

One system that I am a part of is a club known as the Ethical and Responsible Business Network (ERBN) in that there are interconnected elements organized to achieve a goal. The parts include all the members, some of whom are board members/leaders, some are active members, and others only attend meetings. Each type of member has a relationship; board members make decisions about which companies will speak at meetings, which affects active members in their decision-making, thus influencing less active members to participate more. In order to function, each part of this system must interact and share ideas. This feeds into its purpose which is to create a community-wide spread in awareness of sustainability-related issues. Another important element of the system is an imperative intangible, which is the passion for sustainability.

While each of the parts are interconnected, there are many things that make me question whether or not it's really a system. The underlying passion for sustainability may be all that's really to it; I can also see the organization as just a conglomeration of members who all just care about the environment, similar to sand scattered on a road that can be taken away or added to without changing the fact that it's still just a bunch of people who worry about sustainable practices. I would much rather look deeply at the organization and see each member as much more than a replaceable grain of sand. The board leaders are intelligent and knowledgeable individuals with connections to other systems, such as the system of local Madison companies that work in conjunction with ERBN, each of which is a system on its own as well. Each member also brings a new voice and perspective to the system, without which it would not function.

The behavior of the organization is also indicative of its consideration as a system. The stock is essentially the tangible, explainable events that ERBN has made happen. Projects, speakers, and general sustainability information are inflows to the system. Members then take that information and interconnect, discuss ideas, and make decisions to create an outflow of

increased awareness about the importance of sustainability to the campus and Madison community. A problem I've seen in the past with the behavior of this system is that there have not been enough inflows. Without guest speakers and outside factors that can provide members with the raw information to make change, that change will not happen since the stock is not high enough to flow back out of the system. I would say we are currently at a dynamic equilibrium, where the rate of information being transferred to members is roughly equal to the rate of impact and change that is taking place on the community. Then again, it is rather difficult to quantify the rate of outflow, since that impact may also be coming from other sources. ERBN is also a system within a system, where the bigger system is UW-Madison, and there are other organizations/systems with similar parts, relationships and functions. So is it really a system if you can't make a graph showing that it's achieving or not achieving its function? I think it should be, but I'm also a very number-rooted person so it's difficult for me to see it as a system if there's no way to prove it.

Whether this organization is really a system or not, I think it's super important to still view it from the systems thinking perspective. As the video from class explains, making distinctions between all of the parts and wholes and seeing the different perspectives and relationships within can allow us to think about everything more critically. And as the book details, there is a long, long history of thinking that dynamically changes between rational, analytical, reductionist, linear, and self-assertive ways of thought. I don't think that any one way is the right way, and sometimes things have to be seen using multiple methods. However, at least in the field of sustainability, I think it's really vital to see how things are related to each other and the impact each and every little action or change to a system can have on that system and all interconnected systems.