



Strategic Management in Legislative Public Management: A Comparative Perspective

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Received 30 June 2015; accepted 20 July 2015

Published online 31 August 2015

Abstract

This article consists of a comparative study, on an international level, among the organizational structures of legislative houses and the strategic management practices adopted by these institutions. This comparative research is based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Different maturity levels of management practices and large heterogeneity among organizational structures were identified. Limitations for generalizing the results are due to the accidental sampling approach used. The practical results presented come from a proposed model for evaluation of institutional maturity level concerning management practices. This model is supposed to be helpful for parliaments' management improvement.

Key words: Parliaments' management; Strategic management; Legislative power; Legislative organizational structure

Guimaraes, A. S., Schwartz, F. P., Werneck, J. D. S., & Melo, M. R. M. (2015). Strategic Management in Legislative Public Management: A Comparative Perspective. *International Business and Management*, 11(1), 13-24. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/ibm/article/view/7201> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/7201>

INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to conduct an international level comparative study of organizational structures in legislatures and also the strategic management practices

adopted by these institutions. The experiences from Chambers of Deputies (or equivalents) and Senates (or equivalents) were reported.

The justification for this study arises from the growing expectation—or from the demand in some cases—that actions in the public sector must be capable of responding to and anticipating demands from society and moreover, that they must be implemented efficiently, effectively, transparently and ethically. What has been observed is an increasing citizen interest in knowing about and monitoring legislative operations and effectiveness in addition to increasing institutional controls, specifically in relation to the legislative power and its primary functions of representing citizens, debating major international subjects, legislating and overseeing public spending. This translates into greater accountability not only concerning what is done, but also how it is done, by whom it is done and finally, for whom it is done. In this context, strategic management has come to be a necessity in the public sector.

Strategy, transplanted into the public sector and particularly into legislative power institutions, is a conceptual tool necessary for responding to two essential questions: in what direction should the legislative power move forward and how people should be mobilized in this direction. Mintzberg (1994), when analyzing the existing theories on strategy, addressed two prevailing theoretical views: the first understands strategy as a problem of positioning; the second assumes it is a question of perspective. From the view of positioning, the strategy has a *downwards* view, focusing on the exact point in which the legislative power encounters the citizen and a view *from the inside out*, which sees existing social demands. From this analysis, one comes to a possible proposal for a direction in which to move forward. From the view of perspective, in contrast, the strategic view is *inward*, focusing on the thoughts of collective and *upwards* strategies, forming a macro-view of legislative power.

This aspect is more potent as a motivational factor. The approach of this paper is the strategic management as an element in the institutionalization process of parliaments.

In seeking an institutional approach, this research dialogues with the work of Polsby (1968), which analyzed the institutionalization process of the United States Congress and took the view that the administrative organization and institutional configuration affect the political system, hence the importance of this study. From Polsby (1968, p. 165) came the statement that “it is hard—indeed for the contemporary observer, impossible—to shake the conviction that the House’s institutional structure does matter greatly in the production of political outcomes”.

Critically analyzing and understanding the processes of strategic management, considering the specificities of the legislative branch is important for expanding knowledge of administration in legislatures. It is also important for identifying trends of legislative power as a whole that lack in-depth studies. In general, strategic management initiatives in the public sector are associated with the executive power. Hence, it is understood that such studies may contribute to strengthening the image of the legislature as a power that is also concerned with the rational use of resources and with the application of constitutional principles related to public administration.

1. METHODOLOGY

This study is comparative and combines quantitative and qualitative techniques. It is based on a structured questionnaire organized in two parts. The first part contains fields for institutional identification and structural analysis of the legislative houses which is a topic little explored in literature. The second part has eleven closed questions, with the possibility for comments, and focuses on the theoretical perspective of the positioning school, which in turn deals with issues such as mission, vision, objectives and indicators.

271 questionnaires were sent to federal legislative houses—chambers of deputies and senates or their equivalents—in Portuguese, English, Spanish and French, using as a base a list of members from the Interparliamentary Union (IPU).

The focus of this study is descriptive, with organization, presentation and systemization of the data. The statistical inferences were restricted to the respondents and are without the intention to generalize. Discrete quantitative variables were the object of univariate analysis, such as frequency distribution and descriptive measure, in addition to being subject to bivariate analysis, such as calculating correlation coefficients (Barbetta, 2008). Qualitative variables were dealt with statistically and presented by means of specific graphs.

A spatial model was created by the authors with the goal of preliminarily identifying the stage of maturity of

each researched legislative house with respect to planning and management actions. The idea emerged from the perspectives of the authors concerning the vision and action¹ concepts. In this sense, the model was based on some scenarios that were outlined to identify variables which could characterize the institutions in the context of planning management:

- Scenario 1: profile of mechanized bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 2003) in legislative houses, highly hierarchical and with a wide division of labor. This could discourage critical thinking about future perspectives (**vision**) of the institution and therefore, seem unnecessary to have a plan different from **action**. In this case, the institution would be driven by the **inertia** of the mechanized model.
- Scenario 2: in light of the administrative difficulties and inefficiency of work processes, as well as being aware of the need for change, administrators initiate movements for thinking about and proposing new paths (**vision**) for the institution, translating them into plans for change. However, they are unable to get them off the paper (**action**) because they are still absorbed by the culture and by the mechanized bureaucratic procedures which counteract the focus on results, which the changes are demanding. In this context, the plans do not go beyond intent and only sail in the perspective of the **dream**.
- Scenario 3: those who have overcome the first obstacles of the mechanized model; **action** has gained space. Demands for improvements, long repressed, are answered with a surge of initiatives, many times disordered and with departmental focus, self-centered, which in general diverge from the institutional objectives (**vision**). In this scenario, the saying that prevails is that “...action without planning is fatal” (unknown author), given that valuable resources may be allocated to projects of secondary importance, despite having a technically refined character. Thus, the actions meet the goal of maintaining the highly qualified staff active (**pastime**), who tend to propose initiatives which enhance their individual specialties and not necessarily those of the institution.
- Scenario 4: tired of seeing projects sink

¹ Let it be registered that the model was inspired upon two proverbs: the first is Japanese and states that “Planning without action is a dream. Action without planning is a nightmare”; the second is from an unknown author and says that “Planning without action is futile, action without planning is fatal”. The authors adapted the proverbs to the Cartesian model proposed in this study, which situates the organization into quadrants based on the relationship between vision and action: “Action without vision is a pastime. Vision without action is a dream. Action with vision can change the world”.

which were invested with so much time and resources—a situation not necessarily linked to a lack of quality, but to the lack of alignment in the institution's purposes—the administrators recognize this need for a convergence of efforts, to row in the same direction of the vital objectives of the institution. In this context, the administrators coordinate work to define in detail, to all of the staff, these objectives (**vision**), which need to be well understood and pursued by all the staff, with the aid of a plan of **action** rigorously executed and coordinate by those responsible. In this way, the institution is headed for effectiveness in the actions, reaching the **transformation** necessary to keep in synchronized with the evolution of time and with social expectations.

Two essential elements describe the scenarios objectively: vision and action. The proposal presented here consists of attributing a ranking to these parameters and also to associate them with defined levels of maturity for strategic management. Level of maturity is understood to be a set of management practices applied in the institution, which in this proposal, can be classified into four suggested categories:

1. **Inertia**: when there is little or no vision and action is restricted to the bureaucratic process already in place.
2. **Dream**: when the vision reaches levels impossible to be achieved within the existing system of action.
3. **Pastimes**: when the actions do not reach the vision, or there is a lack of definition, or a lack of alignment and systemization.
4. **Transformation**: when the actions are coordinated and focused on reaching the previously defined vision.

Based on the semantic context of the questions asked in the questionnaire's second part, the authors have agreed to rank the institutions researched by assigning degrees (or weights) of action and vision (ranging among the values 0-factor missing, 0.5-factor partially present, and 1-factor clearly present) to each question (see Table 3 in section 2.2). This resulted in a two-dimensional matrix that combines the perspectives of vision and action into the four suggested categories of maturity level.

We are aware that this is not perfect and that there are other ways to study the phenomena. Indeed, it will always be the case that the values adopted in every variable will be a matter of discussion and the weight of some variables will be seen as arbitrary. However, we draw from our work and experience as civil servants in a Parliament house.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Given the research procedure adopted—structured

questionnaire sent without control of the return rate (censuses)—it was obtained a non-usual random sample. Hence, it is impossible to generalize the results. However, this type of approach may be considered valid due to the fact that the research involves a small population and furthermore, the researcher profile is one of experienced civil servants from the legislative power which endows them with the capacity to judge whether or not the data discovered should be included (Barbetta, 2008).

2.1 Institutional Data

In this section, possible correlations between discrete quantitative variables [number of representatives, number of staff, and population quantity] raised in the questionnaires are investigated.

32 answers from 30 countries (11% of respondents) were obtained. By continent, there are 21 European countries, six American, two Asian and one African country represented. Of these 32 legislative houses, 13 correspond to unicameral parliaments (Portugal, Maldives, Luxembourg, Guatemala, Georgia, Ghana, Finland, Estonia, Croatia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Bulgaria and Andorra), eight are chambers of deputies (Germany/Bundestag, Argentina, Bolivia, Canada/House of Commons, Slovenia, France, Poland and the United Kingdom), seven correspond to the Senate/Upper House or Federal Council (Germany/Bundesrat, Belgium, Belarus, Canada, Chile, Italy and Japan) and three are from countries that have a bicameral system whose responses referred to the parliament (Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Ireland/Houses of the Oireachtas).

An important feature and object of studies in representative democracies (Mill, 1983) is to measure the effective capacity of parliamentary representation. One of the indicators directly associated with this capacity is the relationship between the number of inhabitants and the number of elected representatives. An ideal value for this relationship is a reoccurring theme in Political Science (Manin, 1997; Pitkin, 1972). In the United States constitution for example, the principle of one representative for every 30,000 citizens was established, but only after extensive debate and controversy (Crocker, 2010).

Using the United States constitution as a basis for criteria, it may be observed in Table 1 that 11 countries (equaling 44% of the respondents) have less than 30,000 people per representative. This suggests more suitable conditions of representation given the convergence of interests and capacity for action of a group grows as the size of the group diminishes (Olson, 1999)².

² Although this study solely observes the criteria used in the United States, it must be noted that a more in-depth analysis of representativeness should take into account other variables such as those related to the electoral system and the political maturity of the institutions and the population of the country (PITKIN, 1972; GAMA NETO, 2011).

Table 1
Survey Data for Chamber of Deputies and Senates or Equivalents

Country	Representatives	Staff	Staff/Representatives	Population	Population/Representatives
Chamber of Deputies or equivalents					
Germany	620	2832	4.57	82,162,512	132,520
Andorra	28	17	0.61	84,614	3,022
Argentina	257	2200	8.56	40,764,561	158,617
Austria	183 ^a	440	1.80	8,413,429	45,975
Bolivia	130 ^b	732	5.63	10,088,108	77,600
Bosnia and Herzegovina	42 ^c	144	2.53	3,752,228	89,338
Bulgaria	240	1164	4.85	7,446,135	31,025
Canada	308	2241	7.28	34,349,561	111,524
Cyprus	56	221	3.95	1,116,164	19,931
Costa Rica	57	ND	ND	4,726,575	82,922
Croatia	153	246	1.61	4,395,560	28,729
Slovenia	90	374	4.16	2,035,012	22,611
Estonia	101	234	2.32	1,340,537	13,272
Finland	200	466	2.33	5,384,770	26,923
France	577	1356	2.35	65,630,692	5,417
Ghana	230	476	2.07	24,965,816	108,547
Georgia	137	939	6.85	4,329,026	31,598
Guatemala	158	474	3.00	14,757,316	93,400
Ireland	166 ^d	447	1.98	4,525,802	27,263
Luxemburg	60	83	1.38	515,941	8,599
Macedonia	123	279	2.27	2,063,893	16,779
Republic of the Maldives	77 ^e	136	1.73	320,081	4,156
Poland	460	782	1.70	38,298,949	83,258
Portugal	230	383	1.67	10,689,663	46,476
United Kingdom	650	2832	4.57	62,417,431	96,026
Average	213.3	812.4	3.32	17,382,975	54,621.6
Std. Dev.	179.7	857.7	2.08	23,298,227	44,783.6
Median	158	456.5	2.34	5,384,770	31,598.7
Senate or equivalents					
Germany	69	201	2.90	82,162,512	1,190,761
Austria	62 ^a	440	1.80	8,413,429	135,700
Belgium	71	370	5.20	10,754,056	151,465
Belarus	64	77	1.20	9,559,441	149,366
Bosnia and Herzegovina	15 ^b	144	2.50	3,752,228	250,148
Canada-Senate	105	432	4.10	34,349,561	327,138
Chile	38	331	8.70	17,269,525	454,461
Ireland	60 ^c	447	2.00	4,525,802	75,430
Italy	315 ^f	997	3.20	60,788,694	192,979
Japan	242	1312	5.40	126,497,241	522,715
Average	104.1	475.1	3.70	35,807,249	345,016.3
Std. Dev.	96.3	387.5	2.3	4,138,768	330,572.8
Median	66.5	401.0	3.0	14,011,791	221,563.5

Note. Developed by the authors. **a.** the responses given by Austria refer to the Parliament as a whole, in spite of the system being bicameral. The calculations related to staff/representatives were made with respect to the total number of representatives (245) while the population/representative calculations were made in relation to the number of representatives in each House-183—National Council and 62—Federal Council. **b.** Bolivia recorded the election of 130 members and 130 alternates. **c.** the Bosnia and Herzegovina situation is similar to that of Austria, with 42 representatives in the House of Representatives and 15 in the House of Peoples. **d.** The situation in Ireland is similar to Austria, with 166 deputies and 60 senators. **e.** Number of members of the Republic of the Maldives Parliament obtained from the Inter-Parliamentary Union site. **f.** Population taken from population Source: <http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>, on 25-01-12. **g.** Decimal places disregarded. **h.** Maximum and minimum values highlighted in bold. **i.** the responses given by Austria refer to the Parliament as a whole, in spite of the system being bicameral. The calculations related to staff/representatives were made with respect to the total number of representatives (245) while the population/representative calculations were made in relation to the number of representatives in each House-183—National Council and 62—Federal Council. **j.** The Bosnia and Herzegovina situation is similar to that of Austria, with 42 representatives in the House of Representatives and 15 in the House of Peoples. **k.** The situation in Ireland is similar to Austria, with 166 deputies and 60 senators. **l.** Population obtained at <http://www.ibge.gov.br/paisesat/main.php>, on 25-01-12. **e.** Decimal places disregarded. **m.** In Italy, there are 315 elected senators. However, according to the Italian Constitution, the Senate may include senators for life, nominated by the President of the Republic from among citizens who have honored the country with relevant achievements in social, scientific, artistic and literary areas, in addition to ex-presidents of the Republic, who become senators for life by law. At the time of this research, there were seven life-long senators.

The distributions of the variables in Table 1 are asymmetrical as illustrated by the box diagrams in Figure 1. For this reason, they are better represented by the median³ as a measure of central trend. It must be stressed that the maximum and minimum values may be outliers. For this reason, the data were dealt with in boxplots in which the median of the set is represented by the horizontal center line in the box, while the lower and upper quartiles are represented by the lines which delimit the box. The height of the box is an estimate of the overall variability of the data, which represents 50% of the values. The vertical lines (whiskers) generally represent the minimum and maximum.

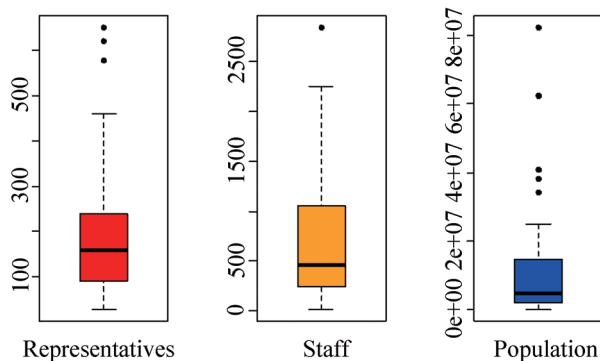


Figure 1
Quantitative Variables

The principle of contemporary representative democracies preaches proportionality between the population (or electorate) of a particular constituency and its number of representatives in the Chamber of Deputies (Taagepera & Shugart, 1989). In this study, the quantity of representatives is not broken down by territorial unit within each country. Nonetheless, the relationship between the population and representatives may be evaluated and it varies from one representative for every group of 3,021 (Andorra) persons to one for every 158,616 (Argentina). Figure 2 illustrates the scatterplot of the number of representatives versus the population as an independent variable. The linear regression line was also drawn. Visual inspection suggests a high degree of association between population and the quantity of representatives, which is confirmed in Table 2 by calculating Spearman's correlation coefficient.

In terms of the amount of staff, 48% of the Chamber of Deputies or equivalents has up to 457 (approximated median) staff members. In the case of the relation of staff members to representatives (Figure 3a), only Andorra has fewer staff members than representatives (0.6), whereas

³ The median is more robust than the average in the presence of outliers (numerical observations distant from the rest of the data) or measurements with great variability. It occupies a central position in a set of ordered data and has the property of dividing it into two equal parts in relation to the number of its elements. It may be stated that 50% of the observations are less than or equal to the median and the other 50% are greater than or equal to this measurement.

in 48% of the Chamber of Deputies, or its equivalent, has about two staff members per representative.

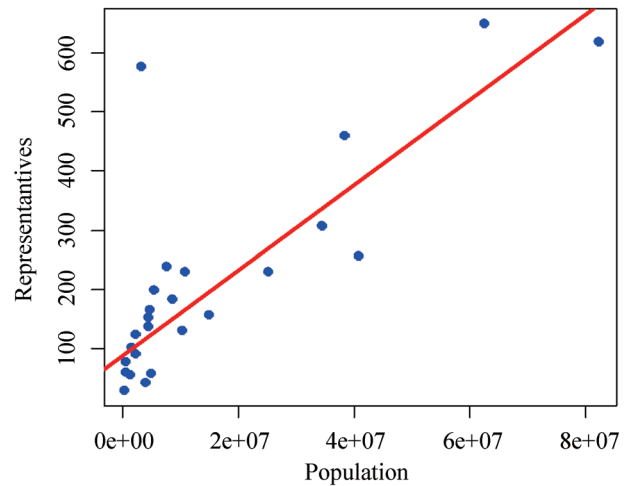


Figure 2
Representatives vs. Population

Table 2
Statistical Correlation: Spearman Coefficient (*r*) and Coefficient of Determination (*r*²)

	Representatives and Staff	Representatives and Population	Staff and Population
Chambers	$r = 0.89$ $p < 0.01$ $r^2 = 0.80$	$r = 0.80$ $p < 0.01$ $r^2 = 0.64$ *	$r = 0.82$ $p < 0.01$ $r^2 = 0.68$
Senates	$r = 0.55$ $p < 0.10$ $r^2 = 0.30$	$r = 0.77$ $p < 0.01$ $r^2 = 0.59$	$r = 0.37$ $p = 0.29$ $r^2 = 0.14$

Note. Developed by the authors. Data are non-normal distribution according to Shapiro-Wilk test ($p < 0.05$) and Spearman Coefficient was estimated for correlation analysis. In these cases, the value of p is the probability that the correlation coefficient value (r) is due to chance. Small values of p (bold style) indicate that r is statistically significant. Strong correlation means values between 0.70 and 0.89; very strong correlation means values between 0.9 and 1.

The largest Upper Chamber has 315 representatives and 80% of the Senates or equivalents thereof have more than 400 staff members. The relationship between the population and senators (Figure 3b) oscillates between one senator for 75,430 people and one for 1,190,761. Taking into consideration the median, 50% of the senates researched have less than 200,000 people per representative. The relationship between the population and senators is in contrast with the relationship between the population and deputies which was to be expected given the characteristics of senatorial houses and the fact that senators usually represent the member states of a federation and not the population. Therefore, representation takes place in a fixed and specific number, independently of the state population.

As for the relationship between staff members and representatives, 50% of senates operated with up to three staff members per senator.

Given that the majority of the data obtained is not normally distributed ($p < 0.05$), the non-parametric

Spearman coefficient was calculated. Also calculated was the coefficient of determination r^2 , which represents

the fraction of variance that is shared between the two variables.

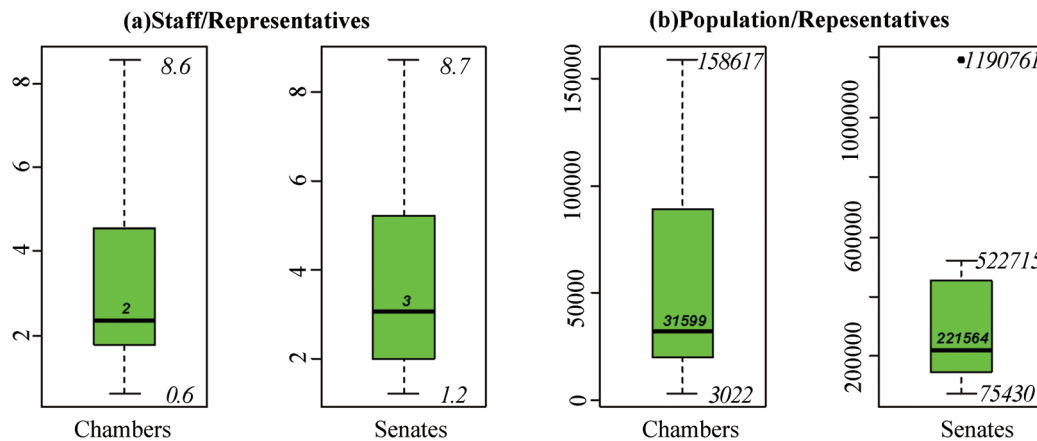


Figure 3
Staff/Representatives And Population/Representatives

The Spearman coefficient points to a significant correlation between representatives and population in all categories. It was less intense in the case of senates and their equivalent, which was to be expected given the lack of connection between senatorial representation and proxy. The coefficient r^2 confirms that the population size is a strong explanatory factor of the number of representatives, for all of the categories studied. For

example, it can be said that the population explains 64% of the number of representatives of chambers; the remaining 36% can be explained by other factors such as the system of government, culture of the country, etc.

Returning the focus to the representative/population relationship, one can observe that the chambers have a median approaching the criteria of the United States representation.

2.2 Answers to Questions

Table 3
Survey Questions Results

Question	Yes		No		N/A		Degree of	
	C ¹	S ²	C ¹	S ²	C ¹	S ²	Action	Vision
1) Are there declared institutional objectives with defined goals, which guide administrative actions?	23	8	1	2	1	0	0	1
2) Are the indicators checked periodically?	18	5	5	5	2	0	1	0.5
3) Are the indicators used as instruments for making administrative decisions?	16	6	6	3	3	1	0.5	1
4) Are the institutional objectives and indicators widely communicated in the internal setting?	18	6	4	3	3	1	1	0
5) Are short and long-term action plans formulated to reach the established objectives and goals?	21	6	1	3	3	1	0.5	1
6) Are the plans linked to the term of office of the Governing Body?	10	3	12	6	3	1	0	0.5
7) Are there defined criteria for selecting and prioritizing the actions?	13	6	9	3	3	1	1	0.5
8) Is the work process aligned with the defined objectives?	20	7	2	2	3	1	1	0.5
9) Is there a regular practice of periodic revising of objectives, goals and indicators?	20	8	3	1	2	1	1	1
10) Is the periodic revision done by a specialized area or unit?	14	6	7	3	4	1	0.5	0
11) Has there been at least one example of improvement made in management practices in relation to one of the questions from the questionnaire?	18	8	4	1	3	1	1	0.5

¹Chamber of Deputies or equivalent

²Senates or equivalent

Question 1. Are there declared institutional objectives with defined goals, which guide administrative actions?

Considering the peculiar institutional character of

legislative houses, there is a question about whether or not there is a need for having declared objectives given that these are constitutionally defined (see the discussion

on this in Guimarães, Schwartz, Souza, Melo & Teixeira, 2012). Therefore, the expectation was that there would only be affirmative answers, even though they refer to a constitutional matter. There are schools of thought that relativize the importance of goals, “although it is typically assumed that a strategy oriented towards goals is a necessity in organizational life, it is actually a socially constructed necessity, characteristic of a mechanistic mindset” (Morgan, 1996, p. 38). This counterpoint stands out, above all, given that there are negative answers to the question, which forces the conclusion that there are legislative houses that exist and operate with there being declared institutional objectives (both of the German houses—*Bundestag* and *Bundesrat*—the Japanese Senate and the Parliament of Andorra⁴).

Of those who responded to the question and also made comments, five (Portugal, Poland, Slovenia, Belarus and Argentina) indicated constitutional functions as objectives of the parliament. The Belgian Senate reported its strategic objectives as well as statements regarding their vision, mission and values, recurring topics in the adoption of strategic management, especially in the approaches of schools of design, planning and positioning⁵.

A few of the commentaries stand out. The Bolivian response reports “political” goals openly, which is a theme that is usually controversial since it questions the possibility of measuring the quality of the legislative power through quantitative means: “to meet 100% of the requirements of laws, draft laws and requests for information”. The Canadian House of Commons stated that it has a Multi-Year Business Plan⁶, which defines concrete projects created so that strategic objectives are met. This Business Plan establishes “quantitative performance metrics to measure success.” The Parliament of Ireland has also mentioned having a business plan. What was also attested to is that the structure and processes allow a correlation with the Executive in terms of setting priorities and strategies. The House of Commons England cited specific objectives related to sustainability, such as “reducing the use of energy and water and carbon emissions.”

Question 2. Are the indicators checked periodically?

Intentionally, the question leads to a secondary affirmative answer as to whether or not there are indicators⁷. Amongst the Chambers of Deputies or equivalents, only 5% responded negatively to the question, while in the case of the Senates or equivalents, the responses are equally divided.

Of those that responded affirmatively, there were those

who specifically mentioned monitoring budget indicators. The House of Commons in Canada reported that under the Business Plan, the indicators are given to the Clerk’s Management Group via a status report, with semi-annual data on the progress of projects and results of the performance measurements established in the Plan. The Parliament of Slovenia states that the organizational units prepare a work plan or strategy, defining tasks, activities and objectives, as well as performance indicators. The financial indicators are monitored and measured regularly, while the outcome indicators are measured periodically, depending on the nature of the task, activity or individual project. Qualitative indicators, such as those which measure “legislative process support”, are measured annually.

Question 3. Are the indicators used as instruments for making administrative decisions?

Despite the high prevalence of positive responses, the lack of comments may be considered a symptom of too little attention to the subject. The French Assembly emphasizes that achieving the goals does not affect salaries or promotions, while in the Chilean Senate, meeting the targets entails financial incentives to the staff.

Question 4. Are the institutional objectives and indicators widely communicated in the internal setting?

Of those that responded positively, eight mentioned making use of intranet/internet as a means of communication (House of Commons, UK; Parliaments of Ireland, Finland, Estonia, Belarus National Assembly⁸ and House of Representatives of Argentina). The United Kingdom House of Commons emphasizes that the strategy and corporate plans are on internet and that since September, 2011 the performance comparison under “Key Performance Indicators” has been shared with the staff each month via intranet. An annual report is published containing information on performance in relation to the outlined goals. The Bolivian Chamber of Deputies and Parliament of Ghana mention circular letters pertaining to the budget to make official announcements. The Congress of Guatemala highlights that it communicates to certain hierarchical levels corresponding to their functions. Among those who responded negatively, the Assembly of the Maldives reported that the institutional objectives are not reported to the general public. However, information regarding finance, meetings and constitutional amendments is published on internet. The Slovenian Assembly said that the annual labor program, strategy and indicators are not presented in detail to the internal staff, but there is sharing of this information with areas and sectors. The Canadian House of Commons does this by publishing the Multi-Year Business Plan, which allows sharing information related to planning among managers and staff in various areas and services.

⁴ Symptomatically, in the comment field, the respondent for the Parliament of Andorra wrote down: “no answer possible”.

⁵ Mintzberg (2010)

⁶ The objective of this study is not to discuss influences, warranted or not, of the private sector on the public sector.

⁷ There was a concern in the survey about the restriction on the number of issues raised, done for purpose of facilitating a response.

⁸ The comments from Belarus concern, above all, legislative information that is widely disclosed on the internet to society on the whole.

Question 5. Are short and long-term action plans formulated to reach the established objectives and goals?

Twenty-seven parliaments (77%) reported having long and short-term action plans in order to achieve the strategic objectives, while 11.5% (4) denied having them and the same percentage did not answer. Among non-responders, the Austrian Parliament reported that they are under construction and the Polish Chamber that there are no specified documents as such, but in spite of this, the administration takes relevant actions. The Italian Senate informed that the Directive Commission presents guidelines for action that are implemented by the competent bodies (Chair or Secretary General).

Of those who responded affirmatively, two highlighted actions related to staff development (Argentine Chamber and Maldivian Parliament). The Argentine Chamber also noted the fact that they are developing actions in order to obtain ISO 9001 certification given that there are various parliamentary areas in the certification process. The Finnish Parliament explained that each unit prepared a plan of action for the following year. In the Bulgarian Assembly, the plans are also departmental. The Council of the Republic of the National Assembly in Belarus speaks of working plans that are monthly or quarterly. The Guatemalan Congress informs of developing an annual Operative Plan, an annual plan for auditing and administrative manuals of operation. Some parliaments seek to define plans of action better defined and aligned with a strategy: the United Kingdom House of Commons emphasized that the corporate business plan and the business plans of each department in the House are aligned with broader strategic objectives; the Irish Parliament explicitly cited alignment between the Strategic Plan and the Corporate Business Plan. The National Assembly of Slovenia works with a financial planning benchmark, with a definition of objectives, expected results and indicators.

Question 6. Are the plans linked to the term of office of the Governing Body?

In all categories, there was a predominance of negative responses. This temporal “disconnect” between the action plans and the terms of the governing bodies indicates the relative independence of administrative actions in relation to political configurations. However, the influence of politicians on administration in legislative houses is very strong, as can be seen by the responses concerning the powers and duties of the governing bodies.

Question 7. Are there defined criteria for selecting and prioritizing the actions?

Twelve parliaments (35%) report that there are no defined criteria for prioritizing actions, four (11%) did not respond and 19 (54%) report they select and prioritize the execution of actions. Among those who responded negatively, the French National Assembly noted that even if these criteria are not defined, the managerial and administrative actions should ensure consistency, as in any public or private organization; the Slovenian

Assembly highlighted that prioritization took place due to the need for effectiveness in legislative procedures and the budget restrictions. The Italian Parliament said that there are no established criteria; nevertheless they are generally identified through administrative action guidelines.

Amongst those who responded affirmatively, the Chilean Senate informed that the main criterion is strategic guidelines, similar to the Parliament of Ghana in which this prioritization also occurs in accordance with the implementation plan of the strategic plan. The Irish Parliament has a Management Advisory Committee, which selects the appropriate priorities as indicated by a cross-functional group of managers. In the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, priorities are set by the strategic action plans and proposed by Assembly departments.

Question 8. Is the work process aligned with the defined objectives?

In relation to the question of alignment of the work process with the defined objectives, 77% (27 institutions) responded affirmatively; 11.5% (4), answered negatively and 11.5% (4) did not respond, being that the Austrian Parliament said “not yet”, making it clear that they are still *in the process* of doing this. Among the four who responded negatively, two of them had stated in Question 1 that they did not have defined objectives (Japanese Senate and the German Bundestag). The Council of Andorra and the German Bundesrat, who said there were no defined objectives, responded affirmatively to this question, being that in the comments, the Bundesrat reported “no answer possible”.

The Argentine Chamber mentioned that there are norms to address the adequacy of procedures in order to coincide with the goals set; the Chilean Senate said that they are working continuously seeking the best practices for the active alignment of plans, goals and objectives specific with the strategic objectives. Moreover, due to this they are migrating from one management system supported by information technology (such as integrated management systems—IMSSs), which allows for improving the processes, mainly those that are administrative.

Question 9. Is there a regular practice of periodic revising of objectives, goals and indicators?

As for the question on the practice of periodically revising the objectives goals and indicators, 28 reported yes (80%), four (11.5%) said no and three (8.5%) did not respond. Among the latter is the Austrian Parliament that said that this would begin in 2012. Of those who responded negatively, there is the Japanese Senate and the German Bundestag in addition to the Croatian Parliament, which made no comment and the Polish Chamber, which reported that revising happens more in response to perceived needs than due to a regularly set period of time.

Of those who responded positively, there are the Council of Andorra and the German Bundesrat, which initially stated they had no defined objectives. The

Canadian Chamber commented that the objectives are revised annually by the administration and with each new legislature a new strategic plan is prepared. The indicators are revised annually as part of the Multi-annual Business Plan. This annual activity is also cited by the National Assembly of France, the Guatemalan Congress and the Parliament of Maldives. The Italian Senate mentions yearly revisions by the Internal Budget and Guidelines for administrative actions. The Canadian Senate conducts such a revision at least every six months, while for the Estonian Parliament this period is four years, when new development plans possibly with new objectives will be outlined. The Parliament of Ghana also mentions a similar period when it reported that their last Strategic Plan 2006-9 ended up being revised and a new plan is almost ready. The Irish Parliament mentioned quarterly analyses done through detailed revisions of tasks and deliverables. These revisions are comprised of internal progress revisions in operational areas based on status reports in each deliverable using a traffic light approach and cross-functional revisions, made by the General Secretary, of the strategic priorities and global progress.

Question 10. Is the periodic revision done by a specialized area or unit?

As for the question on the periodic revision of objectives, goals and indicators being done by a specialized area or unit, the response was affirmative in 57% of respondents (20), negative on the part of 28.5% (10) institutions and 14.5% (54 units) did not respond. Among those who did not respond, the Polish Chamber (SEJM) noted that these controls were done as part of the work in the Chancellery's units. The Canadian Chamber said that the revision work is coordinated by the Office of Corporate Planning, but the changes are carried out by operational units. Then there is the Austrian Parliament, which seems to be in the process of implementing strategic planning, stated that this revision will be promoted by the specialized unit in the organizational structure.

As for the negative answers, the Parliament of Ghana reported that although there is no specific area, there is a Steering Committee designated by the President with the responsibility of supervising preparation of the plan, while the Budgetary Unit provides administrative support. The French National Assembly informed that the directors of service have the responsibility of reporting to the Director-General and the Secretary-General.

Regarding the affirmative responses, the Argentine Chamber reported that it is done by the Governing Board, through its three secretariats, which receive reports from the respective areas. In the Bolivian Chamber, the Division of Planning and the Budgetary Unit are responsible. The financial area is also involved in the process in the Bulgarian National Assembly, where the Department of Internal Auditing provides risk management guarantees and the Financial Control Sector performs legal control prior to any commitment being

put into effect or cost realized. In the Canadian Senate, the Strategic Planning Office facilitates the process of revision; in the Irish Parliament it is the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission, which coordinates and facilitates the quarterly revision process. Similar procedures are also mentioned by the Luxemburg Chamber, in which revision is done by the directors, with those responsible for the services and also in the Estonian Parliament, where the process is coordinated by the research department, but with the involvement of all units of the Chancellery. The United Kingdom House of Commons mentioned that two people in the Office of the Chief Executive assist the Steering Committee revising the objectives, goals and measuring performance.

Question 11. Has there been at least one example of improvement made in management practices in relation to one of the questions from the questionnaire?

Regarding the question related to having at least one example of an improvement made in management practices, 74.5% (26 parliaments) said yes, 11.5% did not answer and 14.5% (5) responded negatively. Among those who declined are the Japanese Senate, the Croatian and Slovenian Parliaments, the Bulgarian National Assembly and the German Bundestag.

Concerning those who did not respond affirmatively or negatively, the Polish Chamber noted that management practices are submitted to constant improvements in several units of the Chancellery in accordance with needs and circumstances.

2.3 Strategic Evaluations—Results from the Proposed Model

The questions were focused on the theoretical perspective and the intention was to demonstrate both the existence of a strategy (formalized and made explicit in documents) as well the consequences of its execution in the reality of legislative houses.

Thereby, the maturity model was proposed to match authors' interests that were not only learning about the planning or existence of such actions, but also knowing the capacity of legislative institutions to transform plans into action. It is known that formulating a plan does not ensure its execution. Corporate and government strategies fail more due to execution problems than those of conception.

In this sense, weighing the questions regarding action and vision gives a panoramic view which helps to understand institutions in the context of planning management. For example, question 1, which related to declared institutional objectives, was classified as having more to do with the field of "vision" than that of "action". As for question 2 on the existence of measuring indicators, it was classified in both concepts. This is because indicators bring both a goal-oriented component and verification of its implementation, with greater emphasis on the latter. The result is presented in the Table 4.

Table 4
International Scene Score

Name of Parliament	Score		Legend	Name of Parliament	Score		Legend
	Action	Vision			Action	Vision	
Chamber of Deputies or Equivalents				Guatemala	7.5	6	GTM
Germany-Bundestag	0	0	DEU_C	Ireland	7.5	5.5	IRL_C
Andorra	4.5	2	AND	Luxembourg	6	4	LUX
Argentina	7.5	5.5	ARG	Macedonia	7	5	MKD
Austria	0	1	AUT_C	Maldives (Republic of the Maldives)	6.5	5.5	MDV
Belarus	7.5	6	BY_C	Poland	1	1.5	POL
Bolivia	7.5	6	BOL	Portugal	7	6	PRT
Bosniaand Herzegovina	7.5	6	BIH_C	United Kingdom	7.5	5.5	UK
Bulgaria	5.5	5	BGR	Senates or equivalents			
Canada (House of Commons)	5	4.5	CAN_C	Germany-Bundesrat	4.5	2	DEU_S
Cyprus	0	0	CYP	Austria	0	1	AUT_S
Costa Rica	7.5	6	CRI	Belgium	2.5	3	BEL
Croatia	3	4	HRV	Belarus	7.5	6	BY_S
Slovenia	4	5.5	SVN	Bosniaand Herzegovina	7.5	6	BIH_S
Estonia	5	3.5	EST	Canada—Senate	7.5	6	CAN_S
Finland	5	4.5	FIN	Chile	7.5	5.5	CHL
France	4.5	4	FRA	Ireland	7.5	5.5	IRL_S
Ghana	7	5.5	GHA	Italy	4	2.5	ITA
Georgia	6	4.5	GEO	Japan	0	0	JPN

Note. The column Score is the sum of the weights of each question.

Once the action and vision components were identified in the questions, it was then possible to synthesize the research data in a compact and visual way; favoring the understanding of what is essential as well as a comparative-situational analysis of the various legislative houses.

Also taken into account was the element of “logical consistency”, having in mind correspondence of the topics

among the questions. Due to inconsistency, the following answer patterns were disregarded:

- No (Question 2) and Yes (Question 3);
- No (Question 9) and Yes (Question 10);
- No (Questions 1 and 2) and Yes (Question 4);
- No (Questions 1 to 10) and Yes (Question 11).

Comparing the weights to the responses, the matrix in Figure 4 emerges:

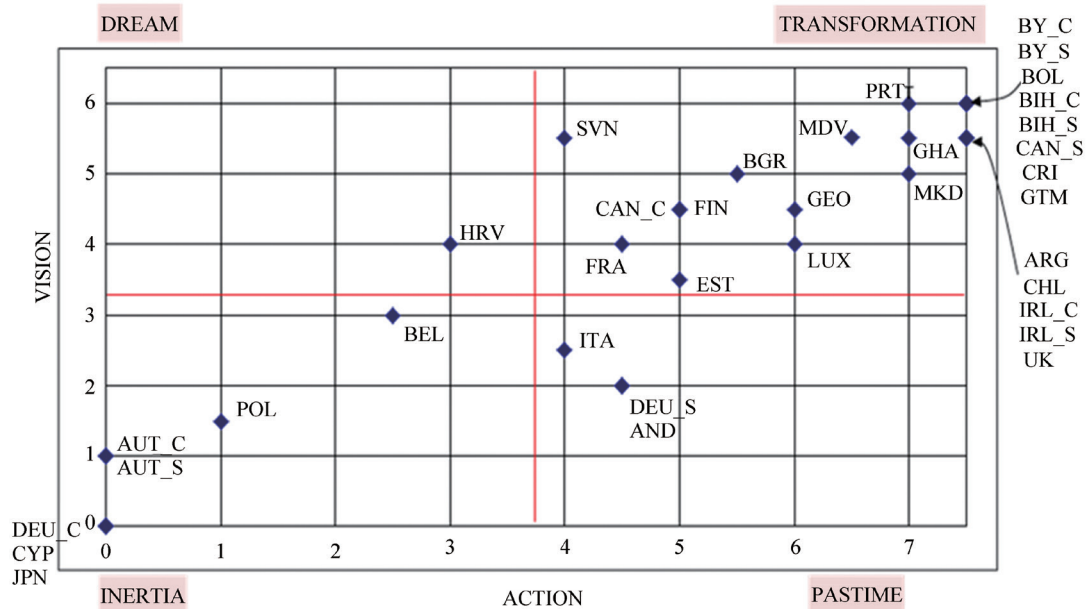


Figure 4
Comparative Matrix

The upper right quadrant indicates that there are actions in progress (from the strategic management point of view) and these are guided by a defined vision. When the actions lack this vision, there is a pastime situation (lower right quadrant). When there is vision, but the actions are still insufficient, the proposals of strategic management are not concretely established, remaining a dream (upper left quadrant). In the worst case, when there are no actions and no vision, it appears as inertia.

Every model is designed with the intention of discovering something about a phenomenon that is believed to exist. Whatever this phenomenon may be, an explanation is sought from the set of data collected in the real world to infer conclusions about what is being studied. Therefore, a model is a simplification of reality and may result in misinterpretation. It is worth mentioning that the model proposed was designed *a posteriori*⁹, which brings with it some restrictions as to its validity. Given that the questions were also developed without having the design of the model in mind, logical inconsistencies were pointed out, which hinders its application, despite proposals for compensation of the distortions identified. Finally, in view of the questionnaire's format (closed questions, with space for comments), it is clear from the comments that sometimes the response to the question could have been different depending on the level of accuracy of the respondent. Exemplary of this situation are the negative answers in the closed questions accompanied by comments such as "we still do not have one, but it will be implemented in the coming year".

In any case, a new field has been opened to be further explored in future studies, with the foresight of applying the model *a priori*, where it is expected that one can investigate, for example, how much planning and management efforts from the legislative houses are capable of generating impacts on society.

CONCLUSION

The great heterogeneity in the institutional configurations of legislatures reveals a healthy feature of institutional adaptation. Parliaments submitted to pressure and to social control seek out other institutional arrangements, which allow them to respond appropriately to their respective societies. The path to change is better than living with the stigma of inefficiency and uselessness and speeches defending dissolution or closure. This finding clearly dialogues with the hypothesis from Polsby (1968) that administration affects politics.

It remains evident that legislative houses have the need to define objectives in addition to their constitutional duties. Despite a certain degree of confusion in terminology, the parliaments define a host of objectives,

⁹ The respondents were neither informed of construction of the model, nor of its criteria.

varying from those with highly political connotations (meeting 100% of the legal requirements) to others that are diffuse and not very accustomed to the specific topic of parliaments (sustainability in the operation of the parliament). The fact that these objectives are associated with indicators and performance goals, and having these indicators measured effectively and employed as an aid to the decision making process is already a matter that is more fluid. This can be concluded from Table 3 and considering the high percentage of affirmative responses for questions 1, 2, and 3, respectively for Chambers (92%, 51.5%, and 46%) and Senates (80%, 50%, and 60%).

These results are concerning since they make an analytical explanation relatively common in strategic management processes plausible-their ornamental character (Tullock, 2004).

The communication processes typically reveal a profile of mechanized bureaucracies, with formal means prevailing (circular letter, portals), hierarchical restrictions, and absence of detail, opacity or simply no communication. This is also a factor of concern given the importance of communication for the twin processes of semantic assimilation and engagement in strategic management.

Plans of action are present in the majority of legislative houses researched, showing that there is in fact an attempt to coordinate actions. Tellingly, the question with the greater degree of controversy (disparate responses) was that which inquired about the time linkage between plans of action and the orders from the governing bodies. The political-technical relationship is a central element in public administration as a whole, which assumes peculiar contours in legislative houses. The time gap between plans of action and governing bodies may be understood as a sign of institutionalization (the plans transcend the sitting managers).

As for the effectiveness of the plans to mark the decision making process, again there is controversy. There are no criteria for selecting and prioritizing actions, although, as there are plans, the Plan of Action is the criteria. As was argued during the design of the model, the response patterns that form logical inconsistencies were annulled.

Parliaments are institutions and as such, "tend to develop their character, structural complexity, norms and procedural standards, patterns of leadership, and decision-making routines over a period of time" (Copeland & Patterson, 1997, p. 5). Given their characteristics and their presence at the core of the government, with their own teleology, the legislative power is a peculiar field of study, particularly in research related to the form of its organization and operation. Investing in this field of study is to assume that the administrative is interwoven with the political and that structures for governing and organizing affect political routines and decisions.

There needs to be advancements in delineating what will be legislative public administration. The challenge is great because the administrative units of the legislative

power are underexposed to popular demands. It is not a measure of opacity, but is its very teleological nature. While the administrative units of the executive power can be clearly associated with a specific type of problem resolution or serve social demands, legislative offices are entities that are competitive and subsidiary to a political body whose main function, in the popular imagination, is to produce laws. It is precisely this aspect on which popular demand is concentrated upon, which ultimately focuses on lawmakers, exempting the administration. The absence of clear pressure on administration can lead to lenient positions and culminate in a form of meaningless and undesirable bureaucracy.

Strategic management has come to this institution, the Parliament, whose management paradoxically, was so resistant to opening up to society, to create a sense of responsibility. The institution provides a stable foundation for the continuation of human activity with a significant reduction in the need for decision making. Decisions are moments of anguish for humans, used to their origins when guided by instinct (pre-made decisions) and living in caves (reducing the need for processing environmental information). The problem is that the struggle for survival tends to enforce organizational methods better adapted to thrive in its environment, not necessarily the most apt to benefit their environment. Reflections on strategic management in parliaments are therefore, welcome.

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