

Case Study Synergy Vision

OUR SERVICE:
Employee Ownership
BUSINESS SECTOR:
Communications Agency

■ Employee Ownership is a natural step forward for Synergy Vision. We have transferred 87.5% of the company to our employees, which protects our people-focused ethos and will drive continued innovation for clients, as well as growth and long-term sustainability!"

FIONA DAWBER, FOUNDER & CEO, SYNERGY VISION



The business

Synergy Vision, founded in 2007, is an award-winning medical communications agency. They have offices in London, Dublin and Sydney.

Why employee ownership (EO)?

After about 10 years, Founder and CEO Ffiona Dawber started to be approached by potential buyers, mostly larger competitors. After meeting a couple, she realised this succession route wasn't going to fit with the company's 'people's first' values.

She found out about EO at a local business community event and after some research, she and her colleagues decided the EO model was right for the future of Synergy Vision and in line with the Company's objectives and values – especially their people-first ethos.

In 2021, with 50 employees, the Company became 87.5% employee owned.

Simplifying a complex structure

The company structure was a little complex, involving a holding company, trading subsidiaries in three countries, and minority individual shareholders in each. There was also an EMI option scheme in the holding company. Each company had its own valuation.

To facilitate a transfer to EO, the minority shareholders in each subsidiary exchanged their shares for shares in the holding company, giving it 100% ownership of each subsidiary. Most shareholders then sold their shares in the holding company to the Employee Ownership Trust (EOT). The EOT tax incentives were not available for those outside the UK.



How does it work?

The company made a commitment to start sharing profits with all employee owners in the first year of EO, rather than waiting until the EOT had paid for its shares.

Running the company day to day continues to be the responsibility of the board and company directors. The EOT's core role, as the company's controlling shareholder, is to act in the best interests of the EOT's beneficiaries, its employees. This includes ensuring the company is being well run by its directors as an EO company.

The EOT is operated by its trustees; comprising one former owner, one employee and one independent person.

Since becoming EO, retention has greatly increased, with turnover 25% prior vs 14% post. Recruitment is also easier as mostly done through word of mouth instead of hiring recruiters now.

There is also now a people committee which helps with internal communications throughout the company.