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**DATA DISSEMINATION MEDIA: HOW TO ESTABLISH
FIXED RELEASE DATES FOR MAJOR INDICATORS AND
HOW TO MEET THEM**

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DATA DISSEMINATION MEDIA: HOW TO ESTABLISH FIXED RELEASE DATES FOR MAJOR INDICATORS AND HOW TO MEET THEM

Summary

Review of the present situation in the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics with reference to means of dissemination of various types of information emphasizing the implications of the site on the World Wide Web and the information disseminated through it.

The result of Israel's subscription to the Special Data Dissemination Standard, recently established by the International Monetary Fund.

Discussing the Advance Release Calendar- as being implemented in the CBS; and,

Introducing a control system which affects the organizational aspect of each division and improves the functioning of Data Dissemination to Information Media. At the same time it helps to adapt to new concepts of work and requires change of work habits.

I. Types of Statistical Information for Dissemination - Review

1. Means of Dissemination

Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) has been working ever since its establishment in 1948 under the assumption that statistical data should be always available, reliable, timely and comparable to every user, specifically all kinds of mass media.

Since its establishment back in 1948 Israel's CBS has been concerned in supplying statistical information to all interested. This is still being done through Press Releases and by Public Information-in the office and by mail (Fax) and through Publications (periodicals, "special publications").

Lately, there are more and more requests for selected data released from the Data Base, for "diskette" versions of some of the publications. We are increasingly engaged every day in dissemination (by fax) of Press Releases to a growing list of addressees and updating of data for our site in the Internet.

During the year 1996 (especially in its second half), some important plans were carried out. Plans which brought about changes in the structure of the statistical information dissemination system, the keyword of which is *Progress*.

Apart from an automated computerized "**fax mailing**" system for quicker distribution of releases, and apart from the installation of a computer-based **Automated Answering System** which enables everyone to get a "computer voice" answer on all details of the various price indices, the most remarkable innovation was the establishment of a **site on-the World Wide Web**.

The information on this on-line site is considered to be of great interest to a variety of customers who access a connection to the service. Some of the popular topics are: **Last Month's Price**

Indices (which are updated each 15th of every month , the minute they are released to the media), **Monthly Bulletin of Statistics** (consists of variable major indicators) and **Press Releases**.

This recent exposure through the site in the Internet increased enormously the amount of requests of statistical information with regard to the site specifically and to all kinds of other inquiries in general. E-mail enables almost everyone from all over the world to pose questions and to expect a prompt response.

2. Israel 's CBS subscription to the Special Data Dissemination Standard

Moreover, in early April 1996 ,the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)** established the Dissemination Standards Bulletin Board (DSBB) which is maintained by it as a service to its members that have or who might seek, access to international capital markets in the provision of their economic and financial data to the public. It contains information on data and data dissemination practices (metadata) submitted by Fund members like Israel's CBS that subscribed to the Special Data Dissemination Standard (SDDS). The SDDS, in taking a comprehensive view of the dissemination of economic and financial data identifies four dimensions of data dissemination:

- The data: coverage, periodicity, and timeliness;
- Access by the public
- Integrity of the disseminated data
- Quality of the disseminated data

For each of these dimensions , the SDDS prescribes several monitorable elements - good practices that can be observed or monitored by the users of statistics. **To support ready and equal access, the SDDS prescribes advance dissemination of release calendars.** This procedure, in addition to the on-line site, requires the various divisions (the sources of the statistical output) of the Bureau of Statistics to acknowledge its importance and to start to adapt to it physically - personally and mentally - focusing on the concept of work.

The CBS management must take into account that this is the beginning of a **transformation** which requires a certain period of time to get adjusted to. Until about a year ago, when there was actually no commitment (like now to the IF) to release statistical output at a specific date, there was no need in establishing fixed release dates ,the more so to meet them.

With regard to press releases , which are the first to transmit the updated data or some other new interesting findings to Information Media, there was very little planning (except fixed release dates for monthly Exchange Rates and for the Tel-Aviv Stock Exchange). Until recently, most of the Press Releases (85%) were disseminated within short notice .

3. Consumer Price Index

This was true for almost all the information for dissemination except for the Consumer Price Index. This index has always been considered most important in shedding light on macroeconomics performance and policy. No matter what , with hardly any computerization and relatively low wages like the rest of the employees in the CBS , the Price Index was always ready on time (16:30 on -weekdays ,13:30 on Fridays) on the 15th of each month like clockwork.

Today , the index is *simultaneously* released through the press-release and in a Press Conference to all interested parties such as correspondents and- the ‘latest’ -it is posted on the Internet web site of the CBS at the same time .

The question is *How?*

How has this been achieved?

What can be learned and can it be implemented in other CBS' divisions ?

The answer to this question is simply - *work culture*. Every person who belongs or joins this group or “team” of the Price Indices’ division , is imbued with the fact that he is part of a mission to be carried out each month. The commitment to the Ministry of Finance ,to the Central Bank ,to the Federation of Labour in Israel and other policy makers, motivates the people and increases their involvement in preparing the monthly Price Index . This has been the situation for many years , way before automation and computerization. This principle should be well remembered during the process of conducting a new operation, which requires different work habits than before .

II. Control System - to improve the functioning of Data Dissemination to Information Media

1. Advance Release Calendar - Press Releases for the ‘next’ week

As previously mentioned , the divisions of the Bureau of Statistics hardly had any fixed dates for dissemination of statistical data.

The subscription to the IMF Special Data Dissemination Standard which requires monthly updating started to imply , still at a slow pace, a new concept of work. Later on, the CBS decided to prepare a weekly advance release calendar - forecast of press releases for the next week which is transmitted on-line to the CBS site.

Each division’s mission is to inform, on its own initiative, the spokesperson’s division about the subject of the press release and the estimated date on which it will be ready for publication. This should be considered as part of the work of every division and its proper functioning.

This innovation has been conducted since December 1996 , and is being examined and analyzed. The CBS management made the decision, but it was the job of the spokesperson’s division to convey it to the various divisions. At this stage , we did a lot of talking and persuading senior employees mostly, of the advantages of this organized way of announcing their findings or any other statistical data that are of interest to the public and the importance of fixed release dates for better functioning of every division. After many phone calls and countless reminders we can report that the idea of advance release calendar is more or less accepted. But it has not yet become part of the daily work of the divisions and it’s not yet delivered on their own initiative. Since it still does not work automatically although understood we were considering some major improvements. If this succeeds it may easily be implemented for similar missions.

As to feedback outside the CBS - it was highly appreciated and unanimously accepted by the Media. Reporters and journalists got used to it very quickly . They anticipate this bulletin board every Thursday and it happens to be very helpful in preparing their schedule for the ‘next’ week

2. Purposes of the Advance Release Calendar

Advance release enables **better deployment** of the media concerning dissemination.

Good coverage is also achieved by **proper scheduling** with regard to other information released at the same week.

Logical order as result of advanced release turns out to be useful not only outwards but moreover **inwards**. It requires a **new attribution of occupations** which is refreshing and increases motivation

Fixed dates for release of major updated indicators leave more space than before for **special releases** the aim of which is to announce ,for example, a new survey, a new way of calculation or to introduce some main findings in a forthcoming publication.

Fixed Release Dates - just established - happen to strike roots rather rapidly and easily and **affect policy makers and decision takers** in planning and organizing meetings and discussions based on statistical data released on a fixed date.

Fixed Release Dates are the source of **more information** for dissemination , **more feed back**, better **exposure** which arouses **more interest** more thirst for knowledge and bring about new **professional relations** . Some of the fruitful ones are to create **productive work** and more information again and again.

3. Implications of Change

As can be imagined , it is almost an impossible mission to introduce a new operation which seems at fist sight quite aggravating, oppressing, awkward and simply unnecessary. A fifty years old conservative governmental bureau as the CBS , hates to be troubled , dislikes changes especially when the individual does not benefit from them right away. Having experimented for two months we came to conclusion that there must be a computerized control system to take over , that will save a lot of time and at the same time will transmit the data for dissemination, accurately almost automatically directly to the P.C. at the spokesperson's division.

After a comprehensive inquiry I suggest that every division should nominate a **coordinator** - somebody who is popular and accepted by his colleagues who knows his job- not the head of the division- but he may be one of his assistants. One who is aware of the importance of this operation , reliable enough in carrying out this project , assertive and controlling in a friendly way.

4. Progress Report

This person will be in charge of updating the progress report which will appear on my PC screen. This coordinator will serve as a **contact person** between his division and the division of Data Dissemination. He will be the watchdog , on the one hand responsible for his fellowmen delivering the data when expected , and on the other hand for warning on time through this control system if anything goes wrong. This Progress Report will be carried out through one of the Internet tools.

The Dissemination Unit centralizes the various Progress Reports on the base of which the Advanced Release Calendar is formed .We tend to believe that it will become easier in the course of the time and once the divisions get used to the new project they will appreciate the advantages of this new concept of work.

III. The problematic nature of fixed release dates and its enforcement in the Bureau of Statistics

1. Obstacles from the outside

As described earlier, the Bureau of Statistics consists of various divisions and sub-divisions which supply data on demographic, economic and social developments in Israel. The statistical data are prepared with the assistance of government ministries, institutions, establishments and businesses, as well as people and families who take part in the various surveys.

It just so happens that quite often data cannot be released on time as expected because of someone outside the bureau. Although it is easier to lose control over outside factors there is still a chance to emphasize the importance of the time element and to try to convince again our partners outside the CBS. Besides, today, there is a possibility to release data before the appearance of the final publication (hard copy).

Sometimes the obstacle occurs in the early stages of the survey, sometimes there is a fault in the figures collected that was revealed after the analysis of the data.

Until a short time ago, the Bureau of Statistics was not used 'to be in a rush' while performing a survey. Apparently it is part of the concept that in a governmental office budgets are limited and frequently cut down but employees are rarely fired consequently.

2. Implementing change

It ought to be admitted that the CBS has changed a lot in the last three years. This is due first, to the personal change of the management. Two important figures retired and two new 'leaders' took over. Well informed and much more open-minded personalities introducing new attitudes and new perceptions. A great amount of computers was bought and allocated generously. Almost everybody underwent a great deal of courses since the personal change and the significant enlargement of the division of Training which contributed not only to the enrichment of the employees but also to the whole atmosphere. People in all levels felt that they are being taken care of, they are listened to far more than before during the previous management and they are encouraged to be creative.

So, with respect to timing it seems right and ready for change in spite of some understandable criticism expressed by a number of employees still resisting still longing for the old managers.

As already mentioned, the establishment of fixed release dates does not affect the organization as a whole but it introduces a new concept of work that can be learned from for further changes to come.

The CBS is a large organization that quite naturally undergoes changes constantly. Most of them are not too dramatically imposed but at the same time there is tendency to neglect the effects of the implementation of these changes on the organization.

IV. Conclusion

The meaning of the verb "**to establish**" in Oxford Advanced Learner's dictionary is: "**to set something up on a firm or permanent basis.**" In other words, building a new modern storey on a big and old house - namely - changing the whole house.

The answer to the question “how to establish fixed release dates for major indicators and how to meet them” depends above all on the type of organization, its state while introducing a new operation, and the preparedness of the people to accept the change in the culture of work and its implications.

Successful change¹ builds on constructive interactions among multiple groups within an organization. Three basic groups must be coordinated if change is to be effectively implemented: *change strategists*, *change “implementors”*, and *change recipients*. Each group carries its own assumptions, agendas, and reactions. Unless these are considered both at the outset and during the unfolding of the change process, the most well-meaning will be thwarted.

As the Advance Release Calendar based on fixed dates is processed by introducing new computer systems, one should keep in mind that it can result in temporary chaos. The well known change expert Chris Argyris argued that almost any action that disturbs the organizational status or represents a threat to an individual’s habitual way of doing things is likely to provoke often defensive behaviours. Change researchers claim the rational suggestions for implementing change are most useful when they are addressed to the entire range of people involved in the change process.

As previously mentioned, the CBS has been undergoing some significant changes lately. One of the results of the reorganization is the development that brought about the need for a division of Dissemination of Information. The establishment of fixed release dates is within the limits of this division and once successfully accomplished it will spur the management to conduct more beneficial reforms.

¹ Kanter, R. N. Stein, B. A., Jick, T. P. The challenge of organizational change The Free Press, New York, pp. 369-394