

# Parliamentary Organisation, History and Knowledge

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**Abstract:** This study elucidates how the historical and organisational evolution of parliamentary staff is related to the establishment and development of organisational knowledge resources within parliamentary institutions. The use of parliamentary staff reflects an effort to acquire institutional expertise, knowledge and professionalism in the legislative branch to counterbalance a perceived advantage within executive agencies. Parliamentary staff contribute to constructing organisational memory and knowledge, by shaping and sharing knowledge resources that support legislative processes. Parliamentary staff preserve continuity, institutional memory, and expertise. The rise of expertise and knowledge within parliamentary staff is related to the increasing organisational complexity over time of parliamentary administrations that enables parliamentary staff to develop knowledge capabilities assets that contribute to fostering the effectiveness and decision-making capacity of parliamentary bodies. The organisational and professional development of parliamentary staff helps improve knowledge capabilities and expertise, supporting parliaments in exerting influence on policy making.

**Keywords:** Organisation and knowledge, History and organisation, Parliamentary staff

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## 1. Introduction

Parliament could not effectively perform institutional functions, concerning law making and policy making without the support of administrative and legislative parliamentary staff that exert influence on policy processes by expertise, professional advice and consulting (DeGregorio, 1975; Fox and Hammond, 1977), leading to autonomous and independent, effective and efficient working parliamentary institutions (Hammond, 1984; Romzek and Utter, 1977; Ryle, 1981). Parliamentary staff relies on expertise and knowledge acquisition, and professionalism in the legislative branch to counterbalance a perceived expertise advantage within executive branch agencies (Campbell and Laporte, 1981; Bontadini, 1983). Organisations need to acquire and generate knowledge, and invest on knowledge (Davenport and Prusak, 1998), and rely on knowledge and organisational infrastructures and capabilities (Gold, Malhotra and Segars, 2001). Parliamentary staff rely on knowledge assets and capabilities. The organisational design supports the rise and the improvement of knowledge within organisations. The research question refers to how the basics of organisational knowledge arise, and how knowledge management infrastructures are related to the organisational design and complexity. There are few studies that investigate the relationship between organisational knowledge management sources and the historical evolution of the organisational structure. The aim of this paper is to elucidate how organisational as well as historical development of parliamentary staff helps support the rise of knowledge sources and capabilities within the parliamentary organisation. This study relies on archival and qualitative data related to a review of literature in the field of law and history on the organisational development of parliamentary administrations. The study is descriptive and exploratory. The attentiveness to historical research and perspective in organisational analysis is rising. Historical narrative helps to understand the organisational phenomena and advance in organisation studies (Clark and Rowlinson, 2004). The organisational knowledge relates to historical development and evolution of parliaments as complex organisations that contribute to enabling knowledge-intensive resources and practices. It is important to explore how organisational knowledge sources are built and sustained historically in order to let people and structures may contribute to learning and knowledge organisational practices. The study is organised as follows. After introduction and theoretical background that refers to the relationships between knowledge, memory and organisations, the methodological section follows in the third paragraph. The fourth paragraph elucidates the relationship between knowledge development and the organisational complexity of parliamentary staff. The historical and organisational evolution and development of Italian parliamentary staff is presented in the fifth paragraph (1861-1907). Finally, discussion and conclusions are set out.

## 2. Knowledge, Memory and Organisations

Knowledge is an essential source that enables the organisations to develop successfully in long term horizon. According to Davenport and Prusak (1998) knowledge refers to a fluid mix of framed experiences, values, and contextual information, and expert insight to incorporate new experiences and information. Organisations need to create and improve knowledge assets and infrastructures to drive organisational success and learning. As stated by Gold, Malhotra and Segars (2001) organisations need of knowledge infrastructures, and rely on the organisational structure as a means to develop knowledge capabilities and processes. Organisations need to

enhance, preserve and maintain the knowledge assets (Freeze and Kulkarni, 2007). Singh Sandhawalia and Dalcher (2011) have stated that a knowledge management capability framework enables common understanding, and provides a track to implement knowledge-led initiatives. The organisational structures enable the rise of knowledge infrastructures and facilitates the development of a culture of knowledge within the organisation (Pandey and Dutta, 2013). Organisations need to develop continuously new knowledge sources in order to improve innovation processes (Vesperi, Reina, Ventura, Cristofaro and Melina, 2024), and contribute to value co-creation in order to identify new solutions for knowledge generation (Vesperi, Melina and Ventura, 2023). Organisations recognize knowledge sources in order to develop collective intelligence and support the skills of employees to create and enhance organisational knowledge infrastructures and resources (Bollinger and Smith, 2001). Organisations need to develop the organisational memory which helps store communicable and integrated knowledge (Walsh and Ungson, 1991), proceeding coherently with historical perspectives of organisational development (Booth and Rowlinson, 2006). Knowledge is embedded in routines, practices, systems, and people (Argote and Ingram, 2000). Organisational memory, routines, norms and professional expertise help support knowledge creation and knowledge retention (Argote and Miron-Spektor 2011). These knowledge sources evolve over time being influenced by organisational design and historical development (Levitt and March, 1988).

### **3. Methodological Section**

The study refers to a qualitative, descriptive and exploratory methodology to analyse how organisational and historical evolution of parliamentary administration is related to the rise and development of knowledge sources and infrastructures that parliamentary staff develop to provide aide and assistance to parliamentary organisation and institution. The study focuses on one exploratory and illustrative case study concerning the historical and organisational development of parliamentary administration and staff within the Kingdom of Italy since 1861 to 1907. The case study helps to explore and provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon in relation to the context whereas the boundaries are not clearly evident. The case study methodology follows an empirical inquiry without the rigidity of a predefined structure for observations and analysis (Yin, 2009). Historical analyses help understand organisational development and evolution in long term horizon (Kieser, 1994). History helps variable selection and hypotheses generation within a theoretical context (Üsdiken and Kieser, 2004; Üsdiken, Kipping and Engwall, 2011). The study relies on the analysis of literature in the field of law and history of parliamentary staff and administration. Reinterpreting the issues emerging in the literature coherently with the organisational setting helps us to appreciate how organisational knowledge is rising in relation to historical and organisational development in long term horizon.

### **4. Knowledge Development and Organisational Complexity Within Parliamentary Organisations**

Parliaments depend on expert sources of information, knowledge and advice provided by parliamentary staff (Fox and Hammond, 1977). Parliaments have developed staff structures coherently with their own historical traditions and roles (Blishcke, 1981 Campbell and Laporte, 1981), relying on parliamentary staff which provide increased knowledge and expert advice (Cheli, 1983), and no partisan and independent assistance of the executive branch agencies (Finzi, 1934). The professional development of parliamentary staff relies on advanced stages of parliamentary system (Soddu, 1999) in relation to both the strategic role of Parliaments and the organisational evolution of parliamentary administrations (Chimenti, 1981). Staff structure is typically incremental, slow and fragmented (Chimenti, 1981; Ciaurro, 1983). The structure of parliamentary administration develops in several work units (Bontadini, 1983): the *substantial units* provide cognitive and consulting support and aide the operating work flow; the *vicarious* and *consultant units* enforce the legislative technique; the *technical* and *instrumental units* perform only executive tasks; the *formal units* translate law making in formal acts. Parliamentary staff rely on specialized knowledge, and influence the policy making process (DeGregorio, 1975). They contribute to expanding the pool of resources and information upon which Parliament draws (Malbin, 1977), developing knowledge and information sources and capabilities, providing technical and specialized assistance, consulting and advice on law making (Ciaurro, 1983). Parliamentary staff contribute to forging the expertise within the parliamentary institution, acting as custodians of historical and procedural memory, and interpreters of procedure and processes (Ferrari Zumbini, 1987; Negri, 1984), managing data and information, and making a knowledge-led and information-driven parliamentary organisation (Bontadini, 1983).

## 5. Historical and Organisational Evolution of Italian Parliamentary Staff (1861-1907)

According to the article 61 of the *Statuto Albertino* about the organisational autonomy of Parliament, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies may exercise their prerogatives by internal regulations. Since 1851 the Chambers of Subalpine Parliament could draw up the budget without the assistance and support of Ministry of Interior, and without any discussion and proposal by government (since 1852). Parliamentary staff was grouped into four offices: the Office of Account and Minutes process; the Secretariat to aide parliamentary sittings, the Library and the Questura were responsible for administrative management. The Senate could use also three reviewers attending at the translation of stenographic. The Librarian-Archivist was in charge to keep the protocol and make and inventory of documents and papers (Pinto, 1983). Thereby, parliamentary staff was able to perform merely administrative tasks (Pacelli, 2001).

Principles of organisational flexibility were introduced with regards to internal regulations of Chamber of Deputies' administration (1863) (Traversa, 1997). Professionalism and knowledge capabilities of stenographs and reviewers increased and improved. Employees were hired by public examination (In Senate since 1869; in the Chamber after 1874 – for stenographs since 1866) (Pacelli, 2001).

The role of General Director which was directly accountable to the Bureau, at the apex of the parliamentary bureaucracy, was instituted with Francesco Crispi assuming the role of Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (on 1876 November 21). The staff structure was transitioning from a decentralized design of autonomous and independent work units to hierarchical and centralized structure. In 1877 the Office of Speaker could appoint the Reviewer of minutes report instead of the whole assembly (Pinto, 1983). Support staff work units were grouped in one department which was articulated into six functional units under the administrative and political authority of Bureau (strategic apex): the Secretariat; the Questura; the Revision; the Stenography; the Library and the Archive.

Since 1892-1893, as a proactive legislature, the Chamber of Deputies played an effective and political role in order to support the Giolitti's policies that contributed to modernising administrative government and public services (Pacelli, 2000). Parliament could play a proactive role on discussion and examination of laws instead of overseeing public policies implemented by the executive authority and government (Montaldo, 2001). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the organisational structure of parliamentary administration at Chamber of Deputies developed as centralized and vertical design. The Bureau was the key part of organisation. The Services were: the Secretariat and Archive, the Questura and Post, the Library, the Compiler of minutes process, the Review, the Stenography (Pinto, 1983). The design of the structure helped maintaining the physical facilities, accounting management for its expenditures, and providing transcripts of its debates (Chimenti, 1994; Ciaurro, 1983).

The parliamentary institution needed to reinforce the information and knowledge sources, and the quality of legislative documentation, study and research, and to improve the quality of human resources and professionalism of staff in order to improve, enabling the parliamentary staff to provide aide to the legislators with regards to the policy process. With regards to the increasing workload of legislature, the Speaker of the Chamber needed to be assisted by a top administrative manager who was able to provide expertise and develop knowledge and professional consulting in relation to the parliamentary procedure. With Giuseppe Marcora assuming the role of Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies (1904 November 20) the organisational design of governance mechanisms and structure could lead to parliamentary staff able to provide a legal, procedural and technical support and aide to deputies without being dependent of political parties. Bureau approved the distinction between legislative and administrative departments (1905 April 12) consistently with the organisational model of French National Assembly's bureaucracy (Pacelli, 2000).

The office of Secretary-General was instituted on 1907 June 2 (Pacelli, 1984). The lawyer Camillo Montalcini was appointed as the first Secretary-General on 1907 July 1 (Pacelli, 2000). Legislative and administrative services and work units were grouped in a structure articulated in four services: the Secretariat; the Office of minutes report; the Questura and the Library. The Director of the Questura was responsible on administrative matters and financial management. The Secretary-General should ensure the effective functioning of legislative and study support services in order to satisfy the deputies' demands about law making and procedure consulting, and let knowledge capabilities and assets develop. The Secretariat was structured into several work units: the Archive; the Review; the Stenography and the Legislative Statistics (Pacelli, 2000). As a professional advisor and expert on law and parliamentary procedures, the Secretary-General might support the Speaker in parliamentary sessions, and keep the archives and minutes report of Bureau, acting as *primus inter pares* among the senior officials. Professionalism and specialization of staff on parliamentary procedure and law improved in relation to

the operational complexity of work units. As a custodian of praxis and procedural regulations, parliamentary staff could play an autonomous and institutional role by developing knowledge capabilities to support the parliamentary institution and organisation (Pinto, 1983; Traversa, 1997; Pacelli, 1984).

## **6. Discussion, Implications and Conclusions**

The rise of knowledge infrastructures and sources is related to the organisational complexity and design of parliamentary administration. Parliamentary staff may contribute to increased knowledge sources and professional capabilities, leading to knowledge management and sharing practices. The organisational development of parliamentary administrations supports the rise of knowledge sources and infrastructures that improve the parliamentary workload, and contribute to the organisational learning of parliamentary systems and structures. More competent and knowledge-led the staff, the more alternatives it will cover. The support of parliamentary staff to the legislative body will be depending on knowledge sources, coherently with the organisational development of Parliament and the complexity of its administrative support staff or apparatus. The increasing professionalization of staff in the fields of law and interpretation of procedure influenced the strategic behaviours of the legislature, leading to an increased organisational knowledge, and enabling knowledge sharing and management within the structure of parliamentary staff. The organisation design and the rise of knowledge sources are strictly dependent on historical, managerial and organisational development of parliamentary institutions. Professional, knowledge-led empowerment and organisational autonomy of parliamentary staff enable the parliamentary staff to provide both no partisan and technical support and aide to Members of Parliament, providing knowledge and information sources. Professionalism and knowledge-led competences of parliamentary staff may improve in relation to increasing strategic and organisational evolution of parliamentary administration. There are managerial and organisational implications. Advanced stages of parliamentary system and organisation support the rise of knowledge and information sources and infrastructures, leading to professional development of parliamentary staff. The organisational design enables the rise of knowledge assets and capabilities. The rise and the implementation of knowledge sources and infrastructures relies on managerial competences and development. Professional development of parliamentary staff helps improve knowledge capabilities and sources. Parliaments should invest in organisational design and knowledge sources in order to improve the performances and of parliamentary staff. This study is mainly descriptive and exploratory. There are several limitations. Historical research and analysis on the organisation design and practices of Italian parliamentary administrations should be completed. Future research implies to investigate the relationship between knowledge management practices, human resource management and professional development of parliamentary staff.

**Ethical statement:** I declare that any ethical clearance was required for the research.

**AI statement:** I declare that AI tool were not used to create this paper.

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