

*Show me the incentive,
and I'll show you the
outcome.* ~Charlie Munger

Private/shareholder → incentivized to extract

Employee-owned → incentivized to distribute

Cooperative → incentivized to democratize

Commons/public → incentivized to collectivize





Zingerman's Deli

Ann Arbor,
Michigan

Privately owned as a partnership

17 businesses

~\$70M annual

700+ employees

- 1982 - Ari Weinzweig and Paul Saginaw opened a single deli
- Grew by feel & values. Deliberately chose not to franchise
- Each new business launched as a partnership with a managing partner who owns a stake
- Profits and resources shared across the community of businesses
- Open-book management: every employee sees the financials

Bob's Red Mill

Milwaukie,
Oregon

Private, but employee-owned as an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP)

100% Employee owned

~\$300M annual

700 employees

- 1978 Bob and Charlee Moore bought an old stone mill
- Turned down countless buyout opportunities
- 2010 on his 81st birthday transferred the company to the 209 employees
- Every employee receives stock annually, vested ownership paid out when they leave
- Employees benefit financially but don't necessarily govern directly





Mondragon Coop

Spain

Employee Owned Cooperative

260+ businesses

~\$12B annual

~70k employees

- **1956: 5 workers at paraffin heater factory & a priest born from devastation not prosperity**
- **Four sectors: owns its own bank, industrial manufacturing, retail grocery chain, and a full university**
- **Workers invest capital to join — they are owners not employees**
- **One member one vote — the General Assembly elects the Governing Council which appoints the CEO**
- **Profits reinvested or distributed to worker retirement accounts**

Evergreen Coop

Cleveland,
Ohio

Employee Owned Cooperative

6 Businesses

\$40M+ annual

300+ employees

- 2009 with 12 employees at Evergreen Cooperative Laundry from decades of disinvestment and redlined neighborhoods
- Partnership between six Cleveland neighborhoods and anchor institutions to redirect procurement to locally owned worker cooperatives
- Workers build an ownership stake over one year and share in profits
- Acquire businesses from retiring owners → convert to employee ownership → support with shared capital, governance training, and back-office services





Permission to Experiment

- These are not models to copy, but to learn from
- Use the lessons in your own context
- Don't take dominate/existing models as "normal"
- Building for community benefit comes with friction
- Every system we have today is a mix of others' wild experiment

The ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently.

~David Graeber

Resources

Cooperatives

US Federation of Worker Cooperatives
National Cooperative Business Association
International Cooperative Alliance
Democracy at Work Institute
USDA Rural Cooperative Development

Employee Stock Ownership Plans

National Center for Employee Ownership
The ESOP Association
Project Equity

Other

Kate Raworth's Doughnut Economics
Marjorie Kelly's Generative Economy
Practitioners who write:
Ari Weinzweig's A Lapsed Anarchist's Approach to Building a Great Business
Thomas Piketty's Capital in the Twenty-First Century
David Graeber's The Dawn of Everything
New Economy Coalition
New Economics Institute
Zebras Unite

