

How Should Elected Members Learn Parliamentary Skills?*

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This lecture will deal with three aspects of parliamentarians' skills:

1. the functions of the parliamentary institution and the skills required for their execution
2. how parliamentarians acquire their skills, and
3. how should parliamentarians acquire their skills?

Today's lecture is hosted by one of the world's most long-established and respected parliaments. Given Australia's role in parliamentary strengthening, it is fitting that the lecture takes an international perspective.

Parliaments spearhead governance in democracies. Efforts to strengthen parliaments made over the last decade by organisations including the Centre for Democratic Institutions, the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank Institute are therefore unsurprising. However, since parliamentarians (members of parliament and senators) perform central yet unique functions affecting the effectiveness of parliaments, a considerable focus has been placed on ways of improving their knowledge, skills and abilities.

It is against this background that the lecture discusses recent research by my colleagues and me investigating how parliamentarians acquire knowledge, skills and abilities for their parliamentary functions and how parliamentarians could be assisted to better fulfil their responsibilities in relation to the parliament. The emphasis is on the implications for the functioning of the parliament as the supreme political institution within the system of government. The study concentrated on the skills relevant to the parliament's functions rather than for the career of the individual parliamentarian. It did not investigate campaign or other political skills.

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1. Parliamentary functions and the skills required

The effectiveness of parliament is, like virtually every social institution, dependent on the capabilities of members and senators to discharge their functions. It is then surprising to find so little said about those capabilities and how they are acquired. We can speculate that that is due to the greater interest of the media and the media's consumers in the contests of ideas and the struggles for power. The public's focus is on politics, not parliament.

Scholarly journals are more likely to publish studies of parliament but again report few studies about the capabilities required.

Let us look a little more deeply. What are those capabilities?

To answer that question, it is an advantage to be a public management scholar in a department of management in a business faculty, rather than a political scientist in an arts faculty. The public management scholar can easily collaborate with human resource scholars.

We learn from human resource scholarship that capabilities can be classified as knowledge, skills and abilities. Moreover, we learn that the particular knowledge, skills and abilities required by the individual reflect his or her functions and in turn the functions of the organisation—in our case a house of parliament.

The functions and relationships of the parliament within the democratic system clearly affect the effectiveness of national governance—its capability to provide goods and services and to adapt to changes—for example, changes internally to its demography and externally to demand for its exports.

We may think 'everyone' knows the functions of a parliament—but do they?

Most parliamentary scholars take Walter Bagehot's (1867) description of the British House of Commons as holding an 'elective', 'expressive', 'teaching', 'informing' and 'legislative' function as a starting point for defining parliament's functions in more detail. Robert Hazell reports that there are seven classic functions of legislatures. These are: representation, legislation, deliberation, scrutiny, budget setting, making and breaking governments, and redress of grievances.¹

¹ R. Hazell, *The Challenges Facing Our Parliaments: How Can We Improve Their Performance?* NSW Parliament, Sydney, 2001, p. 16.

Notwithstanding the different foci of ... individual parliaments, a number of common themes emerge from these definitions and descriptions. They relate to the three basic functions of representation, legislating, and oversight with four functions—deliberation, budget setting, making and breaking of government, and redress of grievances—either being subordinated to one of the core functions or combining them. These correspond to the seven functions identified by Hazell (2001) and provide a convenient summary of the functions.²

Legislatures in executive presidencies differ in that they do not make or break government nor redress grievances.

Table 1: Parliaments studied (interviews)

Parliament	Number of interviews	Parliamentary system	Executive presidency	Established democracy	Emerging democracy	One party	Bicameral	Global region
Australia	9	✓		✓			✓	Oceania
Canada	10	✓		✓			✓	North America
Ethiopia	11				✓		✓	Africa
Indonesia	3		✓		✓			SE Asia
Jordan	14	✓			✓		✓	Middle East
Marshall Islands	13	✓			✓			Oceania
Papua New Guinea	11	✓			✓			Oceania
South Africa	8	✓			✓		✓	Africa
Timor Leste	13	✓			✓			SE Asia
Tonga	11	✓			✓			Oceania
United Kingdom	12	✓		✓			✓	Europe
Uruguay	8		✓	✓*			✓	South America
Vanuatu	15	✓			✓	✓		Oceania
Vietnam	11	✓			✓			SE Asia
Total number of interviews	155	*democracy restored after military rule 1973–85						

² K. Coghill, P. Holland, A. Kinyondo, C. Lewis, and K. Steinack, 'The functions of parliament: Reality challenges tradition', *Australasian Parliamentary Review*, vol. 27, no. 2, Spring 2012, p. 56.

Our recent research commenced with a pilot study of the induction for Australia's new senators in 2005 and expanded to a full-scale project spanning various national parliaments with different constitutional models and histories of democracy. These ranged from the Australian House of Representatives and the House of Commons at Westminster to the newest, the Parlamento Nacional of Timor Leste (table 1).

Parliamentarians and officials were also surveyed, with responses received from parliaments listed in table 2.

Table 2: Parliaments studied (survey)

Parliaments from which responses were received from parliamentarians and officials	
Argentina	Lithuania
Australia	Luxembourg
Austria	Malta
Bangladesh	Mauritius
Belgium	Mexico
Bhutan	Netherlands
Bosnia and Herzegovina	New Zealand
Bulgaria	Norway
Canada	Peru
Chile	Poland
Costa Rica	Romania
Czech Republic	Slovakia
Ecuador	Slovenia
El Salvador	South Africa
Estonia	Spain
France	Sri Lanka
Greece	Sweden
Iceland	Switzerland
India	Uganda
Israel	UK
Jordan	Uruguay
Latvia	Zambia
Parliaments from which responses were received from parliamentarians only	
Albania	Hungary
Belarus	Malaysia
Colombia	Panama
Dominican Republic	Paraguay
Germany	Rwanda

One of the interview questions asked was about the parliament's functions identified by Hazell. This was important because national parliaments are sovereign institutions. As such, their functions are self-defined within the provisions of the national constitution. It follows that the perceptions of the members of a parliament are crucial to understanding the actual contemporary functions of that parliament. Parliamentarians and senior staff of their parliaments were asked to 'Rank the (functions referred to above) of Parliament in ... order of importance'.

The research exposed considerable differences both in what interviewees see as the main functions of parliament and in how they see the intertwined relationships between the seven classic functions (table 3). Furthermore, strikingly different weights were given to particular parliamentary functions by parliamentarians and training providers (parliamentary staff and other providers of parliamentary capacity building) within the same parliamentary chambers.

Table 3: Parliamentary functions: average rating

	Representation	Legislation	Scrutiny	Making or breaking government	Deliberation	Redress of grievances	Budget setting
MP interviewees	2.2	2.0	3.7	5.9	3.8	5.4	3.9
Training provider interviewees	3.18	1.77	2.77	5.27	4.10	5.73	3.25

Note: 1 = highest rating (i.e. most important); 7 = lowest rating (i.e. least important)

MPs rated representation much more highly than did training providers; the latter rated scrutiny rather more highly than did parliamentarians (table 3). At first glance, the rating of representation is consistent with Michael Mezey's finding that:

in virtually all countries, representatives devote a significant portion of their time to being present in their community and helping constituents with individual problems that they might be having with various branches of government.³

³ M.L. Mezey, 'Representation and constituency relations', *Comparative Assessments of Parliament (CAP) Note*, December 2011, p. 18. Retrieved 10 November 2012 from http://www.cid.suny.edu/capnotes1/Mezey_CapNote_011912.pdf.

Representation could be seen as ambiguous. It could be providing Mezey's 'constituency services' or it could be deliberating in parliament on legislation and resolutions on behalf of constituents. However, given that overall it was rated differently and more highly than legislating or deliberating, we can accept that the answers generally referred to 'constituency services'. However, it is important to note that some did not see 'constituency services' as the function of the parliament but a matter for the presidential executive, in Uruguay for example.

The low significance given to making or breaking government is puzzling, especially in Australia and the UK, where the compositions of the current governments are a direct result of who can command majority support in the lower house. If either government lost the confidence of the house, that government would be broken.

These findings suggest two things. Firstly, representation, legislating and scrutiny are the most important functions of the parliament and accordingly the functions for which appropriate skills are most important to the institution.

Secondly, the low rating accorded to 'making or breaking government' may indicate a surprising blindness to a fundamental aspect of the operation of the constitution. The latter is not out of the question, having regard to Dodi Indra's finding of a poor understanding by Victorian parliamentarians of the function of the Auditor-General's office and its relationship to parliament. That is, as the supreme audit body acting on behalf of the parliament, in Australia and many other democracies.⁴

At a minimum, that requires that the features of the constitutional context in which parliament functions must be clarified for all newly elected and continuing members of a parliament.

The parliamentary functions must be discharged effectively and efficiently. For that to occur, its members—the parliamentarians—supported by the parliament's officials must have the capacities to contribute effectively to that discharge.

There is a range of perspectives on the appropriateness of training for parliamentarians. Some argue that the capacities with which a parliamentarian comes into parliament are those on which he or she had been elected; to alter these could be to interfere with democratic representation. Others view training as appropriate if limited to processes and the practical aspects of legislating. Yet others have few reservations about any training, including negotiation or other political management

⁴ D. Indra, *The Performance Audit Expectation Gap: A Case Study of Performance Auditing in the Victorian Public Sector*, unpublished manuscript, Melbourne, 2005.

techniques. There are differences as to whether the more political skills are best provided by parliament, political parties, or others.

There were some distinctive cultural differences pertaining to what is acceptable ethically. For example, many have no difficulty with representation of particular constituent issues, such as assistance to obtain public housing, but in Uruguay such assistance to an individual is to confer an unfair advantage.

These considerations highlight the importance of clarifying the context and objectives of training.

In management speak, the parliamentarians are the organisation's principal human resources and the development of their knowledge skills and abilities is human resource development. Human resource development necessarily involves adult learning as distinct from children's development and education.

Much is known about human resource development in business and in the public service but very little concerning parliamentarians had been published prior to our research.

Let us now turn to how parliamentarians learn skills relevant to parliamentary functions.

2. How parliamentarians acquire skills

Adult education and training theorists have established that adults including parliamentarians can enhance their knowledge, skills and abilities when exposed to andragogical techniques in organisations and that this in turn improves the effectiveness of organisational performance.

Importantly, studies from human resource development can help in understanding how training can impact parliamentarians. This is despite significant differences between parliamentary and other careers, including different 'recruitment' processes, potentially short careers, party discipline and the unique institution in which they work—the parliament. Newly acquired knowledge, skills and abilities induced by experiential forms of training programs can potentially improve performance, to the benefit of the parliament, political parties and individual parliamentarians' re-election prospects.

That leads us to consider what types of programs are offered to newly elected and continuing parliamentarians.

Sources of programs offered to parliamentarians

Sources for the design and delivery of programs offered to parliamentarians vary significantly and this is based on how established a parliamentary democracy is in a particular country. Indeed, in well-established parliaments such as Australia, Canada and UK, there is a wide range of training providers from which parliament and parliamentarians can choose to receive training. These normally span three common sources. The first is in-house training programs, provided by parliamentary staff and external providers. These providers usually focus on providing orientation and induction to new parliamentarians.

The Australian Senate and House of Representatives provide significantly different induction programs.

In July 2005 the new senators had been elected several months in advance of the commencement of their terms on 1 July and ample time was available between that date and their first sitting. The 2005 Senate induction program had an unusually large number of new senators, including one former member of the House of Representatives. The program extended over four days and was well-attended. It did incorporate adult learning techniques including a form of experiential learning—a mock sitting. Officers of the Senate observed that since mock sittings were first included in induction programs, newly elected senators had become skilled more quickly.

The 2010 House of Representatives program was held over one and a half days as is customary. House of Representatives staff indicated that this is the maximum period which newly elected members of the House of Representatives can make available in the context of the short time between the declaration of the polls and the first sitting, and demands on them during that limited time. The program did not include any mock sitting.

In the UK following the 2010 elections, an extensive range of professional development programs were offered to the 232 newly elected members of the House of Commons. They were offered by a range of organisations including the Hansard Society. The proportion of parliamentarians who participated appears to have been quite small—estimated at about 19 per cent.

The second source of programs offered in well-established parliaments is from political parties. Loyalty to political party means that party-member parliamentarians are likely to accept requests to participate in training which the party organises. They

provide workshops and mentoring programs to their candidates and parliamentarians so as to maximise their effectiveness as party-member parliamentarians.

One Australian Labor Party parliamentarian reported having attended a half-day media training program at the national office of the party in the lead up to the 2007 elections when, as he explained, 'there was an expectation that Labor would win the election'.

Similarly, a Canadian parliamentarian from a conservative party stated that his party had been providing 'hour long Monday night experiential programs to its caucus members' coupled with 'one-on-one mentoring among parliamentarians'.

Party whips in particular play a central function in organising and providing various forms of training to caucus members in these established parliaments. Indeed, according to one Australian parliamentarian, whips provide a popular and practical source of training to Australian parliamentarians. They do so, he said, 'by assigning MPs motions to raise in the parliament and when and how to do so'. They also provide parliamentarians with a common line of argument a party has adopted concerning a particular policy issue should parliamentarians get to be questioned by the media. These party-sourced training programs are normally well-regarded and attract maximum attendance as parliamentarians tend to strictly adhere to party-organised events.

The third common source of training in established parliaments is the parliamentary library. This source is valuable particularly to parliamentarians who opt to engage in self-learning techniques. In this case, the only involvement of parliamentary staff is in terms of directing parliamentarians on how and where to get relevant materials to enhance their learning experience. The data shows that this source of training is mainly accessed by senior parliamentarians who want to supplement their knowledge, skills and abilities with up-to-date relevant information.

In Canada, members of their House of Commons hire experienced staff to act as 'both enablers and trainers'. As a result, such staff usually attend training programs with the view of, in turn, training parliamentarians. As one parliamentarian stated, 'I have got three full-time staff in my constituency office ... I learn through them'. These sentiments were echoed by another Canadian parliamentarian who pointed out that whenever he hears of some good training program around the world he sends his trusted staff because, 'he gets the best training from this trusted staff'.

The majority of the nascent parliaments, on the other hand, do not have the luxury of many internal sources of training from which to learn. They mainly depend on

training programs provided almost exclusively by external organisations. For instance, Pacific parliaments such as Papua New Guinea, Tonga and Vanuatu have, for more than a decade, relied on training programs provided and/or sponsored by the (Australian) Centre for Democratic Institutions and the United Nations Development Program. This has resulted in concerns from Pacific nation parliamentarians that training programs provided in their parliaments are usually out of context and therefore inappropriate for them.

It is because of concerns about the applicability of training programs offered by external providers that there has been a trend in some larger emerging democracies to establish their own parliamentary training bodies. For example, in order to improve the effectiveness of parliamentary training in Vietnam, the Training Centre for Elected Representatives (TCER) was established in 2005. The body has since been tasked with formulating a training program that stretches throughout the entire parliamentary term—five years. Similar institutions have since been established in countries such as Pakistan and South Africa.

MPs in several nascent democracies cited other sources of training that are either not used in other parliaments or less frequently used. These include the use of field trips and (in South Africa) encouraging parliamentarians to undertake relevant university courses.

The nature of the programs currently provided for parliamentarians

Training programs are normally identified by the Office of the Clerk (or equivalent, for example Secretary General) and/or political parties represented in the parliaments. These are mainly designed and delivered based on the perceived knowledge, skills and abilities needs that parliamentarians have at a particular time. For instance, the offices of the Clerk are responsible for conducting and/or organising orientation and induction programs for new parliamentarians.

Importantly, no known rigorous training needs assessment has been conducted to inform training design and delivery in parliaments. Certainly, feedback from participants in programs is common and training providers make professional observations and assessments of training needs, but without comprehensive training needs assessments it is difficult to identify potential relevant training designs and delivery techniques.

Information about training programs was collected from interviews at parliaments listed in table 1 and surveys of parliamentarians and officials at parliaments listed in table 2.

Training programs available in parliaments studied usually differ in nature depending on the intended objective of the training providers/organisers. For instance, in well-established parliaments, most of the in-house training programs (seminars and workshops) are mainly delivered in lecture format.

These programs, which can take up to a fortnight are usually meant to give orientation and induction to new parliamentarians on important matters they need to know about in order to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. The majority of parliamentarians shun these types of training programs, because as adults, parliamentarians prefer adult learning techniques, which are more experiential than pedagogical.

At the other end of the scale, some parliaments do little more than welcome the new parliamentarian and leave him or her to sink or swim alone.

Figure 1

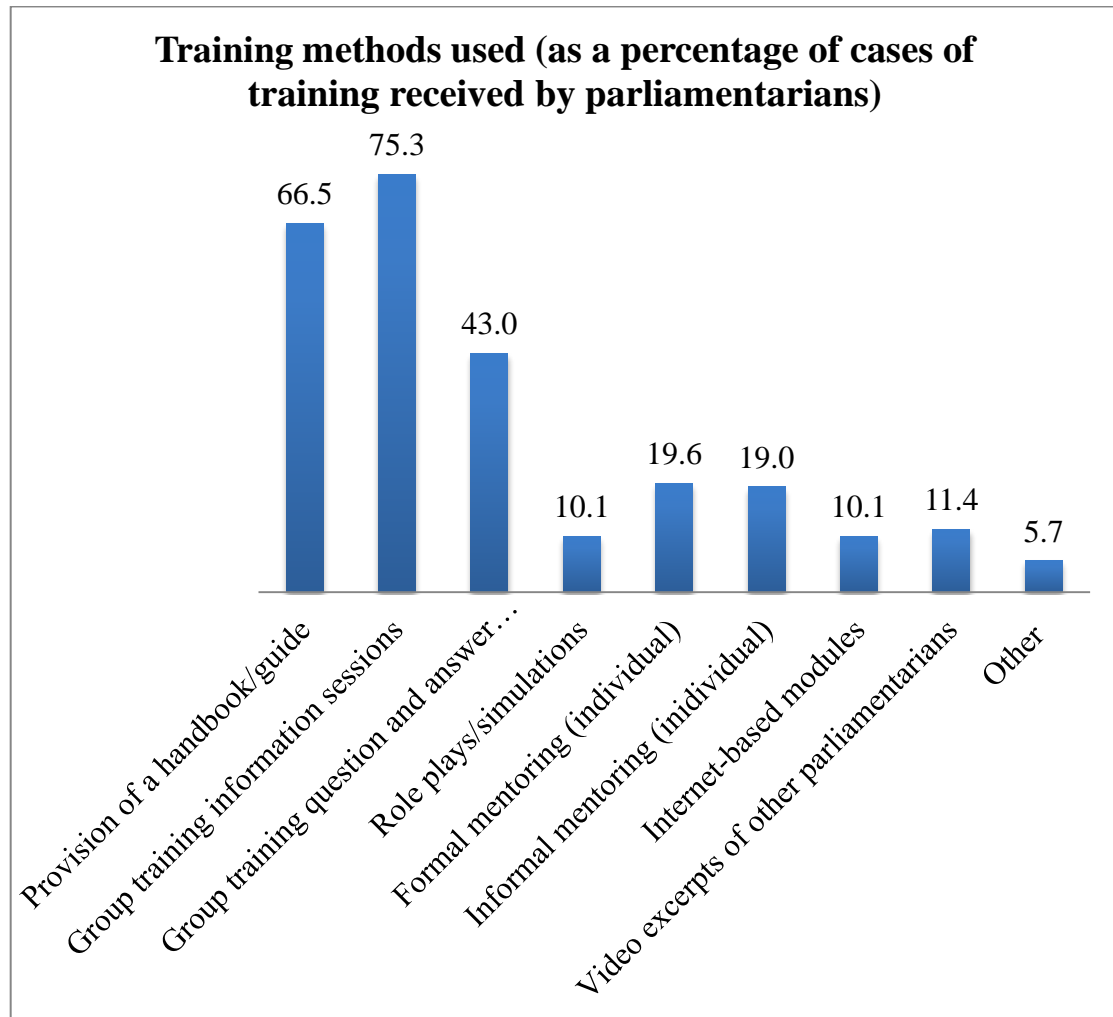
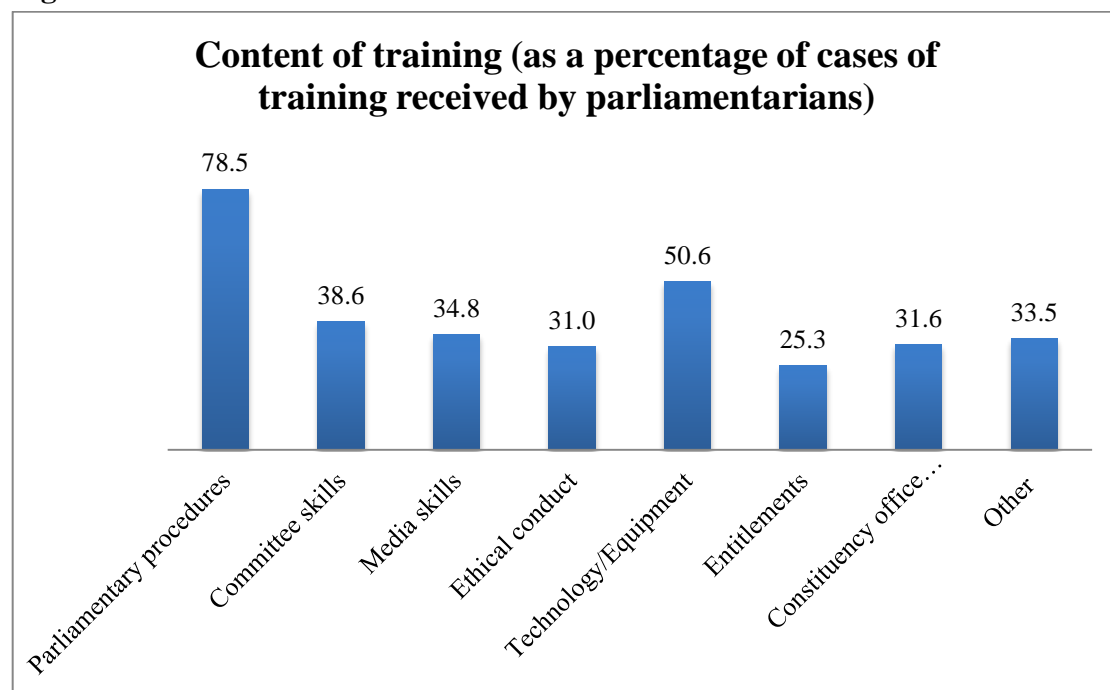


Figure 1 shows the training methods used in programs provided to research respondents. Very few programs use adult learning techniques.

The content of training reported in our research is shown in figure 2.

Figure 2



Content typically includes parliamentary procedures including standing orders, legislative processes and technology/equipment. Surprisingly, entitlements information was not universal. Some programs address ethical conduct whilst others deliberately eschew the topic on the basis that parliamentary officials should not try to tell parliamentarians how to behave.

Many parliamentarians interviewed demonstrated a strong interest in being better informed on policy issues. Training in budget processes was particularly highly valued, where offered.

Most party-based training programs such as mentoring did not rely on lecture-style presentations. They are mostly hands-on in nature and therefore more effective. In South Africa for example, senior parliamentarians are usually tasked with the responsibility of assisting new parliamentarians to effectively and efficiently perform their various functions.

Mentoring does have its problems for while some senior parliamentarians can do an excellent job in mentoring, they can also 'use their experience to spoil aspirations or lead new parliamentarians in the wrong direction' as one Ethiopian parliamentarian

explained. It follows then that mentoring should be supplemented by other forms of training programs so as to allow new parliamentarians not to be overwhelmed by domineering senior parliamentarians.

Party training can also involve some group work. For instance a Canadian parliamentarian stated that his party provides a weekly group work session to consider legislative matters or questions to be posed in the house in the following week.

Another type of program offered at the party level in established parliaments is on-the-job training. These programs are usually coordinated by party whips. For instance, a party whip in Australia provided a training scenario showing his approach when training a new parliamentarian. He pointed out that:

I have done it for people before ..., little tips like I might approach them and say: now, look you got 20 minutes to speak on these Bills. Don't go in there with a speech worth 20 minutes. Go in one with 15 minutes worth. If you fall short no one's going to say, 'Well they're a fool. They don't know enough about the subject to talk for 20 minutes'. And inevitably because you'll feed off an interjection, or something else will pop in your mind and then ... you'll go 20 minutes anyway. And again, if you try to go 20 minutes you'll get distracted and you'll run out of time and you'll miss saying the most important thing you wanted to, the point you wanted to make.

The most prominent types of in-house training available in both established and nascent democracies are seminars and workshops offered in lecture format. As is the case in established parliaments, parliamentarians in emerging parliaments do not embrace these types of training programs. As an Ethiopian parliamentarian pointed out 'interactive workshops help more than lectures'. A South African parliamentarian claimed he was 'hijacked by one of his colleagues' to attend a training session which was of no benefit to him. He explained:

I sat there, listened to him (the trainer) when he was talking he was doing graphs, economic graphs and then I looked at him (his colleague) and said I am not putting my foot in here again. I am lost. There is nothing that encourages me to come back here.

Self-training methods using documentation such as handbooks, online materials and DVD-stored parliamentary materials provide another form of training. Although data from the interviews shows the method is not widely used, some parliamentarians both

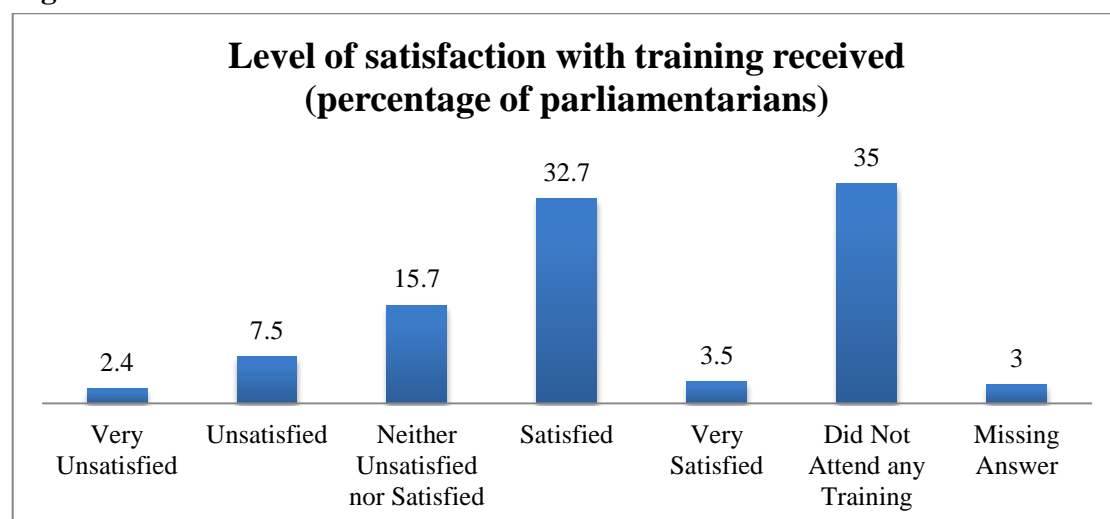
in established and nascent democracies have reportedly used this method to reinforce their knowledge, skills and abilities on specific parliamentary issues.

A few parliaments have provided field visits for their parliamentarians. Indeed, parliamentarians from Jordan, Ethiopia and Vietnam have toured other parliaments, particularly established democracies in order to gain knowledge, skills and abilities through an exchange of ideas with their counterparts.

The most disappointing finding was the modest level of satisfaction with the programs undertaken, as reported by the parliamentarians participating in the research.

As figure 3 indicates, only approximately 36 per cent of all respondents (equal to 60 per cent of program participants) were satisfied or very satisfied.

Figure 3



Voluntary or mandatory?

Whilst many jurisdictions regard parliamentarians as not being subject to direction and hence not capable of being directed to participate in induction or other programs, a significant proportion of jurisdictions do in fact require parliamentarians to participate in such programs. Participation rates are much higher in parliaments where attendance is mandatory—often approaching 100 per cent.

Whilst some parliamentarians agreed that participation in training should be mandatory, all felt that it should be sufficiently well-designed and delivered as to attract attendance.

Effectiveness or otherwise of methods used to evaluate such programs

There seem to be no rigorous methods used to evaluate training programs provided in any of the parliaments studied. Only a few training providers insist on asking training participants to complete evaluation forms immediately after a training program has ended. However, even these types of evaluation are not comprehensive enough, as they do not allow time for parliamentarians to apply what they may have learnt during training before assessing the benefits of the training program.

A common problem embedded in most of the training programs is that they were designed and delivered without first conducting a thorough training needs assessment. This, together with the lack of rigorous evaluation of training programs has meant that similar mistakes are repeated in each training cycle. It is not surprising then that parliamentarians from both established and emerging democracies point to the same issues rendering training programs ineffective. These issues include, but are not limited to, the fact that these programs are perceived by parliamentarians to be too short and basic to be effective, their content too general to have practical relevance and training techniques too didactic to keep adult parliamentarians interested during training sessions. The need for training providers to conduct comprehensive training needs assessments and program evaluations is urgent. Ignoring this need will guarantee ongoing dissatisfaction with training programs and continued low levels of attendance by parliamentarians.

Prior learning

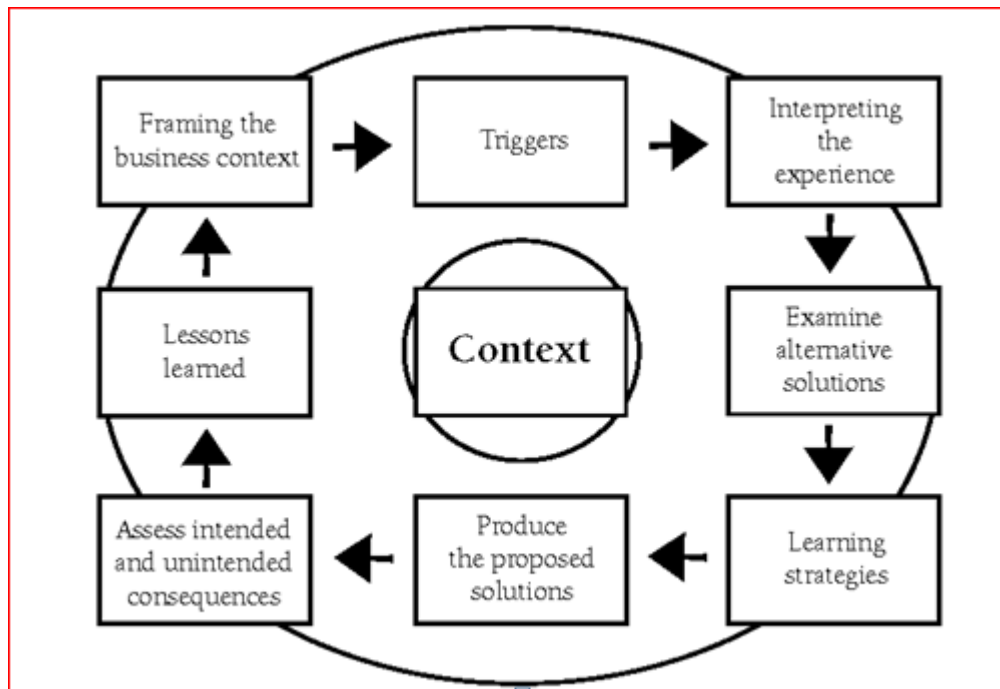
Most parliamentarians take office with at least some of the generic skills needed to contribute to the functioning of the parliament, such as public speaking and debating. Some have learned through prior service in elected office at local, state or provincial level. In the special case of the French Senate, its members are elected by and from the 36 000 local governments, so that they have well-developed knowledge, skills and abilities in most but not all of the Senate's functions. Some previous occupations involved certain relevant skills, the law being the example most commonly cited.

Whilst very few enter national parliament fully equipped with all the skills required to contribute to each of the parliament's functions, it is important to recognise that each new parliamentarian will have unique strengths, weaknesses and training needs.

Informal and incidental learning

Parliamentarians, like adults in many professions, learn many of their knowledge, skills and abilities through informal processes and incidental learning.

Figure 4: Marsick and Watkins's informal and incidental learning model as adapted with Cseh



Source: V.J. Marsick and K.E. Watkins, 'Informal and incidental learning', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, vol. 2001, issue 89, p. 29.

Professors Victoria Marsick and Karen Watkins use figure 4 to explain that:

(t)he circle in the center represents (their) belief that learning grows out of everyday encounters while working and living in a given context. A new life experience may offer a challenge, a problem to be resolved, or a vision of a future state. The outer circle represents the context within which the experience occurs, the personal, social, business, and cultural context for learning that plays a key role in influencing the way in which people interpret the situation, their choices, the actions they take, and the learning that is affected.⁵

The model depicts a progression of meaning making that, in practice, is often more of an ebb and flow as people begin to make sense of a situation. With each new insight, they may have to go back and question earlier understandings. The model is arranged in a circle, but the steps are neither linear nor necessarily sequential.

Whilst it is important to recognise that incidental learning does occur, it is inherently not systematic and may be quite asynchronous with the need to apply certain

⁵ V.J. Marsick and K.E. Watkins, 'Informal and incidental learning', *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, vol. 2001, issue 89, p. 29.

knowledge, skills and abilities. For example, the parliamentarian needs to know and understand the basic standing orders (rules of procedure) from his or her first sitting.

Furthermore, incidental learning risks inadvertently learning incomplete or incorrect knowledge, compromising the performance of the parliamentarian and by extension, the functioning of the parliament. However, when incidental learning does emerge, it can sometimes be built upon by trainers.

Summarising how parliamentarians do develop their skills, we see that these range from very brief welcomes and a reliance on incidental learning to substantial programs utilising adult learning techniques, such as those provided by the Australian Senate, and formalised programs provided by dedicated institutions such as the Training Centre for Elected Representatives (TCER) in Vietnam.

3. How should parliamentarians acquire their skills?

These findings of the experiences of parliamentarians in undertaking training relevant to parliamentary functions lead us to suggestions for assisting them to develop that knowledge, skills and abilities. There are three major suggestions.

Firstly, the content of programs should reflect the institutional interest of each parliament in its members having the capacities to contribute to the effective functioning of the parliament through:

- contextual understanding of the parliament's functions
- analytical, deliberative and communications skills
- information technology abilities and
- ethical competence (moral reasoning capacities).

The success of parliamentary training is predicated on a comprehensive training needs assessment and an understanding of common practices in the particular parliament and its unique features—assessments identifying what parliamentarians in the particular parliament need to effectively perform their function in an efficient manner.

Rigorous evaluation of programs is an essential corollary.

Secondly, participation in training programs should be strongly encouraged. The extent to which the parliament can make participation mandatory will vary according to domestic conventions and practice. Nonetheless, support and encouragement by party whips are generally accepted by party-member parliamentarians as imperative requests. Accordingly political parties should treat participation in training as if it is a condition of parliamentary party membership. However, the benefits must be

demonstrated and recognisable by parliamentarians if programs are to be a catalyst for them to embrace training.

Results from established parliaments suggest that party-based training programs are not only well attended but are also perceived by parliamentarians to be more effective than programs delivered by other providers. There is, therefore, an opportunity among donors and external training providers to collaborate with political parties if they want their efforts to improve parliamentary performance to be realised.

The trend in nascent democracies to establish training centres for parliamentarians can also be emulated across similar parliaments. This is because local bodies, such as TCER, can potentially design culturally and constitutionally sensitive programs and also monitor and evaluate these programs to make them more effective in the future.

Thirdly, adult learning techniques should be adopted and applied, having regard to both human resource development theory and practice and the responses of parliamentarians who participated in the research.

Conclusion

This lecture began from the premise that induction and training for parliamentarians should serve the interests of good governance through more effective functioning of the institution of parliament. It has demonstrated that there are widespread weaknesses in the development of the knowledge, skills and abilities that parliamentarians need in order to contribute to that effective functioning of the parliament.

However, the unique features of each parliament dictate that parliamentary training programs must be localised and rigorously evaluated. Without that, there is the risk that flawed training programs will be replicated and recycled.

Nonetheless, it is clear that three principles should inform the development of programs for newly elected and continuing parliamentarians:

- program content orientated to improved functioning of the parliament
- high levels of participation and
- use of adult learning techniques.

The governance of representative democracies could be improved by the application of these principles.



Rosemary Laing (Clerk of the Senate) — Obviously a central purpose of training is to improve the functioning of parliament. How do you measure that? How do you judge what is an improved function of parliament? What are you looking for and who determines it?

Ken Coghill — As I indicated, parliament is a sovereign institution within the limitations of its role as prescribed by the Constitution. But within that it is a sovereign institution which makes its own way and in our view the appropriate way to measure the performance of the parliament is according to the standards which it establishes for itself. There is not an independent international or outside institution which can say the ‘Australian Senate is doing this wrongly’ or should do something in a different way. I should add that this is an important issue for the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which is one of the partners in this research project. As an association of all of the world’s parliaments, they cannot get into the business of saying to some, ‘Well you are doing things which we regard as unacceptable or incorrect’.

Rosemary Laing — I suppose the media play a strong role in judging whether a parliament is being effective or not but one does not always trust the measures that the media like to use.

Ken Coghill — I think you make a really important point there and the media being what it is tends to report very much on politics and very little on parliament and I would like to think that we could somehow encourage some greater reflection on the way in which the parliament is functioning and the way in which the media reports what goes on in politics.

Rosemary Laing — I suppose another issue is that there is a much greater capacity for people to have direct access to the parliament through webcasts and live transmission and to make those judgements for themselves.

Ken Coghill — Yes, certainly, and I think one of the issues for the future is how the parliamentary chambers can improve the interaction which they have with the public in addition to directly through their elected representatives.

Question — You talk about mentoring and you talk about the role of whips which presupposes political parties which of course in Australia have a very significant role to play. Has your research found anything about independents and members of minor parties who do not have the infrastructure to fall back on?

Ken Coghill — The obvious point is that yes they have real difficulties because they do not have the infrastructure of a party to fall back on, to use your terms, and that in my view makes it all the more important that the parliament as an institution ensures that assistance and support is available to all members of parliament irrespective of party.

Rosemary Laing — How would one go about designing a training needs analysis for members of parliament?

Ken Coghill — Essentially it would be, in my view, getting together a group of senior senators in your case, including the President, to firstly get their consensus view on what are the really important functions that this particular chamber is performing and going from that to what are the knowledge, skills and abilities that each senator should have in order to maximise his or her input to it. That is a very brief summary of what I would suggest.

Question — I am interested in how the media influences the way things are reported, which can affect the motivations of members but also the expectations of the community, particularly in the context of the differences between the findings you have made in developed and emerging parliaments. I am interested to know whether your studies have taken account of some of those differences in the cultural development of approaches to parliamentary democracy because where someone does not quite know what a parliamentary democracy is supposed to do they are also not going to necessarily know that the member's job is effective legislating. Or is it going to be more providing infrastructure resources to the immediate community?

Ken Coghill — As you may have noticed, five of the countries which we studied intensively were in the Pacific and that issue was very strongly identified by Abel Kinyondo who was the PhD candidate who made that his study. You are absolutely right, there are members of parliament in some of those jurisdictions who are quite content to leave legislating to the experts and just put up their hands to wave it through and in the meantime go back to being a big man in their home constituency and dispense funds in that constituency. One of the really important points which I think Abel made in his research is that this makes the role of the parliamentary staff in those parliaments absolutely crucial and his argument, which I accept, is that there should be a very strong emphasis on giving those parliamentary staff the skills to help their members of parliament understand what the implications are of the institution of parliament and their functions within it and that in fact they have quite a profound responsibility for the legislation which they are presently just waving through.

In our view the best suggestion we have—I would not say it is necessarily the solution—is that there should be more emphasis going into support for indigenous parliamentary staff in those parliaments so they can play a role in helping the members of parliament understand what their constitutional responsibilities are and how those can be better discharged than they are at the moment.

Question — I am particularly interested in three aspects: one is leadership or team building, one is communication and thirdly the issue of running a department or being a CEO—the issues of governance and management. I would appreciate it if you could tell me where at the moment the parliamentarians get that training and secondly, how could it be improved?

Ken Coghill — So far as leadership is concerned, from my own knowledge as a member of the Australian Labor Party for over forty years, it tends to depend on firstly the initiative of the individual and secondly, if the individual is lucky, mentoring from someone who can see that individual's potential and is keen to support it.

In communication there is more done, but it is done by the political parties in my observation. I am not aware of a parliament in which there is a significant amount of training in communication skills. However, I would argue that it is a legitimate thing for a parliament to do, that it is in the interest of the parliamentary institution, irrespective of what interest parties may have in it. It is in the interest of the parliamentary institution for its members to be good communicators both within the chamber in making decisions and in communicating to the public about the decisions and deliberations of the parliament itself.

As to running a department, I assume you are thinking here of ministerial responsibility and that is something we have not looked at in this study; it simply was not part of this study.

Question — What do you think should be the training available in leadership and team building?

Ken Coghill — Again, it seems to me that here is something which almost exclusively applies to political party members and not to independents because independents by and large are not part of a team—although there was a case in which a group of people were elected as the United Independents to a NSW local government authority. But to come back to your question, it seems to me that again those skills are things which it is appropriate for a parliament to undertake. In cases where there is a training centre for elected representatives—so its equivalent as in

Vietnam, South Africa and Pakistan—I think it is a more appropriate thing for the training centre to take on rather than a parliamentary institution. The reason I say that is that the officers of the parliament might find themselves in a pretty awkward situation if it looks as if they are providing training to the benefit of the opposition even if they are being even-handed in the way in which they provide it.

Rosemary Laing — And it is really not something that we have expertise in providing.

Ken Coghill — No, and in areas where you do not have expertise, I think it would often be important to bring in people from outside, whether they be private consultants or academics or whatever it may be.

Question — If I read your graph correctly, it suggested that about one-third of incoming MPs did not attend the training sessions. Has there been any analysis as to whether they were unable to attend or why they voluntarily did not attend?

Ken Coghill — It is fairly hard to get answers from people about why they did not do something. The figures vary enormously. I quoted the figure from the United Kingdom from the last election where about one-third of the members were newly elected members and only 19 per cent attended one or more training programs. Now my view is that the very poor attendance needs to be rectified in two ways. Firstly, the programs have got to be designed both in terms of content and delivery so as to be attractive—word of mouth indicates that something is worth going to. Secondly, I think there ought to be a lot of work particularly with the party whips and the party leaders to in effect make it a condition of parliamentary party membership that new members attend and participate in parliamentary induction training programs. Those are the two responses that I would suggest.

Rosemary Laing — Can I add something to that? I have been involved in orientation programs for senators since 1993 and it has never actually been an issue for us. We have had 100 per cent attendance for every round of training and I do not know why that is and there has never been any question of making it compulsory or mandatory, so perhaps we are offering something that is seen as being useful.

Ken Coghill — Well, certainly the limited feedback that I have received suggests that the Senate program is highly regarded by its participants.

Question — Usually when people want an influential and well-paid career, they go and do their training first. I am concerned and confused as to why none of the educational institutions actually offer parliamentary training as it would be a highly

subscribed course, I would have thought, particularly here in Canberra. You would then be able to pick your aspiring politicians from amongst that group and they would pay for it themselves.

Ken Coghill — In the master's program that I teach, we have had some possible future MPs. I would not put it in the terms that they were necessarily aspiring at the time of their enrolment to be a candidate at the next election, but we have had a small number. They have found it very difficult to combine formal university education with their political and other activities. While they are a candidate they are doing two things, they are holding down a job of some sort and they are being a candidate. To add university studies on top of that is not impossible but it is very difficult. I think what would be more appropriate would be short courses which might extend over days or weeks rather than months. As to why they have not been offered to date, my experience since moving to the university sector is that it is fairly inflexible and the funding regime and everything else that applies to universities makes it much more attractive to teach a formal degree course than it does to run short courses.

Comment — I suppose what I was getting at is that as part of an undergraduate course there would be a high degree of interest about parliamentary processes and those sorts of things. As I understand it most MPs train in law. There is no reason why some parliamentary training could not be offered during that degree. A lot of our politicians are actually sons or daughters of former politicians. They have decided very young to enter politics.

Ken Coghill — Yes, just on your point about the law, in fact most people are surprised when they actually look at the figures at what a small proportion of members of parliament do have a law degree. It is not a tiny proportion but it is far from a majority. That is something I would like to set the record straight on. Certainly many of the young people I met who have an interest in a possible political career—not necessarily in elected office but maybe working in politics—take either an undergraduate degree that includes politics and very often foreign affairs and international relations. That is my observation of the people I meet now who want to get into a political career in one form or another.