

Federal Council Chamber - wrong design

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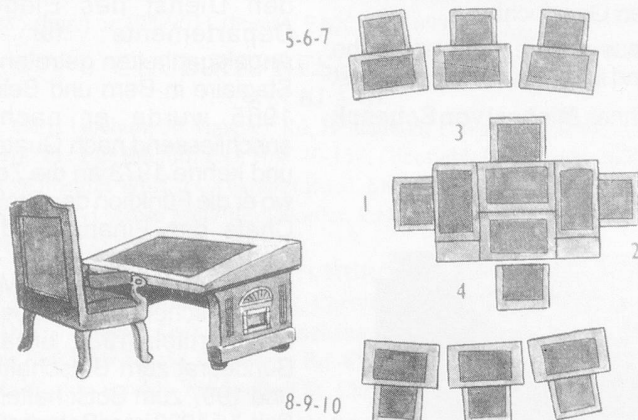
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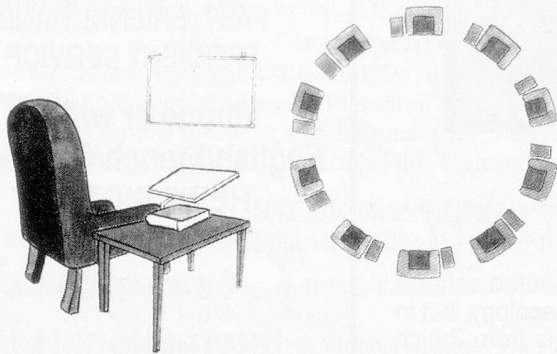
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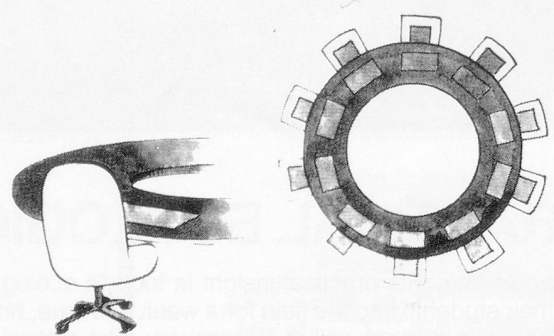
The Federal Council Chamber, dark and gloomy is, according to experts, apparently not conducive to positive, forward thinking. Experts feel a totally new design would be necessary to overcome the problem.



Seating arrangement. President (1), Chancellor (2), Vice-Chancellors (3 & 4), Federal Councillors (5, 6, 7) and (8, 9, 10). Visibility is very restricted between positions 5 & 10, 6 & 9 and 7 & 8.



THE MAGICAL CIRCLE. The ideal lay-out for good communication. All participants can see one another from head to toe. Some people may feel exposed in such a lay-out, as they would be unable to hide behind their desk or behind a pile of documents!



A PIECE OF PINEAPPLE. An alternative to the solution above with a round table in front of the Councilors instead of the little individual side tables.

FEDERAL COUNCIL CHAMBER - WRONG DESIGN

It is being argued, jokingly of course, that the Swiss Federal Councillors have never been able to work efficiently simply because of a bad lay-out of their meeting room. Rarely photographed, never filmed and inaccessible to the ordinary citizen, the meeting room of the Swiss Federal Council has remained unchanged since the end of last century.

The photograph below shows the general lay-out of the room. Just large enough for 10 desks (for the 7 Councillors, one Chancellor and 2 vice-Chancellors), the room is gloomy with dark panelled walls and it lacks proper daylight, a prime requisite for clear thinking. As the first drawing shows, the lay-out has major flaws:

- The Chancellor and his 2 vice-Chancellors form a core in the centre of the room that radically divides the two groups of Federal Councillors and makes communications between them very difficult. Because of the Chancellors' position, most Federal Councillors cannot see one another and, because of the distance, they may not hear one another very well either.

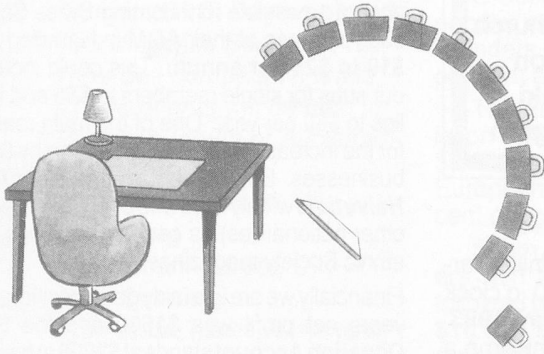
- The face of the President, seated as he is with his back to the window, is difficult to see against the light.

- The 2 vice-Chancellors turn their backs to half of the Councilors.

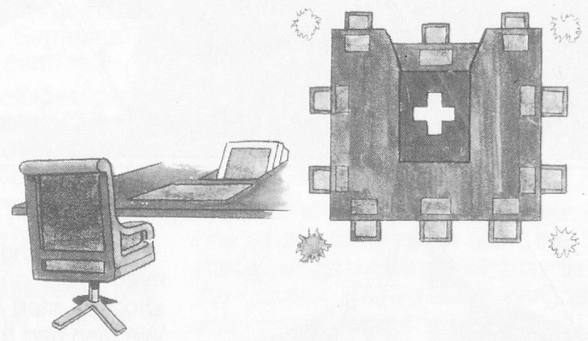
Little is known about the reasons which guided the original designers of the meeting room because the construction plans of the Parliament building have been lost.

Several half-hearted attempts had been made in the past to re-arrange the lay-out but lack of funds and the desire not to break with tradition left the chamber in its original state. However, some bright sparks have come up with a few suggestions how the situation could be improved and make the Federal Council more efficient.

All these designs below make sense and are far more practical than the original lay-out. What is the Federal Council waiting for to adapt to the 21st century?



THE HALF CIRCLE. Small mobile tables which can be moved around according to prevailing circumstances.



TRADITIONALLY SWISS. The heavy table type "Stammtisch", solid and stable, with the Swiss flag in the middle for good measure. Each Councillor would also have his own computer terminal to bring up the latest information (or Lotto results) relative to the discussion at hand.

HIGH YIELD WATCHMAKING

The Swiss have discovered that to produce fewer but more expensive watches makes better commercial sense than to mass produce cheap watches. The annual world production of watches stands at around 860 million of which Japan produces 43% by itself alone. With its production of 373 million watches, Japan earned around 3.4 billion SFR at an average price of around 9.- SFR per watch. But Switzerland, with a production of "only" 40 million watches earned around 6.3 billion SFR (average price per watch 158.-SFR). This was due to the fact that Switzerland produced over half a million expensive watches with an average value of over 4000.- SFR. So this 1% of its total production represented a third of its total revenue. For the rest, the bulk of the cheap plastic watches produced in Switzerland comes mainly from the Swatch factories.

So, thanks to its production of high yield watches, Switzerland is once again the world's top earner in the watchmakers' industry.

CAN SWITZERLAND STILL AFFORD GENEVA?

For 73 years, Geneva has been the number one international city of the world. Ahead of New York or Vienna, Geneva with only 380.000 inhabitants, has 27.800 international civil servants, the highest number of any city in the world.

During the boom years, the costs of providing and maintaining the necessary

buildings to house all these civil servants was of minor importance. But now, the Federal Council starts looking at the costs. Alone the improvements of the present buildings would cost over 400 million SFR. Any additional buildings would cost the Swiss Government a fortune. And so the question arises: how long can Switzerland afford to offer Geneva as an international city to the rest of the world.

Other cities such as Tokyo and Bangkok are offering better conditions and facilities. Salaries are amongst the highest in Geneva, Swiss neutrality is no longer important today and the UNO would prefer to have its European seat nearer to where its action is. So Geneva is loosing in popularity at the same time when the Swiss Government is reconsidering its financial position concerning the presence of international organisations on Swiss soil.



What do the international civil servants represent for Geneva.

27.800 jobs for a total of 260.000.



1.7 billion SFR spent each year on Geneva (the Canton's total revenue is 21 billion SFR).



400 million SFR of lost income taxes since international civil servants are exempt from local and government taxes.

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