

This week I have chosen to analyze the recent story shared by Molly. The example of the potato farmers' dilemma and subsequent solution were of high interest to me. As a business major with a certificate in sustainability, I too find value in changing a system to better help the environment while making sure it is economical at the same time. The story helped me resonate with the idea of boundaries or limits we as actors in the system place on that system that in turn cause problems or inhibit our ability to see the true solutions. In addition, I will talk about the idea of motivation within a system and how this week's story has me thinking of the subject as it relates to boundaries.

To begin, I will identify what I believe Molly and those involved in the potato system placed as boundaries. To me, boundaries can come at any point in a systems life. How one sets up a system, runs a system, or attempts to solve a problem within a system can all have corresponding boundaries placed on them. In this case, we will look at the boundary placed on the system in terms of what those involved considered success. Often, humans without systems thinking view success in a system with a narrow scope. Without considering different outcomes besides the one fixated in the actors' minds, they fall victim to creating boundaries in the system. When this happens, one frequently misses helpful hints that would cure the system, or at least present options to solving the problem. In this case, we have the example of a rise in market share not being realized because there was fixation on receiving a premium. Even worse, when one views a system incorrectly, they can put themselves in a double bind. By doing this, the actors in the system are placed in a snowball effect that is hard to break with their respective "solutions" becoming part of the problem itself.

People could not figure out why they were unable to sell the potato at a premium. When they created this system and scoped its solution, it was narrowly viewed as one where success would mean lots of people adopted the idea and were willing to pay a premium for it. When your view of success this narrow, you set yourself up for failure.

Changing a system's boundaries in terms of what you view as success can be extremely helpful when working intermediately to solve the problem. By having an open mind about what may cure the system's problems or being open to the fact there may be many ways or combination of ways to fix a problem, the possibilities greatly increase. In this system, the physical boundaries of actual sales or money seemed to be the prime motivator. Second, the conceptual boundary of doing the right thing for the environment was a supposed boundary or motivator as well. The actor's believed that people were willing to change for the environment's sake. While people do care, often they are not willing to pay the premium to "change the world". The boundaries were miss-representational of how the system was actually acting.

In this system, the boundaries were changed. It took awhile and some investigating after it was realized the system had sustained itself and the farmers were still using the Heathy Grown Potatoes option. What I admired of those involved, was their inspiration to ask why they still were growing this way. By doing this, they were able to realize and understand the boundaries they themselves had placed on the system, remove them, and subsequently enact the same reason in similar situations moving forward.

Boundaries are defined by motivation. One's motivation to succeed has drastic influence on how the system is constructed and ran. Like I mentioned earlier, it seems that boundaries are a direct correlation to motivation and by changing your motivation, you thusly change the boundaries as well. It was clear the motivation was to sustainably grow potatoes. Digging deeper, there is motivation within motivators. What was the motivation on how they were going to grow it, or continue to grow it that way. Increased market demand by having a product that was valued, farmers were making up the price difference they were losing to the investment of this growing method. Although the motivation was to receive a premium, in the end success was achieved by capturing more market share, making more money, and not effecting the environment like they were before. While boundaries are a clear inhibitor to the actors in a system, those actors should first analyze their motivations to see if that is where the problem lies.