

*The Political Officer
in the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade*

Qualitative problems included:

- *Focus*: Briefs often rambled, hiding the essential information among the verbal chaff. As a result, ministers and officials occasionally missed key points in a presentation.
- *Literacy*: Briefs were often poorly written. Sometimes, it was simply a matter of poor drafting, at other times an attempt to avoid making a judgement for which the author could be held accountable.
- *Anodyne talking points*: Briefs often had nothing to say but pretended that they did. This left the reader "dazed or confused".
- *"Unpolitical"*: Briefs often gave little indication of the "politics" of interlocutors positions, failing to explain how and why the other side saw the issue as it did, what pressures it was under, what it expected to achieve, and why.
- *Bureaucratic*: Briefs often ignored important differences between ministers and officials.

The study recommended a host of measures to address these problems, the essentials of which were to prepare one-page strategic overviews for meetings identifying what is at stake and the objectives to be pursued; to restrict briefs to the items on the agenda of a meeting; to prepare copies only for those participating in the meeting; and to make managers accountable for the substance, quality and deadlines for submissions of briefs.

Discussion at the workshops indicated that all the problems identified in the 1996 study persist to the present day. The 1996 model was tried briefly that year, but thereafter fell into disuse. More promising, however, is that a version of the model was employed in 2000 in one of the geographic divisions (PSE), received favourable reviews, and is expected to be used again.