The Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program (TTCSP) at the University of Pennsylvania conducts research on the role policy institutes play in governments and civil societies around the world. Often referred to as the “think tanks’ think tank,” TTCSP examines the evolving role and character of public policy research organizations. Over the last 25 years, the TTCSP has developed and led a series of global initiatives that have helped bridge the gap between knowledge and policy in critical policy areas such as international peace and security, globalization and governance, international economics, the organisation of denial: Conservative think tanks and environmental scepticism. Environmental Politics, 17(3), 349–385.CrossRefGoogle Scholar. James, S. (1993). Murky power: “Think tanks” as boundary organizations. In D. Golsorkhi, D. Courpasson, & J. Sallaz (Eds.), Rethinking power in organizations, institutions, and markets (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Vol. 34). Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley, pp. 113-133. https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78052-665-2

Abstract

This chapter uses the case of American think tanks to develop the idea of a “boundary organization,” or a formal organization that acquires its distinctiveness and efficacy from its intermediate location in the social structure. Traversing, overlapping, and incorporating the logics of multiple institutional spheres – including those of academia, politics, business, and the market – think tanks at first seem to be organizations “divided against themselves.” However, by gathering complex mixtures of otherwise discordant resources, they create novel products, carry out novel practices, and claim for themselves a crucial mediating role in the social structure. This chapter’s ultimate aim is to consider the implications of this idea for theories of organizational power. With respect to this aim, I argue that boundary organizations – and organizational boundary-making processes in general – underscore the need to think about power in relational and processional terms.

Keywords

Boundary organization, Think tanks, Power

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