

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List

The Defense Acquisition Professional Reading List is intended to enrich the knowledge and understanding of the civilian, military, contractor, and industrial workforce who participate in the entire defense acquisition enterprise. These book reviews/recommendations are designed to complement the education and training that are vital to developing the essential competencies and skills required of the Defense Acquisition Workforce. Each issue of the *Defense Acquisition Research Journal (ARJ)* will contain one or more reviews of suggested books, with more available on the *Defense ARJ* website.

We encourage *Defense ARJ* readers to submit reviews of books they believe should be required reading for the defense acquisition professional. The reviews should be 400 words or fewer, describe the book and its major ideas, and explain its relevance to defense acquisition. Please send your reviews to the Managing Editor, *Defense Acquisition Research Journal*:
Norene.Fagan-Blanch@dau.mil.

Featured Book

**Book Reviewed:**

*The Polaris System Development:
Bureaucratic and Programmatic
Success in Government*

Author(s):

Harvey M. Sapolsky

Publisher:

Cambridge, Harvard University
Press

Copyright Date:

1971

ISBN:

0674682252

Hard/Softcover:

Hardcover: 261 pages

Reviewed by:

Dr. Michael Pryce, Research
Fellow, Manchester Business
School, UK

Review:

During the Cold War, the U.S. Navy set about creating a stealthy nuclear deterrent against the Soviet Union, based upon creating a force of nuclear submarines carrying Fleet Ballistic Missiles (FBMs) known as Polaris. From 1955 until 1960, this capability was developed and fielded under a Special Project Office (SPO) led by Admiral William F. Raborn.

Sapolsky sets out in this book to “describe a government program which worked, a public bureaucracy which was successful” (p.1). As such, it is a “success study.” His basic aim is to find out how a large government bureaucracy can successfully manage a technologically challenging, large-scale weapons acquisition program.

Sapolsky focuses not on the technical accomplishments of the Polaris program, but on the political/management success. He does so by examining the four strategies that the supporters of the program used to protect and manage its resources:

- Differentiation—“the attempts of organizations to establish unchallengeable claims on valued resources by distinguishing their own products or programs from those of competitors” (p. 43);
- Co-optation—“the attempts of organizations to absorb ‘...new elements into [its] leadership or policy-determining structure...as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence’” (p. 47);
- Managerial Innovation—“the attempts of organizations to achieve autonomy in the direction of a complex and risky program through the introduction of managerial techniques that appear to indicate unique managerial competence” (p. 58); and
- Moderation—“the attempts of organizations to build long-term support for their programs by sacrificing short-term gains” (p. 54).

Sapolsky attempts to separate the myths of the program’s success, which have largely been attributed to managerial innovations such as PERT (Program Evaluation and Review Technique), from the realities such as the perceived strategic need for the program and the management competency of the SPO, all of which created an environment that was highly conducive to eventual success. He also shows that in following a technical strategy that did not seek a fundamental advance in the state of the art, the Polaris project was also able to deliver the required performance on time and on cost.

This book, although 30 years out of print and describing a now-defunct weapon system, is essential reading for managers and decision makers who want to understand the critical factors that drive program success.