

# Decision-Making Model at Local Government Level: A New Proposed for Majlis Perbandaran Kuantan

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## Abstract

The subject-matter of the decision-making process is far wider than the traditional coverage of the study of local government. Internal and external factors and the complexity of the processes at various levels are recognized as significant contributors to the process of policy-making. This study attempted to understand this process, based on the conceptual and theoretical framework, and the formulation of a set of decision-guidelines under the new proposed model by interviewing a group of Councillors from Kuantan Municipality Council. Specifically, it attempts to understand the role of Councillors in the local government system and factors influence them in making the right decision. The new factors that developed from this study would contribute to the formulation of a new framework of decision-making. The findings presented are derived from those meeting and support by input from other parties such as politicians, planners and academicians. The interpretation of Councillor's respond to certain questions was descriptively analysed. One striking conclusion that can be derived from the findings is that Councillors have no clear guidelines in order to assist them making a right decision on the council's matter. By using the new process that based on the 13 factors as decision-guidelines, they believed and agreed that will make their decisions fundamentally more accurate and focused. In future research, improvements that could be applied by councillors in ensuring the current process of decision-making at the local government level more inclusive and effective by enhancing the role of Councillors and strengthening strategic partnerships by collaborating with other focus groups.

**Keywords:** Decision-making, Model, Local, Government, Councillors, Urban, Planning.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of power relationships in urban planning has tended to focus on a narrow definition of power rather than using power as the central concept in the explanation of decision-making process and formulation of planning policies. More recently, attempts have been made to imply a deeper understanding of theories of planning within a broader social context, and not only deal with question of 'who governs?' In the field of local government studies, (Rhodes, 1975: 48) claimed that there was a lack of 'models and/or theories which could guide research into local government'. Much of this work is preoccupied with the 'recruitment and background of councillors' with little or no mention on how officials influence decisions and adopts a very narrow definition of local government. Instead of building theory the case-studies often did little more than restate the orthodoxies, clichés and half-truths surrounding local government. Studies have discussed the changing in social-class of councillors, hinting at declining councillor caliber, commented on how party politics first entered local government then radically, probably adversely, altered the style of decision-making and re-affirmed the belief that elected members are to make decisions, while officials are to implement them (Boyle, 1980).

Even though very few studies of local government councillors are available there is little doubt that more is known about the roles, values and attitudes of elected members than about any other component of local government. The traditional studies of councillors examined the relationship between councillors, parties, officials and interest groups (Lee, 1963; Rees & Smith, 1964; Newton, 1976; Collins, 1978) have led to the evolution of interesting but ultimately disappointing models of political behaviour in local government. In general, the application of role orientation models is particularly inappropriate when used to explain planning decisions beyond detail issues (Dunleavy, 1980). The focus on councillor role orientation and formal political

groups assumes that power or influence is concentrated in one, easily recognizable, arena-the council chamber and the political party. Such models assume that local representative is collectively and continuously involved in the process of policy-making.

Currently we are witnessing significant changes in the nature of policy making and management in local government. Essentially, these changes represent a move away from the relatively passive approach towards a more purposeful approach in which local authorities attempt to learn about the nature and causes of local problems and to respond accordingly (Hambleton, 1978). Therefore, what is required is a theoretical framework that could explain and relates the concept of planning to the concept of power, and seeks an explanation of decision-making process. The organizational changes and complex interaction in local government that involve politicians, planners, officers and decision-making bring about the important of current practices and evaluating future changes.

### ***1.1 Local Government and Decision-Making: An Overview***

The academic study of the subject (local government) has also developed over the recent past. The public administration approach was first supplemented by political scientists who examined local authorities as political systems in their own right: the political scientists are now joined by social theorists who seek to penetrate the complex relationships underlying the provision of public services at a local level. Attempts are being made to locate general explanations within wider theories of state (Hampton, 1970).

Local government has also been defined in terms of wider political values, by referring to the dispersal of power from the centre to the localities. Sharpe (1979) has criticized this view on the ground that local authorities are not immune from arbitrary tendencies. One of the claimed is precisely that services may be varied to suit conditions in different localities. But local government may enhance equally by providing access to political activity for wider groups of people that are accommodated through national politics. Therefore the subject of the new urban politics is far wider than the traditional coverage of the study of local government. Economic forces, regional agencies for the administration of public services, and the complex interaction of government bodies at various levels are recognized as significant contributors to the process of urban policy-making (Hampton, 1970). The objectives of the research is to search for a theoretical framework which might lead to a better understanding and analysis of decision-making processes at the local

## **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

For a long time, most attention was paid to the relationship between council and administration, and to the political control of administration. Since the late 1990s, there has been growing pressure to reform the institutional basis for local politics, as well as internal processes and structures. As a result, the growing of participatory approach and economization of local politics are apparent in the managerialisation of local public administration as well as in the establishment of competitive structures. The overall impression is that administrative action has become more efficient.

### ***2.1 Administrative Theories and Politics***

The general principles of administrative organization were first subjected to systematic theorizing by the Frenchman Henri Fayol, who considered that his principles applied equally to industrial and public organization. Theories of public administration were further developed by James Mooney, Luther Gulick, L.F.Urwick, and a number of other writers (Peter, 1972). Fayol and the other theorists did far more than point out obvious defects. One of the main contributions was to promote the use of certain management techniques, such as reporting, accounting and budgeting, in which public administration was deficient. They also believe that they could furnish a more comprehensive set of principles for arranging the formal structure of administration (Peter, 1972). However, each governmental organization occupies a unique place in the social, economic, and political life of the nation that conditions its internal organization and manner of operation. Each must maintain a long-run equilibrium with its environment by taking in some resources such as money, personal skills, legal power, and information and producing the goods and services expected of it to the satisfaction of the public and policymakers. Internally, public organizations are populated by officials with diverse identities and motives that may promote or hinder achievement of the collective mission. Conflict often arises because of incompatibility of these motives (William, 1996). On the other hand, management theorists and experts are usually concerned to promote some concept of administrative efficiency, and organizational analysis is seen mainly as a prelude to suitable prescriptions. The tension between 'administrative accountability' and 'administrative effectiveness' is implicit in these different viewpoints (Peter, 1972: 15)

Fuller understanding of social behavior suggests that organizations can generally function at least as effectively,

and can provide better personal satisfactions to their members, when structures more flexibly. Other factors besides formal structure hold an organization together and enable it to work harmoniously, and some of these factors (such as the shared beliefs of managers or administrators) may be more important (Peter, 1972).

The theorists of municipal reform went on to play a notable part in overhauling the structure of Federal and State governments. The reform movement worked under the impetus of Woodrow Wilson's dictum that it was possible to achieve a self-sufficient 'science' of administrative means, so constructed as to leave administrators perfectly amenable to political leadership (of any type) while remaining free of political considerations in the conduct of their work. Wilson's theories may have been naïve, but they provided an ideological basis for measures which most people approved; namely the curbing of political patronage, the advancement of professional skills, and a tighter framework on internal administrative co-ordination (Peter, 1972:20).

## **2.2 Urban Politics and Urban Theories**

Studies of urban politics are divided between those who focus on urban social movements and see urban politics as defined by grassroots 'activism', and those who are preoccupied with patronage and who see urban politics as characterized by inertia and 'clientelism' The interesting issue is whether 'certain conditions are conducive to more or less participation, different forms of conflict and cooperation, changing arrangements of power and so forth' (Walton, 1998: 460-462; Beall, 2009)

Public choice, sometimes referred to as 'rational choice' (Almond, 1990) or 'social choice' is a theory of political behavior inspired by neo-classical economic models. Its principal assumptions are that human agents are utility maximizers who will seek to make choices that are optimal in terms of the net payback to the individual or the group where the group is acting in concert. This assumption, following Schumpeter (1987) holds that voters' political preferences are set in relation to the political offers (or policies) put forward by political parties in a plural democracy (Parker, 2004: 123).

The elitist theory of urban power identified by Beall (2009) in Atlanta found that most important city decisions were made by informal consensus between economic elites drawn mainly from business and industrial circles. Formal governmental decision-makers, including the mayor, were only peripheral actors until the stage of implementation was reached. In contrast, the plural model of community power advanced by Dahl (1961) holds that power is dispersed, with different elites dominant at different times over different issues.

Robert Dahl, the American political scientist, in his 1961 study of New Haven, Connecticut, is still cited as the definitive text for what has become known as the 'classic pluralist' account of urban government (Dahl, 1961). He did discover an oligarchic and elitist policy in the New Haven of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but into the twentieth century he argued that the leadership of the city had become increasingly pluralistic and diverse. Dahl further claimed that while inequality at the level of the individual certainly existed and carried over to the political level, he also believed that group mobilization and the competition and coalition-forming behavior this engendered ensured no one group could monopolize power for long.

Literature of recent years showing that politics and administration are inseparable has no doubt helped to convince city planners that they are ethically justified in playing the political game (Altshuler, 1973). They are less confident of their own infallibility and more respectful of the value of the political process. Moreover, they believe that they cannot be judged as planners without an assessment of their influence on community decisions.

## **3.0 DECISION- MAKING PROCESS**

One of the most important dimensions of organizations is decision making. How decisions are made, by what standards, at what cost, and for whose benefit are questions of continuing interest. Decision-making is the process of choosing among alternatives in order to satisfy the objectives or meet the criteria of the decision goal. Nobel Laureate Herbert Simon, an economist who dedicated his career to the study of decision processes, wrote that "the whole process of managerial decision-making is synonymous with the practice of management". Decisions are affected by many other factors, including rulings by the courts, societal values, economic conditions, and the values of the people involved in decision-making processes.

### **3.1 Decision-Making Models**

The traditional managerial approach of the public administration focuses on the need for rationality in decision-making. It seeks to enable public administrators to make decisions in the most efficient, economical, and effective manner. One of the earliest models in public choice theory, as applied to urban decision-making, was provided by Tiebout in the 1950s (Parker, 2004). In his analysis, residents of the city can be parcelled into groups of consumers with different sets of tax (price) and public goods (product) preferences. He argued that

market responsiveness worked best in societies where municipal administrations are smaller, because where there is a plurality of local suppliers of public services, it is easier to match tax and service level with the demands of discrete population. In a behavioral context, the generalist administrator is mainly involved in making decisions through determining the operating policies of the organization and the best ways of achieving its major programs. While, this is a complex process involving facts, values, and unanticipated consequences, the administrator always oversimplifies the process by abstracting only a few of the many factors that impinge upon the decision (John & Robert, 1967).

Although decisions are often regarded as the product of an individual mind, organizational decision-making is usually a collective process, the end result of the combined efforts of many individual at many different levels in the hierarchy. The administrator, in effect, choose among recommendations submitted to him by specialists who have traced through several alternatives, marshaled supporting evidence, and indicated as best they can probable consequences of each alternative (John & Robert, 1967). There are two major types of decisions involving organizations; organizational decisions, which are reflected in the output or policies that are generated, and internal decisions that affect day-to-day operations within the organization. Organizational decisions may be thought of in terms of the political model. Decisions are affected by many other factors, including rulings by the courts, societal values, economic conditions, and the values of the people involved in decision-making processes. On the other hands, internal decisions refer to those decisions that managers and administrators make on a regular basis in the daily course of their work. These decisions may not affect major policy matters that go beyond the organization. Regardless of the type of decision, models of decision making provide frameworks to illustrate how individuals and groups make decisions in organizations (Jeffrey, 2005:136-137).

The decisions and the processes involved in making them are not limited to the individual but also performed at the group level. Group decision making is defined as the process of a judgment based upon the input of multiple individuals. Since the resources involved in the group decision-making process as well as the impact of these decisions affect organization performance, it is crucial to make the group decision-making process as efficient and effective as possible. Utilizing a decision making model is a systematic way of establishing group decision making proficiency (Ryan, 1996). The basic principles of scientific decision-making produce a model with the following characteristics: 'identification of needs/problems; setting the objectives; identification of alternative choices; evaluation of alternatives; choice of preferred alternatives; implementation; and monitoring feedback and review.' (Leach & Stewart, 1982: 6)

### **3.1.1 Rational Decision Making Model**

An important figure in the history of administrative theory is Herbert Simon, whose influential *Administrative Behavior* first appeared in 1945, after effectively exposing the contradictions of the scientific administration school. Simon sought an alternative approach to administrative efficiency through the design of a rational model of decision-making. In doing so, he moved away from his predecessors' direct concern with matters which, however disputable, are of obvious practical concern to administrators, to go into the bylaws of logical and psychological theorizing. However, Simon's hope was to find an adequate framework for the extensive use of behavioral research and quantitative measurement, and his search and its contributions have some affinity with the application of modern social science to questions of organization (Peter, 1972)

This states that in any situation an administrator ought ideally to examine all possible courses of action open to him, trace through the consequences of each alternative. He should then choose that course of action which is expected to provide the greatest net satisfaction. The basic of rational problem-solving process is the economic assumption that people attempt to maximize their outcomes when they make choices. Theoretically, people select a criterion, such as income or profit, then evaluate all decision alternatives in terms of that criterion, and finally select the alternative that will produce the best results (Peter, 1972).

Simon argued that maximizing outcomes is simply not possible in most situations and identified several reasons that it is usually impossible, "There are time limits for making most decisions, and there are only so many resources available to gather information". Even if we had access to unlimited information about any problem, there are cognitive limits to how much information we can process at any given time. Putting all these constraints together, Simon argued that human beings attempt to be rational, but they can be rational only within certain limits or bounds. What Simon called 'bounded rationality' suggests that choices will be evaluated, but only within the bounds of these constraints. This result is in a 'satisfying' criterion for evaluating alternatives, rather than in a maximizing one. Thus, the rational decision-making process can be considered a prescriptive model that tells us what we should do to make better decisions, but it does not give us an accurate picture of how human beings actually make decisions (Robert & Janet, 2006: 353-354).

The inadequacies of the rational-comprehensive model led Herbert Simon to develop his idea of 'bounded rationality'. Simon compared 'economic man' to 'administrative man' and determined that the idea of a maximizing decision maker was simply unrealistic. Economists later added various other strategies, such as the idea that decision makers may try to minimize an outcome or the effects associated with an outcome, rather than always trying to maximize an outcome. Simon argued that because of time constraints and incomplete data, decision makers only seek to 'satisfy' when selecting alternatives for their decisions. That is, rather than evaluating all the possibilities, they simply search until they find a solution that satisfies their needs. They will stop searching for potential solutions once they reach this point, when a decision is made, and administrators will not expend any more time on this particular problem. This does not mean that decision makers do not make rational decisions; it means that their rationality is limited because of environmental restrictions and their own ability to process and handle information. Thus, decisions are rational (they are made with the idea that they will achieve desired goals), but are a limited rather than a comprehensive form of rationality (Jeffrey, 2005)

### **3.1.2 Incremental Model of Decision-Making**

One alternative model of decision making in the public sector claims to be both prescriptive and descriptive, and less formal procedure. The model has been called as 'incremental model of decision-making' (Lindblom, 1973). Charles Lindblom's incremental model of decision-making assumes that most governmental decisions usually away from that position. For example, in making a case for new program managers often talk is about how a new idea can be built on existing strengths. This descriptive aspect of model has a similar ring, but in a curious twist. Lindblom also suggests that the incremental model may even make sense normatively. Because incremental proposals focus on well-known experiences, they reduce the number of alternatives to be considered and thus reduce the complexity of the problem at hand (Robert & Janer, 2006: 354).

It is a means of proceeding when the goals are not precise, the evidence and alternatives are incomplete, and political controversy will inevitably shape the final decisions. The model has a short time horizon. No effort is made to commit the government for many years, where the future is seen as too uncertain for that. Rather, the intent is to act in the light of today's understanding and after observing results for a year or a similarly short period, to return, and to adjust the program accordingly. If the participants agree on developing it further, they take the next incremental step. Otherwise they pause or move in another direction. Here too, they satisfy making a choice that is 'good enough' for the situation (Jeffrey, 2005).

The incremental method is also a democratic way of attaining consensus among persons who do not fully agree on the goals or on the means of putting them into effect. The method is openly pluralistic and assumes it is both necessary and desirable to preserve multiple centers of power while making the decisions the public requires (William, 1996: 282-283).

The incremental model of decision making comports with the political approach to public administration. It stresses the need for public administrators to be responsive to the political community, to be politically representative of the groups that constitute it, and to be accountable to elected officials. These values dictate that administrative decision making should involve public participation, that public administration should be based on the development of political coalitions and political consensus, and that it should allow inexperienced, political officials not only to give direction to public administrators but also to exert pressure on them to decide in favor of one policy application or another (Rosenbloom & Kravchuk, 2005: 322-323).

The model recognizes that policy objectives may be too unclear to serve as ends in any operational sense. Consequently, the ends of government policy are often defined by the means available to an agency for moving in some general policy direction. It recognizes that it is politically impracticable to reform the personnel system in one fell swoop, but eventually greater equality of opportunity or social representation can be achieved by developing limited programs toward those ends. Means and ends are treated as packages more or less acceptable to relevant communities of interest. The package that is most acceptable is typically considered the best approach. In this sense, representativeness and responsiveness dominate efficiency, economy, and effectiveness as the values to be sought in choosing means. Administrative decision makers are taking that the incremental approach will consider a few means-ends packages and select one which is satisfactory. Little or no effort is made to reach an optimum decision to maximize the pertinent values. According to Herbert A. Simon's concept of 'satisfying,' it is not rational even to attempt to maximize any given set of values. Rather, decisions are guided by past practice and tend not to rely heavily on theory. However, a substantial degree of comprehensiveness may be built into the incremental decision making model by encouraging the participation of relevant interest groups, other agencies, members of legislature, and concerned individuals in the process of deciding on a policy (Rosenbloom

& Kravchuk, 2005: 327-329).

### **3.1.3 The Governmental-Politics Model**

The model that views decisions as the product of bargaining that takes place among many influential participants is called the 'governmental-politics model of decision making'. It focuses on the 'perceptions, motivations, positions, power, and maneuvers of the players', who differ in ability to shape the outcome (Allison, 1971: 6). It is as much a way of deciding who governs in a highly competitive environment as it is of setting substantive issues (William, 1996: 283).

The decision makers are motivated by and act on their own needs and choices. This process involves a cycle of bargaining among the decision makers in order for each one to try to get his or her perspective. More specifically, this process involves each decision-maker tries to sway powerful people within the situation that adopt his or her viewpoint and influence the remaining decision-makers (Allison, 1971).

The political model does not involve making full information available or a focus on the optimal viewpoint like those rational models (Lyles & Thomas, 1988). Full information is highly unlikely, since the political model operates based upon negotiation that is often influenced by power and favors. In fact, information is often withheld in order to better maneuver a given perspective. The information is often withheld and subsequently incomplete, the optimal view point is not a key aspect of this model.

The advantages of the political model remains that it provides a representation of the subjective manner in which the real world operates, and it can minimize conflict. Conflict is also minimized by the swaying of the powerful people to support a particular viewpoint. Once the powerful people support this perspective, other group members usually fall in line behind them.

### **3.2 Decision-Making in Local Government**

Much attention has been focused in recent years on the basic challenge of planning in a democratic society. How can those who are elected to exercise choice on our behalf preserve and extend their capacity to choose discriminatingly, when the sheer complexity of the issues facing them tends all the time to make them increasingly dependent on the skills and judgments of their professional advisers? (Friend & Jessop, 1971)

Decision-making in local government addresses itself in particular to those more strategic levels of choice which tend to be linked with the terms 'planning' and 'policy-making', and to impinge on the future physical and social development of local communities in a variety of ways which may be only imperfectly understood. Any organization tends to develop certain methods to assist it in taking decisions which, even if they are ill formulated, can be thought of collectively as forming a 'technology of choice'. The planning process in local government requires a technology of choice that explicitly recognizes the particular types of challenge posed at this level. These include the difficulty of isolating one decision from another. The difficulty of appreciating what range of solutions may be possible, the difficulty of making value judgments when confronted with a wide range of social effects, and the difficulty of striking a balance between the pressures for early commitment and the flexibility to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. If such a technology is to be consistent with the principle of democratic control, new approaches will be necessary of internal organization and communication within local authorities (Friend & Jessop, 1971).

Therefore, any form of planning activity by a local authority must take place within a procedural setting which is laid down in the standing orders of council and in more specific instructions to individual committees. The formal sequence of steps in the decision-making process in any local authority in the United Kingdom can be summarized in three different stages; departmental processes, committee processes, and council processes. In some cases, the formal processes of decision may become more complicated because of the involvement of more than one department or a requirement for formal approval of a proposal by more than one committee. If the committee fails to reach decision, two possibilities could occur. That the matter may be referred to a senior committee because it raises issues which the committee does not feel competent to settle on its own, or that it may be referred back to the chief officer to be raised again at a later meeting after further assessments within his department. Assuming that a decision is eventually reached, either by committee in question or by a senior committee, the decision will then submitted to the full council at its next meeting for endorsement by a majority vote of council members or – in the case of a decision taken under delegated powers where council endorsement is necessary – to give other members of council an opportunity to ask any questions about the matter concerned.

#### **4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study based on combination of theory/model construction approach and theory/model testing approach. Theory/model construction approach is a process which begins with a set of observation and moves on to develop theories/models of these observations. This grounded theory/model focused on literature review, observation on previous theories or models and application of those theories or models in local government's decision making process. These conceptual-abstract level is aim to let the concepts and ideas emerge from observations. Most of the references come from local's universities libraries, as well as from internet and other international publications. The formal and informal discussions were applied to gather information on the current practices. The main objective through this exercise is to determine what factors contributed or influence councillors during the decision-making process. These factors will be formulated towards a new set of theoretical or conceptual framework that needs to be tested or predicted. In this case, in-depth interview were carried out with six Councillors of Kuantan Municipal Council (MPK) as well as informal discussion with politicians, academicians and local government's administrators.

#### **5.0 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

More attempts to categorize the roles of councillors undertake, whilst separating out what they do and where they say they place most priority, or gain most satisfaction, have failed to adequately account for what councillors mean by representation or for the role of the party group within it. Councillor roles have traditionally been defined around issues of representation and policy-making. These have categorized Councillors as the representative, the specialized policy-maker and the broad policy maker.

##### **5.1 The Role of Councillors**

Amongst the most compelling and convincing arguments for any form of sub-national, territorially based structure of representative government is that it brings political decision-making closer to local communities. Decision-making by local elected representatives has a local democratic mandate; and, by being more immediate to local communities, it can turn to be far more responsive to local wishes than national government. Thus, local citizens can be assured that the views they articulate will be heard by councillors, and that councillors in turn, will be concerned not only to respond to, but also to anticipate the reactions of the electorate to the policies they develop and decisions they make (Gregory, 1969: 31-47).

Councillors are elected from wards or divisions serves to generate some concern for the needs of the ward and an interest in the views articulated by communities within those electoral areas. The geographical basis of local electoral representation does bring with it expectations on behalf of the voters, that the interests of that 'patch' will be promoted and defended by the councillor. However, Councillors display varying degrees of connection to the concept of representing an electoral area, rather than some other focus of loyalty and interest (Copus, 2000: 215-224).

Besides exploring the fundamental concepts, theories and models of decision-making process as the main objective of the first stage of the study process ( as been describe and discuss in chapter 2, 3 and 4), this chapter, as the second part of the study, do examine the findings based on the in-depth interviews with Councillors of Kuantan Municipality Council. The findings presented in this chapter are derived from those meeting and support by input from other parties such as politicians, planners and academicians. The interpretation of Councillor's respond to certain questions were descriptively analyses and compared to what have been found in the quiet similar studies conducted in several local government, especially in United Kingdom, either theoretically or through a specific case study.

##### **5.1.1 Councillor's Profile**

Before attempting to answer the research question in this study, descriptive analysis on Councillor's profile was made. Four of the Councillors reported to be in the business profession. The other two were reported to be a teacher and a full time politician, accordingly. Most of the Councillors hold either diploma On 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1979, Majlis Bandaran Kuantan was upgraded to Majlis Perbandaran Kuantan (Kuantan Municipal Council) based on the Local Government's Act (Act 171) which remains as to this day. The administration area of the Kuantan Municipal Council has been expanded to 324 Km square which covered four districts comprising of Kuala Kuantan, Ulu Kuantan, Beserah and Sungai Karang. This is 10% of whole area of Kuantan town. Out of that, 20% is taxable area which provides city council service while the rest are developing areas. Degree as their highest educational achievement, and served more than three years as a Councillor. It is interesting to notes that all of them hold the highest ranking post in the political parties, either at the division level or the state level, for at least more than three years. In general, the profiles reflected the acceptable level of qualification of Councillors that been imposed as one of the condition for the appointment.

Section 10 (2) of the Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) states that "Councillors of the local authority shall be appointed from among persons the majority of whom shall be persons ordinarily residents in the local authority area who in the opinion of the state authority have wide experience in local government affairs or who have achieved distinction in any profession, commerce or industry, or are otherwise capable of representing the interests of their communities in the local authority level". The above finding reflects the definite answers to some of the confusion on the question of whom or what the councillor represents amounts to 'representative failure', and a weakening of the link between Councillors and their wards or divisions. They are expected to represent the interests of at least three distinct concerns they must balance these interests, arbitrate between them and act accordingly. The people are best served by the Councillor's own party securing electoral victory or been appointed by the authority (State Government) and act as a coherent unit to pursue the policies to which the electorate have given their support. Such an approach to representation, based on party notions of an electoral or appointed platform, simply serves to ensure the answer to the question what does the Councillor represent is: the party, as suggested by Copus (2004).

Many critics feel that the appointment of the Councillors defeat the whole purpose of having people's representatives at the local authority as the Councillors are chosen by the government based on loyalty to the ruling party (Tawie, 2010), and not because of their merits gained from working experiences at the grass root communities.

This profile's observation also implies what Hampton (1970) described, based on his research in Sheffield, that a Councillor needs to have no relationship, other than a questionable loyalty, with the ward or divisions they represents. As it is political label rather than the candidate's local profile that is instrumental in securing electoral success, it follows that loyalty is to the party and, more importantly, to the party group. At least in urban areas, it is only after election that the Councillor may develop a local profile and area loyalty. Such loyalty may, however, be severely tested if a divergence of opinion occurs between the group and party and the local electorate over any local event, or over the general conduct of council affairs.

### **5.2 The Process of Decision-Making**

One of the primary investigations of this study is to explore the complexity of the decision-making process at the local government level. It is important to understand how the decisions are made and the various levels of decision-making involved. The Malaysia Local Government Act 1976 (Act 171) provides for decision to be made at council meeting, attending by at least one-half of the full number of Councillors that chaired by the Mayor or President (Yang DiPertua), and the full number of Councillors for special meeting and one-third for ordinary (committee) meeting. The study indicates that most Councillors perceived the decision-making is a complex process, by referring to the second and third level of formal sequences of steps in the decision-making process. This step in the decision-making process in Kuantan Municipality Council is similar to that in any other local authorities in the country, as what have been practices in the United Kingdom.

### **5.3 Factors Influencing Decision-Making**

The results of what Councillors thought the most important factors influence their decision-making throw some light on the issues central to understanding the dynamics of political preference in the process. Four factors indicate Councillor's preference, namely:

1. The interest of the public/tax payers.
2. The interest of state government
3. The interest of the party
4. Economic and infrastructure development

From the list, it can be summed up that most Councillors realize that their actions should not be contradictory and against the policies decided upon by the state or interest of the party and the people. At the same time they carry the responsibilities to draw the policy to determine the direction of the local council and the direction has to augur well with the state policy and meet the people's expectations.

The similar approaches has been conducted by Young & Rao (1995) for Widdicombe Committee, United Kingdom, in identified what was the Councillor focus of representation, from the point of view of the public (respondents). Do electors expect their Councillors to act as party loyalists or do they perceive the Councillors as having a more direct relationship with his or her electoral area? Electors' expectations of their Councillors are inescapably conditioned by the prominence in local government elections and local politics of national party politics. Equally important are electors' attitudes towards the balance needed between a Councillor's own personal views, those of his or her party and those of the people he or she represents (Copus, 2004: 42-44).



Young and Rao conclude that in a system dominated by the party group: ‘there is an overwhelming expectation that Councillors should place local interests-either at ward level or across the local area-first. And there is also a clear indication that the public thinks there are limits to the role of party politics (Young & Rao, 1995: 114-115). As the link between the party and Councillor is stronger than that between the Councillor and the electorate, the Councillor will act as a trustee when it comes to developing a representative relationship with citizens, but will act as a delegate when it comes to his or her relationship with the party or the party group.

In addition to the above factors, Councillors still perceived that laws and regulations (including state structure plan and local plan) acts as an important means to guide them in the decision-making process. A local plan is a statutory plan which is a legal document that must be followed religiously by all parties including the government (Goh, 2008). Development regulations are among the most powerful forces shaping the built environment. Land use laws have an enormous effect on urban design solutions. Environmental regulations also affect location decisions, prohibiting the construction of buildings and roads in vulnerable places and shaping conservation lands.

## **6.0 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Accuracy of Decision**

Under representative democracy, citizens elect their leaders, and the leaders are supposedly to make decisions that are best represent the interest of their constituents. In making such decisions, the leaders use two major criteria; i) what they think their constituents want them to do, and ii) what they (the representatives) think its best (Sewell & Coppock, 1977).

The study also looking to the question on how do Councillors know that the decision they make is the most accurate one? Most of the Councillors believe and depend on the formal and informal feedback systems, either from the council, their parties or the tax payers. Therefore the two-ways communication approach, either traditionally method such as informal meetings, dialogues or through internet facilities, will enable the public to responds or make an informed opinion or objection. This not only ensures better quality of participation but also to judge the accuracy of any decision make by Councillors in achieving the stated objectives or target-groups.

As quoted by Azizan (2009), he feels that it is important for the decision makers to provide adequate information and explanation while at the same time allowing feedback from the public. Many planning authorities in United Kingdom have taken the initiatives to improve the provision of planning information to the public. A good example would be the Nottinghamshire County Council which has a website dedicated to provide information about their planning proposals or programs. In the website, the public is able to get background information of the proposal, its aims and objectives, the organizations involved, impact assessment study and the target groups. The opportunity to participate on the internet will also give the chance for those who prefer to participate in discreet manner as not everyone has the confidence to voice out their views publicly (Nikmatul, 2011).

### **6.2 The Needs for the Guideline**

The study also reveals that all Councillors agree on the need of a clear guidelines to assist them in making the right decision in a smoothly, objectively and effectively manners. The current practices shown that most of them relied on the individual’s understandings and perceptions on the issues brought at the council meeting, mostly advice by the directors or senior officers of the internal departments. Even though a general framework occupied of several factors as mentioned in the previous analysis have been used or referred by the Councillors, in some cases the decision will end up with unexpected consequences results or unpredictable reactions or impacts. According to Friend and Jessop (1971), improvement in the planning process is much more likely to take place if these problems can be formally recognized and solutions sought at a more conscious level, and for this reason, they can collectively be regarded as forming a brief for the development of a more purposive ‘technology of strategic choice’ in any government setting.

### **6.3 Factors Contribute To Decision-Making And Preferences**

This is the main objective of the study. The four factors, as described in 5.3 has been developed and expanded based on the literature reviews and discussions with some politicians, planners, academicians, as well as Councillors. As a result, 13 factors have been identified in order to assist the Councillors to make a right decision on any matters related to council’s affairs. These factors were categorized under (Friend & Jessop, 1971);

1. administrators and operational policies
2. local objectives
3. external constraints

Friend & Jessop (1971) state that whenever a situation cannot easily be related to existing operational policies, then the choice of a response may be shaped partly by the personal and group objectives of those concerned, and partly by their appreciation of the constraints which may inhibit the attainment of those objective: such constraints may apply in particular to their ability to mobilize the resources for certain desired courses of action. All these factors-the operational policies themselves, the local objectives, and the appreciation of external constraints-contribute towards the general view of the way in which appropriate actions should be selected. The factors referred as a standard preference for Councillors while debating or throwing any ideas during the council's meeting, especially at the second and the third levels of the decision-making process. The formulation of a new model in decision-making process at the local government level will be based on this assumption. The 13 factors include:

1. The interest of the party
2. The interest of the council
3. The personal interest
4. The expectation of tax payers
5. In parallel to the federal government policies
6. In parallel to the state government policies
7. Support the strategic planning of the council
8. The image of the town center
9. The impact on environment
10. The socio-economic impacts
11. The physical impacts
12. The flow of information
13. The new knowledge/ideas

In the second stage of the interview, this new model that based on 13 factors has been applied on the same Councillors. The result showed that all the Councillors feel that they had a clear guideline as compared to before that acts as a conceptual framework in assisting them in making the decision. At the same time these factors perceived as a check lists in ensuring no view of considerations will left behind during the decision-making process.

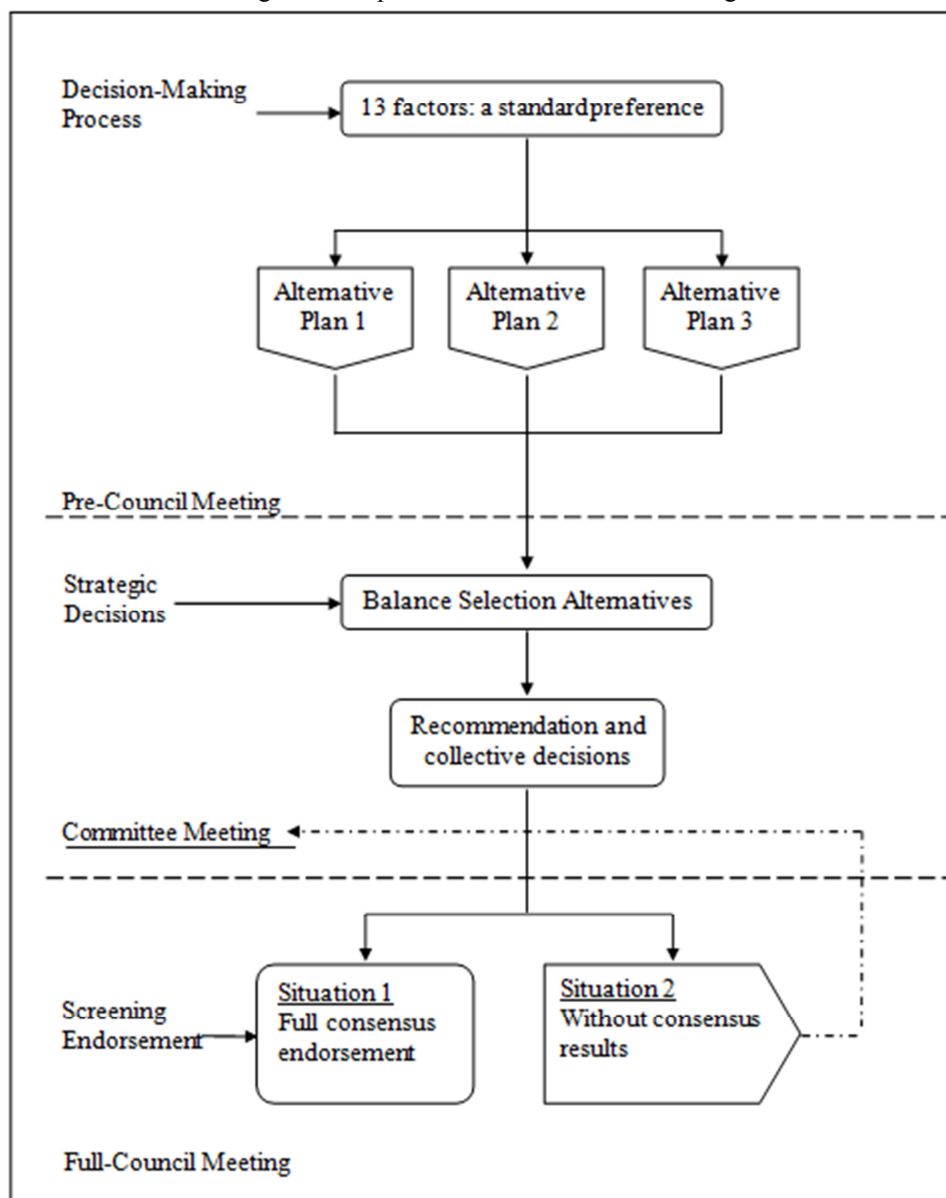
#### **6.4 A New Proposed Model of Decision-Making Process**

The new proposed model of decision-making process at local government level is base on 13 factors that influence any decisions make by Councillors in regards to council's affairs. The rational of having this option is to assists Councillors in making a right, efficient and effective decisions by considering all those factors, collectively and comprehensively. The six main factors, as described earlier, will give a different weight on the importance of each factor. In conjunction to the recommendation of becoming advocate Councillors, they need to be alert to the characteristics and needs of the people they serve, and, where inequalities exist, Councillors need to help ensure that they are well addressed. (see figure 1)

The application of the model begins at the pre-council meeting. The pre-council meeting should providing a forum for the debate of particular controversial issues at the stage before a formal committee decision was reached, either at the Committee Meeting or Full-Council Meeting. Base on the 13 factors, a consensus result or a firmly stand could be finalized, after considering the few alternatives or possibilities as propose by the member of the party. All members (Councillors) of political party should voice out their views and there was always a strong possibility that, meeting in a politically charged atmosphere and deprived of the guidance of their professional advisers, the members might find themselves becoming committed to resolutions, as perceived by Friend and Jessop (1971).

The Committee Meeting is an official occasion at which Councillors and officers meet together, listen to the issues and recommendations from the officers, before translated into official decisions. Where the more strategic decisions were concerned, Councillors seemed unable to address itself successfully to the task of making a balanced selection between alternatives. This tendency could be avoided by having a clear assessment on any particular contentious matters, based on 13 factors, as what have been debate and agreed at the pre-council meeting.

Figure 1: Proposed Model of Decision-Making



At the third level of decision-making process, all Councillors of the parties met as a group prior to the monthly Full-Council Meeting. The task is to screen the minutes of the various committees, and also to formulate their tactics for any other items to be dealt with on the council agenda (Friend and Jessop, 1971). The process will be much easier if the alternative and consensus have been develop and agreed at the first and the second level of the council's meeting, as what have been proposed under this new model. If the Full-Council Meeting unable to resolve any matters arises, or failed of having consensus results, then that particular minute is formally referred back to the Committee Meeting for further consideration and evaluation. The process of decision-making will goes through the same consequences process until the final and consensus results endorsed in the next Full-Council Meeting.

### 6.5 Strengthening Strategic Partnerships

Innes and Booher (2004) stress on the importance of multi-way interactions in which citizens and other parties involve work and interact in both formal and informal ways in the public arena before arriving at conclusions. However this is not easily achievable as different parties will have different perceptions and views on what an ideal city should have. This is more difficult as each party will have preconceived prejudiced perceptions on another party (Nikmatul, 2011). However, Councillors and community leaders share a basic task which is to help people feel able to understand what goes on in their locality. These tasks can only be efficiently carried out if the

Councillors and community leaders know how planning works and how they should participate. Thus the definition of participation should not only be limited to two-way interaction where citizen react to proposals from government but should be continuous and involving multiple players. Even though this is not the main objective of the study but we strongly believe that further exploration on this new public participation approach will give a much better understanding on the overall process of decision-making at the local government level.

## 7.0 Conclusion

The complexity of the decision-making process at local government level always causes the difficulties for Councillors to make a rightful, objectively and effectively decisions. The existing model of decision-making did not provide them with a clear set of factors that guided them while debating any issues at the council meeting, and as a result, to some extent, we saw an inevitable outcome of the contrast between the complexity of choice and the limited options for acceptance or rejection of recommendations permitted by conventional committee procedures. Therefore the study, based on the theoretical conceptual of decision-making process, successfully develop a set of decision-guideline consisting of 13 factors to be used by Councillors while dealing with decision-making process to be adopted for Majlis Perbandaran Kuantan. The six main preference factors choose by Councillors will definitely express the re-definition of their roles as Councillors in a more proper and acceptable sense.

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