



Do Think Tanks Matter?, Second Edition: Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes

Donald E. Abelson

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Do Think Tanks Matter? evaluates the influence and relevance of public policy institutes in today's political arena. Many journalists and scholars believe the explosion of think tanks in the latter part of the twentieth century indicates their growing importance in the policy-making process. This perception has been reinforced by directors of think tanks, who often credit their institutes with influencing major policy debates and government legislation. Yet the basic question of how and in what way they influence public policy has, Donald Abelson contends, frequently been ignored.

Abelson studies the experiences of think tanks in the United States, where they have become an integral feature of the political landscape, and in Canada, where their numbers have grown considerably in recent years but where, compared to their U.S. counterparts, they enjoy less prominence in policy-making. By focusing on the policy cycle, issue articulation (that is, getting issues on the political agenda) and policy formation and implementation (actually affecting the outcome of policies already on the political agenda), he argues that think tanks have sometimes played an important role in shaping the political dialogue and the policy preferences and choices of decision-makers, but often in different ways and at different stages of the policy cycle.

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