

THE (NON)-UTILISATION OF INFORMATION PROVIDED BY THE SENIOR INFORMATION OFFICERS TO THE RESEARCHERS IN THE GAUTENG PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE

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Abstract

Members of legislatures are relying on the researchers to guide and advise them on the alternatives to deliver on their constitutional mandates of law making, oversight, public participation and cooperative governance. The researchers are also dependent on the Senior Information Officers for the provision of current comprehensive, unbiased and reliable information in order to develop research and advisory documents to be used by legislators when carrying out their mandates. However, legislators often decry the standard of research and advisory documents, citing the shortcomings which include among others: inadequateness, inaccuracy and lack of credibility of the information upon which they are to base their decisions or policy direction. This study was set out to investigate the extent to which researchers in the legislatures utilise the information provided by the Senior Information Officers (SIOs) and/or the reasons for non-utilisation thereof in cases where information is not utilised. The study used a qualitative research approach to establish meaning from the views of the participants. In-depth interviews were used as a key method of data collection. The findings of this study suggest that the Gauteng Provincial Legislature's researchers do not make full use of the Information provided to them by the SIOs. Furthermore, researchers appeared not to value the role played by the SIOs in keeping the legislators informed but rather as duplicating the researchers' role.

Keywords: Information services, Gauteng Provincial Legislature, Researchers, Senior Information Officers

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Introduction

Law making is one of the primary functions of the legislature as defined by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. To make effective laws, legislators need reliable, current and unbiased information. Literature survey conducted for this study point that the legislative sector worldwide is highly dependent on information in order to pass laws and monitor the implementation of such laws. Therefore, access to information is made possible by cooperation between the information officers and the researchers. However, literature review suggests that there appears to be no research conducted in the legislative sector, specifically in the South African context, to establish the extent to which information provided by the Senior Information Officers (SIOs) is being utilised by researchers towards contributing to the legislators' capacity to delivery on their constitutional mandates of law making, exercising oversight over the executive, promoting public participation and cooperative governance. This study was set out to address this knowledge gap by investigating the extent to which researchers in the

legislatures are utilising information provided to them by the Senior Information Officers and the reasons for non-utilisation thereof in cases where it is experienced. This article is organised into seven distinct sections that include: the need for information in the legislative environment; contextual framework; research methodology; research design and data collection strategy; presentation of the findings; recommendations for the legislative sector; and conclusion.

The Need for Information In The Legislative Environment

Legislative work is primarily informed by the work of researchers. Research activities could include the gathering and analysis of data, locating and synthesising articles and expert opinions on public policies, and the gathering of knowledge that will highlight the nature, scale and severity of the policy problem and/or tracing the effects or implications of policy options before they are implemented. In undertaking the aforementioned research activities in the legislative environment, researchers are supported

by the Senior Information Officers (SIOs) and are thus expected to use information provided by them.

In this article, information is defined as an invaluable source without which the legislators cannot fully discharge their constitutional mandates. Information is important for the functioning of democratic legislatures. Democratic governance has made the need for relevant, accurate and timely information to support decision-making to be on the increase, especially in the developing countries context. More aspects of society become subject to legislation and this leads to parliamentarians' requiring more information to be able to take decisions in areas upon which they have little prior knowledge (Robinson 1998: 15). Alemma and Skouby (2000:235) agree with Shailendra and Prakash (2008:158) on the central importance of information in every aspect of legislators and also on the associated risks involved if their information needs are not adequately addressed. Legislators need to have their information needs met as this might help them to avoid or minimise making costly decisions.

Frantzich cited in (Miller, Pelizzo and Stapenhurst, 2004:1) argues that legislators ought to have information that is complete, accurate, timely, relevant and at times confidential. Lees as cited in (Miller, *et al.*, 2004:1), suggests that there may be a significant relationship between the amount of oversight-type activities by legislatures and the range of staff and other research and information sources. The need for parliamentary information is probably higher in democratic and developing countries where policy-relevant information is often exclusively the province of the government (Serema, 1999: 180; Miller, *et al.*, (2004:2). In these countries, the legislature needs to be free from government influence and reliable information to understand government decisions and policies in order to assess whether they are valuable or not, scrutinise them and propose policy alternatives. The inability of legislatures' to keep government accountable for its actions often reflects the legislatures' lack of independent information or the inability of legislators to process available information. If the only information available is provided by the government, or if the legislature is unable to understand the available information, then the legislature cannot question in any substantive way the content of government choices, decisions, actions or inactions.

Good research and information can, according to Robinson (1998:5), improve the effectiveness of the legislature in many dimensions. Research can improve decision making on specific policy issues faced by the legislature. Furthermore, research can help improve institutional dynamics within the legislature. It can facilitate agreement by narrowing the range of debate to differences in value, rather than disagreement over the facts of the case. The functions of researchers in the legislative sector cannot be fully achieved without access to reliable, current and

unbiased information. Thus it should be noted that access only cannot assist without the actual utilisation of that information. Effective, transparent and informed legislation relies on adequate access to and use of information. Mostert (2004: 7) posits that the present generation of legislators cannot contribute effectively and meaningfully without reliable information and this could jeopardise the present democracy and the future of the country.

Robison (1998:5) notes that the key to democracy is an effective legislature. However, he goes on to caution that another key to an effective legislature is the knowledge and information that permit it to make informed decisions on specific issues and to play an active role in the policy making of the nation. With the democratic revolutions sweeping the globe during the past twenty five years, the availability of information became a major driving force in the establishment of meaningful legislatures. Robinson (1998: 30) elaborates that active, informed and transformative legislature need reliable information and research analysis to function optimally. Marcella, Carcary and Baxter (1999: 1) add that as democratic governance has grown and governments have become more complex, the need for timely, accurate and relevant information has grown proportionally. According to Robinson and Hyde (1998:40) information is needed for, and contributes to, the legislature in the following ways:

- providing the background for informed decision-making, resulting in more effective public policymaking, especially as the representatives need to cope with a wide variety of complex issues;
- capacity building of representatives by providing them with the means to criticise, amend or present new approaches to public policy issues;
- supplying of a common body of facts which can facilitate political agreement, as it narrows down debates to the differences in values, rather than to differences over facts;
- provisioning of a perceived legitimacy of the legislature's actions in the increasingly technocratic era as policies adopted can be better supported and their continuance sustained through the use of technology; and
- supporting the legislature to act more independently in the overall policy process.

The lack of independent and reliable information creates a situation whereby legislatures have to rely exclusively on government-generated information and prevents them from effectively overseeing the executive (Miller, *et al.*, 2004:6). This situation can be viewed as information crisis. Sheeder (2005:1) is of the view that there is an information quality crisis in both the public and private sectors. The information seeking behaviour of clients and trends in publishing in both the private and public sectors are just a few of the factors creating this. A thorough reading of any public policy may reveal numerous examples of inadequate information,

falsified research, substandard editing, and unreliable or inaccurate sources used in developing such policies.

With the increase in the range of subjects, interests and disciplines of interest to legislators, there has been a parallel increase in the quantity of information available. This is a problem for information providers in legislatures as it is no longer possible for decision-makers to be experts in all areas (Marcella, *et al.*, 1999: 1). Legislators must, however, still make important decisions on complex issues. The need for selecting relevant and reliable information for the complex issues that the legislators have to grapple with is of paramount importance. It is commonly known that executive agencies of governments enjoy privileged access to quality information and fields of expertise. This provides them with a much better opportunity to make and implement decisions than the ordinary representatives (Morstert, 2004:4). To close this perceived gap all parliamentary representatives need to be informed with reliable, current and relevant information (Serema, 1999:179). Based on their perceived superiority, ministries and their support staff (experts) deem the legislature to be relatively uninformed and not likely to comprehend more complex matters (Brian, 1997; Robinson, 1998; Robinson and Hyde, 1998; Serema, 1999). In many instances the executive can control and manipulate what is to be made accessible and what to exclude to the legislature. This can lead to a situation which Serema (1999: 181) describes as legislature “rubber stamping” executive decisions, which leads to skewed decision making.

From the above discussions, it can be deduced that literature provides little evidence regarding the utilisation of information provided by the SIOs, especially by the legislative researchers. The absence of literature on this aspect might be explained by the fact the researchers in the legislatures have shied away from writing and publishing their work. Furthermore, evidence suggests that parliamentary libraries in developing countries are not effectively utilised by legislators and researchers (Miller, *et al.*, 2004: 5). Therefore, this article seeks to ignite researchers’ (both in the legislative environment and in academia) to conduct more studies on the researchers-information specialists interface.

Contextual Framework

In a modern democracy the parliament represents the will of the people, and therefore the legislature needs access to information to generate and maintain public support. Once confidence is lost in a parliament, the way is open to revolution and/or anarchy (Brian, 1997: 55). Democratically constituted parliaments are institutions representing every element of the population, therefore setting the rules and regulations governing the economic, social, political and cultural life of the society they represent (Celik, 1994: 62).

Robinson (1998: 30) points out that active, informed and transformative legislature need vast amounts of information and research analysis to function optimally. Marcella, *et al.* (1999: 1) point out that as democratic governance has grown and government has become more complex, the need for timely, accurate and relevant information has grown proportionally. In South Africa, as in other democratic countries the parliament is a legislative authority vested with powers to make laws for the country in compliance with the constitution. It consists of the National Assembly and the National Council of Provinces. The National Assembly is elected to represent the people and to ensure government by the people under Constitution. It does this by choosing the president, by providing a national forum for public consideration of issues, by passing legislation and by scrutinising and overseeing executive action (South Africa, 1996:27). Having considered the contextual framework, the methodology that has guided this article is presented in the next section.

Research Methodology

To perform optimally in the legislature, legislators require current comprehensive, unbiased, reliable and appropriate information. In his 2012 speech, the former Speaker of National assembly in the Parliament of the Republic of South Africa raised a concern about the poor quality of legislation in the country. Inadequate information provisioning and poor research support given to legislators in the National Assembly and other legislatures are a major contributing factor. Moreover, literature on legislative work is not that substantial. The situation is even more alarming in the South African context and in the entire African continent in general. A few South African authors (Stephanou and Dagada, 2008; Fikeni, 2012; Kondlo, 2012; Madue and Ncume, 2012) are starting to make inroads in this discipline.

The important role of the SIOs in legislative operations seems not to be taken seriously, more especially by the researchers. At the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (GPL), library and information services unit provides reference and desktop research services to researches, committees, members of provincial legislature (MPLs) and the entire staff of the legislature. The library plays a supportive role to the legislature through the provision and control of information in print and other media, retrieval and provision of facilities for its use. With respect to the researchers, the library affords the legislature the ability to gather information from primary and secondary sources of information to enhance their research work.

The GPL Information Centre dispenses its services to Researchers in the following manner:

- a) *A library service*

The library houses a collection of books, Journals and Reports that speak to the constitutional obligations of the legislature which are; Law making, Oversight, Public Participation and Corporate Governance. The library also subscribes to daily and weekly newspapers to keep the MPLs and staff members informed.

b) *Senior Information officers*

A senior Information officer (SIO) is allocated a number of researchers to serve. For example, a Senior Information Officer allocated to the Health Committee would compile a user needs profile of the Health Committee Researcher. This user profile would enable the SIO to provide proactive information to the Researcher on a regular basis. This include sending daily email alerts from media articles, health related reports, policy documents, Bill summaries (National and International), identifying upcoming events and conferences, and conducting information searches covering the subject area of the researcher concerned. The other activity includes creating a database of stakeholders for the Committee Researcher. Researchers at times also request information to be provided to them in order to write informed analysis.

On the one hand, SIOs support researchers with information which is current, relevant, reliable, credible, unbiased, easily accessible and well packaged in order for them to perform their function optimally. Without the provisioning of information and its effective utilisation by researchers, reliable laws, exercising effective oversight over the provincial government and meaningful public engagements in the province would be very difficult to be achieved. On the other hand, researchers are expected to utilise available information in the legislative process to assist legislators to be able to act as the eye, ear and voice of the people which they represent (Iwhiwhu, 2011: 112). Yet, information provided by the SIOs to the researchers seem not to be used, thereby leading to the legislators lamenting the quality of research support they receive.

The standard of living of people in a state or province depends on the quality of laws governing them. Informed laws will result in bettering the standard of living of people of Gauteng. Therefore, establishing the extent to which researchers utilise the information provided to them by SIOs might contribute towards improving the life of citizens of. Members of the provincial legislatures heavily rely on the researchers to effectively carry out their constitutional mandates. The researchers are also relying on the SIOs' accurate, reliable and timeous information for them to assist the legislators to make informed decisions. Based on the contextual framework and preliminary literature reviewed, it can be argued that the importance of information provisioning in the legislative sector is well documented. The above argument represents the first part of this article's research problem in line with

McNabb (2002:6) when he emphasises that the first activity in researching the scientific way is the recognition of a problem.

The second part of this article's research problem is an extension of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Max Sisulu, who in 2012 argued that "... if this phenomenon (inadequate credible information upon which legislators' base their decisions or policy direction) is not investigated and well researched, the sector might continue to experience poor quality of law making". Inadequate or insufficient usage of information by the researchers could seriously contribute towards uninformed and substandard carrying out of the legislative mandated by the members of provincial legislatures.

The assumption or hypothesis of this article is that the researchers in the Gauteng legislature are not leveraging on the information provided to them by SIOs to enrich their research deliverables. The aim of this article is to present the findings of a study that has investigated the extent to which the researchers in legislatures are utilising information provided to them by SIOs and the reasons for non-utilisation of information this is the case. The objectives of the study were to: investigate how the researchers utilise information provided to them by SIOs; determine the factors that might be contributing towards non-utilisation of information by researchers, if any; and to determine whether current information being distributed by SIOs responds to the expectations of researchers.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach. The rationale behind the use of the qualitative method was that the researchers were seeking to establish meaning from the views of the participants. The overall research philosophy/paradigm for this study was between two alternatives of positivism and phenomenology. Englefield (1993: 59) suggests that research offered in a legislature is of an applied nature, seeking to draw on existing knowledge and applying it to understand and provide solutions to concrete problems. It is from this context that a case study was conducted to determine the extent to which the researchers in the GPL utilise information provided to them by the SIOs. The findings of this study can thus be generalised to other legislatures in the South African Legislative Sector and other similar legislative environments.

According to Yin (2003: 24), descriptive case study is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context in which it occurred. In this study the description of the potential impact of services rendered by SIOs' challenges and their potential solutions was formed from the individual experiences of researchers of GPL. According to Yin (1994:38), the use of one case study could be justified if at least one of the following criteria is met:

- The case is critical for confirming, challenging or extending a theory, because it is only one that meets all the conditions;
- The case is rare or extreme and finding other cases is highly unlikely; and
- The revelatory case provides unusual access for academic research.

This study met the last criterion because the researchers were granted unusual access for an academic researcher because of one of them being an employee of the GPL and due to the inherent nature of that researcher's job. This kind of access is rare for academic research. This provided the researchers with an opportunity to investigate the phenomenon in depth and enable a rich description and revealing a deep structure as argued by Cavaye (1996:236). The study was based on primary research and as such, in-depth semi-structured interviews were used as a key method of gathering information. Conclusions were thus drawn from the analysed data. Recommendations were formulated as a means of contributing to the body of knowledge and to the legislative sector in particular.

Research Design and Data Collection Strategy Employed

In this article, the unit of analysis was the Gauteng Provincial Legislature while the unit of observation was the researchers. The target population for the study was all the 25 researchers in the Gauteng Provincial Legislature (GPL). However, only 17 researchers participated in the study. Researchers were grouped according to different clusters according to the organogram of the Research Services Unit. The clusters were Social transformation, Growth and development, and Governance. Judgment was then used to select the subjects or units from each cluster based on a specified proportion. In other words, purposive sampling was used.

The study used standardised open-ended interviews as a data collection instrument. According to Turner (2010:756), the standardised open-ended interview is extremely structured in terms of the wording of the questions. Participants are always asked identical questions, but the questions are

worded so that responses are open-ended (Gall, Gall, and Borg, 2003: 40). The standardised open-ended interview was chosen because it allowed participants to fully express their viewpoints and experiences with regard to the effectiveness of services rendered by the SIOs. The participants had the opportunity to explain the Senior Information Officer- Researcher relationships, to identify challenges, elaborate on their potential impact and propose alternative solutions. The participants were experienced in the field and willing to share their views. Interviews were conducted individually with all the available GPL researchers.

Data collected from the interviews was captured and stored on two sets of computers. Every qualitative study requires decisions about how the analysis will be done. As per the basic principle of qualitative research expressed by Coffey and Atkinson (1996:2), data analysis for this study was conducted simultaneously with data collection, as this allows one to progressively focus on the interviews and observations, and to decide how to test the emerging conclusions. The analytical tool applied for this study was the thematic networks. Thematic analyses seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels and thematic networks aim to facilitate the structuring and depiction of these themes.

Presentation and Discussion of the Findings

Part of the GPL researchers' responsibility is to keep their principals (MPLs) abreast of the development in their respective portfolio committees and in the broader service delivery atmosphere in the Gauteng Province. For the researchers to stay current with the information required of them, they are expected to have good working relations with the SIOs. From this perspective, researchers are expected to utilise the Information Centre (Library). This section presents and discusses the findings. The first set of results, therefore, focuses on the frequency of the GPL researchers' library use, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Researchers' frequency of visiting the library

None	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Half yearly	Yearly
1	2 x once a week 2 x thrice a week	3 x once a month 1 x four times a month	5	2	1

Table 1 reveals that of the 17 participants, only 4 that is 24% visit the library on a weekly basis, another 4 (24%) on a monthly basis, while 5 (29%) frequent the library at least once every three months. The findings suggest that the GPL researchers are not making adequate usage of the library. A worrying factor is that at least 2 (12%) seem not to be seeing

the importance of using the library. The services of the GPL Information Centre (library) go beyond physical access by end users. The Senior Information Officers are also dedicated to servicing researchers in their respective portfolio committees throughout the different phases of legislative work.

One of the crucial phases of legislative work is the scrutiny of budgets developed by the service departments of the Gauteng Provincial Government.

This phase is known as the 'Budget Vote Process'. Table 2 below, is a synthesis of the researchers' use of information provided by the SIOs.

Table 2. Frequency of usage of information provided by SIOs during the Budget Vote Process

Often	Sometimes	Not at all
9	2	6

An interpretation of Table 2 suggests that on the one hand a high number of researchers use the information provided to them by the SIOs during the Budget Process, while on the other hand, a notable amount does not use the information at all. Of the 17 respondents, 9 (53%) often use the SIOs information in analysing the Budget Votes. Only 2 (12%) occasionally make use of the SIOs information while 6 (35%) completely does not use information provided by SIOs during the Budget Vote process.

The non-usage of information provided by the SIOs during the Budget Vote Process might be explained by the nature of the committees that the researchers serve. For example, the Petitions Committee and the Oversight Committee on the Premier's Office and the Legislature (OCPOL) are

not directly involved during this process. In this instance, the two committees are seen as overseeing the other portfolio committees. Furthermore, two researchers who participated in this study are not assigned to any portfolio committee. They are responsible for conducting *ad hoc* research for the institution and are referred to as 'Institutional Researchers'.

With the information provided by the SIOs, researchers also deliver analyses on the performance of government departments in Gauteng. The departmental performance reports are analysed quarterly and annually. Table 3 presents the results on the usage of information provided to the researchers by the SIOs during the quarterly and annual reporting processes.

Table 3. Usage of SIOs information during Quarterly and Annual reporting processes

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Not at all
Quarterly	0	2	4	11
Annually	1	4	3	9

An analysis of Table 3 indicates that the majority (65%) of the researchers do not make use of information provided by the SIOs during the Quarterly Reporting process. The remaining 35% occasionally use the services of the SIO during this reporting period. An explanation of the non-utilisation of the SIOs services during the quarterly reporting process could be that researchers are mainly assessing the departments' performance against approved Strategic Plans and Budgets. The information provided by the SIOs is of little significance during this process.

From the analyses of the quarterly and annual reports, researchers are expected to identify critical performance areas that need intervention by the portfolio committees. Based on the researchers' recommendations, the portfolio committees then undertake Focus Intervention Studies (FIS) in the areas affected. In preparing for detailed FIS documentation and recommendations, the researchers are expected to use the services of the SIOs, for background and/or current information on the targeted areas. Table 4 below, shows the pattern of the researchers' usage of the SIOs information during the FIS process.

Table 4. Usage of SIOs information for FIS purposes

Often	On request	Sometimes	Not at all
7	3	1	6

For the usage of information provided to researchers by the SIOs for FIS purposes, Table 4 indicates a positive relationship between the researchers and SIOs. The overall percentage of usage of information by provided SIOs is 59%, with at least 41% thereof often using the services of SIOs. A further 18% of the researchers only make use of the SIOs services on request for FIS purposes. The fact that 6 researchers (35%) do not use the SIOs for FIS

purposes suggests that there might be underlying factors that need further investigation.

A further interpretation of the findings suggests that researchers appear to be content with their standard deliverables (Analyses of government documents and FIS studies). Most of the GPL researchers' deliverables revolve around analyses in comparison to actual research output that emanates from independent fieldwork. This finding supports

Rapoo, *et al.*, (2000: 63) who argued that researchers do basic information-gathering functions which involve desk-top activities such as searching the internet for information, collecting documents such as speeches or compiling newspaper clippings and so on. The general consensus is that researchers do not engage in intensive empirical research work which involves intensive literature analysis and field work. However, in this study, researchers have cited a number of reasons or rather excuses for not fully utilising the services of the GPL library and by extension the SIOs. The reasons thereof are highlighted in the below section.

Reasons for the Underutilisation of the Library Services

While the reasons for underutilisation of the library services and the SIOs are in abundance, this article has considered the following as having prominently featured in the participants' responses:

- The library is not conveniently located for easy access by the researchers. Researchers' offices are located outside the main building of the Legislature that hosts the library. It is time consuming to commute between the two buildings.
- The information provided by the library is more on media alerts than credible published research articles. Over reliance on the media can sometimes be to detrimental to the committee work.
- The legislative sector is limiting regarding the recommended information that needs to be incorporated into the analyses. Some committee Chairpersons reject information that cites newspapers.
- The information provided by the SIOs is irrelevant, inaccurate or dated. Therefore, information received from the provincial departments is sufficient to enable researchers to deliver on their analyses.
- Information received from the SIOs is too generic and is of little assistance to the researchers.

An interpretation of the above reasons and the findings discussed above, suggest that the services rendered by the SIOs to the GPL researchers is not fully appreciated by the researchers as per the study's hypothesis presented earlier on. The findings correspond with those of Miller, *et al.*, (2004) who concluded that "... evidence suggests that parliamentary libraries in developing countries are not effectively utilised by parliamentarians". However, in the GPL's case, some of the responses reveal that the situation may be a reflection of misalignment of various service oriented posts, in particular between the researchers and the SIOs. In this regard, a critical finding is that the participants are of the view that "... there is no clear distinction between researchers and SIOs". An overlap of their responsibilities is strongly regarded as unnecessary duplication. This situation also means that there might be an element of role confusion. Thus

recommendations need to be made for the management of the GPL.

Recommendations and Implications for the GPL

The findings revealed that researchers do not fully leverage on the services rendered by the SIOs to enhance the quality of their outputs. It is in this context that Rapoo, *et al.* (2000: 70) are of the view that information consultants do not serve any critical purpose and have recommended that they should be integrated within the committee support section staff as additional support staff to assist Chairpersons in performing their duties.

There are four most critical recommendations emanating from this study that this article advances. To start with, in view of the perceived role confusion between the researchers and SIOs, the first recommendation is that a clear cut role definition of the researchers and SIOs should be fully constructed and shared with the affected parties. Secondly, since the two units (Research Services Unit and the Information Centre/Library) are currently dismantled and operate as independent units falling under different directorates; this study recommends that the units be merged into one in line with the current practice in the entire legislative sector.

Thirdly, two distinct but interrelated posts of 'researcher' and 'content analyst' are highly recommended. In this regard, researchers could fully concentrate on conducting actual research (including regular field work) to inform the work and decisions of the legislators, while the content analysts would focus of summarising the performance of the government departments (the work that obscures the focus of the current researchers). The role of content analysts is explained by Mansura (2012:570) as "... content analysts are responsible for the compilation of strategic advice for committees in conjunction with the chairperson and other role players as well as co-ordinating support and resource availability for committees, including sourcing external expertise for specific technical support and providing content and strategic advice to the committees on their oversight programmes". Mansura's analogy of content advisors fits in very well with the activities and outputs of the current GPL researchers.

Lastly, this article recommends that reading and writing should come natural to the GPL researchers. This means that the GPL researchers should also view themselves not only as knowledge consumers, but as knowledge creators. Apart from the occasional opinion articles published in the internal *Policy Brief*, it is argued that little contribution is being made by the GPL researchers in the knowledge economy. A recommendation in this regard could be that the researchers may consider enriching their standard deliverables by translating them into publishable

research articles with the assistance of academics in the higher education institutions.

The implications of the findings are that, the current GPL organisational structure may have to be altered by merging the two service units of the Information Centre and Research Services into one effective and dynamic unit. In practical terms, this merge may also align the services rendered to the GPL community with that of the entire South African Legislative Sector, particularly the Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) forum, where the two units are viewed as one entity. Theoretically, the creation of two distinct posts of 'researcher' and 'content analyst' might arguably render the researchers more effective than the current GPL practice where the deliverables of researchers are more skewed towards content analysis than actual research outputs. In practice, researchers are knowledge creators who communicate their findings in multiple platforms such as journal articles, expert magazines, opinion pieces, policy briefs, conference proceedings and public debates. Conversely, it cannot be safely argued that the GPL researchers fall under the category of knowledge creators in the strictest meaning thereof.

Conclusion

In the contextual framework, it was argued that "... inadequate or insufficient usage of information by the researchers could seriously contribute towards uninformed and substandard carrying out of the legislative mandates by the members of provincial legislatures". As knowledge workers, researchers are regarded as experts in their respective fields. A more frequent use of the Information Centre (library) is expected to come naturally to them. With the assistance of the SIOs, the researchers should have easy access to current and relevant databases. Furthermore, researchers should proactively recommend relevant books, periodicals and research journals for subscription by the GPL library.

In this article, the GPL was used as a case study with which the legislative sector could gauge the effectiveness of its support staff in assisting the legislators' capacity to carry out of their constitutional mandates. The findings of the study can thus be used to improve the quality of services rendered to the legislators. This could be done by strengthening the working relations of the SIOs and researchers or merging the two units to enhance a more productive use of the support staff.

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