

Our first challenge is ourselves

If we are to shape our future, we will have to ensure DFAIT continues to be an attractive home for the best of the next generations. To do that, we will have to build our strengths and eliminate our weaknesses.

Our strengths are considerable:

- our core values of public service, excellence and community;
- the possibility we offer to our staff, as individuals, to make a difference in the world;
- our capacity to provide careers with mobility, opportunities for learning and room for personal initiative.

Our weaknesses, however, are also real:

- **hierarchy;**
- **compartmentalisation;**
- **regimentation;**
- **an incomplete technological revolution.**

Foreign ministries have historically been hierarchical. It is so pronounced a feature as to be the subject of caricature. (How often have Third Secretaries been asked by friends if they were the secretary's secretary's secretary?) They also tend to be secretive, regarding information as power. All seem to have compartments through which they try to make sense organizationally of a chaotic world. So we are not exceptional. Except that **we are not a classic foreign ministry**; we have a wider mandate and better engagement with the world than many similar institutions.

Why we are in the throes of hierarchy:

Modern External Affairs was shaped in the Cold War, its founders strongly influenced by the British FO, and by the military culture that they personally absorbed in the war. Along with military virtues, like initiative and quick decision making, came the obligation to obedience, compartmentalization and distinctions between "officers" and "other ranks".

External Affairs and Industry, Trade and Commerce both grew dramatically at a time when organizational theory was dominated by the values of large hierarchical corporations. Hierarchy provided opportunity for advancement in both institutions (and the rest of the government), as more and more units were created with more and more people heading them. In the process of building hierarchies, we have built boxed structures in which resources were compartmentalized. These structures now constitute the internal boundaries of the Department.

Hierarchy has also served as our training mechanism especially in the Foreign Service. Like a guild, where master craftsmen pass knowledge to apprentices through journeymen, one generation taught the next "on the job", supervisor to employee.

Hierarchy has also been our "succession planning" mechanism. One generation succeeds another from inside the system. Everyone wants their turn, with seniority an essential qualification for advancement up the hierarchy.

Hierarchy has served similarly as our risk management mechanism. We are in the risk management business. We work in risky environments, are called on to make decisions or give advice with risk attached, we work under Ministerial responsibility and have an obligation to protect our Ministers from mistakes. We rely on successive layers of judgement to ensure that we make no mistakes.

Given the Cold War environment in which our culture was formed, it was logical that we have also used hierarchy to protect information. Our operating assumption has been that information is a scarce good, and in the wrong hands, a danger. People were told what they "needed to know" and no more. Information is aggregated into intelligence at different levels in the hierarchy, compartmentalized vertically as well as horizontally, like rows of boxes.

Hierarchy, in short, has served as an all purpose management tool in the past, but times now demand something more than a **Swiss army knife** to maintain DFAIT in working order.