

Should DFAIT move in this direction of greater specialization, it would be wise to make the most of an officer's knowledge and experience throughout his/her career. At present, the rotation process sometimes removes very effective officers from posts and places them in distinctly different positions. The loss is two-fold: the post loses much expertise, and the TC is forced to start learning all over again. A process of more coherent career planning would benefit business because officers would be more immediately knowledgeable at new postings. For example, a TC first posted to Chile might subsequently cycle through other postings—country, geographic and functional—building on the particularities of Latin America and what is involved in securing business in that region. Better levels of service quality to Canadian business should accrue through such an approach.

More emphasis on training is underway at DFAIT but might be pushed further. Historically, TCs were expected to learn on-the-job rather than as part of a more formal and systematic process. This is changing. DFAIT established the Canadian Foreign Service Institute in 1992 and has put the two most recent groups of TC recruits through a substantial training program. Some limited training of longer serving officers has also been carried out, and plans exist to develop programs for senior and mid-level officers in the near future. Money is, of course, a limiting factor in the development of comprehensive training programs. One important element that has perhaps been overlooked in this process is the locally engaged commercial officer. With an increasing number of commercial officers¹⁴ and a greater share of the workload and responsibility being carried by these individuals, it is unrealistic to expect a flawless response. Thus, more training attention might be given to these important DFAIT employees.

A response of Canadian governments to the increased complexity of the environment in which companies and TCs operate, is collective action. For example, in the telecommunications field, DFAIT works closely with Industry Canada, while in the area of agriculture, initiatives are often undertaken with Agriculture Canada. When only two agencies are involved, coordination should not be difficult, but larger collaborations can be more problematical. Increased attention is being paid to the matter of coordination, which has been an issue in the multi-agency setting in which Canadian trade and investment development is conducted. One successful example of coordination is provided by the annual "International Trade Business Plan" which sets out the opportunities for business, as well as the initiatives that are planned to help capitalize on these. Although this is published by DFAIT, it covers the activities of other departments and ministries too, all of which are coordinated. A more recent initiative is the establishment of sectoral expert groups. These groups often include individuals from different agencies, the goal being to ensure timely information sharing and dissemination across organizations.

¹⁴ The number of commercial officers grew from 185 in 1985 to 333 in 1994, or 80%.