

Chapter 2

The Career Development of Parliamentarians

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Introduction

Parliamentary careers differ markedly from other professional careers in a number of important ways. Firstly, unlike most professions which require specialised training and expertise, there are no pre-requisite qualifications or mandatory training for the role of parliamentarian and therefore new members enter parliament from a diverse array of educational backgrounds. Secondly, many professions require membership of governing bodies or associations that regulate accreditation, establish codes of ethical practice and maintain normative behavioural expectations and ensure that their members remain aware of contemporary issues (Donohue and Holland 2012). Thirdly, most professionals operate with a relatively high degree of autonomy and independence in terms of decision-making, however, according to King (1981, p. 256) “most politicians do not enjoy much in the way of professional autonomy.” Fourthly, inconsistent with other professions, and indeed most non-professional occupations, there is no job description for the position of a parliamentarian which outlines the requisite roles and responsibilities (Samara 2010). Indeed, developing a position description for a parliamentarian may be problematic as research undertaken with former Canadian MPs indicated that there is little common agreement among parliamentarians regarding the role’s core responsibilities, characteristics and expectations (Loat 2011). Given the unique nature of parliamentary careers, it is important to examine their development in terms of a range of factors, such as the careers that parliamentarians hold prior to taking office, the different types of careers that unfold in the parliament, the factors that predict parliamentary career advancement and the post-parliamentary career experience of former MPs. Theoretically, while traditional perspectives of career development may account for the experience of many workers, it may be the case that contemporary perspectives,

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such as the *boundaryless career*, are more useful in interpreting the career experience of many parliamentarians.

Pre-Parliamentary Career Experience and the Rise of the Career Parliamentarian

A number of parliamentary scholars (Allen 2013; Cairney 2007; Jones 2008; Lamprinakou 2014; Narud 2011; Pickering 1998) have noted significant changes and trends in the vocational background of MPs in many advanced parliamentary democracies. Norton (1997) observed a major shift in the pre-parliamentary occupations of MPs elected to the British Parliament in 1992 compared to their counterparts in 1945. Specifically, in 1992, the proportion of Labour Parliamentarians drawn from manual occupations was at its lowest level and the proportion of newly elected Labour MPs from these occupations was lower still. Among Conservative MPs there had been a marked decline in those leaving farming, military and senior executive careers prior to entering Parliament. Conversely, there was a substantial increase in the number of teachers, academics, public relations personnel, journalists and authors representing both parties. Another significant difference was the presence of a considerable proportion (16%) of MPs who had previously worked in occupations within the political domain, such as political consultant or ministerial special advisor. More recently, Criddle (2010) identified that two-fifths of the new Labour members elected to the British Parliament in 2010 had previously worked as an aide to either an MP or a minister. Moreover, 16% of all candidates who ran in this election had worked previously as political researchers, special advisors or lobbyists (Lamprinakou 2014).

Pickering (1998) compared the previous occupations of new Liberal/National Coalition members who entered the Australian Federal Parliament in 1975 with those who were newly elected in 1996. Typically, members of the 1975 cohort had previously worked as lawyers, executives and company directors, accountants, farmers and engineers. Among the 1996 intake of new Coalition members, prior occupations such as lawyers, pastoralists and senior executives were well represented, however, consistent with the findings of Norton (1997) in Britain, a new group was also evident. This emergent group included former political advisers and researchers who had worked previously for either state or federal parliamentarians. Recent data on the occupational backgrounds of MPs elected to the current Australian Federal Parliament (the 43rd Parliament) suggest that these trends are persisting and apply beyond the Coalition parties (the Liberal and National parties). Among the current cohort of parliamentarians, the largest proportion held business executive/management/company director positions (25%) prior to entering parliament, followed by political consultants/advisors/lobbyists (14%), barristers/solicitors/legal officers (13%) and party/union administrators (10%) (Parliament of Australia 2013).

Research examining the occupational background of parliamentarians in Norway over the preceding 60 years (Narud 2011) revealed similar findings. Analogous

to Norton's (1997) findings in Britain, Narud (2011) noted a significant decline in the proportion of parliamentarians coming from farming and manual occupations over time. Also, in line with the studies cited above from Britain and Australia, the most notable change was the substantial increase in the proportion of parliamentarians who had worked as party officials, advisors or aides to parliamentarians. Narud (2011) found that the size of this group has expanded dramatically since the mid-1980s and it would appear that the trend is continuing. For example, among those members newly elected to the Norwegian Parliament in 2005, 27% had been previously employed as party workers and this proportion increased to 34% following the general election in 2009.

The findings above provide evidence of a clear decline in parliamentarians being drawn from manual occupations coupled with an increase in the proportion of those coming from legal and teaching backgrounds. Cairney (2007) described teaching and legal occupations as *politics-facilitating careers* as they assist with the transition into politics. More specifically, he identified a sub-category of these that he labelled *brokerage careers* because they develop in the incumbent relevant analytical and communication skills, as well as providing flexibility and networks to the political class. Also evident in the research cited above is the advent and subsequent rise in the number of parliamentarians who worked as political advisers, political consultants and aides to either MPs or ministers prior to election. These occupations are also considered politics-facilitating careers. Cairney (2007), however, described these roles more precisely as *instrumental careers* as they have explicit links to politics and can serve as a springboard to a parliamentary career by providing a 'political apprenticeship'

Allen (2013) draws a clear distinction between brokerage careers and instrumental careers in that the former encompasses jobs conducive to political office, while the latter comprises occupations that were chosen explicitly for the purpose of attaining political office. It would also appear that in many of the advanced western parliamentary democracies, the proportion of new MPs transitioning from instrumental careers is rising, while the percentage coming from brokerage careers is declining (Allen 2013; Negrine 2008). There may be clear advantages that accrue from having instrumental career experience as these MPs tend to be over-represented in the senior leadership positions in political parties (Allen 2013; Atkins et al. 2013; Cowley 2012). These political apprenticeships provide on-the-job training, insider knowledge, mentoring possibilities, opportunities for recognition by decision-makers and the chance to establish political connections (Jones 2008). Indeed, in Britain Cowley (2012, p. 36) raised the "potential for a two-track career path, with accelerated promotion for those with significant pre-Westminster experience and perhaps a slower route for those without."

Despite scant research, there is some evidence to suggest that the trend towards increasing numbers of MPs shifting from instrumental careers prior to entering parliament has not occurred in developing countries. For example, a recent study examining the occupational backgrounds of Solomon Islands parliamentarians (Corbett and Wood 2013) found that they transitioned to their MP role from a diverse range of occupational backgrounds. Corbett and Wood (2013) also noted that since

1980 there was a steady decline in the proportion of MPs who had worked as civil servants, teachers and provincial politicians prior to entering parliament. Interestingly, they found that the one group that had increased over the preceding 30 years were those MPs who had business backgrounds before becoming parliamentarians. These findings align with those obtained by Olson and Norton (2013) in their study of the pre-parliamentary careers of MPs from European post-communist and post-soviet democracies. Similar to the Solomon Islands, former teachers and civil servants initially predominated in the nascent stages of these parliaments. Over time, however, these groups declined and today the largest former occupational group in the Solomon Islands Parliament comprises business people and managers. Conspicuously absent from Corbett and Wood's (2013) Solomon Islands data were MPs who had previous experience in politics-facilitating careers. The authors suggested that this could largely be explained by the fact that political parties in the Solomon Islands are loosely organised, and by the lack of an opportunity structure through which those with political ambitions might rise.

The pre-parliamentary career experience of MPs raises implications for their training and professional development. At the most fundamental level is the proposition that the training needs of parliamentarians will invariably be diverse. Newly elected MPs who have never worked in politics-facilitating careers are likely to have a relatively naive understanding of the functions of the parliament and requirements of their roles. The training needs of these new MPs are likely to be extensive and therefore they would require training across a broad range of parliamentary activities and roles.

The training needs of recently elected MPs who have worked in politics-facilitating occupations, however, will typically be more circumscribed given the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) acquired in their previous roles. For example, parliamentarians who were trained and previously worked in the legal profession (a brokerage occupation) are likely to have developed KSAs relevant to their MP role, such as a clear and incisive understanding of legislation. Additionally, lawyers' debating skills are typically well-honed as a result of their legal training (participating in mock trials) and from their experiences in court, such as presenting opening arguments, cross-examining and summing up. Parliamentarians who transition from the other archetypal brokerage occupation—teaching—are also likely to develop strong debating and oral presentation skills as these are the 'stock and trade' of teaching and lecturing. In fact, Norris and Lovenduski (1995, p. 110), in their analysis of pre-parliamentary occupations, describe both law and teaching as prime examples of the 'talking professions'. While those MPs entering parliament from brokerage careers may have a good understanding of legislation and sound debating skills, their KSAs in other aspects of their new role (e.g., representation, scrutiny, etc.) may require further improvement through training and development.

Parliamentarians who previously worked in instrumental careers, such as political advisers or aides to either MPs or ministers, often choose these occupations because they provide an entrée to a parliamentary career. Working in instrumental occupations provides incidental and informal on-the-job learning about the roles and activities of parliamentarians, such as addressing constituency issues, dealing

with the media and managing an electoral office (Allen 2013). However, consistent with brokerage careers, new MPs with prior experience in instrumental occupations are also likely to have skill deficits. For example, they may not be accomplished at making speeches or debating as an advisor or aide would be unlikely to perform these types of oratory activities as part of their role, and they are difficult to learn vicariously.

In terms of implications, it is evident that the KSAs of new MPs are contingent on their prior experience. Even those who have transitioned to parliament from brokerage, instrumental or politics-facilitating careers are likely to have KSAs associated with their new role that require development. As brokerage and instrumental careers provide different skill development opportunities, the training needs of new MPs should be individually assessed and the training provided should be modified to reflect these needs. New parliamentarians also need to be aware of their skill deficits and proactively seek out developmental opportunities.

Career Types

A number of typologies have been developed in order to categorise different parliamentary careers. Based on interviews conducted with a large number of British MPs, Searing (1994) identified four parliamentary career types. The modal type among backbenchers (40.5%) was labelled by Searing (1994) as *Policy Advocates* as it comprised those seeking to develop, influence or promote public policy, generally in specialised areas or from an ideological perspective. The second career type, *Constituency Members*, was composed of those parliamentarians whose primary orientation was to serve their constituency, either by attempting to resolve constituents' grievances or by advocating for local interests (Norton 1997). *Ministerial Aspirants* was the third type identified by Searing (1994) as these parliamentarians were either motivated to attain a cabinet post (a subgroup referred to as *high flyers*) or anticipated rising to a junior, rather than senior, ministerial position (a subgroup labelled *subalterns*). The smallest proportion of backbenchers comprised the group labelled *Parliament Man* as the focus of these MPs was the institution itself. Searing (1994) found that the *Parliament Man* type was comprised of three sub-types: *status seeker* (those who relished the status associated with an MP's role); *spectator* (those happy to take the role of observer rather than actor in the application of power) and *clubman* (those who enjoyed the atmosphere and tradition of the Parliament and treated it as a club) (Kotze 2000).

Jones (2008) inductively developed a parliamentary careers typology based on interviews as well as observations of the committee work of Australian parliamentarians. He identified five parliamentary career types in his study. One group of MPs held clear conceptions of parliamentary sovereignty, viewed the parliamentary process as important and focused on functions, such as deliberation and accountability. Jones (2008) therefore labelled this group *Parliamentarians*. Another group of MPs saw their primary role as being a representative for the citizens in their elec-

torate. These parliamentarians, referred to by Jones (2008, p. 84.) as *Constituency Servants*, attempted to assist constituents with governance issues (e.g. problems accessing/interacting with judicial, political, and not-for-profit providers of public goods and services), or their focus was on attaining “a more favourable distribution of the common wealth towards their own electorate.” The third identified career type was referred to as *Partisans* as these individuals saw their primary function in Parliament as advancing the standing and power of their respective parties. Another group of MPs were found to have a very strong focus on a specific policy, or a circumscribed policy area, and consequently they were described as *Policy Specialists*. The final parliamentary career type identified by Jones (2008) was labelled *Political Theorists* as these were highly reflective and intellectual MPs who conceptualised their role directly from theory and for whom theory was the foundation of their behaviour and vocational identity.

Recently, Walter (2012) published the findings of a longitudinal study which also involved Australian parliamentarians. He tracked the working lives of a cohort of MPs who were interviewed when they first entered the Federal Parliament in 1979 and again between 2005 and 2007 when their parliamentary careers had concluded. Analysis of the initial interview data revealed three distinct parliamentary career types: *Parliamentarians*, *Delegates* and *Policy Activists*. The Parliamentarians group was comprised of MPs who viewed parliament as an important and worthy institution. Nonetheless, they saw it as imperfect and therefore able to be enhanced via improvements to committee processes and formal procedures. Those parliamentarians in the Delegates group were very focused on the concerns and aspirations of people in their electorate and they privileged constituency representation above all other functions. Members of the final group, Policy Activists, were less interested in parliamentary processes and accountability or representation. Instead, they constructed their careers according to how they could influence policy. Policy Activists were more ambitious than their counterparts and saw policy work as a means of being recognised and rewarded by decision-makers. When Walter (2012) followed up this cohort at the end of their careers, some interesting findings in relation to their career development were revealed. Firstly, all of those MPs in the Policy Activists group went on to be promoted to either ministerial or shadow ministerial positions. Consequently, the Policy Activists were relabelled *Executives/Achievers*. Secondly, some in the Parliamentarians group attained ministerial or shadow ministerial status, however, most did not and for those who did, it was more likely to be as a junior minister rather than through a cabinet post. Finally, those in the Delegates group, who focused on constituent concerns, were unlikely to be promoted to a senior role.

Clearly, there are similarities among some of the parliamentary career types captured in these different typologies. For example, there is close alignment between Searing's (1994) Parliament Man type and the Parliamentarian types in the typologies of both Jones (2008) and Walter (2012) as the three types are all orientated towards the institution itself. Similarly, Constituency Members (Searing 1994), Constituency Servants (Jones 2008) and Delegates (Walter 2012) all define their role in terms of representing and advocating for those who elected them. There is also considerable commonality among Searing's (1994) Policy Advocates, Jones'

(2008) Policy Specialists and Walter's (2012) Policy Activists types as members of each group conceive their career in terms of influencing policy. The fact that there is such a high degree of congruity among the relevant types described in the three typologies provides some evidence for the robustness of the general types.

Given that each parliamentary career type emphasises different roles and activities, members across the various types will also have divergent training and professional development needs. Using the most recent typology (Walter 2012), those MPs whose career type can be described as parliamentarians are, for example, likely to want and require training to develop their skills in managing parliamentary procedures, such as asking questions in order to scrutinise the government, and in understanding how to interpret bills (Jones 2008). In contrast, those MPs categorised as delegates would be more capable of fulfilling what they perceive as their primary role if they had access to training designed to improve their representation skills. Specific examples of this would be training to enhance their consultation, negotiation and advocacy skills. In addition, because of the primacy they give to the 'front-line' role of their electoral office staff in dealing with constituency issues, delegates are also likely to require training in human resource management. Finally, MPs pursuing a policy activist career would benefit from training in critical thinking and analysis to assist with synthesising and critiquing complex information required for policy development and evaluation. Delegates would also benefit from training to improve their debating skills, which are essential to ensure the passage of legislation through parliament, as well as media skills training to help convince a critical mass of the voting public that the proposed policies they are advocating for are the most appropriate. It is the case that parliamentarians need to fulfil all of these roles, however, MPs from different career types require more advanced training in the particular roles associated with their type. Specific training needs are typically never addressed in the professional development and training opportunities provided by parliaments and parties, which are usually limited to orientation sessions (Coghill et al. 2012). Thus, in addition to basic introductory training, parliaments and parties should assess the training needs of the different parliamentary career types and provide opportunities for advanced skill development. Indeed, by addressing these specific skill deficits, the performance of MPs is likely to be improved (Coghill et al. 2008a).

Studies on training in the corporate sphere indicate that 'out of the box' training programs are often of marginal value. Increasingly, organisations are shifting to a pluralistic view of professional development that values diversity (Sullivan 1999). One manifestation of this pluralistic approach is the *cafeteria-style professional development programs*, designed to assist employees in navigating their career. These programs often begin with an individual-level training needs analysis (TNA), the findings of which then inform the different training options provided. Employees can choose the training courses they believe will best address their needs. In addition, the programs provide feedback on performance, career counselling, and access to innovative reward systems which are tailored to meet both the needs of the individual and the organization (Brousseau et al. 1996). Those with responsibility for the training of MPs, both within the parliament and at the party level, could apply

some of the practices of these cafeteria-style professional development programs. For example, TNAs of parliamentarians' current skills and desired skills (via surveys or interviews) could be conducted at regular intervals and these could inform the training programs provided. Formal training for MPs could be supplemented with other personal development activities (e.g. mentoring, performance feedback, career counselling, etc.).

Recently, Docherty's (2011) analytical work examining Canadian parliamentary careers revealed an interesting phenomenon: a marked increasing trend toward 'party switching' (shifting allegiances between political parties) over the preceding 15 years. Indeed, between January 2001 and May 2004 (37th Parliament), more federal parliamentarians moved between political parties (27 MPs, 8% of the Chamber) than any other parliamentary period in nearly a century. Further, more than 50 parliamentarians switched parties between 2000 and 2010, which was greater than any decade in the history of Canadian politics. Docherty (2011) noted that those who shifted party allegiances traditionally had not fared well in terms of their electoral survival or their career advancement. Interestingly, however, he observed that those parliamentarians who switched parties during the decade leading up to 2010 were generally rewarded with re-election. In addition, they were more likely to be promoted to senior positions which, according to Docherty (2011, p. 200) would likely "ease their eventual transition back to non-elected life." He suggested that this high incidence of party switching in recent years may indicate the emergence of a new career path that he labelled *Free Agents* who have a more flexible and pragmatic view of party loyalty. Given that this is a relatively nascent phenomenon, Docherty (2011) was rightly cautious not to over-interpret the findings, which may well be peculiar to Canada. He did, however, note that as the ideological distinctions between Canadian political parties has narrowed, a phenomenon evident in many advanced democracies (Chivers 2013; Singleton et al. 2013), Free Agency may become increasingly common.

Advancement

Parliamentarians, consistent with other professional workers, have the desire to continue in their occupation and seek career advancement. To some extent, the career advancement of parliamentarians is largely determined and managed by the party and those who seek higher office must do so within the structure of the party hierarchy and by adhering to party discipline (Docherty 1997). According to Borchert and Stolz (2011), an important issue impacting the career advancement of parliamentarians is that, typically, there is a limited opportunity structure (i.e. available positions) and a large pool of candidates suitable for promotion to these circumscribed positions. Most backbenchers rise to the level of committee member, but progressively fewer are promoted through the sequential levels of committee chair, parliamentary secretary, junior minister and finally cabinet minister. Indeed, Dalvean (2012) examined ministerial careers in the Australian Commonwealth Government

while the Liberal/National Coalition parties were in office between 1996 and 2007 and found that the probability of any individual Coalition parliamentarian becoming a Cabinet Minister was only 14%.

Irwin et al. (1979), in a longitudinal study, examined which social background and motivational factors were able to explain the career success of 141 members of the Dutch Parliament. In this study they compared 'successful' parliamentarians (those who attained higher office) versus both 'stayers' (those who remained on the backbench) and 'dropouts' (those who withdrew from their parliamentary role either voluntarily or involuntarily). They found that the strongest predictor of parliamentary career success concerned the financial position of the parliamentarian. Specifically, those individuals who experienced a substantial drop in income when they entered Parliament were more likely to attain higher office. Parliamentarians who had access to a considerable additional income source were also more likely to be promoted. The fact that these financial factors were strong predictors of career success does make intuitive sense. For example, it is logical to expect that individuals, who have held highly paid positions prior to entering parliament, are able to attain success in their parliamentary careers because they are more capable, qualified and skilled than their counterparts and, therefore, more likely to be promoted. Similarly, having access to a substantial additional source of income suggests that they have market power and their skills are valued outside the Parliament or that they are able to focus more on advancing their parliamentary careers, unencumbered by financial worries.

Motivational factors also ranked highly in terms of predicting career advancement in Irwin et al.'s (1979) study. Indeed, they found that the third strongest predictor was spousal support with those parliamentarians having partners who encouraged and supported their parliamentary career being more likely to rise to higher office. The importance of spousal support and career encouragement in relation to career success has also been established in studies examining workers who are employed in other careers (Parasuraman et al. 1992; Parasuraman et al. 1996). Another important motivational predictor of career success identified in Irwin et al.'s (1979) study was the extent to which a parliamentary career infringed on family life, with those reporting low levels of perceived work/life interference being more likely to advance in their political careers.

Weinberg et al. (1999) examined the workload of British Members of Parliament and found they worked inordinately long hours, with 40% indicating that they typically worked between 55 and 70 h per week and a further 41% reporting that they worked in excess of 70 h per week. Weinberg et al.'s (1999) study did not report working hours according to position, however, with promotion comes additional responsibility and therefore it is likely that many of those working more than 70 h per week held more senior positions. Not only is the workload of parliamentarians excessive, it is also often unpredictable and when parliament is sitting, it occurs away from the home and family of most MPs. As a consequence, it is not surprising that the additional work/life imbalance associated with a senior position, where even more travel and time away from family is required, acts as a disincentive to seeking advancement to higher political office.

There is evidence that suggests that promotion from the backbench at a young age and early in a parliamentarian's career is predictive of advancement. Atkins et al. (2013) examined data for appointments to Cabinet for both the Labour and Conservative governments in the British Parliament between 1945 and 2010. They found that between 1945 and 1983 those parliamentarians who subsequently attained a cabinet position were, on average, 5–6 years younger when they received their first appointment, compared to their colleagues who never reached cabinet. Likewise, data for the period 1979 to 1997 found that the average age of junior ministers in the Thatcher and Major governments who were ultimately promoted to the cabinet, was 5 years younger than their counterparts who never rose above the level of parliamentary secretary. This trend persisted while Labour was in government in Britain (1997–2010). During that time the average age of first-time junior ministers, who eventually went on to become Cabinet ministers, was 45 compared to 49 for their counterparts who never attained a cabinet position. Moreover, during this period only 15 % of Labour parliamentarians, aged 50 and over when they received their first junior ministerial appointment, went on to become cabinet ministers. This compares starkly with those who were aged under 40 when they were first appointed as junior ministers, as 26 % of this cohort went on to be promoted to the cabinet. Indeed, Atkins et al. (2013, p. 366) concluded that there was an “established pattern whereby anyone coming into politics at 50 years old is a virtual nonstarter in the promotion stakes on age grounds alone—so far behind that they cannot catch up.”

Consistent findings were obtained by Dalvean (2012) in the Australian Federal Parliament between 1996 and 2007. Specifically, Dalvean (2012) found that the probability of being promoted to a cabinet position increased up until the age of 47, after which the probability decreased. This study also indicated, for those Coalition members who entered Parliament in 1996 and who were subsequently promoted to Cabinet, the average time before they received their appointment was 5.5 years. Australian data obtained by Weller and Fraser (1987) also indicated that members who had not received a ministerial post after 10 years in the parliament were unlikely to be promoted later. Miquel and Snyder (2006), in a study involving state legislators in the United States, found that a considerable amount of ‘positive sorting’ occurred with highly capable and talented individuals being promoted early in their career and advancing quickly to positions of significant responsibility and power. Similarly, Cowley's (2012) study of current leaders of major parties in the British Parliament indicated that all leaders attained their positions very early in their careers, with Ed Miliband being made Labour leader after 5 years in the Commons, David Cameron being selected as the Conservative leader after 4 years and Nick Clegg being chosen as the Liberal Democrats leader after being in Parliament for only 2 years.

The findings of the studies discussed above are consistent with the tenets of a relatively recent perspective of career advancement referred to as Career Tournament theory (Rosenbaum 1989, 1990). According to this theory, an individual's career unfolds through a sequence of tournaments where he or she competes for promotion via current job performance with other employees at a similar level. Winners are promoted and go on to compete with other tournament winners for high

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