

Although I am still considering which topic I will select to use for my final project for this class, it is clear that tragedy of the commons will play an important role in the system. For our midterm presentation, we presented information about our experiences, observations, and systems analyses about a small kitchen for a restaurant owned and operated in a tourist town in northern Wisconsin. Several traps came clear to us, namely success to the successor, and burden to the Intervener. These had to do with the interpersonal relationships between the bosses and the lower level cooks, and both showed that management had a superfluous amount of power, and this harmed the workflow. This type of situation did not clearly depict tragedy of the commons since the workers were not necessarily striving for maximum restaurant output in a way that would lead them to compete for resources.

After our class discussion about tragedy of the commons and group presentations which directly covered the subject, I felt further pushed to look for instances of this trap in our system. Tragedy of the commons governs so much of society, so it must be present in some form. In order to look harder, I turned to Elinor Ostrom's principles for managing the commons and compared them to our proposed changes for management. In order for this to be reasonable, I had to first determine a stock which was being misused. An interesting concept that arose was one of employee morale as a pseudo-stock. Morale is needed to keep employees working at a productive rate. This is enhanced by the fact that low wages, low unemployment, and a shortage of minimum wage service workers in the area created a work incentive that is much less than appealingly persuasive. Tragedy of the commons comes into play when the morale of one employee impacts the overall atmosphere. If all the workers are outwardly cheerful, a positive feedback loop forms and all employees passively encourage each other to be happy and productive. If one employee starts to act somewhat grumpy or uninvolved, it can continue for a while unnoticed by management and without a large effect on aggregate morale. Once the trend spreads, aggregate morale takes a large hit and the common stock of morale in productivity diminishes greatly.

An interesting problem now lies in the hands of management. It is difficult to use many of the Elinor Ostrom's principles of managing the commons, since this commons is not tangible. How can morale standards be set across the group of employees, when motivation and cheerfulness manifest themselves differently in every worker? Further, how can the impediment of common morale by individual employees be quantified?

Soon, I realized that work spaces generally create a very unique tragedy of the commons dilemma. Many of the principles ring true with an entire new meaning when applied with a human resources lens. The second principle declares, "Match rules governing use of common goods to local needs and conditions." In the example of morale, this governing principle helps guide management with the advice that various employees may demonstrate morale and emotional motivation in different ways. Similarly, it is important for managers to follow the principle of user, specifically worker, engagement when forming ground rules for any abuse of the commons. This dually affects the output of the restaurant and the well being of all employees.

Overarchingly, in the use case of intangible commons in the work environment, pinpointing the identity of the worker is equally as important as the identity of the systems thinker.

To me, this concept is one that most definitely needs to be explored. I plan on using some form of interpersonal system in my final project, and I look forward to investigating nuances in the commons.