Key Concepts in Political Models

- central question: how to distribute inevitably scarce resources (money, power, prestige, time, etc.)

- focus on power, conflict, politics, competition

- individual, group, and unit interests do not always overlap with overall organizational interests

- political rationality ≠ classic "cognitive" rationality

- the critical questions:
  -what is at stake?
  -what solutions are possible?
  -who benefits (cui bono)?
  -who decides (who are the players)?
  -why now?

- core explanatory ideas in political analysis:
  -interests and interest groups within organizations drive behavior more than goals
  -where you stand depends on where you sit (and thus what you see)
  -stakeholders (inside and outside the organization)
  -constituents
  -compromise, negotiation, bargaining
  -symbols
  -coalitions and their formation
  -power = resource control, not goal/mission control
  -games, game theory, winners and losers
  -power networks (players, stakeholders)
  -issue definition
  -"spin"
  -arguing with force, rather than subtlety and balance
  -relativity of means and ends, and costs and benefits
  -conflict episodes
  -the evolving decision context (one's resources and stances change over time)
  -"negotiated order"
  -"zones of indifference"
  -organizations as open systems (multiple environmental factors)

- internal conflict and competition under the political model
  -can be functional for the organization and its people, not always pathological or dysfunctional
  -can foster energy, innovation (e.g., Apple's "skunkworks")
  -can be productively sought, and even built into structure (e.g., Congress, the judicial system, athletic
       leagues)

- resource-dependency theory and the centrality of the external environment under the political model
  -organizations are open systems that are dependent on contingencies in the external environment
  -survival depends on ensuring continuing resources for producing their products and services
  -organizations attempt to reduce others' power over them and increase their own power over others by
       managing their resource interdependencies and their uncertainties
  -organizations will attend mainly to their major resource dependencies – their keys to survival
  -organizations maintain and even potentially reduce their reliance on those key dependencies via
       diversification, structural change, managing contractual and professional relationships with suppliers
       and competitors, etc.