DEVELOPING STRATEGIC SYURA TOOL TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

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ABSTRACT

Meeting is the most important tool in managing organization. However, study shows that meeting is not conducted effectively. Many problems occur during the process. These problems lead to the deficiency of organizational decision making and its performance (Gregorion, 2006). This research is very important in providing meeting tools to improve the performance of the meeting. Study shows that due to ineffective conduct of meetings, many problems occur that lead to the deficiency of organizational decision making and performance (Gregorion, 2006). This study is important to provide employers with a measuring tool to identify the weaknesses when conducting meeting. It covers six different domains of a meeting which include chairperson's perspective, participants' perspective, process perspective, minutes, contents and implementation of the meeting. After capturing the performance of the meeting, this research provides a special tool to tie up the problems of meeting with the proper solution. As a result, the user can improve their meeting skills by identifying the correct way of conducting meeting. This research produced ready-to-use meeting kit to improve performance of meeting. The kit includes: software on measuring effectiveness of meeting, *syura* descriptors and *syura* notes. The uses of the kit will help improve decision making process of the organization through meeting as well as improving the organizational performance.

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CHAPTER 1

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The Importance of Effective Meeting

Meeting is one of the most common and most important communication events at a workplace. At an organization, people meet to exchange information, make decisions and solve problems, which are usually done in formal or informal meetings. What is more, the performance and development of a company depends mostly on decisions which are made in meetings. Meetings require the attendance of appropriate personnel, expenditure of cost, time spent and proper planning which process runs through even before the meeting starts. Therefore, it is important to ensure that meetings are planned and conducted effectively.

1.2   Background of the Study

Leaders and managers often overlook on the facts that having the necessary skills, abilities and plans in conducting meetings (McNamara, 2007) is important. Unsuccessful meeting often follows when wrong decisions regarding the planning of the meeting itself are made: meetings are not planned effectively; irrelevant personnel are called for the meeting; meeting is too short or too long; agenda is not followed; and meetings documents are not complete. Most importantly, a meeting fails when the members of the meeting do not play their specific roles – chairperson, secretary and participants. As the result, meetings are prolonged; more questions and issues are raised than resolved; time and cost spent and so on.

The consequences of conducting ineffective meetings will affect individual performance as well as the performance of the organization. These problems can be found not only among new employees but also leaders and managers who have years of working experience. Thus, the needs to measure employees' knowledge and ability in conducting meeting is important in order to assist an organization especially managers and leaders.

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This research, hence, focuses on identifying the skills and abilities that each participating member of a meeting should possess, comparing the skills needed in a common meeting to *syura* – an Islamic concept of conducting meeting, designing a measurement tool to assess meeting effectiveness based on *syura* principles, and proposing a solution to the organization on how to develop employees' skills and abilities in conducting effective meeting.

1.3   Objectives of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the attributes of *syura*
2. To develop a measuring tool to assess meeting effectiveness based on *syura* principles
3. To develop diagnostic kit to the problems based on *syura*
4. To develop modules in improving processes in meeting based on *syura*

1.4   Scope of the Study

This research focuses on:

1. Attributes of *syura*.
2. Resources and subjects only in Universiti Malaysia Pahang.
3. The outputs of research are applicable to any organization that uses meeting as a way in making decision.

1.5   Significance of the Study

The researchers hope that the study would contribute to the university, the organizations, and the country in the following aspects:

1. To produce ready-to-use product to be commercialized
2. To identify weaknesses in conducting meeting
3. To increase effectiveness in conducting meeting
4. To develop strategic tool in performing meeting

CHAPTER 2

2.0   LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Meeting

A meeting is a gathering of at least three people who share common objectives usually to solve problems, make decisions and exchange information. Meetings are one of the most common events at a workplace. Every personnel at an organization from low management people to top management executives will need to attend or conduct meetings. Data collected from a survey showed that most executives and company planners spent half of their days in meetings, even when they are traveling (Croston & Gouldings, 1966). Interdepartmental meetings, client meeting and branch meetings are a few types of meetings that executives have to attend when they are away from the office. This indicates that the needs to ensure meetings are conducted effectively and successfully are crucial.

Since meeting requires cost, personnel and time, Shoop (1998) states that participants of meeting tend to be discontent when meetings end up ineffectively. From a survey of 635 executives, Smart (2006) lists that among the characteristics of a negative meetings include drifting from the subject of discussion during the meeting, poor preparation, lack of listening from the members of the meeting, verbose participants and unsuitable length. Effective meetings can be achieved; however, they require deliberate planning, must be conducted in an effective and efficient manner and need to be well managed by the leader (Shoop, 1998).

Thus, this study will investigate on identifying the important elements that need to be addressed in order for a meeting to be conducted effectively. Understanding and embedding *syura*, the Islamic principles of conducting meeting, into our practice might help solve some problems related to meeting.

2.2 *Syura*

Syura is one of the most significant tools in managing an organization. The prophet Muhammad SAW (PBUH) revealed systematic techniques in performing *syura* (Zakaria, 1980). Today, management uses meeting as a way in making decision. However, most of the meetings face problems especially during the process of meeting (Gregorian, 2004). The team members should know the processes and conduct the meeting based on the best procedure of it. The uses of suitable procedure will bring effectiveness on the decisions made during the meeting.

Syura is a process in which decisions are made collectively by considering the negative and positive aspects during the discussion. In *syura*, the techniques used are different compared to the existing meeting process. The uniqueness of the *syura* will help an organization to run the meeting effectively. Thus, it is important to develop a tool based on *syura* principles in helping the effectiveness of meeting. This research is useful to develop strategic process in *syura* in order to increase the efficiency of meeting.

2.2.1 *Syura* Principles

The principles of *syura* in conducting meeting are based Rasulullah's SAW techniques in making decision which are:

i. Avoiding negative behaviour in meeting

ii. Avoiding from making wrong decisions

iii. Making the right decisions

iv. All members must contribute in expressing opinion and implementing tasks

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CHAPTER 3

3.0   METHODOLOGY

The Study

This study follows a step of procedures that include library research, qualitative research, rapid prototyping, pilot testing and product testing.

3.1   Library Research

This method is used as the initial stage of research to research for information on meeting and *syura,* identify the *syura* principles and to develop the *syura* measuring tool. It involves:

- Defining *syura* and identifying its principles
- Defining and identifying the principles of conducting meeting
- Identifying the problems relating to the process of conducting meeting, meeting documents and people involved in a meeting
- Identifying existing techniques in conducting meeting
- Comparing existing techniques and *syura* principles of conducting meeting

These findings will assist the researchers to develop *syura* measuring tool, and the module. The researchers found many examples of guidelines, modules and handbook which contain techniques and approaches of how to conduct meeting effectively; however, there were no measuring tools to measure meeting effectiveness which is based on *syura* principles. Therefore, it is essential to develop this *syura* measuring tool as office equipment in order to assist organizations to measure meeting effectiveness.

3.2   Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is used to conduct an in-depth study with the experts of *syura* and professional communication namely meeting at Universiti Malaysia Pahang. This includes:

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- Defining and exploring current problems that are causing deficiency in conducting meeting.
- Defining and exploring existing techniques in conducting meeting.
- Defining and exploring issues related to the process, documents and people involved in a meeting

All the information collected at this stage together with the library research will assist in the development of the items, domains and descriptors of the measurement tool.

3.2.1 Samples

UMP's Staff:

The respondents of the study were academic and non-academic staffs of UMP who have been randomly selected from various faculties, departments and units.

The Field Experts:

The field experts interviewed in order to obtain information and data regarding *syura* and meeting are all from UMP. The field experts involved in this study includes:

a. Modern Languages lecturers who provided information on meeting as professional communication
b. Human Sciences lecturers who provided information on *syura* and its principles
c. Administrative staff who frequently conduct and attend meetings

The field experts' participation in this study includes:

a. providing relevant information on meeting and *syura*
b. providing expert opinion on the items, domains and descriptors of the measurement tool

c. proofreading the items, domains and descriptors of the measurement tool

d. pilot testing the measurement tool

3.2.2 Instrumentation and Procedures

<u>Interview Session</u>

The first step into the study was to conduct interview session with a number of academic and non-academic staff at UMP to obtain first-hand accounts on meeting-related issues.

The discussion during the interview sessions covers the following:

1. aspects of meeting as understood
2. issues and problems faced when meetings are conducted
3. suggestions to overcome the problems

<u>Arbiter Analysis</u>

The information gathered from the interview sessions together with information gathered from the library research, 50 item statements were developed for the measurement tool. This is the <u>first draft</u>. This draft was given to the field experts mentioned earlier to perform Arbiter Analysis. Arbiter analysis refers to the analysis when related experts analyze all the items in the measuring tools and comment on the suitability of each item as an item for a measuring tool.

<u>Administration to the UMP's Staff</u>

The amended measuring tool was then administered to a number of UMP's staff. The administration of this measuring tool among the contract workers is vitally important as another phase to determine the reliability and validity of the measuring tool.

At the end of this stage of the process, the measurement tool was finalized. Based on this, the *syura* measurement kit was compiled.

This kit includes:

1. *Syura* Measurement Tool software to measure the effectiveness level of the meeting ranging from the role of the leader up to the implementation of the meeting
2. *Syura* Meeting Meter to gauge the deficiency of meeting as well as efficiency
3. *Syura* Performance Map to match the meeting performance with the solutions
4. *Syura* Meeting Descriptors to elaborate the supposed to be elements in the meeting
5. *Syura* Guidebook to further explain the process to improve meeting performance

3.3 Rapid Prototyping

This method is used to develop the *Syura* Measurement Tool Software. The software can be used by any organization as an office tool to help them upgrade the effectiveness of their meetings. Two research assistants were appointed in order to design and engineer the development of this software.

The process of developing the software includes:

- Developing algorithms for *syura* tool
- Coding and developing the framework and the system
- Calibrating and testing the tool

3.4 Pilot Testing

This method is used to test the validity of measurement tool as well as assessment check tool. This method is important to know the capability of the research output in solving problems relating to meeting. So far, the measurement tool has been

tested twice, and the actual pilot testing still needs to be conducted in order to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement tool.

3.5   Product Testing

This method is used to evaluate the user acceptance of the kit product. This is to identify weaknesses as well as problems from using the product. The product is again tested among UMP's academic and non-academic staff.
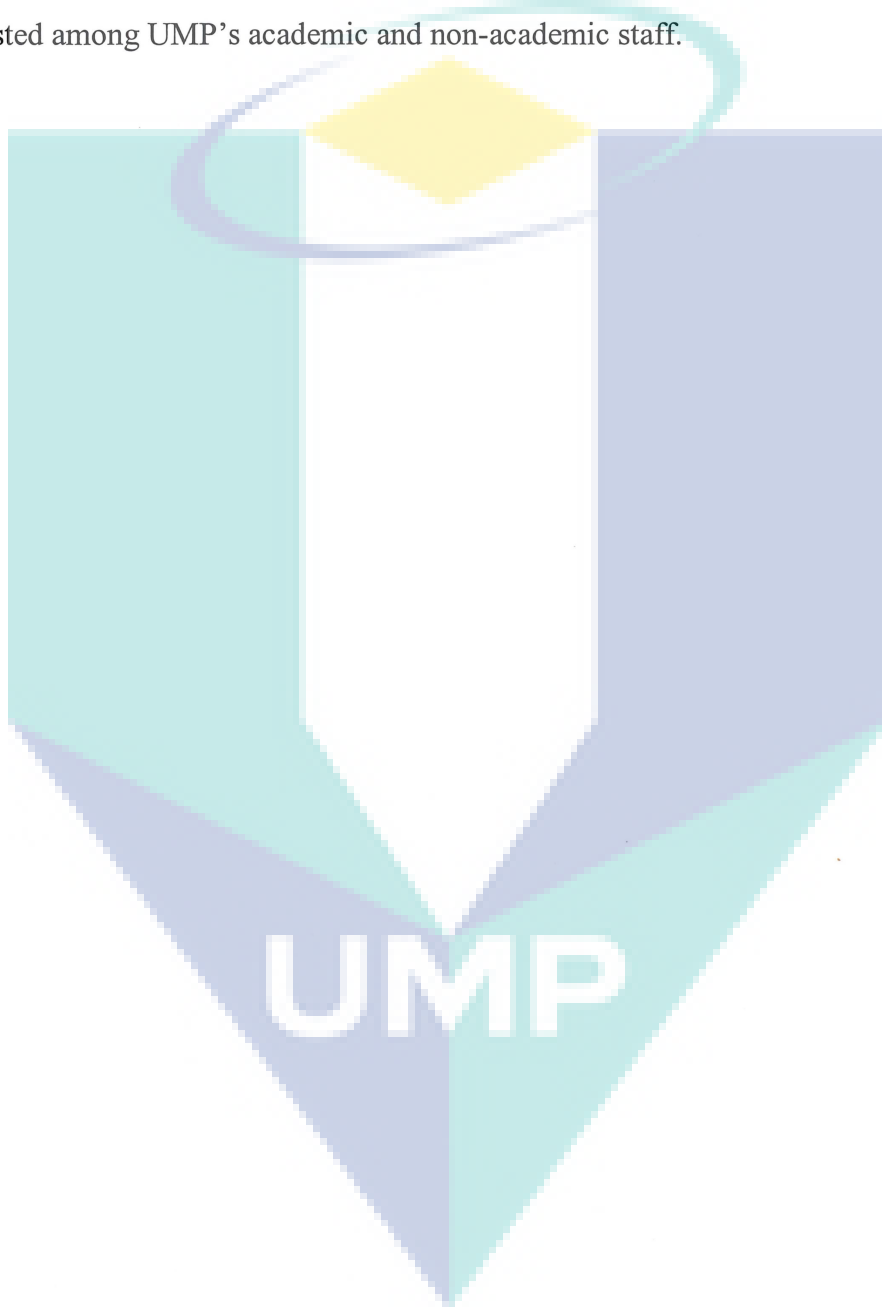
CHAPTER 4

4.0   DISCUSSION

4.1   *Syura*: The Power of Meeting Measurement Tool

In the process of developing the measurement tool, the items and domains have been designed, developed, tested, analyzed, amended and retested twice.

Based on all the responses, opinions and suggestions of the interview sessions, the information was analyzed, and together with the findings from the library research, 50 item statements under seven domains of *syura* principles of conducting meeting were constructed. This would be the first draft of the measuring tool.

The seven domains are:
- Role of Leader
- Role of Members
- Process of Meeting
- *Syura* Minutes
- After *Syura*
- Elements of Meeting
- Time Management

This draft, then, was analyzed by seven experts using the Arbiter Analysis. The comments from the experts are important in determining which item should be maintained, deleted or amended. All comments from the experts were considered and some changes were made to the first draft of the measuring tool, however, none of the items was deleted.

4.2   *Syura* Measurement Kit

4.2.1   *Syura* Measurement Tool Software

The software contains eight pages. The first seven pages list down all the item statements according to all the seven domains identified earlier. The

respondent will answer based on the 3-score scale provided next to each statement. At the bottom of each page, a meter depicting the measurement based on the answers provided can be found. Figure 1 illustrates the first page of the software which shows the item statements for the domain "Role of Leader".


Figure 1: The Domain Page

The answers of all the statements will be automatically calculated by the software. The individual score for each domain will be shown by the meter found at the bottom right-hand corner of each page. The individual score (in percentage) will be shown again in the Score Summary page together with the overall meter for all the domains. The Score Summary page cannot be opened until after all the statements in all the domain pages are answered. The results will indicate the respondent's understanding and performance in conducting meeting. Respondent would

be able to know in which domain his weaknesses or strengths lie. Figure 2 displays an example of the Score Summary page.
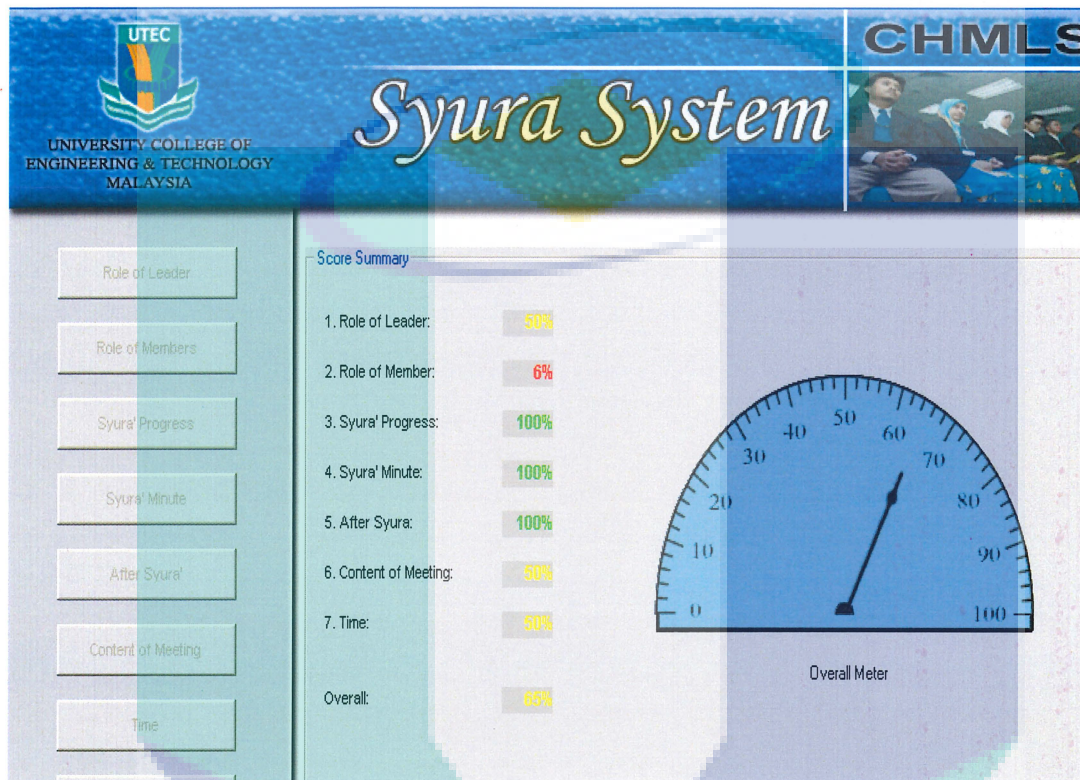
Figure 2: The Score Summary Page

4.2.2 *Syura* Domain Descriptors

To assess workers' knowledge and skills in *syura*, the measurement tool is designed based on seven domains which are:

1. Role of Leader
2. Role of Members
3. Process of Meeting
4. *Syura* Minutes
5. After *Syura*
6. Elements of Meeting
7. Time Management

Syura Domain Descriptors are a set of general definition and interpretation of each of the domain. A brief general description of the domain descriptors is as follows:

Role of Leader

Leader or the chairperson of a meeting plays an important role to manage and control the process of the meeting and ensure its objectives are achieved at the end. The responsibilities of a leader stretches from before the meeting start, during the meeting until after the meeting which include appropriate agenda is planned and distributed to the correct participants, meeting is managed properly, and tasks assigned to participants are followed-up. The success of a meeting, therefore, relies heavily on effective role played by the leader.

Role of Members

Persons attending the meeting are usually decided by the leader depending on the objectives and needs of the meeting. Although presence at the meeting is assigned to them, members of the meeting should play their role effectively from the moment they receive the notice of meeting. Members of meeting should ensure tasks assigned are prepared and completed, opinions and ideas are expressed during the meeting, chances are given to other members of the meeting to voice out their opinions and tasks assigned during the meeting are carried out.

Process of Meeting

Sitting position of the leader and members, distribution of agendas and minutes of meeting and the necessary documents during the meeting are among the factors that will determine the success and effectiveness of a meeting.

Syura Minutes

Minutes of meeting is one of the important documents required for a meeting. Minutes are formal documents which need to be written clearly and documented for future reference. Since minutes include all the details of the discussion, decisions made and tasks assigned, to ensure that meeting are written correctly and distributed to all members of the meeting is very crucial.

After *Syura*

Decisions made in the meeting should be implemented and put into action, and tasks assigned should be carried out.

Elements of Meeting

Knowing the important elements of meeting and deciding on it is essential. Among the elements of meeting that should be given priority are chairperson, secretary, participants, and meeting documents.

Time Management

The implementation of a meeting actually begins at least seven days before the meeting starts, that is, when the notice of meeting is distributed until when the next meeting is scheduled. Thus, managing time and giving high priority to time management in conducting meeting is, therefore, crucial

The item statements of the measurement tool are developed based on these seven domains, and therefore, the knowledge and skills in conducting meeting of staff could be also assessed. The *Syura* Domain Descriptors as included in the Safety Aptitude Measurement Kit can be found in the Appendix.

4.2.3 *Syura* Meeting Meter

This is a scale of measurement to assess respondents' knowledge and skills in conducting a meeting. The score shown by the meter is important to understand respondents' understanding of every domain in *syura*, and this could assist users to improve their knowledge and skills in conducting meeting. The users are able to understand the level of their *syura* understanding, and in what domain they have to improve.

The meter is very important to any leaders and managers of a company to gauge the ability that their workers have in conducting meeting. Proper training can be identified and provided to employees who are lacking meeting skills.
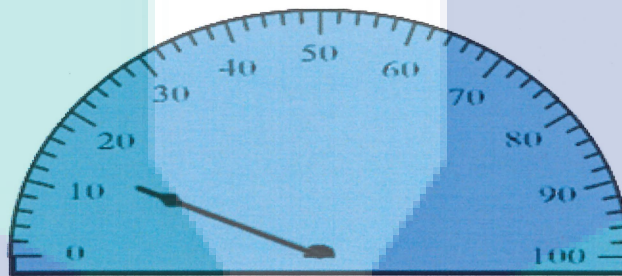

Figure 3: The Meeting Meter

The indicator of the descriptors for each domain is scaled from 0 to 100. The knowledge and skills of the users will increase if the arrow scales higher towards 100, whilst if the arrow scales towards 0, the knowledge and skills of the users in conducting meeting gets lower. Figure 3 illustrates the meeting meter.

All the seven domains have individual meeting meter while the overall meeting meter which sum up the total score of all the seven domains can be found in the Score Summary.

4.2.4 *Syura* Performance Map

This performance map details the users' knowledge and skill in conducting meeting using percentage according to the seven domains.
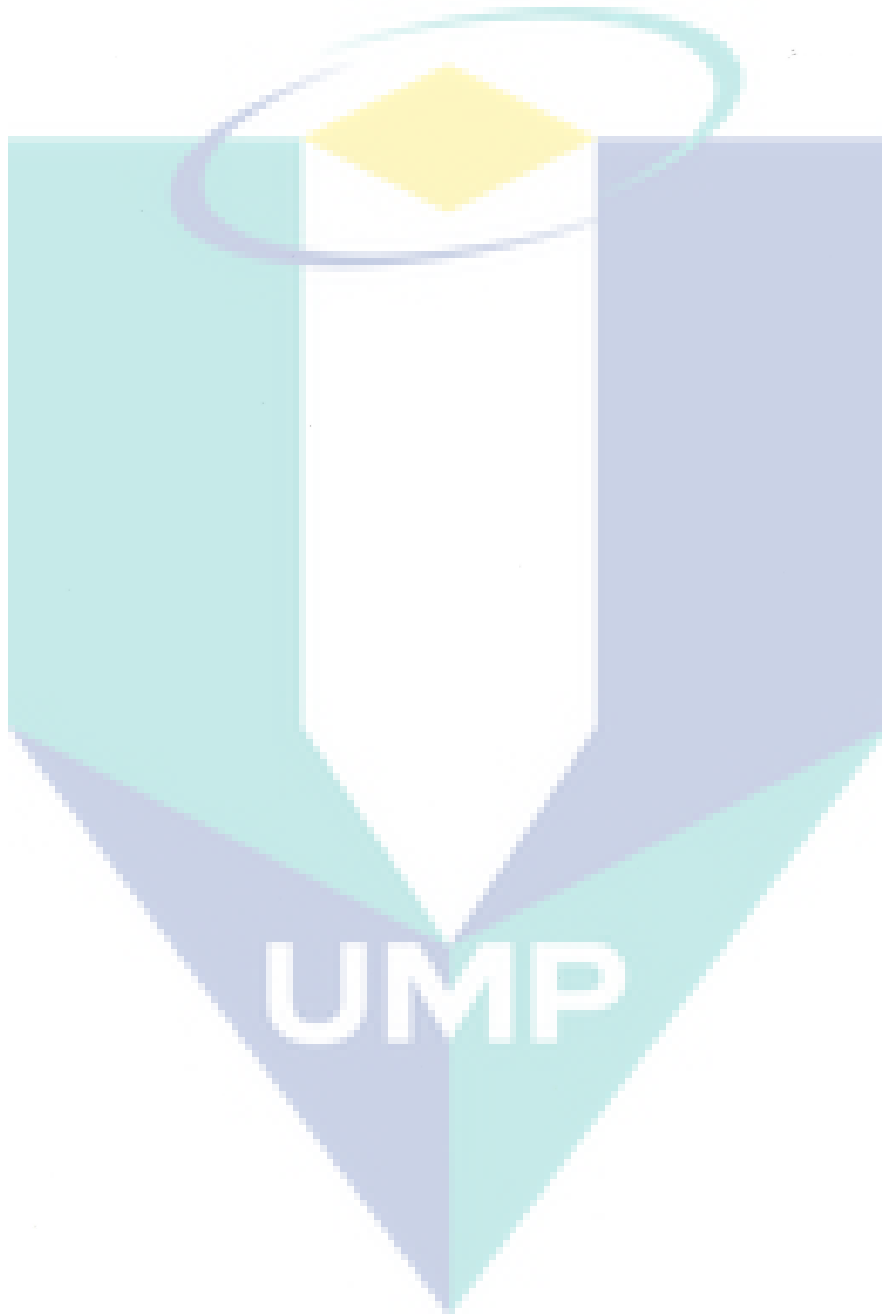
CHAPTER 5

5.0   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   Limitations

The respondents

- The respondents for this study are only selected among UMP's staff. As such, it only represents the results that are congruent with the population of UMP. It might not give accurate results if users from other companies or different types of industry were to use.

The measurement tool

- Some of the item statements for the domains are repeated, but written in different ways. Therefore, all the item statements and the domains need to be revised and reanalyzed.
- The term *syura* and meeting have been used interchangeably in the measurement tool; therefore, the exact term should be determined.
- Consequently, the researchers have to spend more time than is necessary in order to complete just one stage of the study.

5.2   Recommendations

- Factor Analysis needs to be conducted to determine the reliability and validity of the domains suggested by the researchers.
- A more thorough Arbiter Analysis needs to be conducted.
- Administration of the measuring tool and the Alpha Co-efficient Analysis needs to be run a few more times to minimize any insignificance to each of the item and descriptor of the measurement tool.
- A demographic survey of the contract workers should be conducted in order to formally determine their background.

5.3   Conclusion

This research is important to develop a tool in managing institution. The tool is ready to be use and to be commercialized in the market. The kit is the first in the category as an Islamic organizational tool in institutions. Uses of the tools will help organization identify their weaknesses and also do some improvements to the meeting process. Hopefully this research contributes to the development of civilized community and organization for the betterment of life as revealed in the Quran.
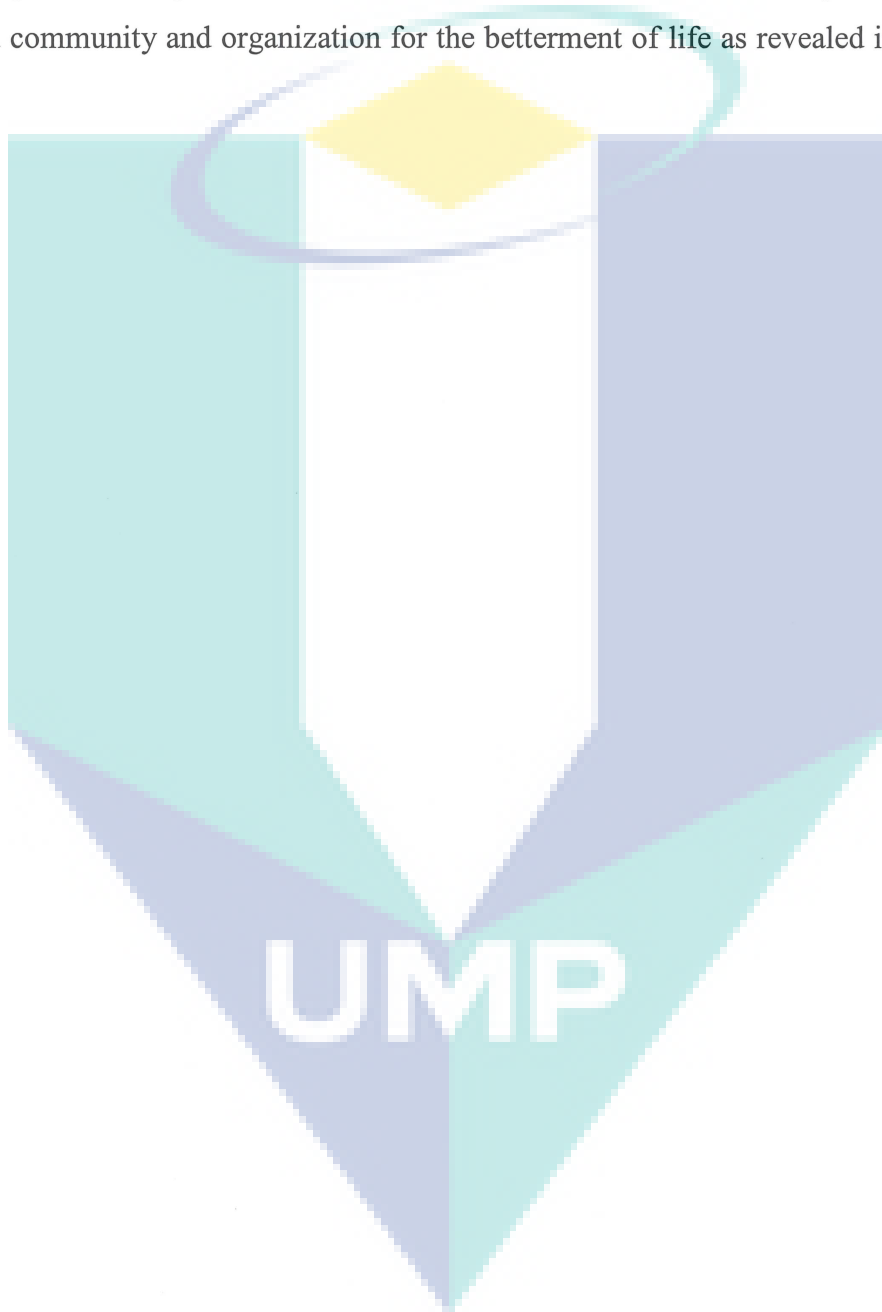
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Syura

Descriptors

Tools in managing institutions

Role of Leader

1. Get report from previous meeting
2. Discuss / assign tasks to complete / improve decision of the previous meeting
3. Get ideas / discussion on the agenda
4. Make decision/s (by leader)
5. Decision for the benefit of group (not individual)
6. Finish the agendas
7. Ensure the involvement of the members
8. Postpone the meeting
9. Avoiding interference during meeting.

Role of Members

1. Pay attention to the meeting
2. Give opinion if needed
3. Give the best opinion
4. Think that the other opinion is better
5. Avoid discussion outside agenda
6. Obey to the decision of leader
7. Obey to the decision of meeting
8. Implement the decision
9. Get permission to go off

The Process

1. Motivation towards syura
2. Positioning in a circle position (facing)
3. Close to each other
4. Identify chairman / secretary / safety /
5. Identify agendas
6. Discuss the agendas
7. Finding solution / make decision
8. Summary

Minutes of Meeting

1. In writing
2. Minutes taken by secretary of session
3. Point form on the decision of meeting
4. Conclusion / summary at the end of session
5. Approval on minutes at the end of session
6. Minutes are ready at the end of session
7. Distribute the copy of minutes at the end of session

Things to do After Meeting

1. Agreeing on the decision
2. Implement the decision
3. Try your best to implement the decision
4. writing
5. Implement even pause by obstacles
6. No reviewing on the decision
7. Implement completely before next meeting

Basic elements

1. Chairman
2. Members (if more than 2)
3. Secretary
4. Agendas
5. Follow up activities
6. Others

Syura Timing

1. Implementation time from week to week 4
2. Implement consistently / based on schedule
3. Begin meeting at the right time
4. Duration of meeting 30 minutes - 90 minutes
5. Urgent matters needs frequent meeting
6. Reasonable time to complete tasks

Positioning of Syura

Chairman

Secretary

X

UMP
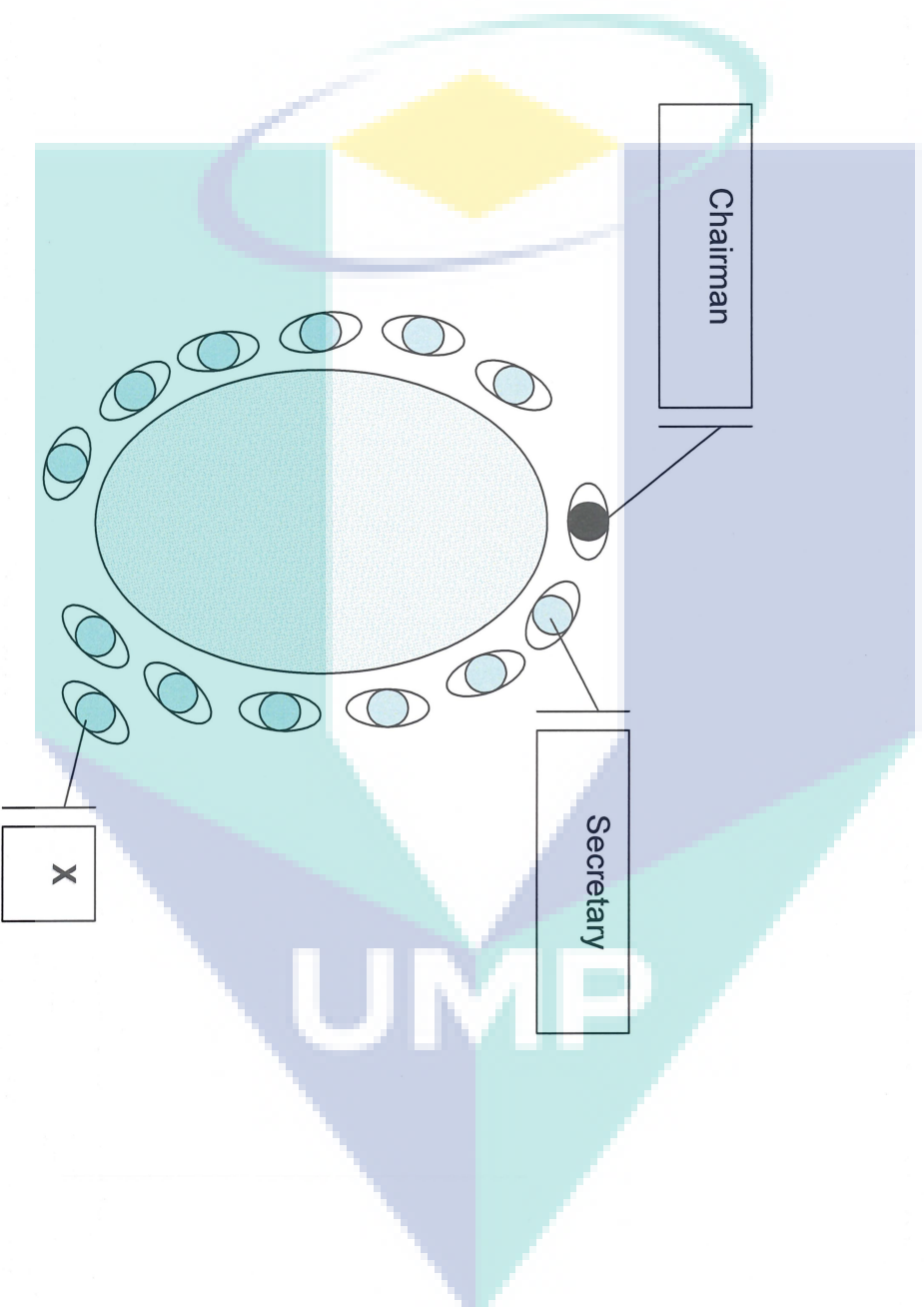
Problems

1. Discuss other matters
2. Ignore direction from leader
3. Ignore decision of the meeting
4. Monopoly during meeting
5. Poor responses

Syura Performance Map

Score Range	Performance
Below 30%	- Very Weak
Between 31 - 50%	- Weak
Between 51% - 65%	-Moderate
Between 66 – 75%	- Good
More 76%	- Very Good
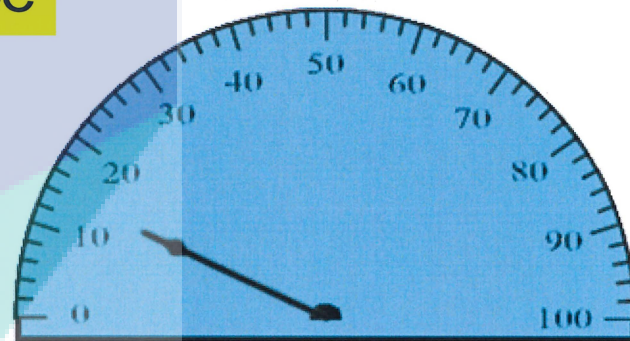
Syura Detail Performance Map

Domain	Very Good	Good	Moderate	Poor	Very Poor
Role of leaders	76% and more	66% - 75%	51% - 65%	31% - 50%	Less 30%
Role of members	76% and more	66% - 75%	51% - 65%	31% - 50%	Less 30%
Syura Progress	60% and more	50% - 59%	40% - 49%	30% - 39%	Less 30%
Minutes	76% and more	66% - 75%	51% - 65%	31% - 50%	Less 30%
After Syura	60% and more	50% - 59%	40% - 49%	30% - 39%	Less 30%
Contents	76% and more	66% - 75%	51% - 65%	31% - 50%	Less 30%
Time	76% and more	66% - 75%	51% - 65%	31% - 50%	Less 30%

UMP