



THE GAMES ROOM

Joan Butterfield is the proprietor of a new store in the Old Bank building called the Games Room which specializes in toys and games. They hope to have the widest selection of darts and dart boards in the area, and such board games as backgammon,

chess and checkers. They also offer executive toys, jigsaw puzzles, masks such as Pierre Trudeau or Rene Levesque, and strategy games. Anything not on stock in the store can be ordered and received within a week.

On Parliament Hill

By STEWART MacLEOD
Ottawa Bureau
Of The Herald

Those chaps over at the Treasury Board who keep an eye on the purse strings while trying to ensure that government is run efficiently, certainly have a way with words. But then most of them in the planning and policy branches are fairly senior, perhaps in the \$300,000 a year range, and there is no reason why they shouldn't be able to express themselves with the same efficiency they expect from other public servants.

And they love issuing memos. I just came across this one on communications and it is addressed to the deputy heads of all departments and agencies—not a bad circulation list for a start. What the chaps at the Treasury Board are saying is that there should be improved two-way communications between various departments and agencies.

"Let's talk more," is what they are really saying. Come to think of it, that wouldn't be a bad phrase for them.

Instead, they introduce the subject this way: "The communication and exchange of ideas or administrative policy matters is encouraged and maintained to optimize the use, mix and cost of administrative inputs in program results."

I wish I had thought of that first. The enlightening memo goes on to talk about how communications can be transmitted:

"There are usually three ways to receive input from, and to maintain two way communications with, departments and agencies. Treasury Board advisory committees, membership on interdepartmental committees and informal departmental inputs."

Now that represents a real breakthrough, doesn't it? And I bet that if the Treasury Board hired some outside consultants, for \$100,000 or so, they might even come up with fourth and fifth ways to communicate—perhaps mentioning letters and telephones.

I would like to give you more details on the fine art of government communications, but I am having difficulty understanding the memo.

So I will turn my attention to another memo, also from the chaps at the Treasury Board, who were so specific a few months ago

on the delicate issue of measuring performance in the public service. This time we are dealing with "operational performance measurement" and "the purpose of this circular is to state the Treasury Board's policy and guidelines governing the measurement of performance of government operations."

"The policy is based on the concept that it is sound management practice for control, planning and accountability purposes to monitor the movements of the relationship between the results of operations and their associated costs and the desired effects."

What an original concept! Wait until private industry gets its mitts on this idea. As opposed to the memo on easy communications, this one on government performance is comprehensible to many ordinary citizens. For instance, I had no trouble coming to terms with this bit of economic philosophy: "It is obviously fundamental in measuring performance to be able to relate costs and results."

But just in case anyone has trouble with this, the memo adds that "further information on this subject can be found in the Treasury Board publication 'Benefit Cost Analysis Guide'."

I'll pass this time. Another paragraph that I grasped in a flash reads like this: "For most types of performance indicators, reasonable approximations are generally sufficient providing that they are in general agreement with the financial records."

Of course if they are not in general agreement with the financial records we can assume there will be hell to pay.

There are a couple of questions that deputy ministers are asked to keep in mind while measuring performance. "Are the existing indicators sufficiently accurate for their intended use?" and "Are the indicators provided in time to be of significant use?"

No deputy minister could ever think of these things on his own.

But my favorite piece of advice for the deputies is that bit about not overlooking important indicators. "Movements of the unemployment rate, for example, can have a bearing on the degree of difficulty experienced in obtaining placements in a manpower program."

No kidding.

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