

3. OBSTACLES TO GETTING THE JOB DONE

The four workshops held at the Canadian Foreign Service Institute, along with interviews conducted for this study, suggest that optimal use of the department's political resources confronts two sets of issues.

The first are department-wide issues, which affect all groups but have a particular impact on political officers. These relate to the department's mission in the era of globalization, the department's policy development capacity, business planning, and information management.

The second are issues particular to political officers. These relate to staff reductions and personnel policies, relationships between geographic and functional bureaux and between the department and other government departments, political reporting, how the department manages certain operations such as crises and visits, and procedures for generating briefing materials.

DEPARTMENT-WIDE ISSUES

The department's mission in the era of globalization

During the 1990s, Canada along with most other Western countries reviewed the operations of its foreign ministry and introduced changes to ensure its capacity to deal with new global realities. These included the 1995 reorganization to enhance the leadership role of ADMs and devolve increased responsibility onto DGs, the establishment of a Global Issues Bureau in 1996, and a huge investment in communications technology. These changes, however, did not come to grips with the role the department should play in government, or address the question of whether the department has any role at all to play.

For at least 20 years, the department has found it difficult to define a role for itself which resonates not only with its employees but also with other government departments and with Parliament and the public. Some of the difficulty dates back to the early 1980s when foreign policy and trade were combined in a single department. The problem was not the merger of old "External" and old "IT&C", but the failure to complete the process of integration and create a distinctive new entity. As workshop participants and others observed during the course of this study, trade remains "a department within a department", with its own structure, systems, "stream", and mandate. While the smaller party, it has been more successful in defining a role for itself over the years which has protected not only its identity but its resources. A measure of its success is that the department lists trade and economic issues as its top priorities -- though it is the political and security dimensions of global issues which dominate policy-making and take up most of the time of every foreign minister in the Western world including Canada's.