

Various means exist to deal with problems here, including:

- More trade commissioners in the field
- Changed recruiting, career planning and training practices
- Better coordination
- Clarification of roles

DFAIT has changed its staffing levels and patterns in an attempt to deal with ever-tightening budgets. Because it costs about three times as much to maintain a Canadian TC overseas than that same person would cost in Canada, foreign posts have seen considerable staffing changes. Some have been closed while most posts have been scaled back. TCs have been withdrawn to Canada and locally-engaged commercial officers expected to take up the slack. With fewer TCs in the field and greater demand, it has proven difficult to provide the quality of service that business expects. TC disquiet is another consequence of staffing changes. Since many individuals joined the TCS at least in part because of the foreign service component, the reduced number of overseas postings is not entirely satisfactory. It seems important therefore that DFAIT commit to placing more TC resources in the field and a commitment of this kind has recently been made. (11)

A complaint of companies in various evaluation studies has been that TCs do not display sufficient business acumen. It is difficult to know whether this is a recurring or new theme. The latter is thought more likely and almost certainly reflects the fact that today's TC operates in a more complex business and technological environment than his/her predecessor.¹³ Given this situation, several possibilities exist for providing higher levels of service to business; these include recruiting, career planning, and training initiatives.

In the past, TCs have been viewed and recruited as generalists—the “Renaissance” person that could turn a hand to almost anything. As business and technology becomes more complex, however, the advisability of a continuation along these lines can be questioned. If information technology is to continue to be a Canadian trade and investment priority, for example, perhaps the time has arrived to recruit TCs with the special knowledge and/or experience required, rather than expecting this to develop over time. A similar argument can be made for the targeted recruitment of people with regional knowledge and language skills. It appears as though recruitment practices are moving in these directions although the best solution is not entirely clear. In the technology area, for example, given the speed at which knowledge is made obsolete and Canadian supply capability changes, it could be that hiring specialists on contract is more effective than investing in dedicated personnel. (12)

¹³ Seasoned officers refer to the different “operating environment” of the TC today. Observable changes include: more players (countries and companies), the shift in regulations (from bilateral to multilateral agreements), the greater number of business methods (from simple trading arrangements to a plethora of alternatives), and the advanced nature of technology.