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# Book Reviews: The Implementation Game

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# BOOK REVIEWS

THE IMPLEMENTATION GAME. By Eugene Bardach. M.I.T. Press, Boston Massachusetts. 1977, Pp. 323. Reviewed by Richard A. Buddeke.†

Eugene Bardach's "The Implementation Game" is the first in a series on American politics and public policy sponsored and published by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The book is primarily concerned with the frustrations faced by government planners in the interval between the making of a policy decision and the establishment of effective operations. It exposes the seemingly countless little steps that add up to delay, procrastination, and, in some cases, defeat or distortion of the program.

To make this point, the author uses a figure of speech — games — whence came the book's title "The Implementation Game." He pictures the people concerned with carrying out a policy as playing separate games within the process. He describes and classifies the games, gives examples of situations in which each has been used, and assigns them titles. Thus, for example, there is the "Budget Game," in which established and presumably cooperating bureau-crats with existing budgets examine the advantages, disadvantages, and extent of their financial participation, or "Pile On," where a recognizably good little program is over-burdened by those trying to attach their interests to it, or the "Easy Life" game of career civil servants who do things in their own established way and within their own self-sufficient order of priority.

The author does a good job of analyzing and titling his games, some of which are "Up for Grabs," "Easy Money," "Keeping the Peace," "Tokenism," "Massive Resistance," and "Pork Barrel." He classifies the game types into "Diversion of Resources," "Deflections of Policy Goals," "Resistance," and "Dissipation of Personal and Political Energies." One cannot help but wonder whether Mr. Bardach's catalog of games might not be as effective in teaching bureaucrats how to frustrate program development as it is to help programmers to identify and understand the causes of delay.

It must be remembered that this is a book on policy. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology is orienting its series that way. Mr. Bardach is an academician and a product of those shadowy policy analysis offices that operate in isolation as "think tank" arms of an agency head. He seems to be good at that sort of thing. However, his sometimes cynical descriptions of the games played create the inference that many public servants enjoy tearing down policy. He does not seem to understand that most government employees are responsible for day-to-day operations in which they are held accountable for the services they perform, the money they

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spend, and the personnel and facilities they use. Most have watched the gallant Lochinvars of policy gallop from the nether regions into Washington, Sacramento, or Columbus and gallop out again leaving behind an assortment of ideas, generalizations, and a relieved contingent of pragmatic operators.

Nor is this a book on law or legislation. Most of the policy examples given involve administrative determinations of policy. The author is not seriously concerned about the legal beginnings of the decisions he would see implemented. He seems to be unaware of the constitutional and statutory framework designed to surface the very problems he discusses. In the democratic tradition, basic policies are set by legislation. In Washington and in most state capitals, extensive hearings precede legislative policy determinations, and federal and state administrative procedure acts prescribe methods that must be followed by bureaucrats to be sure that all relevant interests are considered before administrative policy is set.

Mr. Bardach is concerned about solving the problems he raises, and he makes a number of suggestions that are acceptable. For example, he feels that a good theory supporting the policy is important, that intermediaries should be used in negotiations, that project management techniques could be employed, and that efforts should be made to work around known obstacles to progress. His principal solution, however, involves another figure of speech. He feels that the promoters of policy should prepare a "scenario" for their game plan. This "method simply involves an imaginative construction of future sequences of actions — consequent conditions — action — consequent conditions. It is inventing a plausible story about 'what will happen if . . .' or, more precisely, inventing several such stories." He supplements the idea with an outline, drawn from his "games" that he feels should be followed. All of this is good but it is not new. Tough old bureaucrats have been doing those things for years without the dramatic figure of speech.

At one point — just one point — the author recognizes that "negotiations in the policy-adoption phase are simpler and faster because the participants feel it less important to resolve uncertainties (they can be taken care of in the implementation phase!) and also because the rules of the game do not require uncertainties to be resolved." That illustrates the point to which a solution should be directed; where a consideration of operational problems is postponed to the implementation stage, responsible officials are forced to play Mr. Bardach's games. The author has had great fun jabbing his finger into sore spots in the implementation process, weaknesses which could have been treated or eliminated by pragmatic planning at the policy-making stage.