

It's amazing to watch superior ownership alignments in action, whether that's in companies, co-ops, or countries!

So, just what are superior ownership alignments? That's where the ownership of an enterprise connects in unusual ways to other parties to create very effective, mutually-beneficial arrangements. OK, so let's talk examples of superior ownership alignments!

For several decades, leading businesses in the U.S. have used stock options very effectively. Here's how that works. Stock options are granted to an employee of the company—these options essentially allow the employee to not only receive salaried compensation, but that employee can also exercise his or her options in order to become an owner, a stockholder. And that's often staged in annual increments.

For example, a fictional company for our podcast purposes, Acme Inc., issues 50,000 stock options to a highly-recruited new employee, Maria Sanchez. Those options vest over five years. Then, as Maria continues her employment, she can acquire actual stock ownership by exercising 10,000 options each of the next five years for an agreed-upon price. In so doing, Maria has become a part-owner of Acme Inc.!

And when Acme becomes hugely successful financially—say, like Amazon or Apple or Google have in recent years—Maria not only has her ownership, the value of that very stock ownership can increase dramatically in ensuing years. If Maria joined Acme early in its history, Maria could become wealthy! That's good personal stewardship, which in turn allows Maria to distribute her wealth in amazing ways!

Why does Acme want to do this type of deal with Maria? Well, for several reasons! First, Acme wants Maria to join the company and be a major contributor! As a valuable professional, Maria could join other companies that have great prospects, too. So Acme must sweeten the deal to acquire Maria's services. Second, Acme can attract Maria with less cash up front than what she would command for a cash-only compensation package. That allows Acme to preserve cash in its early years for additional hires. Third, it's just plain fun for Acme to share the vision and the upside with its team members. Contrary to what many may like to think, authentic leaders dearly love to align clearly and deeply with others for mutual benefit. Sam Walton, Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg—these leaders linked to others and helped make many of them wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. That's superior ownership alignment!

But of course, many companies that have issued stock options have faded dramatically or even gone bankrupt. In the past, should one have joined either Facebook or MySpace, the company that Facebook defeated? That's free enterprise—you actually can fail! So, here, Maria must have good judgment!

Stock options are just one particular form of ownership upside. Some companies use what are called stock warrants or restricted stock units—companies like Amazon and Google do that. Here's the last word: superior ownership alignment with others by strong leaders can make every person a winner!

OK then, how about a co-operative? Recreational Equipment Inc. (REI) is a specialty retail enterprise that provides outdoor clothing and equipment. REI has earned a loyal following of customers who avidly pursue an outdoor lifestyle. But part and parcel of that loyalty is surely due to its retail co-op structure.

So just what is a co-op? Well, essentially “members” or a similar category of people—not stockholders—are the owners. Currently, for a small member fee, REI offers millions of its active members a dividend for future REI purchases and voting privilege in electing REI's board of directors. REI has created a superior alignment of customer-owners, while their competitors like the now-defunct Sports Authority struggle.

Co-ops have a storied history in segments of American society, not least of which are farmers' co-ops in rural towns, where farmers have banded together to build massive grain-storage facilities and other

service operations to share costs and cushion the vagaries of low prices in grain markets in the short-term, waiting for market prices to increase. In countless American farm communities, by far the tallest building in the community is the farmers' co-op storage elevator. Such co-ops can be superior alignment—neighbors who compete in international markets banding together in a co-op for mutual benefit. Savvy!

Well, what about countries? Notwithstanding the problems and issues inherent for all countries, it's clear that some republics and democracies have been highly successful in binding citizens together for the mutual benefit of one another. In the current era of deep discontent, it's easy to be critical of republics and democracies. But rare is any other form of government that truly works to the widespread, significant benefit of its ruled people—look at the history of kings or emperors or dictators or communist politburos!

Many astute students of history would likely agree to Winston Churchill's assessment in 1947, after World War II: "Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time...." When people truly structure the best of republics or democracies, that's superior alignment—citizens' self-government!

But the most superior alignment of all, of course, is embedded in God's "better covenant," as the writer to the Hebrews so eloquently writes. It's God's utterly unique cleverness that is clearly evident in how He has structured His Kingdom on a truly effective working basis. We should first remember, of course, in Paul words to the Colossians, all true believers have "been transferred to the Kingdom of [God's] Son."

Now, not only do believers have citizenship in the Kingdom of God, we are joint heirs with Christ! And Jesus the Son's inheritance is unimaginably vast: Hebrews 1:2 in the ESV says that "in these last days [God the Father] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world." Again, we are joint heirs to that! Is that not supreme? Beyond our wildest imagination, we are joint heirs with Christ, and Christ is the heir of all things! And there is no membership fee for a co-op, there are no stock options to earn. Instead, we have citizenship in the Kingdom for free, by the grace of God, paid for at the Cross by Christ. Whoa. Joint heirs. That's simply unparalleled!

But God has another dimension of amazing alignment to the Owner of the Kingdom. Paul makes it clear to the believers at Corinth in 1 Corinthians 3:9-14. Those followers of Jesus who build on the foundation of Christ will receive rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We are assured that all who are saved will appear before Christ, and the works that are not on the foundation of Christ will be burned up. But He also specifically rewards each believer for his or her proper building on the foundation of Christ!

And all we have to do is build. To proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. To make disciples. To send missionaries. To be missionaries to those in our spheres of life. To love God and truly love our neighbors.

God's ways. Now, that's where we truly find superior alignment. Vastly superior alignment. For building on the foundation of Christ, we who are already joint heirs with Christ will receive rewards even beyond our status as joint heirs. Here's the structure, then. God loves us so much that upon simple belief in Christ, we become joint heirs with Christ. Loving? Yes. An amazing gift? Yes. But some of those who receive the gift of eternal life, we learn from Paul and we seem to observe here and now, don't do much building on the foundation of Christ after that. Still, God has promised rewards to those who do. Practical? Yes. Brilliant? Yes. Informative? Yes. Sustainable? Yes, for a couple of thousand years so far. So, we know what can lay before us. What a privilege!

Has your enterprise created superior alignment that's unusually effective? Perhaps alignment like stock ownership? Or co-op membership? If your enterprise is a church, are you binding together with God's incredible alignments...proclaiming the Gospel and building on the foundation of Christ? Astounding!

A&A: Application & Action

1. In your workplace enterprise, is your enterprise taking full advantage of all possible superior ownership alignments? Explain.
2. Is your church binding together with God's standing offer of incredible alignments...making new disciples, proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, and building on the foundation of Christ? Give concrete examples.
3. In your spiritual walk, give examples of what you have done or expect to do in building on the foundation of Christ.