



Emmaüs anchors the strength of a healthcare network in shared strategy

Emmaüs, a network of 26 healthcare facilities in the province of Antwerp, groups almost all sectors of healthcare, such as hospitals, psychiatric institutions, residential care facilities, home counseling, day care, service centers,... to provide the best care for its patients and residents. In order to stand stronger together, not only today but also in the future, Emmaüs partnered with delaware to facilitate a co-created strategy with concrete objectives to work towards.

The vision of Emmaüs has always focused on the synergy between different healthcare organizations, with respect for their individual differences. Especially during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the network could align its members towards a joint battle plan by sharing information, expertise and resources. "I'm a big believer in very pragmatic and concrete partnerships," says Inge Vervotte, Managing Director of Emmaüs. "These should be based on the needs in the field, instead of pooling together resources for the benefit of an overarching structure. That is why our members can remain independent and receive all the in-house support they need – from us and from each other – in a lean structure without any of the strict rules that are often imposed in big cooperations."

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Inge Vervotte, Managing Director of Emmaüs

A future-proof network strategy

The healthcare network is currently going through a period of transition and renewal. Vervotte adds: "Since the network's founding in 1998, a lot of older employees and managers have passed on the torch to a new generation of healthcare professionals. Getting these new members involved in our decision making and engaging them to support the network is the key to a healthy future." This was the main reason Emmaüs started the journey to redefine their corporate strategy. The network wanted to start a dialogue with its members about their individual purpose in the healthcare group and the shared values and common dynamics of Emmaüs. "Since I had previously participated in several strategic sessions where delaware was also present," Vervotte mentions, "I knew how they worked and was convinced they could help us."

In preparation of the yearly 2-day offsite with the executives of the affiliated healthcare institutions, Emmaüs and delaware created a task force to map out the differences and similarities between the members, tackle challenges in each sector and form a shared vision of the future. Vervotte: "In my opinion, it is crucial to make the distinct characteristics of our institutions tangible. It is the only way to prevent perceived similarities or differences from standing in the way of a strong collaboration." Geert Scheipers, partner at delaware, agrees: "It's always a good starting point to make everyone's position clear at the start of such a strategic exercise, especially when the background of each participating institution is so different. This forms a solid basis to apply our sound strategy management methodology and come to a clear and compelling vision for the future." The working group, consisting of representatives from every healthcare sector within the network, collected opinions from



members on a broad range of topics through an online survey and set the framework for the strategic exercise.

Consolidating the network's expertise

"Through this thorough preparation, our strategic offsite was very efficient and constructive," Vervotte recounts. "The survey results were consolidated into several key areas to be discussed with all members during these two days. Together, we created a clear visual model with Emmaüs' core values, strengths and priorities for our members." Using the strategy map as a starting point, several expert groups were created to try and solve the specific healthcare challenges determined during the 2-day offsite. "This is an excellent way to translate Emmaüs' strategic goals into clear and concrete critical success factors going forward," Vervotte adds. "Members can group or exchange sector-specific expertise to come up with unique solutions, which is a major asset for our network."

One of the most pressing challenges to come out of this exercise was the growing need for experienced healthcare personnel. Vervotte explains: "We all struggle with the decreasing number of healthcare professionals in Belgium – due to work pressure and other restrictions in degrees and competences – so this is one of the key structural issues we will be addressing in the near future."

A constructive and engaged partnership

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the member meeting had to be held digitally, but this didn't stop Emmaüs and delaware from getting everyone together. Scheipers: "We provided every member management team with the necessary video and audio equipment to make the online meeting go as smoothly and professionally as possible." This proactive and flexible approach certainly had its intended outcome, according to Vervotte: "During our final joint session, we received the wonderful feedback that our members were vitalized to tackle our shared challenges. I greatly appreciate the efforts made by delaware to let the member meeting go through as planned. Their cooperative and engaged way of working suited my own direct style of communication. As a constructive sparring partner, they understood the specific needs of Emmaüs, thought along and tailored their strategic assistance accordingly."