Organizational Theory

I. Defining Organizations

A. Formal apparatus of administration (generic)
B. "Groups of individual human members assembled in regular ways, and established structures and procedures dividing and specializing labor, to perform a mission or achieve an objective. (Allison & Zelikow, EoD, p.145)

II. Three of A&Z’s key features of organizations (see p.145-46)

A. Create capabilities to achieve some aims, but constrain ability to achieve other aims
B. Develop organizational culture and identity; socialize members; develop norms
C. Possess bundle of technologies: (not just artifacts but knowledge of how to create or achieve certain aims)

III. Value of Organizations

A. Achieve selected ends efficiently
B. Necessary to process vast quantities of information
   1. "Bounded" rationality of individuals
   2. Flawed parts create better "whole"
C. Essential rationalization of policy

IV. Pathologies of Organizations

A. Myopic goal seeking
B. Management of time and resources generates tradeoffs between efficiency (getting the job done cheaply and quickly) and effectiveness (getting the job done as well as possible)
C. Organization-centered interests form distinct from superior political units (organizational biases)
D. Irrationality of organizations
   1. Time and information load tradeoffs yield irrational outputs
   2. Outputs generate identities and interests: tail wags the dog
E. Hierarchy v. democracy: do organizations dominate society?
F. Dysfunctional Path-Dependency: SOPs and cultures are deeply institutionalized, limiting ability to change
V. What Makes Organizations Change?

A. Budget Feast: more money, new areas to become involved, or opportunity to strengthen existing roles
B. Prolonged Budget Famine: need to decide which missions are more important
C. Drastic Failure: public failure of established SOPs leads to internal and external pressure for change