Secretariat.

The training program can be divided into three (3) major areas: information and orientation; skills building; and public policy issues.

A Needs Assessment tool should be designed to determine the actual interventions needed in formulating a training agenda. In a seminal paper done in 1989, a leading academician proposed that seminar-workshops can be categorized into three (3) phases:

> "The first would include sessions on committee organizations, committee procedure, the authorization process, the congressional budget process, and an overview of floor procedures. The second, an advanced course, would cover detailed session on raising measures for floor consideration, the amending process in the House and the Senate and the resolution process between the two (2) chambers. Legislative examples can be drawn from the Congressional Record which analyze the congressional budget process. The third, a graduate course, would be a four-day exercise in which participants assume the role of a Member of Congress and move legislation through the legislative mill. This is an intensive and strictly participatory program with legislative specialists and others serving as substantive, parliamentary, and legal advisers."

Pushing legislation to **create the Legislative Academy is critical** in order to prepare for the next Senate and nurture the Secretariat's knowledge and skills in the long term. Congress has been in existent for 16 years. The next 10 years should give focus on the development of the institution's human capital and what better way than to tap retired officials and congressional specialists to serve as the nucleus of the Legislative Academy.

Senate Online

The 12th Congress saw the House of Representatives going online. During the 10th Congress, the House of Representatives provided its Members with access to the information superhighway. A Needs Analysis was conducted to see how to facilitate quick implementation of building the House online. Today, one can scourge through a lot of information made available via www.house.gov.ph.

The push to go online started with a private effort to put the two houses together online. The site www.philcongress.com[9] that was established to advocate for "Electronic Democracy" - where basic information about members can be accessed and where members can be reached via email and the goings on of Congress are made available to the public. The irony of it was www.philcongress.com was adjudged and awarded the best government site by the 1st Webby Awards in 1999. The proponents likewise pushed for the concept of "Electronic Democracy" to then Speaker Manuel Villar and Senate President Franklin Drilon.

The Senate can very well position itself in the front pack of Electronic Democracy due to its limited membership. It is quite easy to build the websites of Members, integrate them in the Senate hub and promote transparency of its operations. Even pursuing a total electronic processes and procedures can be managed well due to its small membership relative to the House. In fact, the Senate can lead in this agenda and pursue a more modern and technologically enhanced operation than the House. But it would seem that the House is leading the pact in modernizing its operation. The Senate may learn from the House' experience.

But it is also a lot challenging to **build the competitive intelligence of the Senate through an information database sharing online (private site) among PSG, LBRMO and LRS.** When Members start believing the data churned in by the Secretariat than NEDA's, DOF's and DBM's, then legislation can be proactive and real policy making pursued.

Integrity and confidentiality of documents are issues that need to be resolved in going online. These issues though would have to play second role to the public's constitutional "right to information". **In the language of Generation Y, transparency is being online.**

Instituting Review Powers

In this era of rising deficits, policy making will be shaped by budgetary politics. A proposed measure has impact on revenue and regulations. **The Secretariat must be empowered through an amendment of the Rules to exercise review powers over bills reported out of committees that could potentially lead to more unfunded mandates or more regulations.**

The structures and procedures of all technical offices will have to be reviewed so as to assist the Senate, both the Members and the committees, in exercising its oversight power. **A red flag system has to be instituted** when, among others:

1) The Executive is not implementing a congressional mandate
2) Laws passed are not funded
3) IRRs are departing from the intent of the law
4) There are shortfalls in revenues
5) Macroeconomic assumptions of the budget go haywire
6) Budgets of offices are not utilized properly
7) Reportorial requirements are not met by the Executive

Secretariat as Experts: Staff and Media Guide

The Secretariat has a vital role in every new Congress - brief new Members, train their staff and develop media's appreciation of the legislative process.

With every new Congress, the Secretariat has a unique chance to show its inherent strength: knowledge of the institution, the processes and procedures and legislative history. It should therefore rise to the challenge and be truly "*primus interpares*" with Senators when it comes to legislation.

Building the Committee System

The Committee System is the heart of policy making. If the committees do not function properly, markups become very messy and laws are ill-conceived and badly written. **There is therefore a need for a full complement for committees, such as the system that was in place in the 8th Congress where personal staff of Members acted as Legislative Committee Secretary and worked hand-in-hand with the respective Committee Secretary.**

A Committee should be composed of the Committee Secretary, 2 researchers and a secretary as a minimum complement. The committee procedures have to be standardized so that there is only one functional flow. A buddy system or rotation system could be explored so individuals have a chance to develop equally through exposure to other issues and hands-on experience. This will promote knowledge sharing, build expertise leading to generalist approach in orientation, and give a different perspective on policy assessment.

Perception Game

The poor public perception of Congress is not a unique phenomenon only observed in the Philippines. This is true in all capitals since Congress as an institution is hard to understand from a layman's perspective. Its processes are too complex. It is too rudimentary because of rules, too tied to tradition and the likes. And yet, Congress has a direct impact with the citizenry because the products of the institution affect everyone.

At a more general level, "the public often appears unaware that the central task of the legislative process is to fashion a consensus from among disparate interests. The public appears to view compromise pejoratively instead of as a natural and constructive part of the legislative process necessary to achieve consensus." The challenge is to make transparent its operations, explain and educate the public on what Congress is all about. Tours and telling the historical story of Congress are ways by which it can be made closer to the public. But first, a decision has to be made to finally build a common site.

Public access has always been an issue. When you ente Congress, a complex and labyrinth security check greets you. Some areas are off-limits. Committee schedules, including bicamera meetings and directory of offices are not posted in strategic places and if they are, the same are not updated.

Others refer to public attitudes on Congress as the reasons why the institution is not well appreciated. **It is recommended that a survey be commissioned in order to really feel the pulse of the public and come up with a reform package to address issues that will be raised from the survey**.

Meanwhile, the Senate has to decide to conscientiously engage the public. It has to open its halls more, its processes and procedures have to be transparent and explained, and a People's Day can be instituted so that there is engagement. This can all be carefully positioned through a Communication Plan and the appointment of a Spokesperson that is institution-based and not personality-attached, such as that of the Supreme Court model.

Live coverage of Senate hearings and floor deliberations may also be studied for its unique role of bringing the Senate closer to home.

Hiring and Promotion Process

In order to attract the "best and the brightest" and leave in the institution the best minds, any organization would need a human resource planning, recruitment, selection and placement program. Moreso for a highly political organization such as the Senate. The spoils system is a reality but such a common practice can be tempered in favor of the institution that remains far longer than any appointing power.

If the beneficiary of a spoils system passes the hiring procedure of a political organization, the more the organization grows, matures and moves on. On the other hand, getting hired and promoted solely on the basis of the spoils system can retard any organization and ultimately cause its irrelevance.

If the Secretariat wants to be treated as "*primus interpares*", it has to bite the bullet and apply without fear or favor an honest to goodness hiring and promotion system, hence, strengthen the formal institution.

Permanent Site

The Senate started out in the Old Executive Building in 1987 where its library was occupying the hallway of a staircase and yet the librarians were able to do their job inspite of such space constraints and very limited collections. Then the library was assigned to an area near a boiler room while its EDP-MIS was occupying another hallway of a staircase. That is how the Senate opened and served the 1987 Senate. The Senators did not complained. They buckled down to work and the Secretariat rose to the challenge and gave a sterling service.

Then the Senate was evicted by the National Museum in the 90s. Today, it is occupying rented space that cannot accommodate future expansion.

Part of the problem inherent in the Philippine Congress is the inability of its leaders to agree in having a permanent site. Some say it is not crucial to the institution. We say, it is quite crucial for it cannot, with definitiveness, plan its evolution until both Houses are in one location. Thus, one gets to compare the seeming disparity in the services, roles, functions and responsibilities of similar positions. The public is also amazed at how the House of Representatives was able to go online with 219 Members while the Senate has only 22 Members.

A Permanent Site could lead to a harmonization of organizational strengths and the minimization of organizational morass.

Only then can Congress build its character.