

4. BEST PRACTICES

Every foreign ministry is unique, a product of its place and time. But foreign ministries everywhere share a common purpose, perform similar functions, and have characteristics which separate them from all other public institutions. As a group, therefore, they provide a rich field in which to explore for "best practices". Lessons can also be learned from the experience of other departments of government, and from one's own history.

The following is an inventory of suggestions, drawn from current practice, for how the role of political officers in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade can be made more efficient and effective. Sources include discussion at the four workshops held at CFSI, interviews with individuals inside and outside the department, and research conducted in the course of the study.

The suggestions are divided into two groups, the first dealing with department-wide issues, the second with issues particular to political officers.

DEPARTMENT-WIDE ISSUES

The mission of the department

A point of view about corporate purpose and direction is essential if an organization expects to be able to mobilize its resources in pursuit of worthwhile objectives. When "strategic intent" is unclear, individual and unit initiative are circumscribed by bureaucratic orthodoxies which are generally agnostic with respect to ends and blind to the possibilities of change.

Globalization has changed the context in which foreign ministries operate and has compelled them to assume difficult and complex new responsibilities. It has, however, also obscured what their core functions should be and what kind of "political" resources they will need. DFAIT has responded to the challenge with important structural adjustments and a heavy investment in communications and information technology. But it has yet to articulate a vision for the future which clarifies the department's mission, the kind of resources it needs, and its strategy for developing and sustaining these resources.