both sectors. The findings also underscore strong institutional path dependency, with legacy structures shaping PPP trajectories. The resulting typology offers a critical lens for understanding how Malaysia's public service is reimagining capacity development in response to contemporary PPP demands, advocating for more integrated, adaptive, and context-sensitive reform approaches.

**Keywords:** Public-Private Partnership (PPP); privatization; Malaysia Plans; capacity development; public sector development

### Introduction

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are widely recognised as long-term collaborative arrangements between the public and private sectors aimed at delivering public goods and services (Abatecola et al., 2020) although the concept itself remains inconsistently defined across the literature due to its evolving and context-dependent nature (Ke et al., 2023). Globally, PPPs have become a preferred strategy for governments seeking to manage public assets and infrastructure amid fiscal constraints (Yong Kim & Thuc, 2021) in which risks, responsibilities, costs, and benefits are shared in delivering public assets and services (Alexander et al., 2021; World Bank, 2017). In Malaysia, PPPs are institutionalised as collaborative arrangements where the private sector finances, develops, and manages projects or services under government supervision for public benefit (UKAS, 2022). Although the formal terminology of PPP was introduced relatively recently, Malaysia's engagement with PPP-type arrangements dates back to the *Privatization* and *Malaysia Incorporated* policies introduced during the Fourth Malaysia Plan (4MP) in 1983 (Khairuddin et al., 2016). Since then, PPPs have progressively expanded through successive Malaysia Plans, reflecting the government's continuing reliance on public-private collaboration as a national development strategy (Ismail et al., 2020; Rashid et al., 2016).

Within this policy trajectory, the terms “privatization” and “PPP” have often been used interchangeably, reflecting Malaysia’s dual-track PPP strategy that incorporates both Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) and privatization processes (Rashid et al., 2016; Ismail et al., 2020). Although the formal terminology of PPP was only adopted in 2010, Malaysia’s engagement in PPP-style arrangements had been underway since the early 1980s under the broader rubric of privatization.

Nevertheless, managing PPPs is far from straightforward. PPPs are inherently hybrid as projects, involving complex implementation, monitoring, and governance processes (Matinheikki et al., 2021; Suwardi & Saad, 2024). This hybridity reflects the dual imperative to meet both financial and social objectives, often aligning PPPs with the logic of social enterprise (Shah & Naghi Ganji, 2019). Despite their significance, the project management (PM) dimensions of PPPs remain underexplored in academic and practical discourse (Matinheikki et al., 2021). Moreover, while hybrid organizational arrangements present unique managerial challenges, the influence of their institutional contexts on project execution is still insufficiently understood (Söderlund & Sydow, 2019). As PPPs continue to evolve, the capabilities of project teams, particularly in the early stages of social infrastructure projects, have emerged as a key factor influencing project outcomes (Jewer et al., 2023). This underscores the growing need for specialized competencies through tailored capacity development programs, especially within the public sector to navigate the multifaceted demands of PPPs.

Capacity development has been widely understood as a dynamic and continuous process through which competencies are built, maintained, and reproduced across multiple levels. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2006), characterises capacity development as extending beyond individual skill acquisition to encompass the strengthening of institutional arrangements and systemic capabilities that enable actors to pursue development objectives independently and sustainably (Manu et al., 2018; UNDP, 2009). In a similar vein, the World Health Organization (2020) frames capacity development as the progressive enhancement of competencies required not merely to meet existing performance expectations, but to adapt to evolving demands and achieve higher standards over time. This broader conceptualisation is particularly salient in the context of PPPs, where effective capacity cannot be confined to individual expertise alone but must be embedded within organisational structures, governance processes, and policy frameworks that collectively shape implementation outcomes (Cohen & Hanrahan, 2021; Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2022).

PPP initiatives are often large and complex, with most challenges arising during implementation (Kokkaew et al., 2022; Van Den Hurk, 2016). The complexities have presented a major challenge to traditional methods of public administration because of the intricate structure of governments and the numerous actors involved (Kokkaew et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023), leading to clashes in government values or moral standards (Paanakker & Reynaers, 2020). Moreover, it requires extensive effort to administer the differences in work nature and cultures and align with their different objectives, respectively (Kokkaew et al., 2022; Suwardi & Saad, 2024). As highlighted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2020), the effectiveness of PPP implementation is significantly influenced and impacted by the public sector’s institutional capabilities and its ability to collaborate effectively with private stakeholders. To address these challenges and mitigate informational disparities in PPP procurement, public sector entities must cultivate appropriate capabilities (Irfan et al., 2021; Zada et al., 2023) and address the issue of limited PPP expertise (Kavishe et al., 2018). This involves acquiring the requisite competencies for project initiation, execution, and adaptation to the evolving landscape of PPPs. Additionally, the complexity also arises from partners' differing perceptions and strategies, particularly in the context of managing the PPPs (Agarwal et al., 2023; Kujala et al., 2021).

Recognizing the changing functions and duties of government officers involved in this complex and uncertain environment, it is clear that the essential capacity development necessary for their roles has also undergone a transformation (Song & Hao, 2023). This underscored the imperative for the public sector to appreciate and acquire additional proficiencies and strong institutional capabilities (Casady et al., 2019; Irfan et al., 2021). The unanticipated project approval delays, construction setbacks, and commencement issues were a result of a conjunction between an ill-prepared PPP agency and public agency representatives who lacked the required capabilities (Navalersuph & Charoenngam, 2021), and the inability to align the capabilities with the private provider’s skills frequently results in conflicts, renegotiations, takeovers, buybacks,

abandonment, and, in extreme situations, project cancellation (Irfan, 2021; Zawawi et al., 2014). While workforce readiness remains a critical concern in public administration, current scholarship offers limited insight into how the competencies of public sector personnel influence their adaptability in responding to transformative shifts associated with the evolving future-of-work paradigm (David et al., 2024). As global governance and service delivery systems become increasingly dynamic, there is a pressing need for the public sector to reconceptualise its approach to capacity development, with an emphasis on fostering forward-looking skills and competencies (Tangi et al., 2021). This imperative is further accentuated in the domain of PM, a field characterized by continuous evolution, where historical success benchmarks may no longer suffice under contemporary operational demands (Amoah et al., 2022).

The inherent complexity of managing PPPs as hybrid arrangements involving multifaceted contractual, financial, and governance structures necessitates a highly skilled and strategically agile project team (Agarwal et al., 2023; Reich, 2018). Thus, effective PPP implementation depends not only on institutional mechanisms but also on the project team's capability to navigate the full lifecycle of project activities, from planning and design to execution and post-completion evaluation (Gasemagha & Kowang, 2021; Irfan et al., 2021). Consequently, building organizational capacity within the public sector calls for a deliberate investment in project-specific competencies, contextual knowledge, and adaptive management practices that align with the complexities of PPP governance (Casady et al., 2020; Quelin et al., 2019). In this regard, continuous identification, development, and institutionalization of relevant capacity become essential not only to keep pace with advancements in PM theory and practice but also to respond to the shifting administrative logics of contemporary public sector reform. Moreover, the field is fragmented, indicating a need for further investigation where regional variations in practices and partner capabilities contribute to PPP schemes' efficacy (Chileshe et al., 2020).

In response, this study systematically reviews Malaysia's national development strategies until 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP) to assess how public sector capacity development is framed in relation to the institutional, fiscal, and governance challenges embedded in PPP execution policy. This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the evolution and institutional framing of PPP capacity development within Malaysia's national development plans. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the research seeks to uncover how Malaysia's public service is reimagining capacity development in response to contemporary PPP demands, as reflected in how these priorities are conceptually articulated, prioritised, and institutionalised within policy discourse, rather than to measure implementation outcomes or establish causal relationships. National planning documents such as the RMKs function not merely as technical policy instruments, but as authoritative texts that reflect state intentions, governance priorities, and underlying assumptions about public-sector capability. Qualitative content analysis enables the systematic interpretation of these texts to identify latent themes, policy emphases, and shifts in institutional logic over time dimensions that are not readily captured through quantitative methods. Therefore, a qualitative approach is methodologically congruent with the research objectives and the nature of the data. The study also provides practical insights from a stakeholder-oriented perspective, with implications for both policy formulation and practice. The structure of this paper begins with the examination of the content of the Malaysia Plans, followed by the presentation of the empirical findings, and concludes with a discussion of the results, limitations, and the conclusion of the study.

## Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative content analysis design to explore the representation of PPP initiatives and public service sector capacity development in Malaysia's key development policy documents, covering the 1MP to 12MP and their Mid-Term Reviews. The study focused exclusively on the alignment between PPP initiative progression and public service sector capacity development objectives within the broader policy trajectory initiated under the New Economic Policy (NEP). Drawing on Krippendorff's (2004) framework and the directed content analysis approach by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the study adopted a single-coder, interpretive qualitative content analysis design consistent with Krippendorff's emphasis on analytical

coherence and reflexive rule-based coding in qualitative inquiry, where depth of interpretation and contextual meaning take precedence over coder convergence.

This study utilised document analysis as the primary data collection method. Relevant excerpts that explicitly or implicitly referenced PPP progression and capacity development initiatives in the public service sector were identified based on thematic and contextual relevance. The use of qualitative content analysis enabled the study to systematically examine recurring strategies, implementation patterns, and program typologies reflected within Malaysia's national development policy documents across different policy periods.

The study was based exclusively on publicly available government policy documents, including Malaysia Plans from the 1MP to 12MP and their respective Mid-Term Reviews. In line with Krippendorff's (2004, p. 111) recommendations, this study adopted a combination of stratified and purposive sampling to enhance analytical relevance and representativeness. Documents were stratified by plan edition, with attention limited to sections referencing PPPs and capacity development to capture temporal trends. Within these, purposive sampling was applied to isolate passages outlining specific interventions, institutional structures, or strategic approaches aligned with the study's focus.

The data collection process involved identifying and extracting relevant textual units from the selected policy documents. Relevant excerpts that explicitly or implicitly referred to PPP progression and public service sector capacity development initiatives were systematically identified based on thematic and contextual relevance. These textual units were then compiled and organised according to the respective Malaysia Plan periods to facilitate comparative analysis of recurring policy strategies and implementation approaches across different developmental phases.

As this study employed qualitative document analysis, no interview or focus group discussion protocol was utilised. Instead, the analytical process was guided by Krippendorff's (2004) framework and the directed content analysis approach proposed by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Initial coding was guided by seven pre-established categories, while additional themes emerged inductively as analysis unfolded, reflecting Krippendorff's rule-based guidance and reflexive coding approach. Analytical rigour was ensured through iterative coding, continuous comparison across documents, and transparent documentation of coding decisions throughout the analysis process.

As the research did not involve human participants, personal data, or confidential information, formal ethical clearance was not required. All documents analysed are in the public domain and were accessed through official government sources. Ethical research principles were upheld through accurate representation of policy texts, transparent documentation of analytical procedures, and reflexive interpretation to minimise bias and misrepresentation.

The process of identifying, generating codes, and categorising data excerpts leading to the development of study themes was conducted using ATLAS.ti 25 software. Data organisation for the systematic structuring of codes and their subsequent aggregation into analytical categories was further guided by the thematic analysis matrix framework implemented within ATLAS.ti 25 (Zairul, 2025). Each excerpt was systematically coded and categorized, generating a typology with unique identifiers to ensure traceability and support a rigorous interpretation of Malaysia's evolving PPP and public service capacity development policy landscape. These textual units were coded to trace recurring strategies, implementation patterns, and program typologies across different policy periods. The analytical procedure ultimately supported the development of a structured typological interpretation of Malaysia's evolving PPP and public service capacity development policy landscape.

## **The Findings**

A comprehensive analysis revealed 352 excerpts, with 219 that specifically reference PPPs throughout the policies outlined in the 1MP to the 12MP and 133 that specifically reference the programs implemented throughout the plans that reflect the government's evolving approach and strategies in enhancing public service sector capacity. Each excerpt was coded into one of seven strategic categories based on its program orientation and was distributed according to Malaysia Plans and policy era (Table 1 and Table 2).

Table 1. Categories and Excerpt Across the Malaysia Plans

Category	Excerpt Within the Malaysia Plan											
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Administrative Planning	0	0	2	0	3	0	9	0	1	18	0	0
Role of the Private Sector	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Privatization	0	0	0	0	0	0	63	38	34	0	0	0
Strengthening Infrastructure	0	0	0	0	6	7	7	7	2	0	8	0
Public Service Transformation	0	4	2	1	0	22	12	10	5	7	27	38
Public Sector Programme and Financing	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0
Manpower Development	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0

The distribution of excerpts is across seven categories, namely Administrative Planning (33 excerpts, 9.35%); Roles of Private Sector (8 excerpts, 2.27%); Privatization (135 excerpts, 38.35%); Strengthening Infrastructure (37 excerpts, 10.51%); Public Service Transformation (128 excerpts, 36.36%); Public Sector Programme and Financing (6 excerpts, 1.7%); and Manpower Development (5 excerpts, 1.42%). At the category level, Privatization *and* Public Service Transformation constitute the largest proportions of coded excerpts, whereas categories such as Public Sector Programme and Financing *and* Manpower Development appear less frequently.

Table 2. Categories and Excerpts Across the Policy Era

Category	Distribution of Excerpts According to Policy Era						
	Count	Percent (%)	NEP	NDP	NVP	NEM	SPV
Administrative Planning	33	9.35	5	9	1	18	0
Role of the Private Sector	8	2.27	5	0	0	3	0
Privatization	135	38.35	0	63	72	0	0
Strengthening Infrastructure	37	10.51	6	14	9	8	0
Public Service Transformation	128	36.36	7	34	15	34	38
Public Sector Programme and Financing	6	1.7	0	6	0	0	0
Manpower Development	5	1.42	3	0	0	2	0
Total			26	126	97	65	38
Percent (%)			7.39	35.8	27.56	18.47	10.8

Note: New Economic Policy (NEP), New Development Policy (NDP), National Vision Policy (NVP), New Economic Model (NEM), Shared Prosperity Vision (SPV)

Table 2 summarises the distribution of coded excerpts across policy eras. Overall, the New Development Policy (35.8%) and National Vision Policy (27.56%) account for the largest shares of excerpts, followed by the New Economic Model (18.47%) and Shared Prosperity Vision (10.8%), while the New Economic Policy represents a smaller proportion (7.39%). This presentation provides a comparative overview of the relative emphasis placed on different strategic categories across successive policy eras.

#### Administrative Planning

The Administrative Planning category encompasses themes related to enhancing PPP implementation through

improved coordination and strategic planning. It comprises 33 excerpts, representing 9.37% of the 352 excerpts identified. To provide greater analytical resolution, these excerpts were further disaggregated into three thematic components, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Themes under the Administrative Planning

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Supporting effective and smart partnership	13	39.39	0	0	1	0	1	0	5	0	1	5	0	0
Rationalizing the role of the Government	12	36.36	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	10	0	0
Enhancing Policy Frameworks	8	24.24	0	0	0	0	2	0	3	0	0	3	0	0

The dominant themes were supporting effective partnerships (13, 39.39% of this theme), rationalizing the government’s role (12, 36.36% of this theme), and enhancing policy frameworks (8, 24.24% of this theme). These were most frequently cited during the 10MP (18, 5.11% of total excerpts), followed by the 7MP (9, 2.56%), with the majority of the themes concentrated within the NEM period (18, 5.11%).

*Role of the Private Sector*

The Role of the Private Sector category includes codes describing initiatives to enhance private sector participation through the establishment of various committees to provide consultative forums and assistance. This category was represented by 7 excerpts, accounting for 1.99% of the total of 352 excerpts. These excerpts were further disaggregated into two thematic components, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Themes under the Role of the Private Sector

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Public-private sector coordination	5	62.5	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Areas of private sector participation	3	37.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0

As shown in Table 4, the most frequently observed themes were public-private sector coordination (5, 62.5% of this theme) and areas of private sector participation (3, 37.5% of this theme). These themes were most cited during the 10MP (3, 0.85% of total excerpts). When examined by policy era, references to the role of the private sector are primarily concentrated within the NEP era (5, 1.14%).

*Privatization*

The Privatization category captures excerpts addressing managerial aspects of privatization implementation. It comprises 135 excerpts, representing 38.35% of the total excerpts dataset. To provide a more detailed breakdown, these excerpts were further classified into thematic subcomponents, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Themes under the Privatization

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Bumiputera participation	30	22.22	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	10	8	0	0	0
Capital market and prospect	28	20.74	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	7	4	0	0	0
Gains from privatization	28	20.74	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	9	11	0	0	0
Policy and regulatory frameworks	21	15.56	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	5	6	0	0	0
Implementation process	18	13.33	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	5	5	0	0	0
Technology transfer	4	2.96	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
Training and manpower development	4	2.96	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
Funding	2	1.48	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0

As shown in Table 5, the dominant themes include Bumiputera participation (30, 22.22% of this theme), capital market and prospect (28, 20.74% of this theme), gains from privatization (28, 20.74% of this theme), policy and regulatory frameworks (21, 15.56% of this theme), and implementation process (18, 13.33% of this theme). These were most frequently cited in the 7MP (63, 17.90%), followed by the 8MP (38, 10.80%) and 9MP (34, 9.66%). By policy era, references were most prominent during the NDP period (63, 17.90%) and the NVP era (72, 20.45%).

### Strengthening Infrastructure

The Strengthening Infrastructure category comprises 37 excerpts (10.51%) describing efforts to enhance core infrastructure critical to national economic growth, specifically through privatization models. These excerpts were further disaggregated into sector-specific thematic components, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Themes under Strengthening Infrastructure

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Transportation	30	81.08	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	5	2	0	8	0
Telecommunication	5	13.51	0	0	0	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	0
Water	1	2.70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Sewage	1	2.70	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

As shown in Table 6, the dominant themes included the privatization of transportation (30, 81.08% of this theme), telecommunications (5, 13.51% of this theme), water (1, 2.70% of this theme), and sewerage (1, 2.70% of this theme). These initiatives were predominantly cited during the 11MP (8, 2.27%) and evenly across the 6MP, 7MP, and 8MP (7 each, 1.99%). By policy era, references were concentrated under the NDP (14, 3.98%) and NVP (9, 2.56%) periods.

### Public Service Transformation

The Public Service Transformation category includes codes for capacity development policy and programs that modernize entire public service sector management through various training, improving recruitment and organizational restructuring initiatives. This category was represented by 128 excerpts, accounting for 36.36% of the 352 excerpts. These excerpts were further classified into thematic subcomponents, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Themes under Public Service Transformation

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Public sector personal and talent development	47	36.72	0	0	0	1	0	8	2	0	3	7	6	20
Improving project management	27	21.09	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	10	11
Enhancing collaboration with private sector	22	17.19	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	8	2	0	2	2
Organizational Development	14	10.94	0	4	2	0	0	4	0	1	0	0	0	3
Optimization of administrative system	12	9.38	0	0	0	0	0	4	2	1	0	0	3	2
Enhancing service delivery	6	4.69	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	0

As shown in Table 7, the most frequently observed themes in this category were public sector personnel and talent development (47, 36.72% of this theme), improving project management (27, 21.09% of this theme), enhancing collaboration with the private sector (22, 17.19% of this theme), and organizational development (14, 10.94% of this theme). These themes were most commonly cited during the 12MP (38, 10.76%), followed by the 11MP (27, 7.67%). By policy era, references appeared most frequently under the SPV period (38, 10.80%) and NDP era (34, 9.66%).

### Public Sector Programme and Financing

The Public Sector Programme and Financing category captures initiatives aimed at enhancing fiscal access and broadening financial markets to enable greater private sector participation in PPPs. This category comprises 8 excerpts, representing 1.70% of the 352 total references. these excerpts were further classified into thematic subcomponents, as presented in Table 8.

As shown in Table 8, two key themes emerged: fiscal consolidation and capital market reforms, each cited in 3 excerpts (50.00% respectively). These initiatives were exclusively referenced during the 6MP and 7MP, reflecting a policy shift under the NDP era (6, 1.70%) towards financial discipline and market liberalization to support PPP implementation.

Table 8. Themes under Public Sector Programme and Financing

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Fiscal consolidation	3	50.00	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0
Capital market reform	3	50.00	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0

*Manpower Development*

The Manpower Development category comprises excerpts highlighting private sector-led training support for the public service and initiatives promoting PPPs within basic education. This theme is represented by five excerpts, constituting 100% of the total corpus as presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Themes under Manpower Development

Theme	Total Excerpt		Distribution of Excerpt in the Malaysia Plan											
	Count	Percent (%)	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
Enhancement of manpower planning	5	100	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	0

As shown in Table 9, the dominant subtheme, enhancement of manpower planning, was reflected in all five excerpts. These references were primarily concentrated in the 5MP (3 excerpts, 0.85%) and the 10MP (2 excerpts, 0.57%). By policy era, mentions were distributed between the NEP era (3 excerpts, 0.85%) and the NEM era (2 excerpts, 0.57%).

**Discussion**

This section offers a critical examination of the typological trends underpinning Malaysia’s PPP trajectory and the public service sector’s capacity enhancement initiatives, as derived from a comprehensive content analysis. It interrogates the prevailing policy emphases, the evolution of strategic priorities across distinct policy regimes, the marginalization of certain program types, and the persistence of institutional path dependencies. The discussion contextualizes these findings within wider theoretical discourses, policy frameworks, and global development narratives. By doing so, it aims to elucidate Malaysia’s shifting approaches to PPP implementation and the corresponding institutional capacity responses necessary to support these complex governance arrangements.

*Typology Evidence of PPP Development as a National Development Mechanism*

The typological analysis extracted from the Malaysia Plans offers compelling evidence that PPPs in Malaysia have been accorded sustained prominence as a strategic mechanism for national development. Notably, from the 7MP to the 9MP, privatization, as a core modality of PPP, was featured as a standalone chapter. This consistent focus across three successive national development plans spanning fifteen years demonstrates the Government’s strong confidence in and commitment to PPPs as a lever for economic advancement and administrative modernization. Although the 10MP and subsequent plans no longer feature privatization in dedicated chapters, numerous excerpts throughout these documents continue to underscore the significance of PPPs. The introduction of the Public-Private Partnership Master Plan 2030 (PIKAS 2030) in 2024 marks a strategic attempt to further harmonize and enhance the efficiency of PPP implementation. This plan signifies a renewed policy emphasis on positioning PPPs as a cornerstone for advancing both economic productivity and public sector effectiveness.

### *Public Service Capacity as a Strategic Enabler of PPP Evolution*

Concurrently, analysis of the coded excerpts suggests that the Malaysian Government and the public service sector are increasingly cognizant of the imperative to strengthen internal capabilities in tandem with the evolving complexity of PPP implementation. This is substantiated by 128 excerpts representing the second largest category, which reflect a consistent emphasis on talent development within the civil service. These initiatives include calls for addressing qualification-post mismatches, enhancing recruitment strategies, and remedying the absence of structured training frameworks, as clearly articulated in the 12MP. This capacity development orientation aligns with international recommendations, including those by the OECD (2019) and World Bank (2020), which stress that the success of PPPs hinges not only on sound regulatory frameworks but also on the public sector's institutional capacity to act as a competent partner where continuous learning should be embedded as a systemic function of the institution, supported by formal structures and organisational resources (Mabade, 2025).

As Malaysia positions PPPs as a central policy instrument, the public service must continuously evolve, strengthening its technical, managerial, and strategic competencies to effectively govern and co-create value in complex PPP environments (Irfan et al., 2021; Zada et al., 2023). Despite these policy alignments, a critical gap remains in assessing the extent to which such efforts have been operationalized and evaluated, particularly within the context of PPP administration. The recommendations outlined in PIKAS 2030, which advocate for increased engagement with researchers to strengthen the capabilities of public sector personnel in managing PPPs, implicitly signal the persistence of underlying institutional challenges. This call for greater empirical feedback suggests that policy ambitions may not yet be fully matched by implementation outcomes on the ground.

### *Led Infrastructure Development: Where Does Sector-Specific Capacity Stand?*

The implementation of PPPs has been widely discussed across various dimensions of public infrastructure delivery in Malaysia. Notably, infrastructure development has remained a cornerstone of Malaysia's national development agenda since the 1MP, encompassing sectors such as ports, roads, and telecommunications. Over time, the trajectory of infrastructure policy has progressively adopted the PPP modality, most prominently reflected in the privatization of port operations (Jeevan et al., 2021). While the government has consistently underscored the importance of strengthening public-sector capacity to engage more effectively with private partners (7MP; 12MP; PIKAS 2030), the articulation of capacity development initiatives remains largely generic and insufficiently sensitive to regional, sectoral, and implementation-specific contexts.

Scholarly discourse similarly emphasises the need for more tailored capacity development approaches. For example, Rodrigues et al. (2023) argue that each PPP project, regardless of its unique characteristics, requires project managers equipped with specialised competencies, particularly in sector-relevant knowledge domains. Despite the evolution of policy narratives from the structuralist orientation of the NDP to the inclusivity-focused agenda of the SPV, Malaysia's core public-sector capacity development mechanisms have remained largely unchanged for over five decades. While such continuity may support policy coherence and administrative stability, it also risks perpetuating outdated capacity development models that are increasingly inadequate for addressing complex and context-specific PPP demands.

### *Project Management and PPPs: Does Hybrid Engagement Matter?*

The Malaysian Government has recognized the importance of PM since the 6MP, particularly in response to persistent inefficiencies in project implementation. Early interventions focused on strengthening PM capabilities to reduce delays and improve coordination across the project lifecycle (6MP). This emphasis was reaffirmed in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (11MP), which proposed the establishment of dedicated project implementation teams and a professionalised pool of PM practitioners within the public service. However, by the time of the 12MP, a critical shift in the policy narrative emerged, highlighting persistent weaknesses in PM practices. The 12MP explicitly attributed poor project outcomes to ineffective management and a continued shortage of specialised talent. These observations align with existing literature emphasizing that PM expertise is vital for managing complex projects, particularly those structured as PPPs (Umar et al., 2023;

Zada et al., 2023). Furthermore, the government conceded that previous national privatization master plans were neither comprehensive nor clearly structured in terms of procedural frameworks or operational workflows (12MP).

Despite sustained policy attention from 6MP through 12MP to project governance across successive Malaysia Plans, there remains limited clarity regarding the scope of PM reforms specifically whether they are intended for conventional government projects or extend to hybrid arrangements such as PPPs that are inherently complex, involving multiple stakeholders, non-linear progressions, and iterative monitoring processes that differ from traditional public projects (Desjardins et al., 2022; Hodgson et al., 2019). The integration of PM functions into public sector organizations traditionally structured along rigid administrative hierarchies has expanded the roles and responsibilities of civil servants. This has contributed to the emergence of a phenomenon known as “projectification” (Hodgson et al., 2019), whereby public institutions increasingly adopt project-based modes of governance (Desjardins et al., 2022). Until now, scholarly attention to the distinctive PM demands of PPPs remains limited. Studies have only marginally addressed the implications of hybrid project structures on administrative and implementation frameworks (Matinheikki et al., 2021), while the influence of institutional context on PM effectiveness is still insufficiently theorized (Söderlund & Sydow, 2019). This raises a fundamental question: can the PM deficiencies highlighted in RMK12 be attributed, at least in part, to underdeveloped competencies in managing PPPs particularly in the areas of knowledge formulation, decision-making efficiency, and adaptive capacity throughout the project lifecycle (Wang et al., 2020) where such considerations are critical for strengthening institutional readiness and enhancing the effectiveness of PPP governance in Malaysia.

#### *Implications of Policy Evolution for PPP Capacity Development*

Overall, the findings indicate a gradual but uneven shift in policy emphasis across successive Malaysia Plans, suggesting that PPP-related capacity development in Malaysia is historically contingent and policy-era specific. During the NEP (2MP–5MP), PPP-related and early privatization initiatives were embedded within a state-led developmental framework, with public-sector capacity requirements largely confined to administrative control, legal compliance, and basic financial oversight. In the subsequent NDP (6MP–7MP) and the NVP (8MP–9MP), when privatization and PPPs featured more prominently as development instruments, capacity-development efforts appear to have prioritised implementation readiness, with comparatively limited emphasis on embedding long-term competencies such as concession management, negotiation continuity, and inter-agency coordination.

As PPPs became more integrated into broader development and service delivery frameworks under the NEM during the 10MP and 11MP, policy attention increasingly shifted towards improving project implementation, highlighting the need to better align public-sector project management reforms with the hybrid, relational, and risk-sharing nature of PPP arrangements. By the SPV era, articulated in the 12MP and reinforced through PIKAS 2030, policy discourse more explicitly recognised the importance of public-sector capability and performance in PPP governance, however, capacity development initiatives remain largely generic, with limited differentiation by sector, project type, or governance complexity. Collectively, these patterns suggest that contemporary PPP capacity deficits are not isolated implementation failures but the cumulative outcome of path-dependent HRM and capacity development structures that have not evolved in tandem with shifting PPP policy logics, underscoring the need for historically informed and context-sensitive capacity development reforms to strengthen long-term PPP governance within Malaysia’s public service. This observation highlights a widening gap between articulated policy aspirations and their practical realisation, suggesting that policy intentions have not yet been consistently translated into observable outcomes at the operational level and, therefore, warrant further empirical investigation.

#### *Limitation*

The findings of this study must be interpreted in light of several methodological limitations. Firstly, the effort to identify excerpts related to PPPs and public service capacity development across the various Malaysia Plans presents inherent complexity, particularly in determining the appropriate unit and level of analysis. The

selection of excerpts was informed by systematic referencing. However, the process also entailed the researcher's interpretive judgment to identify both explicit and nuanced relevance grounded in contextual and thematic comprehension. Given the diverse conceptualizations and scattered discussions of PPPs across interlinked policy chapters, there exists a potential for interpretive bias or analytical ambiguity in the process of excerpt identification and thematic synthesis. Future research should consider adopting more systematic and robust analytical frameworks, such as content structuring tools, automated text mining, or multi-rater coding protocols, to improve the reliability and replicability of findings. Furthermore, broadening the scope of primary sources beyond Malaysia Plans, such as including sectoral master plans, white papers, dedicated policy documents, and relevant book chapters, may yield a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the interconnections between PPP implementation and public sector capacity development initiatives, particularly in relation to alignment across PPP planning and institutional dimensions.

### Conclusion

The proposed typology offers a valuable analytical lens for examining the evolving architecture of Malaysia's PPP implementation, while simultaneously highlighting the public service sector's initiatives to strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration through capacity development. It illustrates the persistent influence of shifting PPP strategies, yet also draws attention to enduring gaps in policy coherence and coordination. Notwithstanding progressive transitions towards more individualized and empowerment-oriented governance approaches, critical areas remain underdeveloped, particularly in aligning institutional capabilities with policy ambitions. As Malaysia confronts increasing socio-economic complexities, future efforts to enhance public service capacity must transcend legacy institutional arrangements. A recalibration is required with one that embeds sector-specific contextualisation, organisational adaptability, and transparent mechanisms for evaluating capacity readiness within the core of policy formulation processes. Such a transformation is pivotal for informing evidence-based policymaking and ensuring resilient PPP governance across Malaysia's varied administrative and sectoral landscapes.

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