



MAYORAL MEMO - 19 JULY 2023

I've always found eponymous laws quite interesting. Unlike legal or scientific laws, which are established through a rigid and systematic process, eponymous laws are more observational in nature. You can always trust that a dropped ball will fall to the ground, thanks to the Law of Universal Gravitation which describes gravitational attraction between objects with mass. But eponymous laws? They're just insightful observations. They might not be based on strict scientific or legal principles, but sometimes they hit the nail on the head.

Perhaps the most famous of these is 'Murphy's Law', which asserts, "Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong." It is a somewhat pessimistic viewpoint, yet it often finds its way into conversation, from showing up late for an appointment to explaining the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster.

Today I'd like to discuss 'Parkinson's Law of Triviality', which posits that at a committee meeting "The time spent on any agenda item will be inversely proportional to the sum of money involved." This interesting observation is supported by behavioural research. Often, people spend more time deliberating over small decisions than necessary and, conversely, not enough time on larger, more significant decisions. This

pattern reflects our ability (or lack thereof) to easily comprehend complex situations and the inherent complexity in the decision-making process.

Consider the hypothetical scenario of a board of directors approving final designs for a large commercial development. It's likely that the board lacks the individual expertise to debate the building materials or the intricacies of all the regulatory and planning processes. But there's a good chance that all board members consider themselves quite proficient at driving a car. Consequently, they may spend a disproportionate amount of time debating the merits of changing the size or orientation of the parking spaces, or where the inexpensive white lines should be painted, while readily approving the rest of the multi-million dollar investment.

When it comes to our current group of Councillors, there's been little evidence of Parkinson's Law of Triviality. Our Councillors ensure they gather the necessary information to make informed decisions, irrespective of the complexity of the issues. On the rare occasions when the information provided has been insufficient, the Councillors have prudently refrained from making a decision until all required data is furnished.

Nevertheless, eponymous laws have a peculiar way of sneaking in when least expected. For instance, at our most recent Council meeting, the Councillors were tasked with making the final decision on a budget worth approximately \$250 million for the coming year. This hefty discussion consumed 35 minutes. Yet, the same meeting saw over an hour discussing and deliberating the location of the Alcohol and Other Drugs Facility – a decision, ironically, that isn't even within the jurisdiction of Council to make!

Tell me your favourite eponymous law at mayor@dubbo.nsw.gov.au and your best example of that law.

Councillor Mathew Dickerson

Mayor of Dubbo Regional Council

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