



Online System Dynamics Collaborative

Obesity Prevention personas

GEO-SD304, System Dynamics Modeling Process

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Dietitian

You work as a dietitian, meaning that you work with individuals on meeting their nutrition goals, improving their diets, and building better eating habits. You do this primarily through counselling, sharing health information, goal setting with individuals, and follow up on goals with clients. You have worked with many individuals for many years. You also are part of a national nutrition advocacy organisation that is demanding better food policy from the government. You do not believe that obesity is actually a problem, but rather you think *perceived* obesity rates is a problem. You think it's wrong that people focus on body weight and that focusing on people's weight is the real problem. So the problem you would like solved is to decrease the focus on obesity and increase the focus on healthy eating. In particular, you think all food is healthy, there is no such thing as junk food or bad food. Instead of thinking there is good food and bad food or unhealthy food and healthy food, you instead think people should just be supported in eating more mindfully and intentionally. You believe that if people are supported in thinking really carefully about what they eat and enjoying food, people's health will improve. You think if the world keeps focusing on obesity, the problem will get worse because people are focusing on the wrong thing.

Policymaker

You are a representative/member of parliament/equivalent in the national government of your home country. You see obesity as a problem because you know that it can lead to many chronic diseases like diabetes, heart attacks, and strokes. All of these chronic diseases cost your country a lot of money. You are concerned about the cost to the health system and the need to either increase taxes or decrease the quality of healthcare because of the burden of all this chronic disease. However, you are facing a re-election campaign next year, and a large sugary beverage manufacturer is one of your major campaign donors. The sugary beverage manufacturer has told you that physical activity is the most important aspect of obesity prevention, and they think that you should invest a lot of time and money into physical activity for people's wellbeing. You think that health activists and academics are unfair to the sugary beverage manufacturer because it's very nice they are so invested in people being active. You are pretty sure unhealthy food, like sugary drinks, contribute to obesity as well, but you think people deserve to have a choice in what they eat and that it's too controlling for you to impose restrictions on what people eat. You think perhaps health education could be one way to help people eat better, but you do not support any taxes to change the cost of food or anything that imposes restrictions on what is available to people in food outlets.

Parent

You are a mom or dad. You are worried about children becoming less healthy, although you are sceptical of obesity, particularly childhood obesity as a problem. You think children can't be overweight or obese, and rather it's just "baby fat." Nonetheless, you remember when YOU were a child – you played outside everyday and were very active, and your family also very rarely ate any takeaway/fast food. You always had home cooked meals. You think the real problem here is that (1) kids spend too much on screens these days and (2) other parents aren't trying hard enough to encourage their kids to eat healthy and instead are buying them fast food all the time. You also think the world used to be safer when you were a kid, and low perceived safety makes it harder to be active. You are passionate about improving other people's parenting and have a blog where you share healthy recipes and tips to get kids to have active fun.

School principal

You are the principal of a primary school (for students years/grades 1 through 6). You really care about your students, but you are overworked and your school is underfunded. A new health law has been passed, and it requires that all schools do three things: (1) teach healthy eating in class; (2) extend physical activity time for students either through longer breaks or more gym class or both; and (3) improve the healthiness of the food available to students at school. You really care about your students and you think obesity is a problem that you would like to solve, but you're not sure how to find the time and resources to implement this. Schools are expected to do so much – educate kids, support mental health, report instances of potential child abuse, and now also keep kids healthy. You think that while schools have a role in preventing obesity, parents have most responsibility, and that while schools should play a role, parents really need to help out too.

Supermarket General Manager

Your country has two large supermarket chains that compete with one another. You are the general manager of one location of one of those supermarkets in a small town. In that small town, your supermarket is the main source of food for people (the other large supermarket chain does not have a location in your town), but there is also a small butcher and a small fruit and vegetable shop where some people shop. You understand that obesity is a problem for your town. Access to healthcare is a big problem in your town, and the health problems associated with obesity are overwhelming the local health service. You would like to see the health of everyone in the town to improve. However, you don't really understand what role your supermarket has to play in this. You sell healthy food and unhealthy food, but you believe everyone has free choice. If they are buying unhealthy food, that is their choice. You often run sales on the unhealthy food items, and the unhealthy food in your supermarket is displayed prominently (ie, at the ends of aisles, at the checkout, at the front of the store). You do this because (1) major food suppliers pay you money to promote their products and (2) you believe unhealthy food is easier to sell because it has longer shelf life. You worry if you were to sell more healthy food or change promotions, you would lose money. You think health education is probably the solution to this problem, but you're open to changing some things about your store if you see evidence that it would change people's behaviour.

Farmer

You are from a long generation of farmers. You know that your family used to farm a diverse range of fruits and vegetables and that many of those fruits and vegetables were sold locally, providing healthy food to people. Now, your farm mostly just grows corn and exports it for various purposes because of government subsidies that encourage you to grow corn. You think obesity is a growing problem both locally in your town and nationally because: (1) people used to eat more fruits and vegetables grown locally and (2) people used to have more active jobs on farms and manufacturing. Now people eat a lot of processed food imported from other countries, and there are very few farming and manufacturing jobs because of technology. You wish that more people understood the food supply chain and invested in farming and local food production in order to increase access to healthy food and also make active jobs available.

High school student

You are a high school student. You understand that obesity is a growing problem, but you're really tired of adults talking about childhood obesity without talking to kids and teenagers about it. The adults always lecture you about eating less fast food and drinking less soft drink and also spend less time on your phone, but they just don't understand. Your phone is a really important part of your life because it's a way to stay connected to friends. You don't understand why eating less unhealthy food is a big deal because you don't feel like you're gaining a lot of weight from that. What you really care about is mental health and climate change, which you see as interconnected. You see food and physical activity as connected to both of these issues. You know eating better and being active improve mental health. Also, you know that eating locally grown food and eating less meat and more vegetables is an important system-wide solution to climate change. You would be interested in being more active and eating better because it would make you feel better and it could help with climate change. However, you are tired of adults talking to you about obesity and how you need to make better choices!