

2 Legislative roles and legislative studies

The neo-institutionalist turning point?

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Although not a unified theory, the concept of 'roles' is central in sociology. It aims to make sense of the uniformity and regularity of individual behavior that results from a position in society and/or from the incorporation of collective norms. Ann Weber (1995: 1134) defines a role as 'a set of norms (obligations or expectations) attached to an individual's social position, occupation, or relationship status'. The definition makes clear that role is a notion that links individuals to their social environment. Roles are played by individuals and can be understood as strategies (Turner 1992). Furthermore, they depend on social status and are identified by others. The notion has been used in different theoretical perspectives, following the initial, and to a certain extent contradictory, developments of the philosopher George H. Mead (1934) and the anthropologist Ralph Linton (1936) in the 1930s. The sociological theories that have used the concept of role are numerous: functionalist, symbolic interactionist, structuralist, organizational, and cognitive (Franks 2007). Yet, since roles may explain the persistence of the social order – and more importantly for us – of political institutions, it can be argued that the concept of roles has a strong functionalist dimension. However, the functionalist conception of roles appears to be outdated today, particularly regarding the role-taking process. Selecting a role is now seen as a less restrictive process: individuals negotiate role 'prescriptions' rather than passively internalizing obligations (Giddens 1979: 117). Consequently, roles may evolve over time.

In political science, the field of legislative studies is probably where the concept of role has been most successful. 'Parliamentary roles', 'legislative roles', and 'representative roles' are all expressions referring to roles played by Members of Parliament (MPs). Following Ann Weber's definition, it can be said that legislative roles refer to the norms (obligations or expectations) attached to being an MP. Given the great heterogeneity of the theories using the concept, it is far from easy to give a more precise definition. By way of an attempt, however, we could say that legislative roles:

- 1 are comprehensive patterns of attitudes and/or behavior shared by MPs,
- 2 enable MPs to be distinguished or identified as a group, and enable us to distinguish between them, and,

- 3 have to do with MPs' own conception of their job overall, and their vision of their voters in particular.

In contrast with the sociological uses of role theory (Hindin 2007), the analysis of legislative roles is more focused on how MPs regard themselves, and less on social expectations on them. There are three key reasons that roles have been widely used in legislative studies.

First, references to roles stem from the similarities between a political assembly and a theatre. As noted by Thomas Saalfeld and Wolfgang Müller (1997: 1), 'the terminology of roles is borrowed from the stage'. In fact, there are a number of reasons why MPs play roles. First, roles express the division of labour between MPs: some of them are good orators, others are specialised in amending legislation, others are preparing to be appointed ministers. Second, roles also account for the wide range of activities and settings that an MP is called upon to face. Much like an actor playing Hamlet in the spring and then King Lear in the fall, an MP may act differently in different contexts, with his/her constituency, his/her parliamentary group and lobby organizations, for example. Beyond the metaphor of the stage, a more general reason for applying the concept of roles to legislatures is the apparent stability of these roles. As the same patterns of behavior seem to apply for decades, or even centuries, there are reasons to conclude that MPs conform to specific shared expectations.

Second, roles represent a strategic move beyond a narrow institutional perspective, to open the black box of legislatures. They have been a way to get behind the formal rules and procedures and look at the politicians themselves, rather than the system. The concept of roles has opened up new ways of grouping MPs, providing an alternative to the institutional categories of opposition/majority, front/backbenchers and even Democrats/Republicans. What some have called the behaviorist turning point in legislative studies has also been characterized by a strong methodological shift. Researchers began to follow legislators closely, to observe not only their position and activities, but also their views on issues and especially the way they understand their work. Consequently, since the 1960s, methodological approaches using both large-N quantitative studies (questionnaires) and in-depth interviews have been developed, for example in US state legislatures (Wahlke *et al.* 1962; Barber 1965), at the Congress (Matthews 1960; Davidson 1969; Mayhew 1974), in Canada (Kornberg 1967), or in France (Cayrol *et al.* 1973; Converse and Pierce 1979).

Finally, the concept of roles enables us to study some of the more complex aspects of political representation in empirical terms. This is important because an essential dimension of legislators' identity lies in the fact that they are elected, and analytical frameworks using role concepts usually – but not always – rely on the representative's relation to his or her constituents. This dimension is very specific to legislative roles. By way of comparison with other professional roles, we might note that there are several kinds of priests and different ways of conceiving the priesthood. Likewise, there are also different types of government ministers. Compared with priests or ministers, however, what distinguishes a

legislator is the (scientific) assumption that their roles are based, in one way or another, on the nature of representation. Thus, in most studies, legislative roles predominately reflect the relationship between MPs and their constituents – either as seen by the MP or according to more objective elements (voting systems, district magnitude, candidate selections, and so forth).

It is worth studying MPs' views on the nature of representation and the way it influences their attitudes and activities because political systems bring about contradictory expectations regarding this link (Bogdanor 1985: 300). The idea that representatives should behave like – and even look like – voters is rooted in democratic expectations. However, as stressed by Bernard Manin (1997: 163), among the principles of representative government there are some aristocratic principles, such as the 'partial autonomy of representatives'. Thus, even if we agree with Hanna Pitkin in *The Concept of Representation* (1972), that 'Representing [...] means acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them', questions arise when we begin to examine the consequences of this position. One view is that the representative should act just as the represented would act. Another view is that the representative should act according to his or her enlightened judgment, even though this might, from time to time, contradict the will of the represented. During the twentieth century, the increased significance of parties introduced a third element into the relationship between voters and legislators. Although this book is not about representation as such, the normative conflict regarding this representational link has theoretical as well as empirical consequences for the study of roles. MPs' attitudes towards their constituents are all the more difficult to capture – quantitatively or qualitatively – when citizens, politicians, and political scientists share different expectations of what this link should mean.

Despite the specific meanings and questions associated with parliamentary roles, the approach in legislative studies has followed the global trends related to the use of roles in social sciences. The first part of the chapter returns to the twofold legacy – functionalist and interactionist – in the research on legislative roles, and considers the reasons for their progressive decline during the 1980s. This might not be surprising, given the ebbing of the role concept in social sciences, but it might make the recent situation seem more so. Indeed, the second part of the chapter argues that with the renewal of interest in institutions and rules within political science, legislative studies have begun to re-discover the concept of roles. In order to assess the homogeneity of a current neo-institutional approach to legislative roles, we discuss in detail a motivational/psychological approach theorized by Donald Searing (1994) and a strategic/rational approach outlined by Kaare Strøm (1997).

The legacy of research on legislative roles in political science

Role analysis in legislative studies has partly resulted in the identification of different families of legislators. Donald R. Matthews (1960) for example, identified four key roles in the US Senate: *professionals* (55 percent), *amateurs* (34

percent), *patricians* (7 percent) and *agitators* (4 percent). Roger H. Davidson (1969) categorized congressmen according to the roles of *tribunes*, *ritualists*, *inventors*, *brokers*, and *opportunists*. However, the concept of role has usually been understood, not simply as a part played in the parliament but also in reference to a specific theoretical framework. Thus, the pioneering study of four United States state legislatures, in *The Legislative System* by John C. Wahlke, Heinz Eulau, William Buchanan and Leroy C. Ferguson (1962), had a tremendous effect on legislative research all around the world during the 1960s and 1970s. The equally important study of the US Congress, in *Home Style: House Members in their Districts* by Richard Fenno (1978), is today regarded as a classic in research on legislatures. These two volumes represent two opposite approaches to the study of parliamentary roles, one functionalist and one interactionist. In order to understand the history of research on legislative roles we need to return to the arguments presented in these studies and reflect theoretically and methodologically on their differences and their effects on political science.

The functionalist tradition

In studying four US state legislatures (California, New Jersey, Ohio, and Tennessee) and by interviewing almost all their members, Wahlke *et al.* (1962) set out to use role theory to uncover the underlying political processes and the informal channels within different institutions. For that purpose, the authors believed that it was important to carefully map legislators' norms of behavior, rather than their individual goals or the institutional rules they operate under. According to their view, roles were intimately connected to institutional positions and relevant behavior:

The concept of role associated with a position of membership in any institutionalized group refers to precisely those behavioral uniformities of regularities which constitute the institution. [...] If one is interested in the structure and functions of an institution, it would seem proper to ascertain and analyze those forms of behavior which are central and constitutive to the institution as such.

(Wahlke *et al.* 1962: 10)

They describe the origin of different roles as a combination of personal characteristics and 'ecological characteristics of political units' (Wahlke *et al.* 1962: 22). These two elements create what they call the individual's legislative role potential. Ecological characteristics include, among other things: ethnic and socio-economic character, party composition, political organization, and level of voter interest.

Wahlke and his colleagues use the notion of roles rather creatively by elaborating a complex conceptual framework with various kinds of roles – 'core roles', 'clientele roles' and 'incidental roles' – related to the actors with whom MPs interact (for details, see Saalfeld and Müller 1997: 4–8). But the impact of

their work has mainly been concentrated on what they define as 'representational roles' (see for example: Eulau and Karps 1977; Kuklinski and Elling 1977; Loewenberg and Kim 1978; Converse and Pierce 1979; Clarke and Price 1981; Müller and Saalfeld 1997; Rao 1998). This field of research distinguishes between *trustee*, *delegate*, and *politico*, which are concepts formulated by Wahlke *et al.* (1962: 272–80). Members of a large number of legislative assemblies around the world have been questioned about these role concepts, and we can see that in their basic form these typologies are straightforward enough. *Trustees* follow their own judgment and conscience, and are influenced by what we might call a Burkean representative ideal. The trustee acts as a free agent in that 'he [sic] claims to follow what he considers right and just, his convictions and principles, the dictates of his conscience' (Wahlke *et al.* 1962: 272). The *trustee* is not bound by any mandate, either by a party or by the constituency. Edmund Burke argued in his famous speech to the electors of Bristol in 1774 that 'Parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole – where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole' (Pitkin 1969: 175–6). *Delegates*, on the other hand, see themselves as having a mandate from someone. They are obliged to follow instructions, even in cases where it is contrary to their own convictions. The *delegate* is an elected representative and should therefore follow those responsible for his or her election. Finally, the role of the *politico* combines the *trustee* and the *delegate*, taking on either one of these two roles depending on the circumstances. This may be done either simultaneously, with the possibility of a role conflict, or consecutively, for instance, he sees himself as a *delegate* in local issues, but a *trustee* in other issues.

However, how you represent something or someone says nothing about what or whom you represent. This is an important analytical distinction. Wahlke *et al.* discriminate between the *focus* and the *style* of the representative (Wahlke *et al.* 1962: 269). A representative's *style* concerns whether they consider themselves bound by the instructions of those they represent or as a free agent; that is to say as a *delegate*, a *trustee*, or a *politico*. *Focus*, on the other hand, refers to the extent to which a representative is guided in their decisions by a concern for general or more specific interests. This means that their representative *style* might be a free agent (*trustee*), but their representative *focus* remains the concerns of a specific group in society. Two further concepts have attracted much interest regarding the focus dimension. The *areal role*, concerns the representative's focus on the welfare of the political unit as a whole or the welfare of a specific constituency. Second, the *party role* tries to capture the importance of the political party.

These two dimensions – style and focus – constitute fundamental aspects of the role system. To demonstrate the connection between them Eulau *et al.* (1978: 118) analyze the answers from 197 respondents from four US state legislatures. One hypothesis is that respondents who focus more on overall state interests (areal focus) do not have any clear state-clientele to refer to, and therefore are more likely to describe their representational style as that of *trustee* rather than *delegate*. As shown in Table 2.1, this turns out to be verified. None of the

state-oriented representatives (i.e. those focused on the overall interest of the state and not on the electoral district) is associated with the *delegate* style.

Furthermore, Table 2.1 shows that it is possible to be district-oriented and still more or less be a *trustee*. That is, the legislator might define him or herself as clearly representing a specific interest (district), but at the same time reject instructions from that specific interest (*trustee*). A third conclusion is that representatives who are associated with the *politico*-style of representation tend to be less distinct when it comes to their areal focus, i.e. they are simultaneously oriented towards the state and district. It is important to remember, however, that this does not say anything about why certain roles appear in a particular context, or if these have any effect on the representatives' behavior. This is only a strategy to map out the system of roles in certain institutions.

There has been an immense effort to conduct studies that explain why representatives adopt certain roles, or that use roles as independent variables in explaining behavior. It is essentially impossible to give a complete picture of the wide range of work inspired by *The Legislative System* (for a more comprehensive review, see Jewell 1983). However, some empirical conclusions are worth mentioning. One argument has been that a representatives' adaptation to a role depends on a process of socialization. For example, the age at which a representative engages in politics is believed to be important. Allan Kornberg (1967) indicates that self-started Canadian MPs with early socialization were most likely to act as trustees. Yet, other studies conclude that there is no connection between socialization and the kind of representative role adopted (Prewitt *et al.* 1966).

The socialization argument seems to be more relevant when it comes to direct personal experience of legislative work. Indeed, a number of studies indicate that representative roles develop with legislative experience. In an American context, Bell and Price (1975) show that the *trustee* role becomes more pronounced over time and that the party role and interest group role develop primarily during legislative work. The volatility of the role orientation during an MP's time in office is further developed in a later study of Canadian MPs, where the conclusion is that depending on their particular career goals (e.g. ambitions to be party leader, cabinet member or Prime Minister) the role orientation of the representative takes different directions over time (Clarke and Price 1981). More ambitious MPs tend to downplay contact with the constituency.

Table 2.1 Areal-focal and representational role orientations in four US states (in %)

Representational role orientation	District-oriented (n = 89)	State-district oriented (n = 64)	State oriented (n = 44)
Trustee	37	55	84
Delegate	36	8	–
Politico	27	37	16
Total	100	100	100

Source: Eulau *et al.* (1978: 124).

The bulk of this kind of research was done on US representative institutions, and there are reasons to believe that the conclusions would be slightly different in a European context. The role of the party organization attracts particular attention in this comparison. In the work of Converse and Pierce on the French National Assembly, the *delegate* role was more pronounced than in the analysis of US legislatures. Political parties essentially turn out to be the most important source of mandate for French representatives (1986: 674). Much more recently, a new investigation of French MPs has confirmed how crucial party affiliation is. Costa and Kerrouche (2007) show that left-wing and right-wing MPs still consider their roles differently. In spite of the fact that the two groups are increasingly socially similar, those on the right tend to see the job as a personal vocation and those on the left as a task undertaken for the party.

The limits and decline of the functionalist approach

It is one thing to establish how representatives define themselves, but the crucial question is whether or not there is a connection between role conceptions and how representatives behave. This connection was to a certain extent assumed in the literature, but it has been difficult to connect various role concepts to actual behavior. For example, a number of studies have tried to determine whether *delegates* act in accordance with the expectations in their districts. Hedlund and Friesema (1972: 744) show that the adoption of roles does not provide an adequate mechanism for insuring that constituent opinions translate into legislative action. Yet, it has been shown that *delegates* are more aware of popular opinion in their districts, and actually tend to act according to voters' expectations on issues with high salience (Kuklinski and Elling 1977; McCrone and Kuklinski 1979). This tendency does not however influence their voting more broadly, i.e. on issues with low salience. This point is put intelligently by Cavanaugh in the following terms: 'in the absence of any instructions to mandate a course of action, the representative becomes a trustee by default' (1982: 128).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the use of the functionalist approach to role theory declined substantially. This was a result of a general reorientation in social sciences and an effect of problems inherent in the theory itself. That is, theoretical expectations were not clearly demonstrated by empirical research, and the idea that parliamentary roles were helping legislatures to fulfill global functions seemed all the more naïve. These more general difficulties of this approach may be dissected into a number of specific problematic aspects. The first problem concerns the source of representative roles, i.e. roles as a dependent variable. Even though a vast number of studies have tried to explain why representatives identify with a certain role, it has not been possible to make any general conclusions regarding these relationships (Jewell 1983: 310). Furthermore, the theoretically complex system of variables that was thought to influence various role identifications, made it difficult to duplicate studies in different institutional contexts. This made it even harder to draw solid conclusions as to why certain role orientations are more common in some settings than in others.

A common critique was also that the *trustee–delegate–politico* typology was perceived as biased towards a US conception of democracy, since 'There is not much 'responsible party' representation in Congress' (Page *et al.* 1984: 741). In a European context the question would be whether a representative is bound by instructions from his or her party organization, rather than from the constituency. Rudy B. Andeweg (1997) argues that the most severe problem with using models 'imported' from the US for the understanding of political roles is the inadequate incorporation of political parties.

The second problem concerns the meaning of the concept of roles; what do roles really capture? One problem here has been the conceptual pluralism in role research, which created confusion rather than clarification. In practice this has worked against the goal of creating a common 'language' as a tool for understanding different roles (Biddle 1986; Searing 1994: 7). Paradoxically, however, the simplified distinction between *trustee* and *delegate* turned out to be rather sterile for several reasons. Those roles that did not exist in the minds of politicians appeared to describe a range of (academic) ways of conceptualizing parliamentary representation, rather than two cohesive patterns of norms and behavior. As Kent Price put it, 'unless the legislators conceive their positions in terms of the trustee–delegate–politico role typology, the concept is not a meaningful phenomenon' (1985: 169). This criticism as to what roles really mean opened up a debate that undermined the fundamental theory of representative roles (see also Francis 1965). For example, it suggested that the process of representation is much more complex than the theory implies (Cavanaugh 1982) or that being a *delegate* is a question of information-seeking and uncertainty-reduction rather than role-playing (Alpert 1979). From a more conceptual standpoint, recent developments in political theory also support the view that the binary distinction between *trustee* and *delegate* obscures the complexity of the representative process as a collective decision depends of the aim of legislators (pluralist or not), the source of their judgment (self-reliant or not) and the degree of their responsiveness (Rehfeld 2009).

The third problem concerns the efficiency of roles as a conceptual tool for explaining individual as well as collective behavior. Is behavior a part of the definition of a role, or is it a mediating mechanism between institutional rules/expectations (independent variable) on behavior (dependent variable)? In *The Legislative System*, Wahlke *et al.* argue that:

[the concept of role] postulates that individual legislators are aware of the norms constituting the role and consciously adapt their behavior to them in some fashion [...] To study the role of legislators, then, is to study particular sets of norms which underlie relevant legislative behavior.
(Wahlke *et al.* 1962: 9)

However, this supposes the ability to make a clear distinction between attitudes and behavior. Is what you do an expression of your role or vice versa? Or is role identification merely the expression of an aspirational ideal? Is behavior

influenced by other concerns? These problems were not helped by the fact that attempts to connect various role orientations to patterns of behavior resulted in disappointment. Donald Gross presents the discouraging conclusion when looking at the connection between a representative's tasks and role concepts, 'representative style [...] is generally unrelated to many of the legislative behaviors one would hypothesize that it would be related to' (1978: 370).

Even though the functionalist approach to role theory was dominant for several years, it was isolated in trying to understand how a representative's attitude and identification influenced his or her behavior. A very different way of approaching this issue is found in what has been called the interactionist approach.

The interactionist approach or the Fenno tradition

To *represent* is a verb. It is not state of mind or self-defined label – it is something you do. Following the same reasoning, to have a legislative role is first and foremost to *play* a role. In order to understand representation and legislative role-taking, we need to understand how politicians learn, negotiate, and cultivate their roles in actual situations, be it in the House or within the constituency. Inspired by the symbolic interactionism elaborated by Mead (1934) and followed by prominent sociologists like Goffman (1959), some studies tried to analyze how legislators constructed their roles according to the institutional setting in which they were placed. Amongst these studies are, notably, Ralph Huitt's case study of a senator portrayed as an outsider (1961), and John Manley's in-depth analysis of the chairmanship of the powerful Committee on Ways and Means in the House of Representatives (1970). But the most influential work certainly originates from the American political scientist Richard Fenno, who wrote two important volumes during the 1970s. The first book analyzes activities in the committees of the US Congress (Fenno 1973) and the second, which is entitled *Home Style* and is perhaps more important for our purposes, follows the district activities of eighteen legislators of the US House of Representatives over a nearly eight-year period (Fenno 1978). In this book Fenno tried to investigate – 'by looking over their shoulder' – what it was that representatives saw when they returned to their home district. His argument was that in order to understand their actions in Washington, we need to understand how these representatives relate to those they are representing. The home district and Washington are intertwined through the actions of representatives, but they are also two completely different worlds. Fenno's work was indeed the culmination of a slow but steady rise in dissatisfaction with the narrow focus on roll call votes in the US.

With the help of his explorative approach, Fenno concluded that the representative's view of the home district, and their actions there, changed over time. He makes a distinction between two phases: *expansionist* and *protectionist*. The first stage is to solidify a core group of supporters that constitutes the backbone of an election campaign; it is then possible to cultivate the support of additional groups within the district. However, at some point this

expansionism ceases and becomes protectionism, where the representative focuses on maintaining his or her support rather than finding additional groups. To a certain degree, this might be a different way of saying that the role (in functionalist terms) changes over time, from a style that is less *delegate* and more *trustee*; a pattern that is recognized in other studies previously mentioned. Over time, a representative becomes more confident in his or her role and does not have the same need of signals from the constituency. Furthermore, according to Fenno, a representative's leverage to choose home style depends on contextual aspects of the district. A district that is perceived as homogeneous gives the representative a narrower opportunity to choose his or her style than a heterogeneous district does. This means that different milieus give a representative a range of opportunities for personal characteristics to define their home style. Furthermore, Fenno argues vigorously that representation is not a one-way street. To represent is not only to act in accordance with the will of the represented, it is also to convince, argue and justify certain behavior. In this sense, not only do Congressmen bring the home arena to Washington, but also the other way around. Thus, Fenno provides a more complex picture of representation than the *delegate-trustee* dichotomy implies. These styles '... persist side by side because the set of constituent attitudes on which each depends also exist side by side' (1978: 161).

Fenno also emphasizes the strategic behavior of legislators:

He [the Congressman] differentiates among them [the represented] in terms of their political support for him and, in some cases, their political loyalty to him. If, therefore, we start with the Congressman's perception of the people he represents, there is no way that the act of representing can be separated from the act of getting elected.

(Fenno 1978: 233)

That is, representatives act purposefully either to gather additional support or to cultivate that already won on the home arena, and the action taken in Washington is a consequence of this goal. In this sense, Fenno's description of the constituency-representative relationship connects with a much wider and increasingly large literature on politicians as rational agents (Ferejohn and Fiorina 1975; Sinclair 1983; Denzau *et al.* 1985).

That being said, Fenno's most important legacy is not theoretical, but methodological. The appendix of *Home Style* consists of almost fifty pages of description and justification of his strategy of participant observation. At the same time, this is probably the area in which Fenno has been criticized the most. It is costly, both in terms of money and time, to do this kind of research and the value added is questionable. This approach is especially criticized for the lack of generalizability, which is to do with the selection of respondents and the size of the sample (Kuklinski 1979). In Fenno's defense however, it should be said that he is aware of all these problems and argues that the approach is first and foremost exploratory and designed to formulate hypotheses rather than to test them.

The cost associated with the scientific strategy that Fenno represents, is possibly the reason that this approach has attracted a limited number of followers. Quite a lot of work has been done to evaluate and measure the constituency-representative link (Parker 1980; Anagnoson 1983; Taggart and Durant 1985), but much of it is not concerned with discussing legislative roles as such. For instance, Bruce E. Cain *et al.* (1979; 1987), followed British MPs in their constituencies, but they were more concerned with measuring and comparing the personal vote – ‘that portion of a candidate’s electoral support which originates in his or her personal qualities’ (Cain *et al.* 1987: 9) – than with analyzing the symbolic dimension of MPs’ encounters. It should however be noted that symbolic interactionism had a big impact in some countries, particularly where political scientists used sociological references in order to escape from the public law legacy. This has been – and still is – particularly the case in France for the study of legislators, but also mayors (Haegel 1994), the President of the Republic (Lacroix and Lagroye 1992) and local governments (Nay 1997).

In practice, the interactionist studies of politics focus on the creation of roles in a variety of social situations, emphasizing the individual meaning that is given to them. Thus, this strand of legislative role research does not follow an approach with pre-set concepts in order to pinpoint the relationship between the represented and the representatives. Instead, the aim has been to emphasize that individual parliamentarians participate in defining their roles and that these roles have many variations, and undergo constant change. This tradition has shed light on the way social interaction shapes roles as well as behavior, but it has suffered from a difficulty in conciliating the uniformity of norms implied by the role concept, and the diversity of institutional settings. Moreover, this school of thought often tends to ignore legislators’ ability to develop their own standpoint independently of the social interactions in which they are engaged. As written by Searing (1991: 1246): ‘The psycho-logicistic cage, in fact, turns out to be sociologicistic’.

The constituency link and European studies

Functionalist and interactionist approaches have both contributed to the research on legislative roles; however, as this short overview shows, their ambitions have not been fulfilled. Inconclusive results, conceptual confusion, empirical costs, and parochialism all contributed to a substantial decline in the use of the role concept in legislative research during most of the 1980s and 1990s. The theoretical and methodological developments came to a halt after this, although a number of empirical studies still use roles as the imperative concept. This has particularly been the case for studies focusing on the constituency link – to the point that using the role concept often means empirically investigating how MPs see their duties toward their voters.

One widely documented trend is the rise of constituency MPs. Phillip Norton for example, analyzed British MPs in a number of different studies, and his main conclusion was that the importance of taking care of the constituency had

become increasingly prominent as a role (Norton and Wood 1993; Norton 1994). This was then further developed and verified by Michael Rush (2001). Pippa Norris, also analyzing British MPs, concluded that there is a significant relationship between ‘members’ commitments to [constituency] service work and their legislative behavior’ (1997: 46). In other words, those MPs who make this kind of duty a high priority also spend more time in their constituencies. Other works comparing northern European MPs tend to conclude that legislators’ role orientations do have consequences for their behavior (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996; Esaiasson and Heidar 2000). Even when the consequences are harder to determine, this kind of research enables the measurement of possible gaps between discourse and action. Dutch MPs, for example, do recognize that they care about local interests but hardly ever meet ministers to defend them (Thomassen and Andeweg 2004), whereas there are reasons to believe that the opposite is true for their French counterparts (Costa and Kerrouche 2009).

Several recent – and less recent (Bogdanor 1985) – studies have focused on the relationship between electoral systems and MPs’ views about representation. This is a traditional question (Miller and Stokes 1963) that has reemerged on the research agenda due to the erosion of political support (Dalton 2004) and the growing recourse to electoral engineering (Norris 2004). However the results of these studies are largely contradictory. McLeay and Vowles, looking at the case of New Zealand, show that there is no substantial difference between MPs’ views on constituency representation, even when they are elected in single-member and multi-member electoral districts. Their explanation is that expectations of acceptable legitimate behavior for an MP are ‘a product of norms and values of the past’ (2007: 92). Other studies are more positive about the causal link between electoral systems and legislators’ constituency focus, but they disagree on what exactly is significant in the electoral system: the proportional versus plurality system (Norton 2002), the number of MPs per constituency (Klingemann and Wessels 2000; Heitshusen *et al.* 2005) or the national or local level of the constituency (Thomassen and Esaiasson 2006). These mixed results reveal firstly that, as elected agents, MPs do care about local interests – independent of their electoral system. They also indicate that electoral variables are not sufficient to explain role orientation but that the social background of the MPs also matters (gender, ethnicity, religion, past profession).

Recently, the introduction of the principal-agent theory mixed with an interactive conception of representation (from below versus from above) borrowed from Esaiasson and Holmberg (1996), has led Rudy B. Andeweg and Jacques Thomassen (2005) to propose an original framework for characterizing the constituency link that gets rid of the old *trustee-delegate* split. The operationalization of this framework on Dutch MPs appears to be particularly promising, but the difficulty labeling the new typology (‘authorization, accountability, delegation and responsiveness’) in terms of roles indicates that this trend in the research is more focused on representation than on legislative roles. Similarly, the ‘task definition approach’ promoted by Esaiasson, which is focused on the types of interest that MPs seek to defend, ‘says nothing about the motives underlying

MPs' view of their task' (2000: 80), and is explicitly opposed to role analysis for that reason.

Apart from the study of the constituency link, there is one particular area in which roles have become an interesting conceptual tool to analyze a swiftly changing political environment, and that is in the European Union. Beginning with the European Parliament, there is an obvious uncertainty as to what representatives should represent: their country/government, national party, European party, etc. The very early study by Hagger and Wing (1979) used a functionalist approach to analyze how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) relate to their work. Their conclusion was that country of origin is the most important factor in explaining why MEPs adopt various roles. A similar point was made by Bernhard Wessels (1999) and Richard Katz (1999) in studies conducted many years later. Katz also emphasized the connection between role orientations and EU attitudes: MEPs privileging legislation over party conflict are more likely to be pro-European than others. Several empirical studies, with different research designs (Blomgren 2003; Scully and Farrell 2003; Scully 2005), conclude that electoral systems and other 'national artifacts' explain to a large extent the adoption of different roles among MEPs. Other 'agents' in the EU, such as European civil servants or commissioners have also been questioned, in a similar way to the MEPs (Hooghe 2001; Trondal 2002; Checkel 2003; Egeberg 2006). One overall conclusion of these studies is that civil servants bring their views on representation with them when they go to EU institutions, and, some of them at least, are molded into a more EU-oriented view over time. At the national level, legislative roles were also used in order to analyze changes due to the interaction with the supranational level. Wessels (2005) connects role orientations in national parliament with MPs' views about Europe. He concludes that national legislators supporting the participation of national parliaments in policy-making, rather than representative functions, were more likely to agree with strengthening the European Parliament and to oppose intergovernmentalism.

The discrete return of roles in various parts of European studies indicates how useful the concept is for analyzing institutional change, and especially conflicts of loyalty within multi-level systems of governance. It partly explains why research on legislative roles has progressively reappeared on the scientific agenda. More generally, the revival of parliamentary role research should be understood as a result of growing interest in the relationship between institutions and political behavior. Various theoretical schools approach the relationship between structure and agency very differently. The neo-institutionalism inspired by rational choice emphasizes how different institutional rules create and circumscribe different incentives for the agent (Shepsle 1989; Tsebelis 2002). The normative neo-institutionalist approach, on the other hand, emphasizes how institutions prescribe behavior with more or less explicit expectations (March and Olsen 1989). Notwithstanding these important differences, these different schools are both focused on the individual's role within a wider set of institutional mechanisms; simply put, it is the interplay between structure and agency that is the key scientific endeavor (Peters 1999: 141). Consequently, with the

neo-institutional approach, legislative studies have become more focused on how legislature's rules affect MPs, especially how they enable or constrain behavior. Roles appear to be particularly relevant when considering the interplay between structure and agent, since they are specific to a given institutional setting but interpreted by individuals. Figure 2.1 presents a very simple conceptual framework related to roles that is shared by neo-institutionalist schools in spite of their differences.

In terms of legislative research, the main question concerns the effects of a given legislature's institutional rules and individual preferences, on MPs' behavior. The concept of role can be seen as interplay between these factors.

As already mentioned, although there were studies on legislative roles published whilst this concept was out of favor in political science research, the theoretical and methodological developments were very scarce. However, two important volumes are exceptions to this. The first is *Westminster's World* by Donald Searing (1994), in which he analyzed interviews with 521 members of the House of Commons conducted in 1971–1972. The second is the collective volume by Wolfgang C. Müller and Thomas Saalfeld (1997), which includes country-specific chapters on Germany, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Even though all these chapters are important in their own right, it is the concluding chapter by Kaare Strøm that has attracted the most attention. Both of these volumes have had an important impact and represent a return of role theories in legislative studies.

Donald Searing's motivational approach

Donald Searing tends to theorize a motivational approach to studying the roles of politicians by placing himself in the tradition of Matthews' (1960) initial study of US Senators and subsequent studies from the 1960s (Barber 1965), 1970s (Woshinsky 1973; King 1974), and 1980s (Payne 1980; Aberbach *et al.* 1981). This approach is based on what used to be called 'purposive roles', that is, roles that are defined according to the purposes of politicians. The main aspect of the motivational approach is the claim that roles should be studied on the basis of how MPs view them.

Searing distinguishes preference and position roles. Position roles refer to the leadership functions at Westminster, such as the Whips. Given the fact that cabinet members belong to the House in the UK some of those roles designate

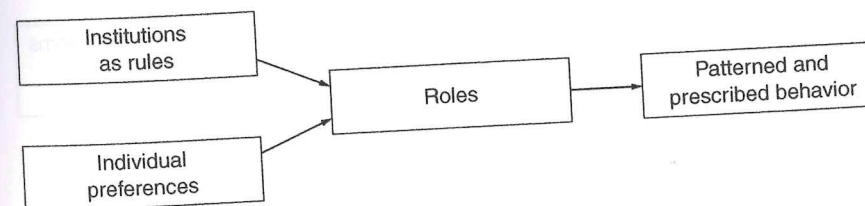


Figure 2.1 The neo-institutionalist approaches to roles.

executive positions (Parliamentary Private Secretaries and Ministers). By contrast, backbenchers play preferences roles that are less institutionally constrained. They represent two-thirds of the sample and are more illustrative of the motivational approach.

Following up Oliver H. Woshinsky's (1973) distinction between four incentives among French MPs, Searing investigates the psychological background of the roles. By analyzing the reasons for selecting a given role, he does not only look at rational preferences (called 'career goals') but also at 'emotional incentives' developed by each individual and rooted in personality. Even though he claims to consider both reason and feeling, he acknowledges that: 'Emotional incentives are the principal energizing forces in all parliamentary roles' (Searing 1994: 19).

If we then try to assess the general neo-institutionalist perspective (see Figure 2.1) from Searing's conceptual framework, Figure 2.2 is the result. The double arrow between the motivational core and roles accounts for the endogenous and exogenous conception of politicians' preferences. For Searing, motivations are not necessarily exogenous to the political process. Consciously or unconsciously, goals and incentives are reconstructed when acting within a given organization (Searing 1994: 483). Politicians therefore adapt to their institutional environment. Even if it is not clearly stated as such by Searing, it could be argued that such reconstruction is closely connected to playing a specific role.

Even if Searing distinguishes his theory from the functionalist approach, he tends to be functionalist in considering that the 'goals' a parliament is supposed to fill (legislation, control, representation, recruitment...) tend to produce the repertoire of roles: 'What is remarkable is that out of all this flexibility emerges not hundreds of different backbenchers roles, but instead only four distinct roles and their subtypes [...]. This reflects the fact that even backbenchers' flexibility is framed by institutional constraints' (1994: 33). What differentiates him from classic functionalist approaches is that the process of selecting and interpreting roles is regarded as central and not fully institutionally determined. Eventually, four roles and ten sub-roles, with their respective career goals and emotional incentives, are identified. The extensive empirical material allows Searing to quantify each of these, as indicated in Table 2.2.

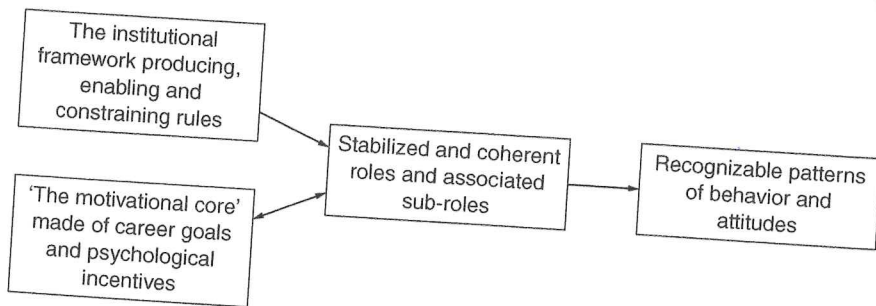


Figure 2.2 Donald Searing's motivational approach to legislative roles.

Table 2.2 Roles and sub-roles among backbenchers at Westminster according to Searing

Roles	Career goals	Sub-roles	Career goals	Emotional incentives
Policy advocates (41% of backbenchers)	Checking the executive	Ideologues (5% of political advocates)	Promoting abstract ideas	Individuality, rectitude, hubris
		Generalists (35%)	Promoting solutions on various topics	Influence, diversity, publicity, game
		Specialists (60%)	Influencing policy in certain sectors	Influence, achievement, self-importance
Ministerial aspirants (25%)	Becoming ministers	High flyers (43%)	Becoming senior ministers	Ambition, status
		Subalterns (23%)	Becoming junior ministers	
Constituency members (25%)	Redressing grievances	Welfare officers (75%)	Solving constituents' personal cases	Sense of competence, sense of duty
		Local promoters (15%)	Solving collective problems	
Parliament men (9%)	Maintaining institutional structures	Status seekers (10%)	Desire to enhance their status	Resentment, status
		Spectators (45%)	Watching the political drama	Vicarious importance
		Club men (45%)	Enjoying the conviviality	Affiliation, avocation, respect

Source: compilation from Searing (1994).

Note
The percentages given in the 'Roles' column indicate the distribution of the 334 backbench MPs. The percentages given in the 'sub-roles' column indicate the distribution of each sub-role within a role category. The sum may be inferior to one hundred given intermediary types. Club men are divided between 'Part Timers', 'Knights of the Shires', and 'Good House of Common Men'.

The most commonly played role in the House is that of the *policy advocate*, but it is highly differentiated between its three sub-roles. *Ministerial aspirants* and *constituency members* are each well identified by their purpose (individual career or constituency work respectively), *parliament men* are less numerous and characterize the pillars of the House.

Motivational roles and behavior

Searing uses in-depth interviews with MPs in order to identify both the repertoire of roles and sub-roles, and to map out which MP is playing which role and sub-role. Creativity, intuition, erudition and above all a comprehensive qualitative approach all appear necessary to achieve this. Yet roles and role-taking are not inferred from actual behavior, but rather on the basis of MPs' general conceptions of their mandate. Having identified the repertoire of roles and assigned a role to each MP, Searing studies the consequences of these roles in terms of action and opinion. In most cases, empirical evidence is provided that motivational roles *do* have consequences. For instance, MPs identified as *constituency members* declare that they do spend more time in their constituency or practice more cross-voting than others. Moreover, role-taking appears to be one of the only statistically significant explanatory variables regarding time spent in the constituency.

Searing argues that this result should not be considered 'tautological', since politicians do not always act in consistence with their self-conceptions. On the contrary, he uses the observed connection between various configurations of roles and MPs behavior, in order to demonstrate the greater relevance of the motivational approach: 'We should, in fact, be very pleased, in the wake of so many studies in which "delegates" did not behave like delegates by voting their constituents' wishes, that we succeeded in generating preference roles like that of the Constituency Members whose players do behave like Constituency Members by tending to their constituents' (1994: 135).

Indigenous roles

Searing delivers a severe critique of the *delegate/trustee* dichotomy, which he sees as being 'constructs that existed in the minds of many social scientists rather than in the minds of many of the politicians we studied' (1994: 13). Instead politicians should be listened to, and the motivational approach suggests that by 'directing our concepts and measures toward roles as politicians themselves conceive of them, we will be in best position to explain the behavior that is inherent in such roles' (1994: 14). Therefore, in many parts of the book, Searing stresses that the label of a given role is commonly used at Westminster, which would demonstrate the relevance of the categorization: 'the fact that backbenchers recognize our four architectonic backbench roles buttresses their plausibility' (1994: 415). The reputation associated with a role within Westminster is also a matter of study. For instance, *constituency members* are frequently criticized by other MPs for their narrow conception of their job, and as a consequence, role-distance may result.

Such a comprehensive approach raises delicate epistemological issues. Firstly, it forces the social scientist to reveal already existing categories rather than creating one's own. In that sense, the added-value of social science is reduced within the motivational world. Moreover, the Durkheimian legacy would certainly blame such an approach for not maintaining a distance from real world. Is the division of labor as perceived by MPs the most relevant way of studying Westminster? Aren't there other roles, hidden to the actors, which could reveal why MPs act in such or such way?

Secondly, this approach is not exactly followed throughout the book. It appears instead that various roles used by the actors (e.g. *ideologue* or *constituency members*) are mobilized alongside others labels probably created by Searing (e.g. *subaltern* or *status seeker*). It is also likely that existing role labels used by MPs, were not kept by Searing (e.g. *diplomats*, *inquisitors* or *half-retired*). It is also unclear whether the relation between a given role and its sub-roles is in the minds of the MP or labeled by the author based on similar patterns. Overall, the process of mapping legislative roles is inevitably subjective (and creative). This not a negative remark, nor is it in all probability very surprising, but the inductive process through which the repertoire of roles is created still remains vague. In a way, these aspects lead one to question the connection between identified roles and MPs' behavior. Does a high correlation mean that the repertoire is cleverly established? Or that the categorization of individual MPs to such or such role was particularly relevant? Or eventually that roles have an impact on behavior? The findings of the book appear to be a set of different elements (the repertoire of roles, the categorization of individual MPs and the consequences of the roles) that are impossible to assess and evaluate separately. Moreover, even if it is true that there is no tautology in correlating motivational roles and behavior, the tautological criticism is more relevant when roles are compared with MPs' opinions, given that they were built on MPs' attitudes towards their job.

Thirdly, the 'indigenous' feature of the roles triggers the question of why legislatures produce them and why MPs adopt them. If the roles Searing brings to light make sense for MPs and if those roles give coherence to MPs' attitudes and behavior, then roles do play a central function in strengthening the division of parliamentary labor, and eventually in producing a vision of Westminster's world. As stated by Searing: 'Members are able to understand the performances of their colleagues as variations on familiar roles that help everyone make sense of political life at Westminster' (1994: 33). Parliamentary actors seem to need roles to differentiate and locate each other within the parliamentary machinery. Roles as identifying principles do have both an individual dimension (they express the need for self-esteem), and a collective one (they offer a specific vision of what a legislature is). In this sense, the motivational concept of role not only tells us something about the representative relationship (like for the *trustee/delegate* split), but also about parliaments as institutions. Parliaments are institutions where the division of labor and the grouping of actors are not only organized through procedures and parties but also through 'composite patterns of

goals, attitudes, and behaviors characteristic of people in particular positions' (1994: 369) ultimately based on how MPs emotionally understand their job.

A one-dimensional actor

A last set of remarks concentrates on the fact that, according to Searing, MPs tend to focus on one singular role. This finding is surprising since qualitative in-depth methods usually tend to give a complex picture of political actors, emphasizing the multiple institutional settings in which they work and the multiple dimensions of their personality. In the field of role theory, the interactionist approach has thus examined how role-taking was dependent on contingent and evolving concrete situations. Contrary to this, interviews conducted in *Westminster's World* tend to reveal that MPs are motivated by one dominant aspect of their job. Searing explains continuously that role homogeneity should be understood in terms of predominance rather than uniformity. All MPs need to secure their electoral position but only a quarter of backbenchers are first and foremost motivated by the idea that they should protect their constituents. Very few backbenchers would refuse to enter the cabinet but only a quarter of them openly reveal their ambition during the interviews. Searing also acknowledges that MPs may modify their role when the length of their career creates new incentives and situates them in a different institutional context. Thus, after fifteen years of being unsuccessful, *high fliers* may reconsider their role-orientation and begin to act as *parliament men*. That said, such shifts occur only on very few occasions over the course of a parliamentary career.

Searing's conclusion that MPs tend to prioritize one role appears to be supported by empirical observations (even by a factor analysis). He argues that the mutual-exclusiveness of the role categories has to do with the functional purpose of roles and with MPs' limited energy. In terms of the functional purpose of roles, playing one role rather than several, strengthens the capacity of roles to situate and guide MPs. As explained by Searing: '[Career goals] are particularly likely to be arranged hierarchically and to carry across contexts, for they are developed to serve the "cross-contextual" purpose of guiding the politician's career' (1994: 416). Yet, this functionalist view does not explain how roles succeed in guiding MPs. The other explanation is focused on the limited resources at the disposal of MPs: 'No one has sufficient time and energy to pursue vigorously all backbench roles at once. Everyone therefore gives some roles predominance over others by choosing among them on the basis of their goals' (1994: 81). This explanation is based on the observations that MPs have limited energy and that pursuing a goal efficiently supposes a degree of specialization. However, beside the rational flavor of the demonstration, no reason is ultimately given for explaining why MPs do have a dominant goal.

The importance Searing gives to a psychological account of MPs attitudes and behavior, encourages an explanation of the mutual-exclusiveness of the role categories based on psychology. Searing relies in particular on the political psychologist James Payne who, with his colleagues, stated that: '[...] each

politician (with few exceptions) has only one incentive, not a mixture of incentives' (1984: 8). Incentives are thus seen as emotional rather than rational drives. According to these theorists, the single-dimensionality of the emotional world of politicians has to do with the painfulness of everyday life in politics, with the highly selective feature of political careers and with the uncertain future of political leaders. Having attested that 'Politics is not a cushy, comfortable occupation', they concluded that 'it was an emotional type of drive that propelled individuals to accept the rigors of political life' (1984: 1, 7). The mutual-exclusivity of roles seems to be ultimately accounted for by what we could call a 'psychologist-Darwinism': the work is so demanding that only the most motivated can succeed, and the most motivated are in all likelihood single-minded politicians.

By way of concluding on Searing's work, it can be said that the comprehensive qualitative material gathered for mapping Westminster's roles, obviously makes it difficult to replicate the study elsewhere for the sake of comparison. Nonetheless, in a follow-up study of British MPs, Wood and Yoon (1998) show that the role orientations identified by Searing seem to be very stable. However, Searing's major contributions lie in his effort to clarify and promote the motivational approach and his attempt to develop a heuristic conceptual – and to some extent theoretical – framework, through the rigor of his case-study. Julien Navarro (2009) uses this framework for instance in order to study the recent institutionalization of the European Parliament. One of the two editors of this volume (Rozenberg 2009) also based his study of the Europeanization of the French Parliament on Searing's framework. These studies confirm the parochial features of some of his results: the great variety of *parliament men* for example has been produced by an institution that is several centuries old; the diversity of *ministerial aspirants* is rooted in the high number of cabinet members and so forth. Yet, these studies by Navarro and Rozenberg also indicate just how heuristic Searing's approach is, not only because of the high probability to find *policy advocates*, *ministerial aspirants*, *constituency members* and *parliament men* in any legislature, but also because the connections between roles, institutional rules and psychological incentives appear to be – at least partially – independent from national political cultures.

Kaare Strøm's strategic approach

In his short theoretical paper of 1997 and in an up-dated version in this volume, Kaare Strøm discusses Searing's framework and emphasizes the strategic aspects of role taking. By defining roles as 'strategies for the employment of scarce resources toward specific goals' (1997: 155), he connects the literature on roles to the more recent rational choice approach. He argues that 'legislative roles can be viewed as behavioral strategies conditioned by the institutional framework in which parliamentarians operate' (1997: 157). In accordance with the overall neo-institutional framework (Figure 2.1), the strategic approach may be illustrated as in Figure 2.3.

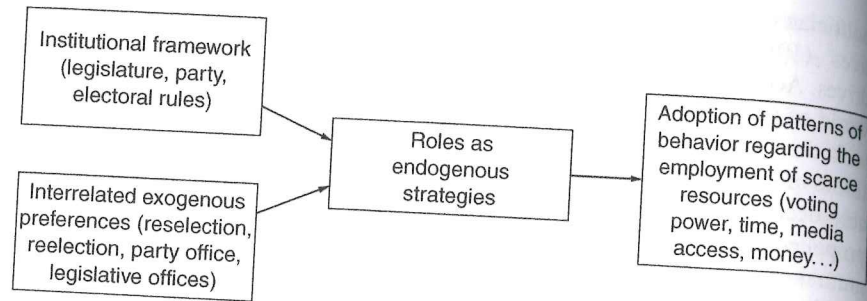


Figure 2.3 The strategic approach to legislative roles.

As indicated in several publications (e.g. Müller *et al.* 2001; Heitshusen *et al.* 2005; Zittel and Gschwend 2008), Strøm's approach has become quite influential. The reason for this is probably the success of rational choice theory in general, but also because of the paper's effort to clarify certain concepts. Roles are defined as endogenous strategies both shaped by institutional rules and by exogenous stable preferences. Furthermore, one of the main benefits of this strategic approach lies in the systematic analysis of the institutional constraints (or lack thereof) that lead to the selection of a given role. These aspects were to some extent neglected by Searing, and Strøm emphasizes the great influence of the rules surrounding the re(s)election of MPs on the strategies they adopt.

Strategic roles?

The main question regarding the strategic approach has to do with the difference between roles and strategies. Although Strøm convincingly argues that roles should be conceptualized as strategies, one might wonder whether it is then useful to continue talking about roles. Is not the concept of roles superfluous if it is synonymous with strategies? Strangely enough, the question is not directly addressed in the paper, but the main answer is probably that roles have to do with patterns of behavior. By postulating that roles are 'behavioral patterns or routines', Strøm implies that efficiently choosing between scarce resources – i.e. acting rationally – leads MPs to systematically adopt specific behavior. This would explain the reference to *roles* and not only to *strategies*, as the very notion of strategy evokes both permanent and contingent adaptation to an evolving situation. Doing surgery work two months before an election is undoubtedly an electoral strategy; doing it on a permanent basis throughout a legislature could be better described as playing the *constituency member* role.

Therefore, conceiving of roles as systematic behavior seems to be central to a rational approach to legislative roles. However, the notion of what is systematic is neither clearly defined nor questioned in Strøm's paper. It could refer to the fact that roles have been played by several MPs and therefore can be conceptualized as

patterns, or it could mean actions are repeated over time when playing a given role, which can be associated with *routine*. Whether pattern, routine, or both, the essential aspect of the concept appears to rely on the notion of repetition and imitation. MPs playing roles repeat the same strategies day after day and imitate each other.

Bounded rationality?

When it comes to rationality, the analytical consequences of these aspects appear to be particularly promising. On one hand, the question of why these patterns appear can be considered from a rational choice perspective: the systematic feature of roles could be understood in terms of cost-saving, it being rational for a given legislator to follow a behavioral routine because roles save him or her the effort of repeated calculations. For instance, an MP will save time and energy in the sifting of her mail if she has decided to act as a *constituency member*. In this case letters addressed by voters from the constituency will be *systematically* answered, whereas mail from national organizations can be neglected. It would be especially easy to delegate that task. To take another example, a newcomer MP seeking to enter the government, will reduce learning costs if a role orientation of *ministerial aspirants* is at her disposal. By reproducing the behavior of successful politicians – that is by following an existing pattern – she will undoubtedly increase her chance of success. Thus systematic strategies enable actors to rationalize a complicated environment characterized by constant arbitrations and decision making.

On the other hand, the systematic aspect of roles could also lead to the opposite conclusion. That is, the limitation of the rationality in the entire process. Recalling Max Weber (1978) we might be reminded of the difference between legitimacy through routine and through rationality. Patterns of behavior might help an actor escape from, or constitute a constraint from, purely strategic behavior. In other words, roles can explain why rational MPs do not always behave rationally: because they are embedded in routines ('I do that because I did it') and because they tend to reproduce patterns of behavior ('I do that because others do it'). Even if roles are driven by goals, interpreting them could become an end by itself, rather than the end being the attainment of the initial goal(s). To take the above mentioned example of the *constituency member*, the habit – and possibly the pleasure – of playing such a role could lead an MP to continue interpreting it even when it is no longer strategic to do so. From a purely rational perspective, there is no use in supporting local constituents in close-door meetings when there is no prospect of being rewarded for the effort. Yet continuous empirical observations suggest that many *constituency MPs* actually go on playing such roles in all circumstances for a simple reason: they have the habit of doing so. The danger of over-playing a role has also been stressed in the literature, for instance with the example of *ministerial aspirants* neglecting their constituencies. Therefore, if 'institutions are the "rules" that constrain "reason"' as written by Strøm (1997: 156), one might wonder whether roles can be regarded as institutions i.e. whether roles also constrain reason.

Strøm meeting Searing

It is unambiguously true that the writings of Searing and Strøm constitute important theoretical contributions to legislative role research in recent years. However, the first question is whether or not these two approaches are contradictory to each other. They use a common framework with specific interrogations based on two different theoretical perspectives. Searing focuses on the MPs' complex and partially psychological motivations for interpreting a given role. Strøm supports the idea of conceptualizing roles as rational strategies. Searing's framework appears to be very elaborate but difficult to duplicate, whereas Strøm's arguments are to a certain extent an initial attempt that has had a noticeable impact. The differences between them are evident when it comes to the conceptions of what MPs preferences are: exclusively exogenous and strategic in one case, exogenous and endogenous as well as strategic and psychological in the other. Yet these differences should not be overstated. Both frameworks share the idea that roles are produced both by institutional rules and personal preferences, and that they have consequences for behavior. Furthermore, both of these approaches converge in their conclusion that each actor predominantly plays a single role, although the justifications for this are explained either rationally or psychologically in the respective theories.

To a large extent, strategic and motivational approaches may thus be conciliated. The rational feature of Strøm's theory rests mainly on the process of adopting a costless strategy within a given institutional setting. The four identified goals of legislative activities appear to be largely axiomatic in this respect: an MP with a seemingly less rational purpose than the four identified (for instance promoting an ideology), could also follow the rational strategy of adopting the role best suited for his/her purpose. Likewise, Searing argues that politicians do not act randomly but that close attention to their motivations reveals the strength of the emotional drive behind strategic goals. Even if reason and emotion are mobilized by different theories, they tend to be intertwined in the minds of political actors. This is clearly the case regarding the sub-role of *specialists* 'where the cognitive goal of influencing the influential is intertwined with the sense of achievement, an emotional incentive' (Searing 1994: 389).

The main difference between the motivational and the strategic approaches fundamentally seems to be focused on their conception of time and role interpretation. Conceiving roles as strategies implies that the achievement of goals is delayed: *constituency MPs* adopt this course of action in order to be re-elected in the future. On the contrary, from a motivational perspective gratification is immediate: *constituency MPs* enjoy acting as *constituency MPs* at the present time. The emphasis placed on immediate gratification is linked with the motivational approach's focus on how MPs interpret their roles. The existence of four backbench roles only indicates how constraining institutional rules are. But within each role MPs have creative leeway as to the way they interpret them – that is in *understanding* as well as *playing* them: 'all of the backbench preference roles we have examined seem less constrained than is usually assumed by either structural or interactionist approaches to the subject. Even the Constituency Member, the clearest backbench role, offers

vast opportunities for developing interpretations to suit individual preferences' (Searing 1994: 195). This focus on the way roles are played could account for the bounded rationality of a neo-institutional approach to roles. As indicated in the discussion of Strøm's approach, the systematic behavioral aspect of roles can be understood both as a strategic cost-saving device and as a sociological process of diffusion of collective norms. However, debate has yet to show to what extent these views are contradictory or complementary.

Conclusion

This discussion shows that the history of legislative role research is long and has indeed been somewhat bumpy. Even though a large amount of research has been devoted to analyzing legislative roles, the theoretical and empirical outcomes of this have been limited. In this chapter, we have discussed three of the major reasons for this. The first problem is connected to the role concept as such. Roles are concepts that need to be defined in a way that makes sense and is theoretically and empirically coherent. A lot of effort has certainly gone in to trying to achieve this. However, many of these concepts have turned out to be more important in academic debate than in the 'real world'. For example, in spite of the sound theoretical argument regarding the difference between a *trustee* and a *delegate*, this distinction has been difficult for respondents to comprehend. The result boils down to a methodological problem: do we really know what we are measuring when we ask representatives about these concepts? The second problem arises (and accentuates the first) when it becomes difficult to identify a connection between these concepts and actual behavior. That is, various concepts of roles have been weak as independent variables. The third problem explored here is that there has been a tendency for studies of roles to be limited to single-system analyses. This generally has to do with the ambition to map out the repertoire of roles in a particular legislative system, rather than connect these roles with independent variables such as the electoral system, party system, political culture and so forth. As a result, roles defined as dependent variables have been inadequately analyzed. Of course, there are studies that contradict this description, but as a general critique it still stands.

If this were the end of story, this book would not need to be written. However, growing interest and knowledge concerning the link between various institutional mechanisms and political outcomes, has led to a renewed interest in legislative roles. Guy Peters, looking at what unites all variants of the neo-institutional trend, concludes that 'Perhaps more than anything else, the individual element of policy-making comes into play as the members of the institution interpret what the rules and values of their institutions are' (1999: 150). What Peters is referring to could be regarded as roles. The basic assumption in neo-institutional theories is that institutions influence behavior, which means that roles can be seen as the product of various institutional environments. With the perspective of normative intuitionism, this means that individuals internalize the explicit or implicit expectations of them as representatives. From this standpoint, roles are

seen as an individual's understanding of what is appropriate behavior in a certain situation. From a more rational choice perspective, representatives' understandings of limitations or gratifications produced by various institutional settings can also lead to the adoption of certain roles. The concept of roles may thus be used either way: to analyze legislators' behavior in terms of either appropriateness or strategic calculation. This should mean that the use of the role concept will probably grow in importance because we need something that identifies uniform attitudes among actors in specific institutional settings.

It is important to learn from history, however. Past focus on the repertoire of roles in a single legislature may not be interesting to investigate per se. But if the question is what kind of attitudes a specific kind of legislature produces, compared to other legislatures, the story becomes more interesting. This is because roles say something about the workings of the institutions under investigation. Furthermore, roles might be an important part of the 'stickiness' of institutions, because even though institutions may change for various reasons (for example adjustments of the electoral system), the behavior of the representatives may remain the same – at least for a while. The reason for this is that roles are attitudes that change slowly and their function in institutional development might therefore be crucial. From this perspective, roles are either products of institutions and/or links between institutions and behavior, through coherent attitudes and values. Ultimately, rather than being interesting in and of themselves, legislative roles reveal something about why political institutions are political institutions.

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3 The emergence and transformation of representative roles

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This contribution starts from the assumption that representative roles are constituent, formative and relatively stable elements of the political order, linking cognitions and norms to positions occupied by MPs in the arena of political competition and the organizational hierarchies of parliaments and parties (Merton 1957; Linton 1945; Searing 1991; Searing 1994). Roles will be considered here as systems of boundary conditions to which the actors who play such roles are supposed to conform, and as the corresponding rights that these boundaries confer. Being both structured and structuring elements of systems of social interaction (Parsons 1951), roles define areas of obligations and constraints that correspond to areas of conditional autonomy.

Special emphasis will be given to MPs' own orientations or perceptions of the part they are supposed to play in the political game, i.e. to their inner definitions of what someone in their position should think and do. Following the lines of Levinson and other protagonists of interactionist role theory, representative roles are seen here as a matter of limited choice, in which legislators "select, create and synthesize certain forms of adaptation rather than others" (Levinson 1959: 175). These adaptive choices are not completely free, but constrained and directed by "structurally given demands [...] associated with a given social position" (Levinson 1959:172). It takes a considerable effort to make these choices, to adopt legislative roles and to display them to others. These choices should, therefore, result in a fairly stable attachment of individual MPs to their representative roles, thereby creating a relatively constant environment for communication among legislators, and between legislators and their extra-parliamentary role partners. MPs' attachment to their representative roles will be reinforced by positive feedback from the aggregate role structure that emerges in the parliamentary environment as a result of MPs' adaptive individual choices. We also suggest that MPs' self-definitions of legislative roles are directed by previous socializing experiences as well as by the political affiliations of MPs, i.e. by their social and political backgrounds that shaped their initial cognitions and norms as political beings.

The taking and making of representative roles will not, however, lead to role persistency. Collective changes of MPs' role perceptions may result from a change of the rules of the game, i.e. from a fundamental change in the