

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

A further explanation offered was that the department appeared not to fully value its own abilities. In the view of one individual, DFAIT consulted too much. There was "a presumption of consultation which goes beyond being creative and productive". Policy development involved "far more people in judgement and decision" than was the case in other countries. Another individual believed policy-making was being distorted by too much consulting with the wrong people. DFAIT was in the habit of "consulting with specialist groups and not the public". "It's almost a version of the Stockholm syndrome, so much talking to like-minded people, pretty soon you convince yourself no one thinks any differently".

### **Business planning**

All organizations struggle with the fact that they cannot control the environment in which they operate and must live with a measure of unpredictability. This is especially true of a foreign ministry. International developments, their *raison d'être*, represent a constant source of new obligations and opportunities to which they must respond. John Coles, the former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, has written that, "With the best will in the world much foreign policy has to be reactive, a matter of responding to events happening outside ... in most foreign ministries, the ad hoc and pragmatic nature of most decision-making has militated against the development of long range and predictive planning".<sup>(12)</sup>

Henry Mintzberg at McGill has noted that: "No amount of elaboration will ever enable formal procedures to forecast discontinuities, to inform managers who are detached from operations, to create novel strategies".<sup>(13)</sup> But if plans designed to "predict" the future are fraught with danger, plans which set a direction for the organization play important roles in its eventual success. Mintzberg believes such plans serve at least three roles: (a) as a medium for communicating strategic intentions and identifying the action required "to ensure that everyone in the organization pulls in the same direction", (b) to provide a method of control, specifying the behaviours expected of particular units and individuals and allowing tracking of progress, and (c) as an instrument of learning, providing data against which assumptions can be tested, performance evaluated, and new directions identified. In a foreign ministry struggling with numerous and complex issues and staff dispersed throughout the world, business plans represent one of the few really effective means for generating a sense of common purpose and direction within the organization.

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<sup>12</sup> *Making Foreign Policy: A Certain Idea of Britain*, John Coles, John Murray London, 2000, p. 11

<sup>13</sup> *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, Henry Mintzberg, McGill University, The Free Press, 1994