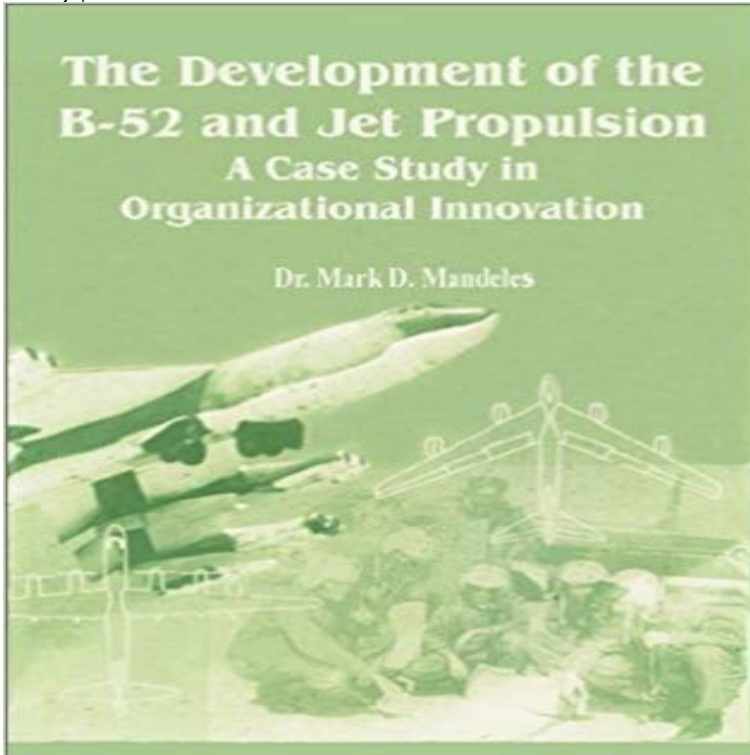


The Development of the B-52 and Jet Propulsion: A Case Study in Organizational Innovation



The B-52 and Jet Propulsion: A Case Study in Organizational Innovation is a coherent and nonpolemical discussion of the revolution in military affairs, a hot topic in the national security arena. Mark Mandeles examines an interesting topic, how can the military better understand, manage, and evaluate technological development programs. We see Murphys Law (anything that can go wrong, will go wrong) in operation. No matter how carefully the military designs, plans, and programs the process of technological development, inevitably, equipment, organizations, and people will challenge the desired expectations. Mandeles argues convincingly that recognizing the inevitability of error may be the single most important factor in the design of effective organizations and procedures to foster and enhance innovative technology and concepts. The book focuses on the introduction of jet propulsion into the B-52. This case study illustrates the reality that surprises and failures are endemic to development programs where information and knowledge are indeterminate, ambiguous, and imperfect. Mandeles choice of the B-52 to illustrate this process is both intriguing and apt. The military had no coherent search process inevitably leading to the choice of a particular technology; nor was decision making concerning the B-52 development program coherent or orderly. Different mixtures of participants, problems, and solutions came together at various times to make decisions about funding or to review the status of performance projections and requirements. Three aspects of the B-52s history are striking because they challenge conventional wisdom about rationally managed innovation. First, Air Force personnel working on the B-52 program did not obtain the aircraft they assumed they would get when the program began. Second, the development process did not

conform to idealized features of a rational program. While a rationally organized program has clear goals, adequate information, and well-organized and attentive leadership, the B-52 development process exhibited substantial disagreement over, and revision of, requirements or goals, and ambiguous, imperfect, and changing information. Third, the messy development process, as described in the book, forestalled premature closure on a particular design and spurred learning and the continuous introduction of new knowledge into the design as the process went along. Military innovations involve questions about politics, cooperation and coordination, and social benefits, and like other development efforts, there appears to be no error-free method to predict at the outset the end results of any given program. This study offers a major lesson to today's planners: improving the capacity of a number of organizations with overlapping jurisdictions to interact enhances prospects to innovate new weapons and operational concepts. We can mitigate bureaucratic pathologies by fostering interaction among government and private organizations.

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