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# Development, Diplomacy, and Expertise: Placing State Bureaucratic Labour in the CIDA-DFAIT Merger (June 2018 Research Progress Report)

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**RESEARCH PROGRESS REPORT #2  
(June 2018)**

***Development, diplomacy, and expertise:  
Placing state bureaucratic labour in the CIDA-DFAIT merger***

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This is the second interim research report for the SSHRC-funded project *Development, diplomacy, and expertise: Placing state bureaucratic labour in the CIDA-DFAIT merger*, summarizing progress and achievements in the second year of funding, May 2017 through June 2018. This project's main objective is to better understand the process and implications of amalgamation between the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), initiated in 2013. Specifically, the research has examined how the merger of development, foreign, and trade policy institutions has altered the labour of professional officer-level experts and the role of policy expertise in the new department, first called the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development, and renamed Global Affairs Canada in 2015. This research constructs a "labour geography" of Global Affairs Canada, examining the operation of and changes within the department as it works through challenges and builds on opportunities created by the merger, starting with the day-to-day work and professional identities of its development, political, and trade officers.

### **Summary from Year 1**

The first research report, completed in June 2017 and downloadable from the University of Windsor's Scholarship at UWindsor catalog at <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/research-result-summaries/1/>, summarized results from a pilot project carried out prior to obtaining SSHRC support and the first year of SSHRC project funding. Several key themes about the CIDA-DFAIT merger were identified in this first year of the project, including:

- The importance of the CIDA-DFAIT amalgamation as an example of a state reworking connections between its development, diplomatic, and trade institutions, and of the difficulties inherent in such a merger, especially around the forging of a new, common institutional or corporate culture and the restructuring of internal mechanisms for reporting, classifying positions, and organizing policy expertise and experience.
- No singular set of best practices or ideal model exists for this kind of institutional merger between ODA and foreign/trade policy institutions, though numerous OECD states have undertaken similar attempts at restructuring in the last two decades. The drivers of and obstacles for such mergers are context-specific and dependent on political conditions, leadership, and projects in each state.
- The amalgamation has had differential impacts within headquarters and in Canada's missions abroad, as well as between different geographic branches where the department has altered reporting mechanisms and information flow between posts and Ottawa.
- Challenges continue to exist even after amalgamation and can persist for several years. The most important is also the most intangible, namely, the emergence of a perception that the department cannot effectively identify, organize, and deploy the skills and expertise that exist within its professional officer ranks. Compounding this is the relative lack of knowledge

within each stream of the work carried out in the other streams; this is particularly the case between the cohort of trade and political officers from former DFAIT and the development officers from former CIDA.

## **Progress Report for Year 2**

In the past year, the primary investigator has focused on two key elements of the project. First is the continued development of the foreign service, focusing on the longstanding importance of “professionalism” in how foreign service officers understand their work and workplace, and the changing nature of diplomatic labour and the history of collective bargaining between PAFSO and the Treasury Board. Second is a greater focus on lines of social difference within GAC as a workplace, looking at how gender and bilingualism factor into corporate culture in the merged department alongside ideas about expertise, competencies, and training in career development and the production and reproduction of policy expertise.

### ***Research Activities***

Since June 2017, the following research activities have been completed. Data collected have been analyzed and summarized by the PI and with the support of three graduate research assistants at the University of Windsor, including a doctoral candidate and three master’s degree students. These research accomplishments include the following:

- An online survey distributed to personnel in the department via social media pages managed by three unions representing members in GAC (CAPE, PAFSO, PSAC/UNE), focusing specifically on experiences with and views of the CIDA-DFAIT amalgamation;
- In-depth interviews with 25 individuals drawn from the development, trade, political, and consular streams, with 23 of these being follow-ups from the survey;
- Reviews of primary and secondary literature on Canadian diplomatic history, including personal memoirs and biographies of Canadian foreign service officers, and over forty years of the PAFSO newsletter *Bout de papier*;
- Content analysis of the last several years of *Departmental Results Reports* and *Reports on Plans and Priorities*, and other government reports and documents related to Blueprint 2020 and the International Assistance Review completed in mid-2017;
- Analyses of publicly available data from the 2014 and 2017 editions of the Public Service Employee Satisfaction (PSES) Survey, focused on questions relevant to themes covered in the PI’s own survey and for those GAC personnel in the EC, FS, and PM classifications;
- Analysis of media coverage of ongoing changes and trends in the department, drawn especially from *The Hill Times* and other news outlets targeted to national and capital region audiences.

The PI developed the online survey in summer and fall 2017, and released it in early November, running through the first week of January 2018, with approximately 100 respondents completing the survey. A bilingual MA student in the University of Windsor's Political Science program translated all survey responses provided in French to English, and a PhD student from Windsor's Psychology program provided statistical analysis of both responses to the Likert scale questions on the PI's survey regarding the CIDA-DFAIT merger, and data extracted from the 2014 and 2017 PSES surveys conducted by the federal government.

Over a third of the survey respondents agreed to provide contact information to carry out an in-depth follow-up interview, and 23 of these completed an interview. The primary investigator conducted all interviews over the phone in English, taking notes but not recording the interviews.

Another MA-level research assistant compiled data from *Bout de papier*, looking particularly at the quarterly newsletter's editorial notebook and president's message, on collective bargaining and PAFSO's perspective on the state of the foreign service, and completed an annotated bibliography of several pieces written by Canadian ambassadors and foreign service officers about their experience in the foreign service. This contributed to a paper presented at the April 2018 meeting of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) in New Orleans, titled "Geographies of diplomatic labor: Institutional culture, collective bargaining, and Canada's foreign service"; the PI will submit this paper for publication in an academic journal by the end of summer 2018, but slides from the presentation can be provided upon request.

## ***Results from Year 2***

Preliminary findings from the past year of this research project are summarized below. These build primarily on data from surveys and interviews, as well as the paper presented at the AAG conference in April.

***Online survey:*** The survey the PI designed and conducted in late 2017 was targeted at EC, FS, and PM personnel in the department's political, trade, and development streams, but also gathered responses from a few others outside these occupational groups, as well as consular officers within the FS group. The survey consisted of four parts: a set of questions on service and categorization in the department; 35 Likert-scale questions regarding various aspects of the respondent's experience in the department and with amalgamation; four open-ended questions about skills and the merger; and a series of demographic questions. More than half of all respondents were located in headquarters (58%), and more than half were FS (58%), though only one third (33%) identified as working in the political stream. Three quarters of respondents (75%) had between 6 and 20 years of experience in GAC or its predecessor institutions and almost three quarters (73%) were between the ages of 35 and 54. More than half (54%) identified as female, and two-thirds (68%) identified as speaking English as their first official language, while only 16 percent identified as visible minority. While the research team conducted

additional analyses of the survey data on the role of years of experience, age, and occupational group in shaping views on the merger, interviews (discussed below) yielded more insights on how demographic characteristics matter for the merger and the department going forward.

ANOVA analysis of responses to a series of statements about the merger and the department on a 5-point scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’ indicate that a handful of factors are most important in shaping how personnel see their work, their workplace, and the amalgamation. These factors were summarized and analyzed in six categories: (1) overall view of amalgamation; (2) colleagues and working together in the department; (3) advancement and career opportunity; (4) support and inclusion in the workplace; (5) management and human resources; and (6) physical workspace.

- **Overall view of amalgamation:** Respondents were neutral overall, though age, years of experience, and occupational group provided statistically significant differences, with PM respondents having a more negative view than others, and a decrease in positive views of the merger with increasing age and years of experience.
- **Colleagues and working together:** Overall, views of collegiality and working together are relatively neutral, with years of experience being the only statistically significant effect, as views tended to be more negative on this front with more years of experience in the department and its predecessors.
- **Advancement and career opportunity:** Views on opportunity for advancement and career development were relatively neutral, tending slightly toward negative overall. Stream and occupational group were statistically significant effects on these questions, with those in the development stream holding more positive views than colleagues in either the trade or political streams. Similarly, ECs were significantly more positive on career advancement than their colleagues, and FSs significantly more negative.
- **Supportive and inclusive workplace:** Again, views were overall neutral, but no statistically significant effects of age, gender, occupational group, or other demographic or professional characteristic were observed.
- **Management and HR:** While views were neutral across the whole sample, they tended toward slightly negative, with occupational group as a statistically significant effect on views. FS and PM respondents were more negative on the relationship with the department’s management and human resources.

- **Physical workspace:** Views were neutral, with the exception that years of experience in the department was a statistically significant effect, as those with more years of experience tended to be more negative on the physical workspaces in the department.

The survey results described above contained few surprises, and corroborated data from interviews obtained in the first years of the project. Results extracted from the 2014 and 2017 PSES surveys (looking at EC, FS, and PM respondents in GAC, and at all GAC respondents by years of experience) suggest, however, that the initial phase of amalgamation in 2013 and 2014 produced negative views among younger respondents as well, and that those in the EC classification initially held more negative views of the merger's impacts. Many respondents reported that the merger significantly affected their workflow and workspace and produced a wide range of obstacles and opportunities in their daily work and career trajectories. While opportunities have been varied and numerous, in interviews, respondents have often described obstacles as crippling to morale and insurmountable for career advancement. While the results in each category of Likert-scale questions were overall neutral, the range of answers varied widely, and in general, we can conclude that more experience in the department and its predecessors CIDA and DFAIT (or even past iterations of External Affairs) tends to produce a more negative view of the most recent amalgamation. This suggests that institutional or corporate culture and change management remain challenges for successfully advancing the merger of CIDA and DFAIT at the working levels.

Open-ended questions on the survey included questions on skills required for respondents' current position; the biggest challenge and most promising opportunity from the merger; and what remains to be done to make the merger successful. Respondents provided details on a wide range of specific skills they felt were vital to their daily work and career development, and mixed views on the merger process and how to improve it. The greatest and most common benefit identified was the opportunity to work across streams more effectively and better understand the work of colleagues in other policy areas handled by GAC. However, respondents also identified this as one of the most significant challenges presented by the merger, with many noting the relative inflexibility of occupational groups and position classifications. Several commented that this makes effective collaboration across streams difficult and is seen as limiting opportunities for advancement and promotion. Significant tensions remain between streams over the relative value of their work in the department, their objectives and focus, and the perceived elevation of certain skill sets over others in the department's promotion exercises. Specifically, some respondents (especially but not only those in the FS category) expressed in the survey and in interviews the idea that the department increasingly rewards experience and skills, such as managing large grants and large numbers of people, that are most likely to be found within the development stream. Conversely, these respondents argue that skills such as adaptability, communication, networking, and political and analytical judgment, which FS officers most commonly identify as their key competencies, are devalued. The historical research on PAFSO,

collective bargaining, and institutional culture in the foreign service carried out this past year suggest, however, that these are not new concerns. Foreign service officers and PAFSO, their bargaining agent and professional association, have long identified a range of pressures (budget constraints, lateral entries to the foreign service, political appointments to ambassadorial posts, institutional shuffles and mergers) affecting their ability to carry out their professional duties as a service and achieve career development as individuals.

***Individual interviews:*** Survey respondents were asked if they would be willing to participate in a follow-up research interview, and if so, to provide a contact email address. Contact information was collected and kept separate from all survey responses. Interviews with GAC personnel in the past year indicate a wide-ranging set of concerns, challenges, and benefits to the amalgamation, and point to some key issue areas for the department going forward. In general, three connected sets of concerns emerged as the most important across the interviews:

- (1) career opportunities and advancement in the department;
- (2) departmental support for ongoing training and skills development; and
- (3) the intersection of bilingual requirements, recruitment at the entry level, and the need for a department that represents Canada as a whole.

A cohort of mid to late mid-career officers (such as FS2, FS3, PM5, and PM6) noted that there are now a limited number of promotion exercises available to them, and the department's shift toward a 'competency-based' approach to promotion and assessment has left many wondering what skills and experiences the department most values. As noted above, many, especially in the FS ranks, identified a common perception that HR places a premium on skills and experience that are unobtainable for them and which are not clearly related to the positions to which they are seeking promotion, such as the ability to manage large sums of money like those found in development grants and contributions, or experience managing large numbers of people. Consular officers further reported that because a majority of them are at posts instead of in HQ, and their training and day-to-day work is so different from that of their colleagues, even others in the FS group, they are at a disadvantage for promotions and are undervalued by and often invisible in the department. Development officers interviewed also pointed to similar problems in relation to a recently initiated and then paused conversion exercise that would move multiple dozen PM positions into a new FS-International Assistance (FSIA) category. Some expressed worry about being at a disadvantage in applying for these because of language or other requirements built into the newly converted positions. Respondents from all streams expressed the sentiment that the only way to advance in the department was to leave, gain experience elsewhere in the public service, and then transfer back in at the EX level.

Overall, concern with stalled careers and limited opportunities to gain new skills, hone existing ones, and move up the ranks or between position types was a dominant theme in the interviews,

often expressed as distrust of management, pessimism about the value the department placed on the working level, and worry about eroding work conditions and autonomy to provide expert advice and analysis. There were positives as well, with many noting more opportunities to work with colleagues in other streams and greater understanding of their colleagues' work. Some respondents have found the merger beneficial with respect to the intersection of policy areas, though some felt policy expertise and daily work too often remain "siloed." A handful of respondents noted that this siloing is reflected in the physical and social structure of the Pearson and Diefenbaker Buildings in Ottawa. This remains less of an issue at post, with smaller teams and closer working relationships between streams that often predate the merger.

Closely related to the first point, but tied to skills development rather than career advancement, many interview respondents also had much to say about training and experiential opportunities in the department. Multiple respondents with several years of experience in DFAIT in particular noted the slow curtailment of training and mentorship opportunities over the last several years, especially for new recruits into the foreign service and for official language training. A surprising number identified increased tensions around bilingual requirements for FS positions, and often connected this to recruitment and the department's representativeness in terms of drawing a diverse body of new recruits from across Canada rather than just the Quebec-Montreal-Ottawa corridor. These concerns and tensions at the working level stand as important elements of any departmental strategy to recruit and train the next generation of consular, development, political, and trade officers and to ensure an effective intergenerational transfer of knowledge and experience, especially in the context of institutional merger and the prioritization of policy coherence. Most respondents felt that the department's attempts on this front have been largely ad hoc, and that GAC has yet to develop or communicate a comprehensive long-term approach to recruiting, training, and mentoring a new generation of officers and to valuing, using, and enhancing current personnel's skills and expertise.

### **Plans for Year 3**

In the final full year of SSHRC funding, the PI will continue to focus on the theme of departmental recruitment and skills development as a primary component of how expertise in GAC is produced and reproduced. Building upon the visit to an embassy post in Latin America in 2017, the PI will conduct up to two further embassy visits, in Asia and in Africa, to examine the merger and other developments from the perspective of a foreign post rather than HQ alone. The PI also will continue to explore the importance of social difference (such as gender, visible minority status, and bilingualism) in shaping institutional culture and professional identity in the department. The PI will examine a summary of these themes from data collected thus far in a presentation titled "Three piece suits and Birkenstocks: Geographies of institutional change and the workplace at Global Affairs Canada," at the August 2018 meeting of the Canadian Association of Geographers/International Geographical Union (CAG/IGU) in Québec City.