Article

Operationalizing Functional Analysis in Public Administration: A Diagnostic Framework for Enhancing System Efficiency in Eastern European Parliamentary Secretariats

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Abstract

Functional analysis (FA) is increasingly used in public sector reforms to assess organizational performance and guide administrative change. However, FA frequently stays procedural and descriptive in both theory and practice, providing little insight into the roots of inefficiencies. The paper addresses this gap by reconceptualizing FA as an organizational diagnostic framework and applying it to parliamentary administrations, a field that has not received much scholarly attention. Using a comparative qualitative case study design, the analysis examined the parliamentary secretariats of Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia, drawing on functional review reports, institutional documents, and available employee self-assessment data. The proposed framework operationalizes FA across four analytical dimensions: governance and strategic management, structural design, staffing, and process efficiency. The findings show that system efficiency is shaped by governance arrangements and strategic management capacity, while structural design influences functional coherence and coordination. Staffing affects performance indirectly by mediating process efficiency rather than through staffing levels alone. Overall, inefficiencies appear cumulative and systemic rather than the result of isolated functional weaknesses. By advancing FA as a diagnostic approach, the study contributes to public administration theory and offers a transferable framework for assessing organizational efficiency in parliamentary administrations and other complex public sector organizations.

Keywords: functional review; strategy management; organizational theory; performance management; public sector reform; new public management

1. Introduction

Public sector organizations across democratic systems face growing pressures to deliver complex services efficiently while operating within increasingly constrained fiscal, political, and institutional environments (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). Despite employing a substantial share of the workforce, approximately 16% in Europe and 11% globally (Sodergren & Gammarano, 2024), public administrations continue to experience persistent inefficiencies related to unsuccessful reforms of their public services, organizations, and staffing configurations (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020). These challenges are particularly pronounced in institutions that combine administrative, political, and representative functions, where performance cannot be adequately captured through conventional efficiency indicators alone (Arnaboldi et al., 2015).

National Assemblies (NA) and their parliamentary secretariats represent a critical yet under-researched segment of the public sector (Egeberg et al., 2015). As central actors in legislative, oversight, and representative processes, parliamentary administrations play a pivotal role in democratic governance (Hanson, 2022). Recent research has increasingly emphasized the importance of parliamentary administrative capacity, particularly the role of professional staff in supporting legislative effectiveness, policy scrutiny, and oversight activities (Crosson et al., 2020; Brandsma & Otjes, 2024; Hofland & Otjes, 2025). However, insufficient strategic coordination, politicized governance systems, and bureaucratic inertia frequently restrict their organizational effectiveness. Because of this, parliamentary institutions usually find it difficult to adjust to changing societal needs, technological advancements, and growing complexity, which compromises institutional effectiveness and public trust.

In response to these challenges, functional analysis (FA) has emerged as an instrument in public sector reform and institutional assessment. Standardized functional reviews are frequently used to map organizational responsibilities, find overlaps, and suggest restructuring strategies (Tunčikienė & Korsakienė, 2014; Jahija, 2017). Even though these applications are common in policy and reform contexts, the majority of current FA techniques are procedural and descriptive, providing no analytical power to explain the persistence of inefficiencies or the interactions between various organizational components. In order to fully integrate organizational dynamics into a cohesive analytical framework, a large portion of the academic literature focuses on abstract functionalist theory or organizational design principles (De Vries et al., 2016; Worren, 2016; Alam, 2017).

This paper addresses these gaps by reconceptualizing functional analysis as an organizational diagnostic framework rather than a reform-implementation checklist. Drawing on functionalist theory, organizational design literature, and New Public Management perspectives, the study develops a multidimensional FA model that links governance and strategic management, structural design, staffing configurations, and process efficiency to overall system performance. Parliamentary secretariats are selected as an analytically rich empirical setting due to their multi-functional mandates, political embeddedness, and central role in democratic systems.

Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: How can functional analysis be operationalized as an organizational diagnostic framework for explaining system efficiency in parliamentary administrations? To answer this question, the study applied the proposed FA framework to a comparative analysis of parliamentary administrations in Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia. Through this analysis, the paper advances three research propositions about how staffing, structure, and governance affect system efficiency. In this way, the study strengthens the analytical underpinnings of FA as a tool for comprehending organizational performance in complex public institutions and advances the public administration literature by providing both conceptual clarification and empirically supported insights.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. New Public Management and Modern Public Sector Reforms

The concept of New Public Management (NPM) brought a wave of managerial thinking into the public sector, shifting traditional hierarchical structures into organizations that prioritize performance (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020). Since the late 1970s, reforms in the public sector have increasingly focused on efficiency, performance measurement, and restructuring, often taking cues from the private sector's management practices (Hood, 1990; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

While these NPM-inspired reforms have led to improvements in transparency and accountability in some areas, they have also created notable challenges within organizations. The push for specialization and decentralization has often led to fragmentation, a lack of coordination, and overlapping functions (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020). Additionally, when NPM principles like performance management are applied too rigidly, they can lead to employee dissatisfaction and a narrow focus on quantifiable results, overshadowing the broader mission and context of the public sector (Arnaboldi et al., 2015).

In response to these limitations, subsequent reform approaches, such as post-NPM reforms and Public Service Logic, have increasingly focused on coordination, integration, and creating value. They have also prioritized developing systematic diagnostic tools to evaluate how well public institutions align in terms of functional alignment, governance coherence, and strategic coordination (Tunčikienė et al., 2013; Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie, 2016; Osborne, 2018). In this setting, functional analysis stands out as a diagnostic method that examines whether the functions of an organization, its governance structures, and resources are in sync with its institutional mandates and strategic goals (Jahija, 2017).

2.2. Functional Analysis as a Tool for Public Sector Reform

Functional analysis has become an increasingly prominent instrument in public sector reform, commonly used to support organizational change, innovation, and restructuring processes (De Vries et al., 2016). In practice, FA is usually presented as a collaborative and consultative method that focuses on pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses of institutions, rather than just a way to justify downsizing. The main goal is to produce actionable recommendations that boost organizational effectiveness and pave the way for sustainable reform outcomes (Muhula et al., 2017).

Recent policy frameworks have further highlighted the importance of FA by connecting it to broader public administration reform principles. Assessments from OECD SIGMA and the European Commission's ComPAct stress the need for alignment with the European Administrative Space, which includes key principles like transparency, accountability, participation, digitalization, and efficiency (OECD, 2023; European Commission, 2023). Additionally, organizational theory has played a role in shaping FA principles, making a distinction between those that guide the analytical process and those that focus on the substantive content of institutional functions (Tunčikienė et al., 2013). However, even with this increasing attention to norms and concepts, many existing FA approaches are still quite practice-driven and fragmented, which limits their ability to systematically compare institutions or uncover long-term root causes of inefficiencies.

2.3. Functional Analysis Conceptual Framework and Propositions

Functional analysis in the public sector is most often conducted through standardized procedural stages, including preparation, data collection, analysis, and the formulation of recommendations (Manning & Parison, 2004; Tunčikienė & Korsakienė, 2014; Jahija, 2017). While this procedural logic provides a useful framework for guiding reform processes, it primarily supports implementation rather than organizational diagnosis with limited adaptability to local institutional and organizational contexts (Xavier, 2013; Ngouo, 2017). To address these limitations, this study reconceptualizes FA as a structured organizational diagnostic framework (Figure 1).

Prior research suggests that public sector performance depends not only on formal organizational structures, but also on governance coherence, strategic capacity, and the interaction of functions within and across complex institutional systems. Accordingly, functional analysis models are typically adapted to the management model of the public institution, the reform initiator, design, and the broader institutional environment (Muhula

et al., 2017). The literature further emphasizes that FA should be grounded in the strategic context defined by organizational missions, visions, and culture (Viola et al., 2012; Favaro, 2014).
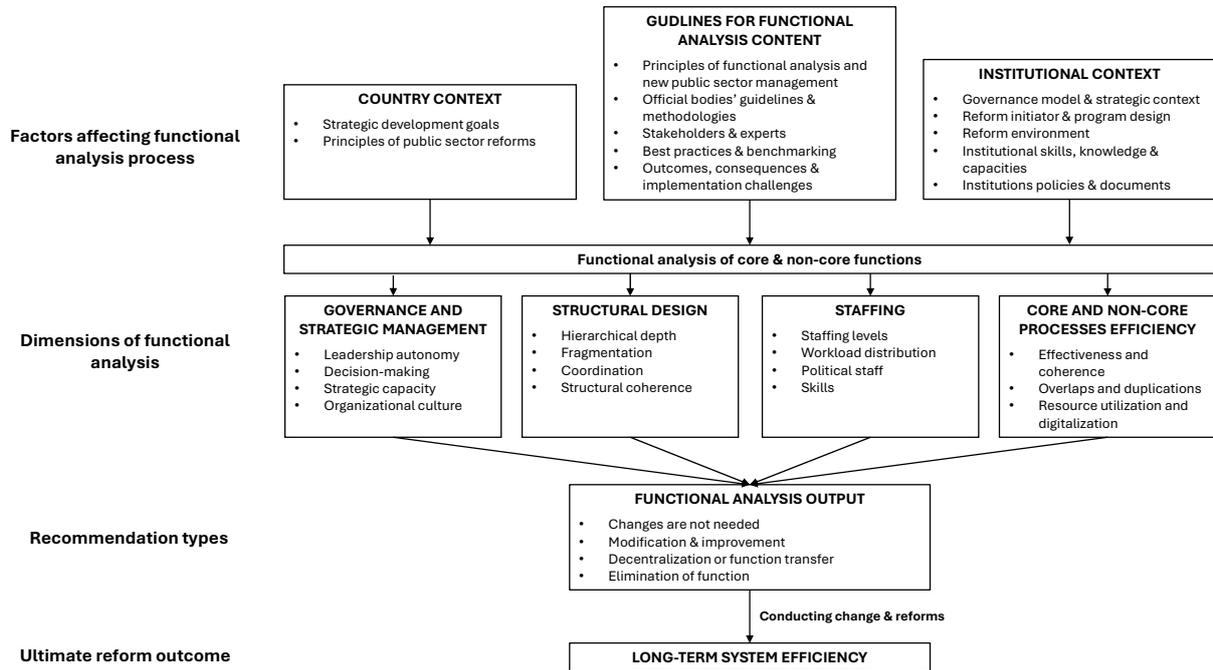

Figure 1. Conceptual functional analysis diagnostic framework for public sector reform. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

From a theoretical perspective, approaches such as Parsons' AGIL framework emphasize the interdependence of organizational components (Lyden, 1975). Complementary models drawing on systems theory and axiomatic design focus on identifying structural misalignments, including functional overlap and conflict (Worren, 2016). In addition, FA models typically incorporate multidimensional criteria for function assessment, including staffing, outcome-related, user-oriented, and inter-institutional dimensions (Tunčikienė & Korsakienė, 2014). These analytical dimensions are often supplemented by integrative organizational frameworks, such as the McKinsey 7S model and other models, to capture alignment between strategy, structure, processes, and other organizational structure elements (Alam, 2017; Mintzberg, 1990; Chandler, 1969).

Drawing on complementary strands of public administration theory and organizational design literature, the proposed framework integrates key conceptual elements without replicating any single existing model. Rather than introducing entirely new organizational dimensions, it brings together well-established concepts from organizational theory and adapts them into a structured diagnostic tool specifically tailored to functional analysis in public sector institutions. Influential models such as Mintzberg's organizational design or the McKinsey 7S framework emphasize the importance of internal organizational alignment. However, they are not explicitly designed to support functional reviews commonly used in public administration reforms.

The contribution of the proposed framework therefore lies in operationalizing functional analysis as a coherent analytical model that systematically links governance arrangements, structural design, staffing configurations, and process efficiency to institutional performance. By translating theoretical insights from organizational design and public administration scholarship into analytically observable and measurable dimensions, the framework enables a more consistent interpretation of functional review findings across diverse institutional contexts.

The resulting functional analysis framework is organized around four core analytical dimensions that capture critical organizational characteristics influencing functional performance in public institutions (Table 1). Together, these dimensions provide a parsimonious yet comprehensive basis for diagnosing organizational strengths, identifying functional bottlenecks, and informing evidence-based institutional reform.

Table 1. Theoretical foundations of the functional analysis framework. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Functional Analysis Dimension	Focus Areas	Authors
Governance and Strategic Management	Leadership autonomy, decision-making and delegation practices, strategic management capacity, organizational culture and change management	Lapuente and Van de Walle (2020) Rosenberg Hansen and Ferlie (2016) Viola et al. (2012) Favaro (2014) Mintzberg (1990) Chandler (1969)
Structural Design	Hierarchical depth, unit size and fragmentation, span of control, functional clarity, and structural coherence	Alam (2017) Worren (2016) Jahija (2017) Mintzberg (1990) Chandler (1969)
Staffing	Staffing levels and composition, vacancy rates and workload, political staff arrangements, staff professional development	Alam (2017) Tunčikienė and Korsakienė (2014) Jahija (2017) Lyden (1975)
Processes Efficiency (Core and Non-Core Functions)	Process coherence and fragmentation, functional overlap and duplication, effectiveness and integration of all processes, digitalization, and resource utilization	Tunčikienė and Korsakienė (2014) Balasubramanian and Gupta (2005) Lyden (1975) Alam (2017) Jahija (2017)

Based on the conceptual framework outlined above, the study advances three research propositions that guide the empirical analysis:

Proposition 1. *System efficiency in public institutions is more strongly shaped by governance and strategic management arrangements than by staffing levels alone.*

Proposition 2. *Structural design influences system efficiency by shaping the balance, coherence, and interaction between core and non-core functions.*

Proposition 3. *Staffing affects system efficiency indirectly by influencing the efficiency of core and support processes rather than system performance directly.*

These propositions provide an analytical lens for examining functional analysis findings across institutional contexts and support the comparative assessment presented in subsequent sections of the paper.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design and Case Selection

This study adopted a comparative qualitative case study design, appropriate for examining complex organizational and strategic management phenomena (Yin, 1994). This method was chosen because it can combine data from various sources and facilitate analytical triangulation, which allows for a more nuanced understanding of the functional

arrangements within public institutions (Noor, 2008). This design prioritizes analytical rather than statistical generalization, which is in line with interpretive approaches in public administration research by Madimutsa (2019), Mihić et al. (2019) and Mihret and Woldeyohannis (2008).

The empirical focus of the research was placed on National Assemblies as administrative bodies responsible for supporting legislative, budgetary, oversight, and representative functions (Hanson, 2022). The development and expansion of a country's economy and society depend on these entities operating effectively and efficiently (Matei & Dumitru, 2020). In fulfilling the aforementioned role of NAs, parliamentary secretariats or administrative agencies play a crucial role. Accordingly, they constitute the unit of analysis.

Instead of focusing on statistical representativeness, case selection was guided by a deliberate, theory-informed logic that maximized analytical significance. Three parliamentary secretariats were selected: the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, the National Assembly of Armenia, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. These Eastern European parliamentary administrations were chosen because they are actively aligning with European public sector principles and implemented functional analyses as part of broader administrative reform processes between 2020 and 2024 (Cardona Peretó & Freibert, 2007). The selected cases share a comparable institutional mandate and functional scope, enabling meaningful comparison, while differing in governance arrangements, reform trajectories, and levels of administrative capacity.

3.2. Data Sources

This study draws on multiple data sources to enable analytical triangulation and strengthen the robustness of its findings. Following the diagnostic approach of functional analysis, the research mainly focused on secondary data, including FA reports prepared for the parliamentary administrations of Armenia and Ukraine during 2020 and 2021 (Walker et al., 2020, 2021). These were supplemented by official institutional documents, including organizational statutes, internal regulations, systematization acts, strategic planning materials, and relevant legislative frameworks governing parliamentary administration and public sector organization.

For the Serbian parliamentary secretariat, secondary data were enriched with primary data gathered during field research in 2023 and 2024. This included an employee self-assessment survey and semi-structured interviews with senior administrative officials, aimed at deepening the understanding of organizational practices, validating documentary findings, and providing extra contextual insight. Due to limited data comparability, primary inputs served an interpretive rather than a cross-case comparative function.

3.3. Analytical Framework and Procedure

The analysis applied the proposed functional analysis framework as an organizational diagnostic tool to examine functional arrangements across the selected parliamentary secretariats. The framework was structured around four analytical dimensions: governance and strategic management, structural design, staffing, and processes efficiency through the review of core and non-core functions, which were applied consistently across all cases to ensure analytical comparability. These dimensions guided the coding, categorization, and interpretation of documentary and qualitative material. Furthermore, the framework aligns with established approaches in the literature and reflects practices endorsed by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), which promotes open, inclusive, and evidence-based, context-sensitive reform methodologies (Kolodny, 2010).

The analytical procedure involved a systematic interpretive content analysis of FA reports and institutional documentation, complemented by qualitative inputs where available.

In line with interpretive case study research, research propositions were used as analytical lenses guiding interpretation. Rather than being treated as hypotheses for statistical testing, the propositions supported pattern-matching across cases. This approach allowed the study to examine whether similar organizational patterns appear across the analyzed parliamentary administrations and how governance arrangements, structural design, staffing configurations, and operating processes interact in shaping system efficiency.

System efficiency and related organizational characteristics are interpreted through observable institutional indicators (Focus areas from Table 1) identified in functional analysis reports and supporting institutional documentation. These indicators include governance arrangements (e.g., degree of delegation and strategic coordination), structural characteristics (such as hierarchical depth, unit size, and span of control), staffing configuration (including vacancy levels, workload distribution, and staff allocation across functions), and process-related indicators such as functional overlap, duplication of responsibilities, digitalization practices, and resource utilization. Rather than relying on single quantitative metrics, the analysis examined how these indicators collectively reflect the efficiency and coordination of organizational functions within parliamentary administrations.

The validity of this study is supported by the strong alignment between proposed conceptual FA framework and established theories of public administration and organizational design. Analytical validity is further reinforced through the consistent application of the same analytical dimensions across all cases, as well as through the use of multiple data sources, which enables triangulation and strengthens the credibility of the findings. Reliability is ensured by the transparent and systematic application of a common analytical procedure across cases. The reliance on official FA reports and authoritative institutional documents contributes to the consistency and trustworthiness of the empirical material. In addition, clear documentation of analytical steps enhances the replicability of the research design in comparable public sector settings.

As with all research employing interpretive case study design, the narrative and context-sensitive nature of the analysis inherently limits the generalizability of the findings (Yin, 1994). Accordingly, the study findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution, focusing on analytical generalization. This limitation is particularly relevant given the focus on only three parliamentary secretariats.

4. Results

As noted, the WFD's functional analysis studies for the Armenian and Ukrainian Parliaments provided the data used in the study (Walker et al., 2020, 2021). For the Serbian Parliament, data were collected from both primary and secondary sources by field research conducted in 2023 and 2024 within the same institution.

4.1. Case Study Background

Given the nature of the case study, it is essential to briefly review the reform context of Serbia, Armenia, and Ukraine. Ukraine became a candidate for the EU in 2022, but Armenia has not yet entered negotiations. On the other hand, Serbia has opened 22 out of 35 chapters after ten years of candidate experience. These differences form part of the broader institutional environment in which parliamentary administrations operate.

Using coalitions and legally-based decision-making, the Republic of Serbia adheres to the continental European model (Muhula et al., 2017). Serbia's Parliament has experienced four significant revisions since the country's 1990 transition to a multiparty system, which have been influenced by government-led procedures and ministries. International agreements, especially those with the IMF, have sustained Serbia's stability despite the difficulties presented by its strict legal frameworks and resource allocation.

Armenia's National Assembly strikes a balance between tradition and reform, preserving institutional stability in the face of political upheaval. Legislative restrictions and capacity limitations, however, impede more significant reforms. Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada prioritizes modernization through UNDP partnerships and e-Parliament initiatives, but legislative overload, staff shortages, and weak inter-institutional communication remain obstacles.

Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of the parliaments analyzed. These background details are important for comprehending how organizational size and administrative capability vary from instance to case. The table is not meant to be used as a foundation for evaluative comparison, but rather to place the following analysis in context.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the parliaments analyzed. Source: Eurostat (2026), Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

Country Context			
	Armenia	Ukraine	Serbia
Total population	2,925,000	42,558,328	6,641,197
Net average monthly salary (national)	680.81 €	527.97 €	838.62 €
Net average monthly salary (public sector)	533.4 €	581.25 €	858.82 €
Parliament Staff			
	Armenia	Ukraine	Serbia
Total number of Members of Parliament (MPs)	132	450	250
Non-political staff	425	1069	492
Political staff	43	85	45
MPs per 100,000 citizens	4.51	1.06	3.76
Gender			
	Armenia	Ukraine	Serbia
Male	306 (72%)	748 (70%)	349 (71%)
Female	119 (28%)	321 (30%)	143 (29%)
Age			
	Armenia	Ukraine	Serbia
<20	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
21–30	163 (38%)	11 (1%)	39 (8%)
31–50	192 (45%)	641 (60%)	300 (61%)
51–60	54 (13%)	342 (32%)	113 (23%)
61+	15 (4%)	75 (7%)	39 (8%)

In terms of the number of MPs, an analysis of the data found significant differences among the Parliaments observed. The average number of MPs per 100,000 inhabitants varied widely, with Armenia having the highest ratio (4.51), Serbia (3.76) close to the European average (4.03), and Ukraine (1.06) resembling European nations such as France and Germany. Disparities were also evident in average public-sector wages. In Ukraine and Serbia, public sector salaries exceed the national average, making these positions attractive, in contrast, lower public-sector salaries in Armenia act as a disincentive.

4.2. Governance and Strategic Management

A comparative analysis of the parliamentary administrations of the Republics of Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia revealed notable differences in leadership structures and management practices. Table 3 summarizes their key governance and strategic management characteristics.

Table 3. Governance and strategic management characteristics of parliamentary secretariats. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

Analysis Focus	Armenia	Ukraine	Serbia
Head of secretariat (position name)	Chief of Staff	Secretary General	Secretary General
Executive support structure of the head of secretariat	Yes, responsible for professional and administrative tasks	Yes, responsible for professional and administrative tasks	No, independent executors and the solo work of Secretary General
Formalization of governance structure	Formally documented and evolved over time	Formally documented and evolved over time	Formally documented and evolved over time
Head of secretariat's political autonomy	Chief of Staff and deputies are politically-appointed	Secretary General and deputies are politically-appointed	Secretary General and deputies are politically-appointed
Task delegation	Tasks are rarely delegated; Chief of Staff handles most routine tasks and strategic decisions	Tasks are rarely delegated; Secretary General handles most routine tasks and strategic decisions	Tasks are rarely delegated; Secretary General handles most routine tasks and strategic decisions
Strategic framework	Long format of mission statements which focus narrowly on legislative, representative and oversight roles	Long format of mission statements which focus narrowly on legislative and oversight roles	Long format of mission statements which focus narrowly on legislative and representative roles
Strategic management practice	No systems for long-term planning and performance monitoring; Lack of strategic plans	No systems for long-term planning and performance monitoring; Lack of strategic plans	No systems for long-term planning and performance monitoring
Organizational culture and change management	Bureaucratic and resistant to change; Lack of change management practices	Bureaucratic and resistant to change; Lack of change management practices	Bureaucratic and resistant to change; Lack of change management practices

Across all three parliamentary administrations, governance arrangements are characterized by centralized decision-making and limited delegation of tasks to operational management levels. Senior administrative leaders, whether designated as Chief of Staff or Secretary General, retain responsibility for a broad range of both strategic decisions and routine tasks. In all cases, governance structures are formally documented and politically embedded, with senior officials appointed through political processes. While such arrangements ensure political oversight, they also constrain managerial autonomy and limit the strategic capacity of parliamentary secretariats.

The analysis further revealed gaps in strategic management across all cases, where strategic practices are often treated as formal requirements with limited practical impact. To illustrate, comprehensive mission statements exist, but they focus narrowly on legislative and representative roles, neglecting oversight and budgetary functions. None of the parliamentary secretariats have established effective systems for long-term planning and performance monitoring. Finally, while analyzing organizational culture, results showed similar patterns across the three administrations, characterized by entrenched bureaucratic routines and limited capacity to manage and sustain organizational change.

4.3. Structural Design

The organizational structures of the Armenian, Ukrainian, and Serbian parliamentary secretariats also reflect the combined effects of past reforms and broader social and political

changes. Their internal structures, employing a hierarchical model containing clearly defined layers of authority from the secretariat head to their support staff, are divisible by type into specialized units (e.g., the Speaker's Cabinet), fundamental units (e.g., sectors and directorates), and smaller organizational sub-units (e.g., divisions, groups or departments). While this arrangement provides clarity in roles and responsibilities, it may also hinder flexibility, innovation, and efficiency through the fostering of a 'silo mentality', which limits cross-department collaboration (Jung & Lee, 2016). In addition, such structures tend to promote top-down, process-oriented bureaucratic cultures that shift decision-making upward (Matriano, 2024).

Furthermore, several structural deficiencies were evident across the analyzed cases. All three secretariats exhibit relatively deep organizational structures of around five hierarchical layers, which aligns with SIGMA guidance. However, public administrations in many EU and OECD countries increasingly favor flatter organizational models (Muhula et al., 2017). Additionally, recommended thresholds for unit size of at least six staff members are not consistently met, suggesting fragmentation and the need for rationalization. The span-of-control ratio also exceeds the reference benchmark of 1:5, particularly in Ukraine, where it reaches 1:6.44.

Additional challenges relate to unclear unit nomenclature and reporting lines. For example, in Armenia and Serbia, the term "Secretariat" refers both to the entire administration and to specific units supporting parliamentary processes, creating ambiguity. Moreover, these units report directly to the Secretary General rather than to a Deputy, raising concerns about strategic oversight. Similar governance issues arise in Armenia, where the Internal Audit unit reports to the same Deputy responsible for finance, limiting its operational independence.

4.4. Staffing

Demographic staffing patterns across the analyzed parliamentary administrations revealed important structural characteristics (Table 2). Although women represent around 70% of total staff, leadership positions remain predominantly male, revealing a persistent gender imbalance in decision-making roles, despite the fact that knowledge and work experience, not gender, should be the key prerequisites for management positions in public institutions (Dragičević & Mihić, 2020). Most employees are between 31 and 50 years of age, with limited youth representation, except in Armenia. Educational attainment is generally high, with the majority holding higher education degrees, including a notable share of PhD holders in Ukraine. Tenure patterns show low internal mobility, as many staff have long service records and have remained in their current positions for extended periods (Figure 2), with job changes occurring mainly due to organizational needs rather than career progression.

Staffing profiles of the parliamentary secretariats of Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia further revealed notable variation in workforce size, composition, and functional allocation. As an initial descriptive benchmark, the number of non-political staff was examined in relation to the number of MPs. Across European parliamentary administrations, non-political staff-to-MP ratios typically range between two and four employees per MP. Within this range, Armenia (3.22) and Ukraine (2.38) fall within the mid-range, while Serbia (1.97) is positioned toward the lower end (Table 4). Given that parliamentary staffing levels are shaped by multiple contextual factors, including legislative workload, population size, and institutional priorities (Otjes, 2022), these ratios are interpreted as descriptive indicators rather than as measures of under- or overstaffing.
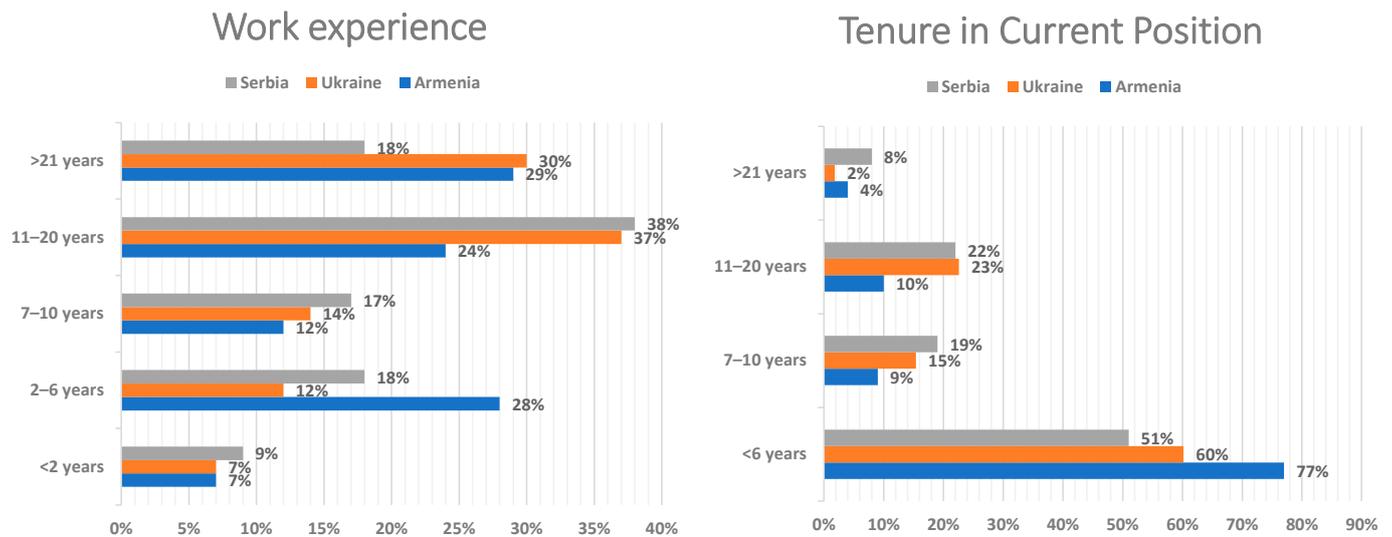
Work experience

Tenure in Current Position

Figure 2. Working experience of analyzed parliamentary workforce. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

Table 4. Staffing of European parliamentary secretariats. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

Country	Number of MPs	Number of Non-Political Staff	Non-Political Staff per MP
Georgia	149	731	4.91
Scotland	129	541	4.19
Germany	709	2964	4.18
The Netherlands	150	600	4.00
The United Kingdom	650	2500	3.85
Moldova	101	375	3.71
Armenia	132	425	3.22
Lithuania	141	420	2.98
Latvia	100	291	2.91
Slovakia	150	397	2.65
Ukraine	450	1069	2.38
Hungary	210	447	2.13
Austria	183	380	2.08
Czech Republic	200	407	2.04
Sweden	349	702	2.01
Serbia	250	492	1.97
Portugal	230	432	1.88
Estonia	101	181	1.79

Across the three cases, approximately 44% of total parliamentary staff were allocated to core parliamentary functions. Vacancy data and employee workload perceptions indicate capacity pressures in both core and key non-core areas. However, functional analysis findings reported 48 vacant positions in Armenia, 78 in Ukraine, and 110 in Serbia, affecting core functions as well as key support areas such as information technology (IT), public relations (PR), and human resources (HR). Approximately one-third of employees across the cases reported a very high workload, with perceived overload most pronounced in Ukraine, where 43% of staff engaged in self-assessment survey indicated excessive workload. In contrast, only a small proportion of employees (5–6%) reported low workload levels. In addition, between 20% and 25% of employees reported regularly performing tasks outside their formally assigned positions or organizational units.

Staffing distribution across functional areas further highlights imbalances between core and non-core functions. While some units supporting parliamentary session processes exhibited staffing levels exceeding current demand, personnel shortages were evident across most core functions. In non-core areas, staffing levels varied by function and country. IT capacity appeared constrained across all three cases, while HR staffing was generally adequate except in Serbia. PR staffing levels remained comparatively low in Armenia and Ukraine (Figure 3). Furthermore, given their overt European tendencies, it was unanticipated that only five employees in Serbian and Ukrainian Parliaments were assigned to these roles, compared to an average of 11 in the benchmarked European parliaments.
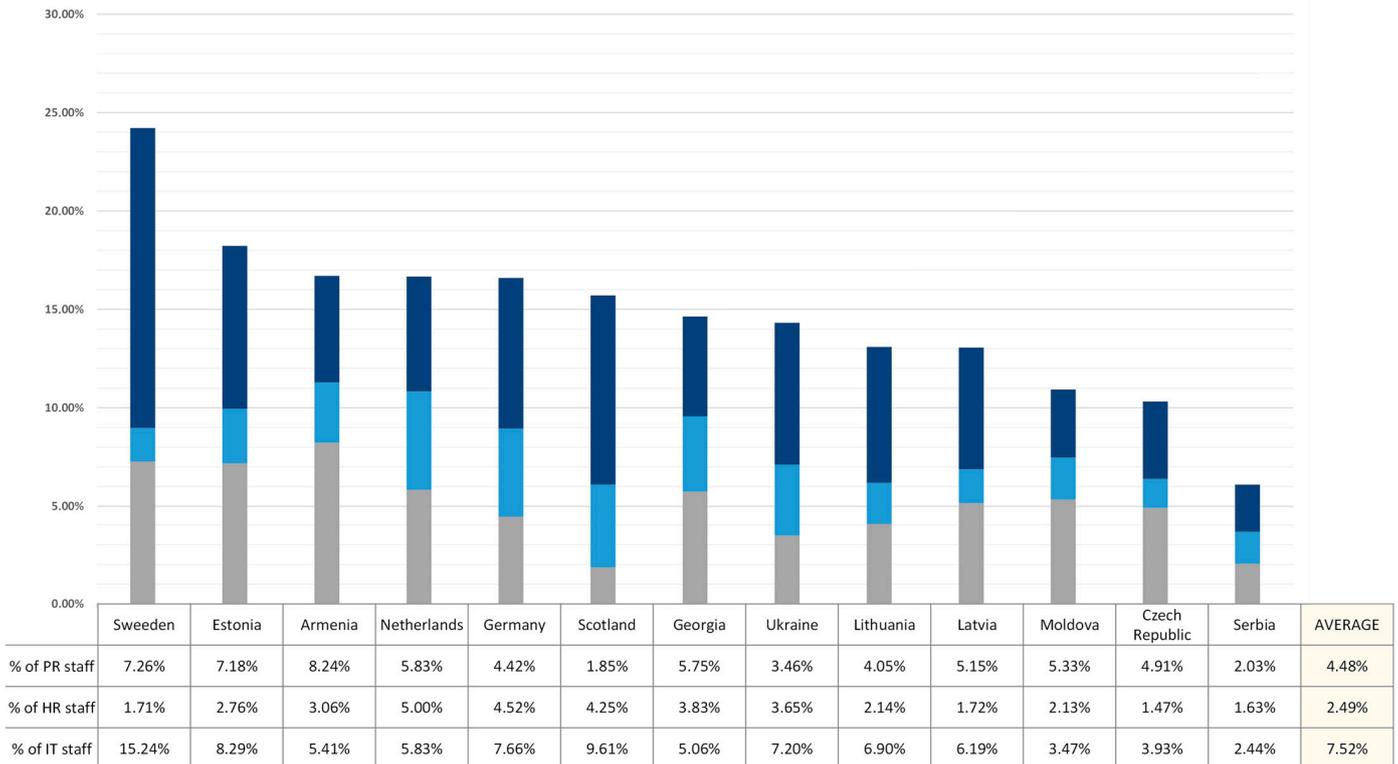

	Sweeden	Estonia	Armenia	Netherlands	Germany	Scotland	Georgia	Ukraine	Lithuania	Latvia	Moldova	Czech Republic	Serbia	AVERAGE
% of PR staff	7.26%	7.18%	8.24%	5.83%	4.42%	1.85%	5.75%	3.46%	4.05%	5.15%	5.33%	4.91%	2.03%	4.48%
% of HR staff	1.71%	2.76%	3.06%	5.00%	4.52%	4.25%	3.83%	3.65%	2.14%	1.72%	2.13%	1.47%	1.63%	2.49%
% of IT staff	15.24%	8.29%	5.41%	5.83%	7.66%	9.61%	5.06%	7.20%	6.90%	6.19%	3.47%	3.93%	2.44%	7.52%

Figure 3. HR, PR, and IT staffing data. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

An examination of political staff supporting Speakers, Deputy Speakers, parliamentary groups, and individual MPs indicated that staffing levels remain below commonly observed European benchmarks, particularly with regard to support provided to parliamentary groups and individual MPs, while staffing of Speakers' offices is comparatively adequate (Table 5). In the Armenian, Ukrainian, and Serbian parliaments, political staff are employed on fixed-term contracts but generally share the same employment status as other parliamentary staff, resulting in blurred distinctions between political and administrative roles.

Furthermore, insights gained through FA show limited institutional differentiation in the regulation and management of political staff positions. Support arrangements for MPs vary across cases and are unevenly distributed among parliamentary groups, with opposition MPs typically relying on more limited advisory and expert support capacities than governing majority representatives. Access to training and professional development opportunities for political staff also varies across institutional contexts, with potential implications for the balance and quality of parliamentary support functions.

Table 5. Political staff in European parliaments. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

Country	Number of MPs	Number of Committees	Number of Political Staff	Political Staff per 10 MPs	Political Staff per Committee
Czech Republic	200	17	17	1.28	1.00
Slovakia	150	19	22	2.20	1.16
Ukraine	450	23	85	2.83	3.70
Serbia	250	20	72	4.32	3.60
Estonia	101	17	32	4.75	1.88
Armenia	132	12	75	8.52	6.25
Lithuania	141	16	87	9.26	5.44
Moldova	101	11	128	19.01	11.64
Latvia	100	17	139	20.85	8.18
Georgia	149	16	223	22.45	13.94

4.5. Processes Efficiency: Core and Non-Core Functions

Processes efficiency across the parliamentary administrations of Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia was examined through the coherence, alignment, and performance of core and non-core functions. Functional analysis findings revealed that inefficiencies are primarily associated with fragmented functional allocation, overlapping responsibilities, and uneven resource utilization across organizational units.

4.5.1. Core Parliamentary Functions

Within core parliamentary functions, including legislative support, committee services, and analytical assistance, several efficiency-related challenges were identified. Over-regulation of selected procedural processes limits operational flexibility, while capacity constraints affect the ability of administrations to provide timely and comprehensive support. With the exception of parliamentary session support, where efficiency constraints are partly linked to the limited use of digital tools, staffing levels in core functions are generally lower than those observed in comparable European parliamentary administrations and the main cause of inefficiency.

Functional overlap and duplication are evident within analytical and legislative support functions (Figure 4). None of the parliamentary administrations examined systematically conduct comprehensive ex-ante assessments of draft legislation, nor do they consistently utilize regulatory impact assessments prepared by executive bodies. Legal support functions are unevenly distributed, with formal legislative drafting assistance often provided informally, contributing to repeated revisions during committee, plenary stages, and general parliamentary efficiency and effectiveness. The use of digital tools, especially ones enhanced by artificial intelligence (AI), to support parliamentary sessions, including speech-to-text technologies and e-parliament platforms, remains uneven across cases. In addition, the number of parliamentary researchers employed within the secretariats is comparatively low relative to commonly cited European reference points, limiting analytical capacity in legislative support functions.

When analyzing standing committees, results showed that they are primarily focused on legislative review, with oversight functions less systematically supported. The number of standing committees varied across cases, with Serbia and Ukraine (23 committees) maintaining higher numbers than the European average of 18–20, while Armenia is constitutionally limited to 12. Committee staffing levels also differ, with Ukraine meeting commonly observed benchmarks for committee membership size (5–10 members), whereas Armenia and Serbia operate with smaller average committee memberships (less than

5 members). High legislative workloads, combined with inflexible staffing arrangements, contribute to workload pressures within committee secretariats.

	Unit	No. Staff	Ex-ante impact assessment	Legal	Research	Post-legislative scrutiny	Citizens 'appeals	Record keeping	Support for legislative initiative	Info./document management	Automated system maintenance	Correspondences	Support to the Leadership	MP request registration	Legislation registration	Committee Support	Agenda and timetabling	Plenary organisation and support
				Legislative analysis														
Armenia	Secretariat	42						●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Standing Committees	132		●	●	●	●									●		
	Legal Support and Services Division	12		●		●			●									
	Expertise and Analytical Department	34		●	●	●												
	Budget Office	5		●	●	●												
	No. structural units undertaking function	**225**	**0**	**4**	**3**	**4**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**
Ukraine	Main Expert Scientific Department	49		●														
	Main Legal Department	43		●					●									
	Legislative Institute	60			●	●												
	Committee Secretariats	353		●	●	●	●									●		
	Main Documentation Provision Department	153					●	●		●	●	●	●					
	Control Department	10						●			●		●	●	●			
	Main Organisation Management Department	42		●					●				●			●	●	●
	Judicial Bodies Liaison Department	12		●														
	No. structural units undertaking function	**722**	**0**	**5**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**
Serbia	Legislation Sector	114		●	●	●	●		●							●		
	Administrative Affairs Department	46					●	●		●								
	Sessions preparation and processing department	19						●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	Parliamentary Library	9			●													
	Foreign Affairs and European Integration Department	27		●	●	●												
	No. structural units undertaking function	**215**	**0**	**2**	**3**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**2**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**1**	**2**	**1**	**1**

Figure 4. Overlaps and duplications matrix. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

4.5.2. Non-Core (Support) Functions

Functional analysis findings indicate that efficiency challenges are also evident across non-core support functions within the examined parliamentary administrations, including financial management, human resources, communication, information technology, international relations, and administrative logistics. Across all three cases, non-core functions displayed varying degrees of fragmentation, limited strategic integration, and uneven resource utilization.

Financial management functions are predominantly administrative in nature, with limited incorporation of strategic planning, medium-term forecasting, or performance-oriented budgeting practices. Over the past five years, Armenia and Ukraine underspent their parliamentary budgets by 3.73% and 7.12%, respectively, while Serbia fully utilized its allocated budget. Despite these differences, financial management practices across cases remain largely focused on procedural compliance rather than strategic financial coordination.

Human resource functions similarly remain oriented toward administrative tasks, with limited evidence of systematic workforce planning, structured performance man-

agement, or comprehensive staff development mechanisms. Communication and public relations functions are distributed across multiple organizational units, resulting in fragmented coordination with media actors and inconsistent approaches to citizen engagement. Furthermore, the findings indicate a limited use of modern digital tools, inconsistent application of social media, and uneven development of outreach activities, relative to practices outlined in IPU standards (Williamson et al., 2024).

Information technology systems are in place in all three parliamentary administrations. However, these systems remain insufficiently integrated, limiting their contribution to workflow efficiency, digital service delivery, cybersecurity, and effective data management. Findings also show that IT functions exhibit relatively low budget allocations (around 2% compared to a European average of 4.67%), alongside uneven staff training and reliance on external expertise.

International relations and protocol functions are dispersed across organizational units, contributing to coordination challenges in the management of parliamentary diplomacy, inter-parliamentary cooperation, and international engagements. Administrative and logistics functions, including maintenance, transportation, catering, and document management, are largely maintained in-house across all three cases (Table 6), with limited outsourcing, uneven vehicle fleet utilization, and partial digitalization of document management.

Table 6. Number of vehicles and outsourcing in European parliaments. Source: Walker et al. (2020, 2021), own processing and elaboration.

Country	Number of Cars	MPs per Car	Maintenance and Cleaning Services	Catering
Ukraine	153	2.94	Own services	Own services
Georgia	101	1.48	Own services	Outsourced
Latvia	75	1.33	Outsourced	Outsourced
Moldova	53	1.91	Own services	Own services
Germany	45	15.76	Outsourced	Outsourced
Armenia	41	3.22	Own services	Own services
Lithuania	38	3.71	Outsourced	Outsourced
Czech Republic	34	5.88	Outsourced	Own services
Sweden	7	49.86	Outsourced	Outsourced
Austria	7	26.14	Outsourced	Outsourced
Serbia	5	50	Own services	Own services
The Netherlands	1	150	Outsourced	Own services
The United Kingdom	0	0	Outsourced	Own services
Scotland	0	0	Outsourced	Outsourced

5. Discussion

This study contributes to the public administration literature by reconceptualizing functional analysis from a procedural reform instrument into a structured organizational diagnostic framework that enables the systematic assessment of institutional efficiency. Although FA is frequently employed in public sector reforms (Manning & Parison, 2004; Tunčikienė & Korsakienė, 2014; Jahija, 2017), the literature findings indicate that such applications often obscure deeper organizational dynamics. Similar critiques appear in earlier research on benchmarking and reform transfer, which shows that standardized tools rarely generate meaningful organizational improvement without a thorough understanding of institutional context (Holloway et al., 1999).

The analytical approach adopted in this study frames FA as a tool for identifying functional misalignments in complex public institutions, emphasizing governance coherence, structural design, staffing, and efficiency of core and non-core processes. Empirical

evidence from analyzed parliamentary secretariats shows that institutional efficiency cannot be explained by staffing levels or formal structures alone, but instead results from the interplay of governance arrangements, strategic capacity, structural coherence, operating processes, and staffing alignment.

These findings are consistent with emerging research in parliamentary studies emphasizing that administrative capacity and professional staff play a central role in supporting legislative scrutiny, policy analysis, and oversight functions within modern parliaments (Crosson et al., 2020; Brandsma & Otjes, 2024; Hofland & Otjes, 2025). Furthermore, the findings also align with NPM and systems-based perspectives that prioritize coordination, integration, and institutional context over narrow performance metrics (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Rosenberg Hansen & Ferlie, 2016).

From a theoretical standpoint, the study goes beyond the common use of FA as an evaluation of organizational design (Worren, 2016) or an application of abstract functionalist theory to public organizations (Lyden, 1975). Additionally, the results emphasize the significance of alignment between structure and strategy for organizational effectiveness, following traditional organizational theory (Chandler, 1969; Mintzberg, 1990). The paper also contributes to the literature of Rosenberg Hansen and Ferlie (2016) by demonstrating that traditional public organizations, such as parliamentary secretariats, do not necessarily have to be excluded from the application of NPM instruments.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study provides empirically grounded insights for parliamentary administrations and reform practitioners, setting the stage for a discussion of the findings through the lens of the three research propositions.

5.1. Governance and Strategic Management as the Driver of System Efficiency (P1)

The paper's findings indicate that governance and strategic management capacity play an important role in shaping system efficiency within parliamentary administrations, providing strong support for Proposition 1. Across all cases, functional performance was less constrained by staffing levels than by centralized decision-making, limited delegation, and weak strategic coordination. These patterns suggest that efficiency in complex public institutions is determined by how governance arrangements and strategic management are structured and enacted, rather than by the volume of human resources alone.

This pattern is consistent with the literature on NPM, which highlights how managerial reforms emphasizing control and performance measurement often fail to address deeper governance coherence and coordination challenges (Hood, 1990; Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020; Arnaboldi et al., 2015). While NPM-inspired reforms have improved transparency and accountability, the findings suggest that in parliamentary administrations, centralized and politically embedded leadership arrangements limit efficacy. Additionally, despite being widely recognized as a critical success factor in public institutions, the analysis revealed the absence of comprehensive strategic frameworks and practices (Mihić et al., 2012; Poister et al., 2013; Djordjevic & Mihic, 2022).

Based on the findings, parliamentary governance in Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia would benefit from a clearer separation between political leadership and professional management, supported by the introduction of collective and strategic leadership arrangements, such as a governing body with an executive board and audit committee. In addition, consistent with Drucker's view, the impact of formal strategies is largely conditioned by the underlying organizational culture (Favaro, 2014). Therefore, to address cultural and change-management constraints, the establishment of a short-term change office is recommended to support organizational transformation and facilitate the gradual integration of change functions into strategic planning structures.

5.2. Structural Design as Determinants of System Efficiency (P2)

Proposition 2, which links structural design to system efficiency through the balance and interaction of core and non-core functions, is also supported by the empirical findings. Examined parliamentary administrations exhibit hierarchical depth, fragmented functional allocation, and limited horizontal coordination. While such structures clarify formal responsibilities, they also inhibit flexibility and cross-unit collaboration, contributing to inefficiencies and functional overlap.

As already said, these findings resonate with classic organizational theory, particularly Chandler's (1969) and Mintzberg's (1990), as the cases reveal weak alignment between strategic priorities and organizational structures, resulting in configurations where formal divisions exist, but functional interdependencies are insufficiently managed. Similar dynamics have been identified in studies emphasizing that poorly coordinated structures amplify complexity rather than manage it (Lyden, 1975; Worren, 2016). The results also illustrate how fragmentation, often associated with NPM-inspired approaches, can generate coordination deficits when not counterbalanced by integrative mechanisms (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020).

In response to these structural shortcomings, the analysis establishes two ways for improvements. First, by including limited adjustments within the existing structure, or by the second, which implies a more comprehensive structural rationalization that strengthens the role of the Deputy Secretary General and newly established governing body, offering greater long-term benefits despite higher implementation demands. Any reorganization in this way should align structure with institutional and national contexts (Holloway et al., 1999; Xavier, 2013; Ngouo, 2017), with a transitional structure serving as a pragmatic interim step toward deeper reform with long-term benefits (Robinson, 2013).

5.3. Staffing as a Mediating Mechanism for System Efficiency (P3)

The findings related to staffing and process efficiency provide support for Proposition 3 by demonstrating that staffing mediate, rather than directly determine, processes and accordingly system efficiency within parliamentary administrations. While variations in staffing levels and workforce composition are evident across cases, system sluggishness is more closely associated with inefficient core and non-core processes than with absolute staff numbers. This suggests that staffing functions primarily as an intermediary mechanism through which process efficiency affects functional performance.

Despite stable staffing levels and high educational attainment, the examined parliamentary administrations face workload imbalances, vacancy pressures, and limited internal mobility, driven by misaligned staffing configurations within fragmented organizational structures than by staff shortages. This finding aligns with public sector human resource management literature, which emphasizes role clarity, skill alignment, and strategic workforce planning over numerical staffing increases (Tucker, 2022; Marjanović & Mihić, 2025) and is reinforced by comparative research showing that staff size reflects assigned roles rather than institutional performance (Hofland & Otjes, 2025). The analysis also identified political staff as a distinct category affecting system efficiency, corroborating the findings of Otjes and Brandsma (2026) that unequal access to such staff can shape parliamentary performance.

The mediating role of staffing becomes more pronounced when examined in relation to core and non-core functions. In core functions, insufficient analytical capacity, limited research activity and fragmented support services undermine process efficiency, particularly in legislative scrutiny, committee work, and oversight activities. Prior research similarly indicates that process efficiency in parliamentary administrations depends less on overall staff numbers and more on the availability, deployment, and coordination of specialized

capacities (Fitsilis & Koutsogiannis, 2017; Brandsma & Otjes, 2024). Fragmentation of these capacities has been shown to weaken legislative quality, especially in systems characterized by high legislative throughput and increasing regulatory complexity (Matei et al., 2019; Crosson et al., 2020).

With regard to non-core functions, areas such as human resources, finance, communication, and information technology tend to exhibit procedural stability but limited strategic integration, constraining their capacity to support core processes effectively. This pattern aligns with earlier studies showing that support functions in public organizations often remain administratively oriented and insufficiently embedded in core workflows, particularly in contexts requiring digital coordination, greater use of new technologies such as AI, public engagement, and effective data management (Loukis, 2011; Papaloi & Gouscos, 2011; Cahlikova & Mabillard, 2020). Similar dynamics can be observed in administrative and logistics functions, where the lack of outsourcing and partial digitalization reflect institutional arrangements associated with varying implications for cost efficiency and sustainability (Karakolias, 2024).

6. Conclusions

This study set out to reconceptualize functional analysis from a procedural reform instrument into an organizational diagnostic framework capable of explaining system efficiency in complex public institutions. Drawing on a comparative analysis of parliamentary secretariats in Armenia, Ukraine, and Serbia, the paper demonstrates how functional performance is shaped by the interaction of governance arrangements, structural design, staffing configurations, and the efficiency of core and non-core processes. By focusing on parliamentary administrations, the study contributes both empirical insights and conceptual refinement to the public administration literature.

The findings indicate that system efficiency in parliamentary administrations is driven by governance and strategic management capacity, rather than by staffing levels alone. Structural design influences efficiency by shaping functional coherence, coordination, and the interaction between organizational units, while staffing affects system performance indirectly by mediating the efficiency of core and non-core processes. Importantly, inefficiencies observed across cases emerge as systemic and cumulative rather than as isolated functional failures, underscoring the limitations of reform approaches that rely on piecemeal organizational adjustments.

From a theoretical perspective, the study advances FA by operationalizing functionalist and organizational design concepts through empirically observable dimensions. By analyzing system efficiency, the proposed framework clarifies the mechanisms through which governance, structure, processes, and staffing interact to produce organizational outcomes. In doing so, the paper extends existing organizational and NPM scholarship by positioning FA as an explanatory and diagnostic tool rather than a descriptive mapping exercise.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the framework offers practical relevance as a diagnostic lens for institutional self-assessment. Rather than prescribing standardized reform templates, it enables practitioners to identify functional misalignments, coordination gaps, and process-level inefficiencies within their specific organizational contexts. While the empirical focus is on parliamentary administrations, the analytical logic of the framework is transferable to other complex public sector organizations characterized by multi-functional mandates and politically embedded governance structures. However, the empirical findings presented in this study should be interpreted primarily within the institutional context of parliamentary administrations rather than as broadly generalizable conclusions for all public sector organizations.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The empirical analysis focused on three parliamentary administrations with relatively similar institutional contexts and accordingly employed a qualitative research design based on a small number of comparative cases. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted primarily in terms of analytical generalization rather than as broadly generalizable conclusions for all public sector organizations. Moreover, the analysis captures organizational configurations at a specific point in time, limiting insight into longer-term reform dynamics. Future research could apply the framework to a broader range of public institutions, explore the longitudinal effects of functional realignment, and further operationalize FA dimensions using mixed or quantitative methods.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

NPM	New public management
FA	Functional analysis
QCA	Qualitative comparative analysis
NA	National Assemblies
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
EU	European union
IMF	International monetary fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
IPU	International Parliamentary Union
MP	Members of Parliament
AI	Artificial intelligence
IT	Information technology
PR	Public relations
HR	Human resources

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