

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

From an operational perspective, therefore, they did not fully compensate for the missing FSs. Their presence can also be disruptive:

- Lacking some of the abilities of FS officers, contract employees tend to be assigned some of the more intellectually challenging and innovative work, while FS officers who "know the ropes" handle less substantive assignments only individuals with their experience can perform effectively e.g. visits arrangements. As a result, some FS officers are not acquiring the skills required for "top-end" work such as the development of complex strategies for emerging issues like human security.
- Whereas FS officers have a "virtual contract" to remain in a position for two to three years, contract employees can and often do leave much sooner, interrupting the flow of work, burdening others until replacements can be found (often not for several months), and undermining corporate memory. Managers who participated in the workshops assessed the attrition rate of contract employees to be about 50% per year.
- Because of their precarious hold on the positions they fill, contract employees are seen to be constantly on the alert for other employment possibilities, leaving their FS colleagues to entertain doubts about their "loyalty and commitment".
- Finally, contract employees tend to be paid more than their FS colleagues, often for doing less work because of their limited capabilities. One director at the workshops said there were seven contract employees in his division whose salaries were higher than his own.

Notwithstanding these "less than satisfactory" results, the staffing actions required to retain non-FS political officers have proven to be complex and time-consuming. They involve managers in the most minute dimensions of preparing job descriptions and classifications, advertising openings, interviewing candidates, and indoctrinating new employees. A single staffing action typically takes three to four months to complete, and the whole process may have to be repeated 6-18 months later as a contract terminates or an incumbent decides to move on to another position -- often elsewhere in the department. At certain times of the year, staffing actions, counselling and training of non-FS employees, and the juggling of work among employees to compensate for vacancies, routinely consumes 15 hours a week of a manager's time (30%).

Managers were aggrieved at the amount of time they had to spend on staffing actions, but their major concern was the obstacles they confronted. Faced with real workload problems, managers said they could not count on the department either to provide them with the resources they need or to facilitate their own efforts to find them. One manager claimed that "The good people always result from our own recruitment efforts". Another summed up the view of her colleagues as follows: "Either the department fixes the situation or it liberates managers to do it".