

- helping trade officers spend more time and effort on these activities;
- developing service delivery guidelines; and
- creating a support unit at headquarters to help missions to interpret the guidelines and resolve service delivery problems.

Two and half years later, the Auditor General found *inter alia* that “services are more clearly defined” and that “implementing more uniform practices can produce operational improvements”.

It is time for the department to consider a similar initiative in respect of political officers.

Managing political resources

Managing political resources presents many challenges. The operating environment is constantly in flux, objectives can change from one day to the next, the tasks to be performed vary over time and from place to place, and the contributions made to achieving certain outcomes can be difficult to estimate. But managing any professional group presents similar challenges. All operate in conditions of uncertainty, precisely the reason for having professionals with the judgement and competencies to respond effectively to the changing times.

A framework for the effective utilization of political resources consists of several elements.

1. Purpose and rationale

The first element is clarity in respect of the purpose and rationale for the work being done. The department is a dynamic organization, continually reorganizing and redistributing resources to reflect changes in the operating environment and in policy orientation. Every year, bureaux are being created, restructured or downsized; missions are being established, expanded, or closed. Their reason for being -- and for being as they are -- needs to be clear to those who work there.

2. Objectives

The second element is planning, in particular the articulation of strategic intent “to ensure that everyone in the organization pulls in the same direction” (Mintzberg). If the department successfully communicates the “big picture”, it can be assured that most of the hard work and ingenuity of which political officers are capable will be channeled in the right direction -- with or without senior management instruction. When objectives are clear, the department can determine with much greater precision the strategies it needs to pursue to achieve those objectives and, therefore, the tasks which would support the strategies. Conversely, when objectives are unclear effort is diffused and results tend to be disappointing.