

From Manuscript to JavaScript:

MPP and Staff Perceptions of Queen's Park 2.0, a Technologically Enhanced Legislature

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### Abstract

“Please, let us not become so archaic that we lose relevance to the people who put us here” (Buckingham et al., 2009). Ron Schuler, a Member of Manitoba’s Legislative Assembly, shared this concern while discussing the role of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) in the 21st century legislature. While there is literature that examines the role of ICTs within American and European political institutions (Hanssen, 2007; Worthley, 1977) little is known about the use of devices inside Canada’s provincial legislatures. According to O'Brien (2002), “legislatures are now looking to technology for more sophisticated means of managing and disseminating their information” (p. 20). However, Buckingham et al. (2009) identifies a number of obstacles that legislative tradition is putting in the way of Members’ utilization of technology. As a result, provincial legislatures across Canada experience varied success in harnessing technologies, which would enhance the legislative processes (Buckingham et al., 2009). One success story has played out inside Ottawa’s House of Commons where the Prism database is “eliminating duplicate data entry and increasing consistency and integrity of information” (O'Brien, 2002, p. 20). However, politicians are now looking toward Web 2.0, interactive websites that allow them to communicate independently with the outside world and how Queen’s Park’s information can meet the needs of Members in this age of the Internet. Using a mixed-methods approach combining surveys and interviews with Members of Ontario’s Provincial Parliament and legislative staff, this paper explores the impact of legislative traditions on the modernization of Queen’s Park with an aim to bridge the gap between the needs of the politicians that leverage technology and those who regulate its use.

## INTRODUCTION

*“Please, let us not become so archaic that we lose relevance to the people who put us here.” – Ron Schuler, Member of Manitoba’s Legislative Assembly (Buckingham et al., 2009)*

Inside of Ontario’s Legislative Assembly, a decades old early morning tradition still continues. In the quiet first hours of the day before the sounds of the call bells or footsteps of the procession up the main staircase, a constant and quiet “thud” can be heard echoing throughout the East and West wings of Queen’s Park. It is the sound of the delivery of the Orders and Notices paper being distributed to the offices of each Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP). The delivery of the Orders and Notices Paper is not only a tradition but a practice firmly entrenched in rule. Section 136.(a) of the Standing Orders of the Ontario Legislative Assembly asserts that the “Orders and Notices Paper...[be] printed and distributed on any one Sessional day” (Ontario, 2017).

A Legislative Assistant arrives at the office with a coffee in one hand and two mobile devices in the other. As they reach down to pick up the Orders and Notices, their iPhone screen lights up with a text from their boss. The iPhone is shaken by a rumbling Blackberry directly beneath. Fifty constituents have re-Tweeted their Member’s latest policy initiative while forty others shared the news on the social media network, Facebook. Several email notifications pour in from media outlets requesting interviews.

Legislators and their staff now operate in a unique landscape where Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and instantaneous communication exist alongside “age-old parliamentary conventions and rules” of political institutions (McNair, 2014, p. 17). As technology has invaded Canada’s political institutions, its importance to the parliamentarians who work within them has increased. A report entitled *Building the Future* released in 1999 by Canada’s House of Commons (1999) emphasized how “IT has become a utility, as important to the functioning of the House as heating, plumbing and electrical systems – enabling Parliamentarians to carry out their work” (p. 38). Despite strict tradition, those who oversee the procedures within Queen’s Park also appear to be embracing technological change. After first assuming office in 2016, Todd Decker, Clerk of the Ontario Legislative Assembly, highlighted that the legislature need prepare to “see more change as the Senior Management Team explores ways to implement new ideas, augment our use of technology, increase the flow of communication within the organization, develop the Assembly’s visual identity and brand, and plan strategically for the future” (Ontario Legislative Assembly Intranet, 2017).

Despite a similar pattern of technological embrace across the country, politicians from coast to coast have condemned their respective assemblies for the sluggish rate at which they modernize (Buckingham et al., 2009). In Ontario, recent discussions focusing on the introduction of electronic petitions have prompted similar criticisms from some of Queen’s Park’s MPPs. In a 2016 interview, Progressive Conservative MPP, Randy Hillier, condemned a legislative report identifying a need for further research required in advance of the implementation of electronic petitions. In response to the report, MPP Hillier stated, “you wouldn’t think something as simple as using technology to allow people to express their opinions and views to government would be so painstakingly onerous” (The Canadian Press, 2016). One year later, the Committee on Legislative Assembly voted to create a sub-committee for even further study. In response to this, New Democratic Party MPP Michael Mantha stated, “we’ve got all the costs, all of the

information is available to us. I'm not sure why we're spinning our wheels in the mud" (Jones, 2017).

Satisfying the diverse technological needs and desires of Ontario's MPPs and staff while observing the unique customs that accompany legislative upgrades is a unique 21<sup>st</sup> century challenge that is not well documented in extant literature. This study will analyze the current technological needs of the Members and staff within Ontario's Legislative Assembly and the perceptions they have regarding technological modernization. This paper will argue that more integration and utilization of Internet-based external applications and programs need to be integrated into the assembly to better meet the needs of Ontario MPPs and their political staff in order to maintain citizen engagement. By examining the challenges of legislative modernization and consulting legislative procedural and technological stakeholders involved in the modernization process, this study will aim to provide recommendations that allow for both technological progression in the Ontario Legislative Assembly while navigating the parliamentary procedures and traditions that exist within its walls.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Introduction*

The previous section alluded to the complexities of modernizing historical political institutions such as Queen's Park. This literature review will discuss research that examines the historical development of technology in political institutions and the narrative of slow change that has followed. As technology has expanded, greater communication options have been made available to politicians. This has paved the way for greater personalization of communication techniques and the commingling of legislative and third party technologies within political offices. This individualization of communication needs and styles of politicians has been brought about by the availability of technologies that exist outside of political institutions. An analysis of the literature will provide a rationale for the overarching research question of this study: *How can the Ontario Legislative Assembly modernize to meet the present technological needs of its Members and staff?*

### *Development of Legislators' Technology Use*

With every wave of innovation that has washed over political institutions, literature examining its impacts on legislative life has followed. In the 1970s, the utilization of computers was the focus of political scientists such as Frantzich (1979) and Worthley (1977) who reviewed how the inundation of information and a growth of data led to a greater need for computers. Both authors point to the utilization of computers largely for administrative needs such as bill tracking and data retrieval while touting technology for its organizational capabilities. Excluding internal reports commissioned within the Ontario Legislative Assembly (OLA) (Fooks, 1985; Legislative Assembly of Ontario, 2006b; Yeager, 1996) there are few academic works that focus on the development and use of technology of the Members and staff within the Queen's Park precinct and Members' constituency offices in the early years. One exception is Bentley's (1986) brief synopsis that describes how the inundation of information resulted in the "need to introduce automatic office technology and information systems" in Ontario and in legislatures across Canada in the mid 1980s (p. 113). These works indicate that the OLA followed a path of technological development parallel to that of the U.S., albeit a decade later.

The advent of the Internet led to a flood of research starting in the mid 1990s that offered analysis of the impacts of Internet on political bodies worldwide. Since then, a body of literature

has explored the impacts of ICTs on the rejuvenation of democracy (Bellamy & Raab, 1999; Coleman, Taylor & van de Donk, 1999; Dai & Norton, 2007; Mulder, 1999; Smith & Gray 1999). Paralleling this discussion was a sub-topic focusing on how politicians themselves use ICTs. In an examination of Westminster MPs' technology use, Campbell et al. (1999) discussed how technology was used by MPs for "information management". Campbell et al. (1999) points to the development of the Internet and how this led to the creation of an internal "parliamentary intranet", similar to that of the Ontario Legislative Assembly (p. 395). Through the Intranet, publication and dissemination of agendas, bills, Hansard, committee reports and the like led to a more paperless Westminster (p. 395). According to Kernaghan (2007), the impact of the Internet was similarly felt at Queen's Park:

The society-wide explosion of the Internet use at this time was reflected in the subsequent creation of an external Internet site for the Legislative Assembly that contained House publications, Hansard, committee publications, and lists of members and services. An intranet for internal communications was also created for such items as a draft Hansard, news, and research papers. (p. 231)

While Kernaghan's (2007) work did not discuss the frequency at which the internal assembly resources were used, the work of Pole (2000) and Campbell et al. (1999) provides evidence to suggest that both internal and external resources were viewed as equally valuable by politicians and staff in the early 2000s. Pole's (2000) findings indicate that the use of internal assembly resources were "used frequently" and "embraced enthusiastically" and used mainly to "perform research" and "track legislation" (p. 311). Campbell et al. (1999) suggests that the parliamentary intranet was also viewed as a valuable tool as it facilitated the delivery of Hansard, committee information, agendas and bills straight to Members' desktops and made "desired information more easily located" so that they could be more effective parliamentarians (p. 395).

The advent of the Internet and this quickened access to information had other consequences for Members' ICT use. As early as the late 1990s, Campbell et al. (1999) pointed out how readily accessible information led to an increase in Members' "response-times and speeds of information delivery...throughout society" and MPs were "under greater pressure to act quickly in all their dealings" (p. 27). Because of this, communication between politicians and their staff, colleagues, the media, constituents, etc. became faster and a greater priority for politicians (Campbell et al., 1999). Pole (2000) also points to the increased importance of communications technology through an analysis of member and staff use of internal legislative and external third party media. The work of Kernaghan (2007) illustrates the growing importance of technology and external communications of Canada's MPs and Ontario's MPPs through an assessment of Member websites in the mid 2000s. Although biographical and contact information were the most common features among Members' websites, Kernaghan (2007) noted a significant upsurge in "press releases and a substantial increase in the inclusion of links" and "communication with constituents" (p. 235). This is indicative of a shift in communication habits within political offices, a trend that has not been explored in Queen's Park since Kernaghan's (2007) work. Kernaghan (2007) also noted that most of this communication occurred through a "one way flow" via biographical and contact information along with press releases and that there was an absence of "advanced IT features" such as videos, surveys or online chat forums (p. 247).

### *Increased Individualization of Communication*

In his study of Queen's Park technology, Kernaghan (2007) predicted that in the years beyond 2007, "newer legislators will bring greater computer skills to Parliament and will be inclined to make more effective use of IT" for consultation with constituents among other duties (p. 239); a body of work that has explored ICT within parliaments since 2007 would agree (Griffith & Leston-Bandeira, 2012; Hanssen, 2007; Lindh & Miles, 2007; Margaretten & Gaber, 2014). According to Lindh and Miles (2007), the increased use of social media, political blogs and the like have led to "a greater individualization whereby parliamentarians have the potential to develop more direct and intense forms of political dialogue with citizens" (p. 434). In their examination of Twitter feeds of Scottish Parliamentarians, Margaretten and Gaber (2014) explain how the individualization of communication has become a priority for politicians hoping to "re-establish trust" with citizens through "authentic talk" via Twitter (p. 346). Using social media in this way allows politicians to curtail traditional media forms where they are portrayed in only short sound bites. They add "people don't have a good view of MPs as a whole" and politicians are not viewed as "normal people" (p. 346). Using an unfiltered social medium allows politicians to "humanise" themselves and "allow their personalities to come through" (p. 346).

A thorough examination of the use of technology of Queen's Park's parliamentarians has not been conducted since Kernaghan's (2007) work. As such, this research study will explore how ICT use of Queen's Park's MPPs has changed since 2007. Through consulting both MPPs and staff, this study looks at how parliamentarians view internal and external ICTs with the ultimate aim of providing recommendations about how ICT resources can be improved within the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

### *The Challenges of Legislative Modernization*

Accompanying the research that has explored parliamentarians' use of ICTs is the criticism of parliamentary institutions for their slow change. Before making recommendations for legislative modernization, it is crucial to understand the unique challenges faced by political institutions not experienced by other sectors. The first-hand account of former MP Richard Allan (2006) provides some of the only work identifying the complex elements that hinder modernization in legislative bodies. According to Allan (2006), the non-partisan nature of legislative bodies is an obstacle of technological modernization. Politicians exist within a "highly partisan environment", but legislatures cannot provide a medium for broadcasting partisan messages (p. 362). Because the legislature can only provide "neutral" information (e.g. biographical information of Members, bills, house documents, etc.) politicians are driven to use third party communication tools to broadcast their partisan messages. Griffith and Leston-Bandeira (2012) echo these same sentiments and add that in an age where parliamentarians are utilizing social media, it can be difficult for political institutions to keep up:

Parliaments have the dual responsibility of upholding the values of representative democracy and at the same time providing a forum for political conflict resolution and decision-making. Parliaments have to keep an impartial and apolitical posture whilst conveying political content. What is more, parliaments have complex and slow processes, making them uneasy bedfellows with fast changing technology. Individual representatives and party groups often have greater flexibility in adopting new media, and indeed many have come to the point of developing new forms of constituency relationships specific to online communication. (p. 498)

While exploring the ICT uses of Queen's Park parliamentarians and staff, this study will explore whether these same contextual constraints hinder the modernization of the Ontario Legislative Assembly.

## METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### *Introduction*

The literature review discussed the obstacles that face political institutions in the process of technological modernization and the uses of ICTs of parliamentarians. One of these obstacles is the differentiation of communication styles and needs of political representatives. Due to the wide array of experiences of Queen's Park politicians and their staff and the complexities associated with legislative modernization, a convergent mixed methodological case study approach was utilized to guide the data collection and interpretation process in an effort to adequately capture the vast technological experiences and opinions of Queen's Park's MPPs and their teams. The following section will discuss the social constructivist theoretical lens that guides this study while outlining the mixed methods data collection and analysis procedures used. A rationale for the use of these research devices will be also discussed in addition to the strengths and limitations inherent within them.

### *Research Questions*

The question that will guide this study is as follows: *How can the Ontario Legislative Assembly modernize to meet the present technological needs of its Members and staff?* Asking this question will help to explore sub-questions focusing on both internal and external legislative technologies and the perceptions of MPPs and staff surrounding the overall modernization of the Ontario Legislative Assembly:

- How are Ontario's MPPs and staff currently utilizing ICTs in their jobs?
- How valuable do Queen's Park's MPPs and staff consider internal assembly programs versus third-party applications to be in their jobs?

### *Theoretical Lens and Research Approach*

Ontarians are represented by 107 Members with political staff who hail from vastly different areas of the province and who have divergent ideological views and deeply held beliefs. Despite the fact that all MPPs and staff at Queen's Park work within a similar political realm, each individual will have a different way of perceiving reality due to their distinct party affiliations, place of residence as well as life and work experiences. Consequently, the way that they operate in their political lives and the channels through which they connect with their constituents will differ. The research literature illustrated how these unique backgrounds of MPPs and their staff impact not only *what* technologies they use, but *how* they use them in their political lives. In his analysis of technological modernization at Queen's Park, Bentley (1986) explains how there is a "significant amount of autonomy in each of the Members offices...and the success of [technology] implementation depends entirely on the acceptance of each Member" (p. 115). To adequately understand the technological experiences of each Member, a "social constructivist" lens will inform the research approach and procedures of this study (Schwandt, 2000, p. 197). Creswell (2013) and Schwandt (2007), describe social constructionism as the lens used to best view the complexities inherent in reality. This is due to the fact that social constructivists "study the multiple realities constructed by people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (Patton, 2002, p. 96). As Merriam and

Tisdell (2015) emphasize, “there is not one reality, but many realities” (p. 122). In accordance with the social constructivist theoretical framework, this research will view all individual experiences of MPPs and their staff as separate and equally valid (Schwandt, 2007). Unlike a positivist approach used in much of the literature, this study embraced the complexities of MPP offices rather than simplifying them (Creswell, 2013; Schwandt, 2007).

This study was conducted at a unique point along both political and technological timelines and as such, the results from this research cannot be generalized to Queen's Park as a whole or to jurisdictions existing outside of it. With an election on the horizon, the technological needs and wants of this year's cohort could differ greatly from the group that will take over in June of 2018. This is also a unique moment on the technological timeline at Queen's Park; social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are no longer viewed as merely superfluous tools, but as valuable channels for political communication. The fast rate of technological change in conjunction with the imminent political changes at Queen's Park dictates that this research be bound by what Stake (2000) calls a “case study” format (p. 438). A case study is a thorough analysis of “a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). More specifically, the unique political and technological characteristics of this study dictates that it will operate as an “intrinsic case study” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). As such, the purpose of this study is not to “understand some abstract concept or generic phenomenon” but instead will attempt to achieve a “better understanding of this particular case” (p. 437). To understand the particularities of technology use at Queen's Park, 41 political staff along with six MPPs were surveyed while two MPPs and two political staff from each of the three parties were interviewed.

To adequately capture these “different perspectives” or “realities” regarding the technological experiences and sentiments of Ontario MPPs and staff, using only quantitative data would be insufficient (Patton, 2002, p. 98). To Patton (2002), gathering this information involves conducting “open-ended interviews and observations” in order to properly scrutinize the “multiple realities” in order to determine what is “right” or “true” (p. 98). Patton (2002) states that “studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors” and that using multiple sources of data allows for “cross-data validity checks” (p. 248). Simply gathering statistics on *what* technologies are used within the offices of the Ontario Legislative Assembly would provide only a one-dimensional and insufficient glimpse of technology for those who oversee technological innovation and traditions of Queen's Park. Patton (2002) provides an apt technological analogy to justify the use of the mixed methods approach:

Just as machines that were originally created for separate functions such as printing, faxing, scanning, and copying have now been combined into a single integrated technological unit, so too methods that were originally created as distinct, stand-alone approaches can now be combined into more sophisticated and multifunctional designs. (p. 252)

The evolution of research methodologies described by both Patton (2000) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015) is analogous to that of the evolution of technology – with every year that they exist, they become more entangled. The result is more pathways to completing the same task. With the entanglement of what Richard Allan (2006) identifies as “office automation,” “electronic campaigning” and “networking,” technologies within political institutions, MPPs and staff now have multiple technologies to use, combine and manipulate to conduct their business (p. 360). In order to garner a holistic view the unique ICT uses, experiences and viewpoints of each Member and political staffer at Queen's Park, a “mixed methods” approach combining “qualitative and quantitative methods” was used (Creswell, 2009, p. 203).



Creswell (2015) describes the mixed methods approach as “combining statistical trends (qualitative data) with stories and personal experiences (qualitative data)” and praises this approach for its ability to “provide a better understanding of the research problem than either form of data alone” (p. 27). To gain a sufficient understanding of the complexity inherent in the communication styles and technology use of each political office within the Ontario Legislative Assembly, both qualitative and quantitative methods will be examined and given equal weight. By merging the two forms of data, this case study will glean “interpretations based on the combined strengths of both sets of data” and will provide a comprehensive understanding of the current technological realm within Queen's Park (p. 33). This will provide non-partisan employees with valuable insights on how to usher the legislature further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century while maintaining the rituals that define the Westminster style of government.

### *Data Collection*

The purpose of this research is to compare and contrast the ways in which political players in Queen's Park use technology in their daily lives. To do so effectively, this mixed methods study employed what Creswell (2009) refers to as the “concurrent triangulation strategy” (p. 215) and what Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) describe as “parallel mixed analysis” (p. 128). In accordance with this method, qualitative and quantitative data for this study were collected simultaneously. The justification for using this method is twofold; according to Creswell (2009), the concurrent method allows for the collection of “well-validated and substantiated findings” within a “shortened data collection time period” (p. 213-214). Given the ten-month period within which this study was conducted, the concurrent methodological design was ideal. Data was collected using what Creswell calls “multilevel sampling” (p. 218) where “random sampling” (p. 217) was used in the collection of quantitative data and “purposive sampling” (p. 217) occurred in the gathering of qualitative data. Miles (2014) highlights the fact that quantitative studies employ mainly “random” sampling while qualitative studies utilize “strategic” sampling (p. 31). By using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this study attempts to offset the shortcomings of each.

The quantitative data was accrued through a Google Forms electronic survey (see Appendix C) that was distributed to the publicly available email addresses of all 107 of Members within Ontario's Provincial Parliament. Emails were sent to each MPP's Queen's Park and constituency offices. Sending the survey to these public emails was the most effective way to reach both Members and their staff concurrently as staff are typically the first to intercept messages sent through publicly available channels of communication (e.g. registered mail, phone, email and the like). Sending out the survey to all Member addresses allowed “each individual an equal probability of being selected” and offered all the ability to participate (Creswell, 2009, p. 217). This “random sampling” is crucial as it allows for data to be “generalized to the larger population” of Queen's Park (p. 217). The survey was comprised of 25 questions and included what Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) refer to as “open-ended and closed ended response questions” in the form of Likert-type and multiple choice formats, asking Members and staff about the frequency (*Frequently to Never*) at which they used the internal legislative technological resources and third-party applications existing outside of the assembly (p. 128). The “content validity” of these questions was achieved through discussions with a member of the OLA's Technology Services Division who was interviewed before the construction of the survey and asked to examine the questions prior to their mass distribution (Fink, 2013, p. 67). This validity of these questions was further informed by an interview with a

procedural services expert. Consulting a procedural services specialist allowed for the formation of questions, which would respect the traditions and history of Queen's Park while shedding light on potential routes toward modernization. This follows Fink's (2013) suggestion to "ask experts whether the [survey] items are representative of the...traits you want to survey" to ensure question legitimacy (p. 67).

The closed-ended questions of the survey were complemented by qualitative data collected through 15-30 minute "semistructured" in-depth interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 252) with both MPPs and staff. Uniformity of the interviews was achieved through the development of the "semistructured interview" protocol (see Appendix B) where a conversational style and open-ended questions were used (p. 254). Allowing MPPs to discuss their technology use in this open-ended fashion allowed for "new ideas" about political communication to arise (p. 255). Interviewees were selected with what Creswell (2015) defines as "purposeful selection of sample participants" (p. 195). Two MPPs and two staff representing constituencies across Ontario were chosen from each of Ontario's three party caucuses to offer their "diverse perspectives" about their communication habits and technology use (Creswell, 2015, p. 195). More specifically, a purposive sample method known as "maximal" was utilized, which aims to consult individuals with a multitude of perspectives (p. 195). The diverse locales that each Member represents in conjunction with their diverse ministry and critic roles indicate that they will have different technological needs. This study aimed to pinpoint as many of these needs as possible so as to assist those in the technology and procedural roles of the legislature perform the task of modernizing within the confines of assembly traditions and constraints.

### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis process of the information obtained during this study was analyzed through what Tashakkori and Teddlie (1998) describe as "parallel mixed analysis" (p. 128), also referred to as "convergence triangulation design" (Creswell et al. 2003, p. 229). The purpose of using this method is to accrue two data sets on an identical subject. In this study, data from a quantitative survey on technology use was merged with anecdotal data gathered through qualitative interviews (Gelo, Braakmann & Benetka, 2008). According to Gelo, Braakmann and Benetka, 2008, "one type of data is transformed into the other type of data" through "data transformation" to allow both sets to be merged together (p. 281). For the purposes of this study, the quantitative survey data was converted into qualitative anecdotal evidence to either counter or further substantiate in-depth interview data (Gelo, Braakmann & Benetka, 2008). This was done within the Google Forms online application where numerical information can be manipulated and presented visually in order to create narrative data corresponding to the qualitative material gathered during the interview process. In essence the numerical data was "transformed into narrative and included with qualitative data in thematic pattern analysis" (Carcelli & Greene, 1993, p. 197).

### *Limitations*

While the limitations of each of the qualitative and quantitative research in mixed methods research compensate for one another, certain limitations remain. The first considers the validity of both qualitative and quantitative data sets within this study. Despite the fact that both types of data are considered equal in mixed methods, the qualitative form of data took precedent in order to share the results as a narrative. A second limitation is the scope of this study. Due to the limited timeframe of this study, 41 political staff and five MPPs were surveyed while two

MPPs and two political staff from each of the three parties were interviewed. It is undeniable that technological development affects everyone in Ontario's Legislative Assembly and input from other participants would have been valuable in enhancing the generalizability of these findings. However, as discussed previously, the results of this "intrinsic case study" are meant to shed light on this particular time period at Queen's Park to provide suggestions for only those who oversee Queen's Park's technological improvements rather than generalize about the technological habits and communication patterns of the broader political community (Stake, 2000, p. 437).

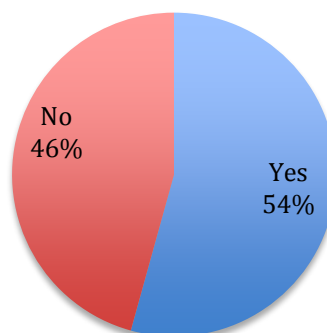
## FINDINGS

### *Perceptions of Modernization within Queen's Park*

When asked about perceptions about the speed of technological modernization within Queen's Park, the survey response of 5 MPPs and 41 staff was polarized (see Figure 1). While 54 per cent of respondents were satisfied, the survey indicated that there is room for improvement. A number of interviewees who were asked their opinions about the speed of modernization at the OLA lauded the legislative assembly for allowing Members and staff to move beyond the Blackberry to Android and Apple devices. One MPP shared how being stuck on one brand of Blackberry "held [Members] back from the world of the App", but added that because of this change, the speed of modernization was "moving along fine now". One political staffer who came to Queen's Park from the private sector explained how the use of Blackberries was "taking a step back". They added that while they liked the idea of supporting a Canadian company, Blackberries were "not up to date" and as a result this staffer used their personal iPhone "in concert with their Blackberries". Another Member explained the importance of the change noting how "MPPs wanted something more advanced, different, more flexible" and gave credit to the legislative staff for how quickly they responded to the request. Similarly, another MPP appreciated the change from Blackberry to Android saying that it "took way too long" but added that the new devices will provide them with a quality camera for enhanced social media content.

These responses demonstrate that since the work of Kernaghan (2007), significant changes have been made to the communication habits of Ontario MPPs and staff. As Kernaghan predicted, "Ontario MPPs are gradually becoming more active and more skillful IT users" (p. 238). The increased use of individual devices demonstrates an increased individualization of communication and decentralized forms of communication as discussed by Lindh and Miles (2007) and Margaretten and Gaber (2014).

Figure 1  
*Do you think technology within the Ontario Legislative Assembly is modernizing fast enough to meet your technology needs?*



### *The Utilization of Internal OLA Technological Resources*

Within the Ontario Legislative Assembly, there are a number of internal technological resources available to both Members and legislative staff. The Internal Assembly Intranet contains a wide variety of information including the daily events happening within the legislature as well as bill information, news clippings and links to library resources and research assistance. Technology Services personnel recently developed a Members' Portal as an additional resource for Ontario's parliamentarians to provide easy access to committee information, event details, and Member details via an interactive chamber seating plan. Figure 2 demonstrates the frequency at which the 46 survey respondents utilize the internal assembly intranet. The results indicate that just over 60 per cent of respondents used the Intranet frequently while 37 per cent reported infrequent use.

These results were also reflected in discussions with those in Queen's Park's political offices. Many MPPs and their staff viewed the OLA internal intranet as an important resource within their office. One political staffer stated, "every time I go to write a speech, I go to look up a bill and what was said about it" and added that it was navigable and comprehensive. Another political staff member shared that they use the Intranet daily to access Instant Hansard, visitor and check-in forms, the legislative phonebook, dining room bookings, committee information and library resources for research. This reflects the results in figure 3 which identify bill information, house documents and research tools as the most used components of the OLA Intranet. Like Pole (2000) and Campbell et al. (1999) there is evidence to suggest that there is great value in the internal assembly resources, but some interviewees indicated that they use the intranet infrequently.

While a number of interviewees praised the Internal resources, some Members and staff claimed that they did not view the OLA Intranet as an asset in their offices. Both Members and staff who were interviewed also indicated the need for instruction on internal resources. One staffer claimed that the Intranet was "not overly valuable" in their work, but added that this lack of use could be attributed to their lack of awareness and training on the tools available. Similarly, another staff member alluded to a lack of training by explaining how they "discover something new every week" on the intranet portal. One MPP shared that there were tasks that could likely be achieved with the help of internal portals, but claimed that they used "alternative mechanisms" to complete the same tasks. Survey respondents also shared similar sentiments. In an open-ended question, one staff member suggested "training and understanding on the tools currently available" while another respondent offered their thoughts on the importance of technology training:

[Technology is] only successful if the principles behind improving technology are clearly understood by the users. This requires training as to how it works together, not allowing everyone with varying degrees of interest and ability to fumble around with it.

One MPP who claimed seldom use of the assembly portals provided another justification for the underutilization of internal assembly resources stating that the resources offered by the assembly were only useful for tasks that were not high on the priority list of MPPs:

I'm not saying it's not useful, but I'm saying relative to other things that we do with our devices, it's a relatively low priority. I think the root of it is so much of what we do here is not legislative. The legislative folks are understandably focused on the legislative component of the job like what legislation is being proposed and passed, what has been said on the record, that's all part of

legislative work, but a lot of the most useful things that happen from a constituent's perspective aren't in the legislature or in the Chamber or in a committee room. They're in those conversations that happen in the hallways when I pull a Minister aside or when I speak to the Premier or when I speak to staff. Those are the things that legislative staff don't have access to, nor should they. So it's very difficult for them to be able to support me on that and as a result, I think the tools, the portal that they provide is only helpful for supporting part of my job and I think that's why I don't use it often.

This echoes the work of Allan (2006) and Griffith and Leston-Bandeira (2012) who attribute the lack of legislative modernization to the non-partisan constraints of legislative bodies. This is made particularly evident by the lack of use of the Interactive Chamber Seating Plan, an in-depth biographical information chart of all MPPs. While establishing the seating plan was a priority for the OLA Technology Services, the "neutral" information that it offers was not of use to most survey respondents.

Figure 2

*How often do you access the internal OLA Intranet (<http://laointra/intranet/>)*

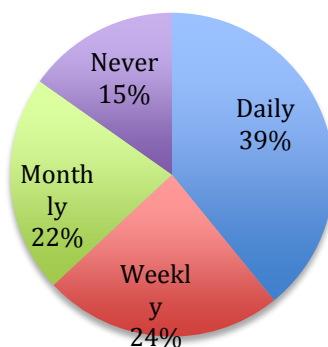
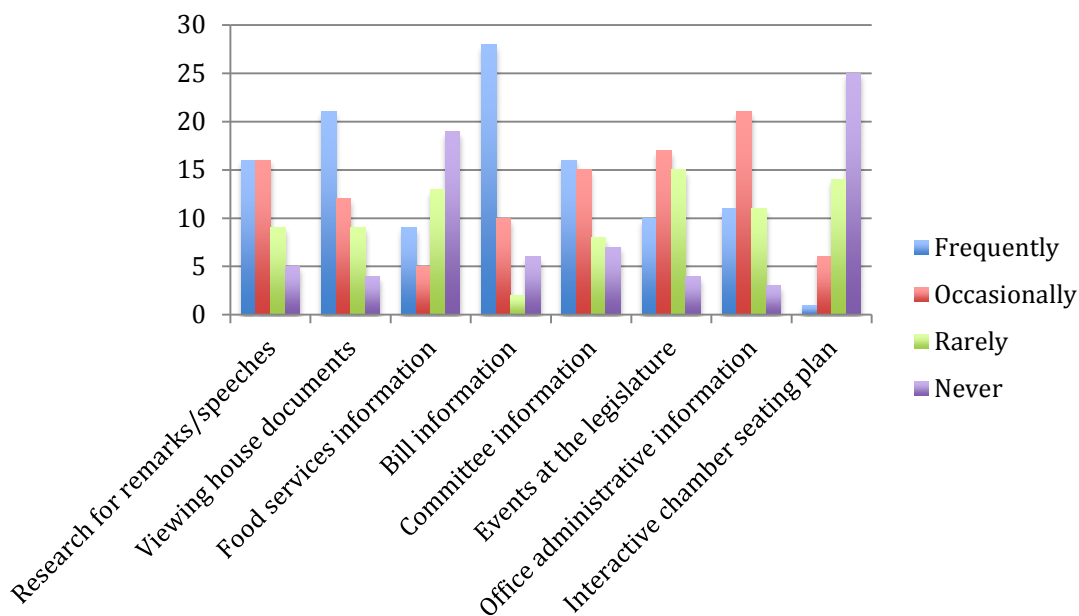


Figure 3

*How often do you use the internal assembly websites for the following?*



### *The Importance of Flexible Communication Tools*

When asked about the technologies used in each office, survey respondents almost unanimously agreed that social media was an essential tool in their offices (see Figure 4) and interviewees agreed. In the majority of interviews with MPPs and staff, social media became the dominant topic of conversation when asked a general question about the technologies they used. In many interviews, MPPs and staff noted that social media was used for “broadcasting” of information similar to the one-way communication discussed by Kernaghan (2007) and that the importance of messaging via social media has escalated in recent years. One MPP shared that the changing media landscape and the 24-hour news cycle in conjunction with the lack of traditional media deadlines has led to the constant barrage of information. For this Member, the “more immediate” and constant nature of information means that “there’s more [information] coming at people” and to break through the “noise” they felt the need to craft a “good message and continually repeat it until you’re physically ill from saying the same thing over and over again.” Another MPP added that the decline of mainstream media coverage within Queen’s Park meant an increased “onus” on MPPs and staff to update the public on legislative activities and programs. One political staffer shared similar sentiments explaining how “90 per cent” of their day was spent communicating messages with the outside world. They added that “if there’s a grant program or if there’s money, if there’s research innovation, you want to let people know who it would be relevant to.”

The interview responses regarding social media also echoed the work of Lindh and Miles (2007) who highlighted how social media platforms have allowed for increased individualization of communication between Members, staff, constituents, stakeholders and the like. One MPP stated that they use social media to “humanize” themselves in order to effectively communicate messages to followers and “stand out”:

A lot of what comes at people are people’s opinions or facts or promotion, right? So it’s just better to tell stories. And they don’t have to be big stories...or complex stories, but they’re stories that speak to the common human experience. It’s really quite surprising how on Twitter, I might get more re-Tweets talking about my dogs...or showing pictures of my dogs or pictures of my mom or something like that. I can do all the political stuff I want, but everybody’s got a mom, right? People are going to relate to that. It’s a common experience.

Similar to Scottish MPPs, it is clear that Ontario politicians are also using Twitter to humanize themselves as was found by Margaretten and Gaber (2014). Another MPP shared the importance of humanization on social media and illustrated how the flexibility of social media helped them direct specific messages to a wide-array of audiences:

I used to tag one post and send it to all three of my major social media channels, but it was hurting me because some people want to follow me just for the person that I am, some want to get the political update and others are just your stakeholders. So I’ve broken it up and have actually increased my followers substantially by targeting people, stakeholders, media and organizations through Twitter...some of them as well through my political Facebook and then I’ve split up my political Facebook and my personal Facebook. People who just want to know the fun-loving joie de vivre guy I am, they follow me on Facebook or Instagram and it’s actually helped me.

In addition to dissemination, interviewees indicated that social media was becoming increasingly important for research and newsgathering. One staffer shared how the

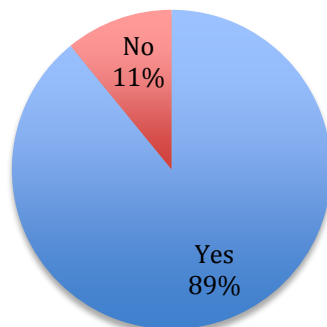
customizability of social media allows them to keep aware of what's happening in their Member's riding while simultaneously following world news and events that could affect their Member's office. One MPP also praised social media for its flexibility in meeting their research and information needs:

I'm wedded to the iPhone in terms of monitoring what's happening on Twitter, the news and also I find Twitter is a great source of information for research reports because I follow the places that are likely to be publishing reports that are of interest and value to me.

While MPPs and staff used social media for one-way dissemination and intake of messages, interviewees also offered evidence to suggest that more two-way communication is occurring. When asked about the use of social media to interact with constituents, one staffer shared how they used social media to gauge public reaction to a government initiative where they were able to garner a sizable "186 responses in 24 hours." This indicates a shift in the online communication patterns of MPPs and staff since 2007. This research indicates that the use of customizable technology tools such as social media are much more prevalent in the offices of Ontario's MPPs. One MPP stated how social media provides "another way for people to...get in touch with the Member" outside of the traditional and less immediate forms of contact such as registered mail or in-person meetings.

Figure 4

*Do you consider social media an essential tool in your job?*



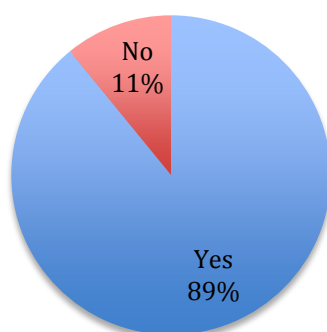
#### *Bridging the Gap: Shareable Legislative Materials for Social Media*

The utilization of social media has created a demand for more shareable legislative materials and 89 per cent of respondents were in favour of this (see figure 5). When asked which materials would be most helpful, an overwhelming number of respondents requested better access to video clips and Hansard clips from the Chamber. One Member stated that Hansard and video is important as it can be shared with constituents inquiring about the Member's latest efforts. In speaking about the importance of video and Hansard, they added that "you really get to know people through their words and people need to know how MPPs act, speak and the positions that they hold." One political staffer suggested that video recordings of Chamber proceedings be archived similarly to Hansard adding how some "people like the value of watching what's going on rather than reading and others prefer reading to watching."

One MPP suggested that the Ontario Legislative Assembly to consider streaming the assembly's proceedings through social media avenues such as Facebook Live and indicated I know that they have a website and theoretically you can go on and see what's happening in the assembly or see what's happening in a committee when it's being videotaped, but that's not a platform anybody's going to seek out...or very few people are going to seek out. I think they should provide that [video] service, but use platforms that people are using. Could there be a constant Facebook live feed from the Chamber? That would be interesting. I think that would get young people...more engaged in it.

Figure 5

*Would you like the ability to share house documents (e.g. Hansard) on social media more easily?*



## CONCLUSION

By utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, this research study aimed to explore the technology use of both internal and external legislative resources of Ontario's MPPs while exploring the rationales for their use. While there is literature to suggest that the unhurried nature of technological modernization may be the fault of tradition in some political bodies, this study provides evidence to suggest that this phenomenon is more complex. The importance of external communications in the daily lives of MPPs and their staff requires the frequent use of social media and other immediate modes of communication outside of the purview of Ontario's legislative assembly. What has resulted is a clear divide between the use of internal assembly resources and third-party resources that exist outside of Queen's Park.

### *Recommendations*

After analyzing a quantitative survey and interviews with MPPs, political staff and legislative personnel, this study presents the following recommendations suggesting how Queen's Park can preserve its traditions while meeting the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs of parliamentarians and political staff within this case study:

#### *1. Enhance the flexibility of legislative technological resources:*

The results of this case study indicated that there is a stark divide between the internal technological resources of the Ontario Legislative Assembly and those that exist outside of it. It would be useful for the OLA to create more digital materials that are shareable on a multitude of media platforms. Greater access to video clips from the house as well as excerpts from Hansard



along with hyperlinks within legislative documents would allow MPPs and staff to share legislative content with greater ease and engage larger segments of the population in political discussions online. Additionally, live streaming the chamber proceedings on sites beyond the Ontario Legislative Assembly website on social media platforms such as Facebook Live would enhance viewership and reach those who may not otherwise watch the happenings in the house.

2. *Provide more training and publicity for technological resources within the purview of the legislative assembly:*

While the results from this study indicated that the lack of use of internal technological resources of the assembly be attributed to the communication priorities of MPPs and staff, there is evidence to suggest that lack of training might also be partially to blame. Providing some in-person training or even a video module explaining the internal assembly resources would be useful for those who are new to Queen's Park. Additionally, regular communication (e.g. email) with all party caucuses about the latest updates and features within internal legislative portals would enhance publicity and potentially increase the number of staff and MPPs who use them.

3. *Perform regular interviews with MPPs and staff to keep abreast of the most frequently used communication tactics:*

As discussed in the literature and the findings, the rapid speed of technological change can make it difficult for legislative bodies to keep up with the demands of all who work within them. It would be useful to craft an interview process that would allow technology staff and procedural experts to explore the technology use of MPPs and political staff on a regular basis. An open-ended discussion would allow those who oversee legislative technology insights into *what* technology is being used as well as *why* it is being used. Gathering this information would equip the assembly with the information that would allow for a more proactive approach to technological change.

### *Future Research*

In exploring this topic, themes arose which would warrant future research. Within this study, both MPPs and their staff claimed to spend a large part of their day crafting and disseminating messages via immediate communication channels. It would be useful to understand exactly what kind of information is being crafted (political or otherwise) and if there is a role that the Ontario Legislative Assembly can play in assisting with these tasks. One interesting theme that also arose was the use of social media on behalf of MPPs to humanize themselves to their constituents and other audiences. It would be useful to explore this topic to understand the changing nature of political communication and if politicians are able to use these tactics to successfully pique the interest of Ontarians who might not otherwise be politically engaged. This may provide some insight into how the Ontario Legislative Assembly could utilize social media in a similar fashion with the aim to reach wider audiences and promote or initiate greater political engagement with those of all ages, particularly the 15-24 demographic.

The results of this case study indicated that the individualization of communication in the larger political sphere as discussed by Lindh and Miles (2007) and Margaretten and Gaber (2014) might also be occurring inside of Queen's Park. A broader study with a larger sample size conducted over a longer time period would be useful in exploring the communication patterns of MPPs and staff in greater depth. Results could also be gathered from other legislative bodies both inside and outside of Canada to facilitate a comparative analysis of the current technological needs and communication habits of politicians and political staff. A study of this magnitude

could potentially garner more insights into overall shifts in political communication patterns providing those in charge of legislative technology with a forecast upon which to predicate changes. Being able to predict changes before they happen and gauge the technological priorities of politicians would save legislative bodies both time and resources and would potentially help to usher them into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Conclusion*

Due to the rapid pace of technological change, the information landscape in which politicians and political staff operate is constantly changing. It is essential that parliamentary officials and technology services staff keep current with the technological demands of political officials while simultaneously working to maintain the rules and traditions that bind the Westminster style of government. Future changes in technology and greater decentralization of information will likely continue and accelerate. In order to maintain an engaged population and a healthy democracy, it is crucial that the legislative officials listen to the technology requests of MPPs and staff to enhance communication channels.

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## Appendix A: Consent Letter



### OLIP Academic Paper – Interview Consent Letter

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Stephanie Lowe and I am currently a 2016-2017 participant in the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme (OLIP) at the Ontario Legislative Assembly. Part of the academic component of this program involves conducting a study focusing on one aspect of the legislature. My research will focus on technology within the Ontario Legislative Assembly—specifically if the technological infrastructure is meeting the diverse communication needs of Members and staff within Queen's Park.

I am interested in interviewing Members of Provincial Parliament and assembly staff about their use of and thoughts about technology as it pertains to communication. I am seeking Members and staff with all levels of political experience and perspectives from all parties. I believe that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this interview will involve one in-person interview approximately 15-30 minutes in length. During the interview, you will be asked questions regarding your information needs as an MPP or staff as well as your use of technology resources provided by the Ontario Legislative Assembly and digital platforms outside of the purview of the legislature (e.g. social media, news websites etc.). The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informational presentations to my colleagues and a presentation at an upcoming research conference. The data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only individual who will have access to this data will be the OLIP academic director, Dr. Peter P. Constantinou.

All interview participants will be quoted anonymously and any audio recordings will be used for note keeping purposes only. This information will remain entirely confidential.

You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time and to withdraw even after you have chosen to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected.

I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time that is convenient for you. Please sign this consent form if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your time and assistance. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Lowe  
2016-2017 OLIP Intern

Name: Stephanie Lowe  
Phone Number: 647-406-4452  
Email: slowe@olipinterns.ca

Academic Instructor's Name: Dr. Peter P. Constantinou  
Contact Information: peter.constantinou@olipinterns.ca

Consent Form:

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Stephanie Lowe and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Interview Protocol**



### **OLIP Academic Paper Interview Questions for MPPs and Political Staff**

#### **Section 1: Introductory Questions**

- 1) How have you seen technology evolve since you began working at the legislature?
- 2) What different ways do you use technology in your work?

#### **Section 2: Technology in the Chamber**

- 3) How do you feel about giving Members the ability to read speeches/questions from electronic devices in the chamber?
- 4) How do you feel about the potential implementation of e-petitions?
- 5) How do you feel about e-voting rather than in-person voting in the chamber?

#### **Section 2: Communication & Social Media**

- 6) Can you describe the media that you use most to interact with constituents?
- 7) Describe the value of social media in your office.
- 8) If the assembly were to supply more sharable materials for social media etc. what materials would you use most?
- 9) How valuable do you consider the internal assembly resources to be in your job?
- 10) Do you have any thoughts about how internal resources could be changed or improved?

#### **Section 3: Modernization of the Legislature**

- 11) How do you feel about a paperless assembly?
- 12) What are your thoughts about the legislative assembly playing a role in governing members' technology use in and outside of the chamber?
- 13) What are your thoughts about the speed at which the legislature is modernizing technologically?
- 14) In an era where parliamentary procedure and technology are sometimes at odds, which do you think is most important?
- 15) What technological changes/improvements would make your job easier?
- 16) Do you have any additional thoughts you would like to share about technology at the legislature?



### Appendix C: Survey Questions

1. Which one of the following best describes you?

- a) Member of Provincial Parliament
- b) Constituency/Legislative/Executive Assistant to a Member

2. In what industry/industries do you have previous experience?

- a) Agriculture
- b) Business
- c) Education
- d) Food
- e) Healthcare
- f) Hospitality/Tourism
- g) Law
- h) Media
- i) Manufacturing
- j) Transport
- k) Not applicable
- l) Other: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How much would you say you rely on technology to do your job?

Not Reliant    1    2    3    4    5    Very Reliant

4. In your job, which of the following do you work with more?

- a) Paper documents
- b) Electronic documents

5. Would you like to see the Legislative Assembly go paperless?

- a) Yes
- b) No

6. Would you like the ability to read remarks in the chamber from an electronic device?

- a) Yes
- b) No

7. Which one of the following media do you use to interact with constituents/citizens? (optional)

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Email				
Telephone				
Social Media Platforms				
Correspondence by Regular Mail				

8. List any other media you use to interact with constituents/citizens: (optional)

9. Do you consider social media an essential tool in your job?

- a) Yes
- b) No

10. Would you like the ability to share house documents (e.g. Hansard) on social media more easily?

- a) Yes
- b) No

11. How often do you consult the following for news?

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Toronto Press Today (Printed)				
Toronto Press Today (Online)				
Social Media Platforms				
Printed Newspaper				
Online Newspaper				
TV/Radio Broadcasts				

12. List any other news media you consult: (optional)

13. How often do you access the Members' Portal (<http://mpp.ola.org/>)?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) Never

14. How often do you access the OLA Intranet (<http://laointra/intranet/>)?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) Never

15. How often do you access the New Members' Orientation Site

(<http://newmpps.ontla.on.ca/en/>)?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) Never

16. How often do you access the OLA public website (<http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/home.do>)?

- a) Daily
- b) Weekly
- c) Monthly
- d) Never

17. How often do you use internal assembly websites for the following?

	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Research for remarks and speeches				
Viewing house documents				
Food services information				
Bill information				
Committee information				
Events at the legislature				
Office administration information				
Interactive chamber seating plan				

18. Would you be interested in more assembly tools that help with office administration?

- a) Yes
- b) No

19. If yes, what additional tools would you like to see? (optional)

20. Do you think that the Legislative Assembly should play an active role in governing Members' technology use both in and outside of the chamber?

- a) Yes
- b) No

21. Should the Legislative Assembly allow for the implementation of e-petitions?

- a) Yes
- b) No

22. Would you like to see electronic voting rather than in-person voting in the chamber?

- a) Yes
- b) No

23. Do you think technology within the Ontario Legislative Assembly is modernizing fast enough to meet your technology needs?

- a) Yes
- b) No

24. What technology changes at Queen's Park would make communication more efficient for your job? (optional)

25. Any additional comments/suggestions: (optional)