



Turning employee voice into meaningful *change*

How a large community services organisation reshaped
leadership, culture and connection to mission

Case study

Context

This case study focuses on a large not-for-profit community services organisation that supports vulnerable people across multiple locations and programs. Employees work in complex environments, often dealing with housing stress, disadvantage, trauma and high emotional load.

Like many organisations in the sector, it has been navigating:

- changing service models and regulatory expectations
- a significant internal restructure, and
- external pressures such as housing shortages and funding uncertainty.

An Alignment & Engagement Survey in 2023 confirmed that people cared deeply about the mission and the clients they serve. It also highlighted opportunities to strengthen the employee experience – particularly around consistency of leadership, internal communication, collaboration between work groups, and the extent to which employees genuinely felt cared for and that they belonged.

Leaders knew they couldn't change everything at once. Instead, they made a deliberate choice to focus on a small number of high-impact areas, using benchmarking and comparison data to separate what felt urgent from what would truly shift the dial.

A new survey – and a clear uplift

Two years later, the organisation ran its Alignment & Engagement Survey again with Insync – and the results told a very different story.

Across almost every *alignment* and *engagement* measure, scores improved, often significantly. Employees were more likely to say their manager encourages teamwork and communicates well, that their work clearly links to the organisation's mission, that work groups serve each other effectively, and that the organisation genuinely cares about them.

In a sector where ongoing change often erodes confidence, employees also reported stronger belief that the organisation is committed to high standards and best practice, that their work group copes well with change, and that they can see a fulfilling future there.

These weren't marginal shifts. Big gains in the strongest-moving measures suggest more than a short-term bounce — especially in areas such as employee care, understanding of contribution and teamwork.

They reflect sustained work over several years to reshape how leadership, communication and care show up in everyday practice – at a time when many others are struggling just to hold the line.

Turning insight into action

After the organisation's 2023 survey, the leadership team agreed on three principles:

- 1 the survey would be treated as a diagnostic tool, not a verdict
- 2 the focus would be on shifting everyday behaviours rather than launching a long list of central initiatives, and
- 3 action would be owned and driven at multiple levels, with business units shaping their own responses.

Instead of a large, top-down program of work, the organisation concentrated on creating the conditions, expectations and support for local leaders and teams to respond in ways that made sense for their context.

1. Building care and belonging through everyday behaviours

Indicator: This organisation cares about me, **+11%**

Indicator: I have a strong sense of belonging here, **+7%**

One early lesson was that employees experience care and belonging less through big campaigns and more through everyday interactions.

Leaders began to pay closer attention to the “small signals” that, over time, shape culture: greeting people by name, noticing when someone has had a tough week, acknowledging effort in the moment, following up after difficult incidents, and simply saying thank you – specifically and often.

Managers were encouraged to weave appreciation into regular rhythms: pausing in team meetings to call out good work, sending short personal messages after big pushes, or taking time in one-to-ones to recognise growth as well as tasks completed. None of this was complicated, but it was intentional.

Over time, employee comments and subsequent survey results showed that these patterns are being noticed. People increasingly describe feeling respected, part of a team, and proud to belong to the organisation. The uplift in results around “this organisation cares about me” and “I have a strong sense of belonging here” reflects thousands of those small, everyday choices.

“*Care and belonging didn't come from a single initiative. They were built through thousands of everyday moments.*”

2. Leading major change with care and integrity

Indicator: My work group copes well with change, **+9%**

Indicator: This organisation is committed to high standards of performance, **+9%**

Between the two survey cycles, the organisation undertook a substantial restructure. One part of the business was reshaped into a more specialised service and a line of work that was no longer sustainable was transitioned to another provider.

Restructure can easily damage trust and engagement. Here, it became an opportunity to live the organisation's values in very visible ways. Leadership invested heavily in employee communication – explaining why change was needed, what principles were guiding decisions, and what it would mean for different groups. Just as importantly, they kept clients at the centre, making sure any transition would be as smooth and safe as possible.

A key focus was how affected employees were treated. The organisation worked closely with the incoming provider to transition people into roles and carry over their leave entitlements. For those who remained, seeing colleagues treated respectfully and thoughtfully (through a difficult process) reinforced the sense that this is an organisation that does its best to “do the right thing”, even when decisions are tough.

The experience also shifted mindsets within leadership. There is now a more explicit recognition that the organisation functions as one interconnected system: when one area struggles or is under-resourced, others feel the impact. This has encouraged less siloed thinking, more shared problem-solving and a stronger sense of mutual responsibility across divisions. That mindset change is reflected in improved results around coping with change and perceptions of high standards.



3. Creating a focused and collaborative leadership community

Indicator: The person I report to encourages teamwork, **+19%**

Indicator: The person I report to communicates effectively with me, **+8%**

Historically, the organisation brought together a very large group of managers for big, presentation-heavy forums. While useful for broadcasting information, these events didn't always build the engagement, ownership or relationships that leaders were hoping for.

In the last couple of years, the organisation has redesigned this approach, forming a smaller, more focused leadership community of senior managers. These gatherings now feel less like a conference and more like a working session.

For example, at a recent "Share the Strategy" day, leaders:

- reviewed survey results tailored to their own division
- worked in small groups to interpret what the findings meant in their context
- identified a short list of practical actions they would take forward, and
- rotated around the room, visiting other groups to ask questions, offer suggestions and share ideas.

This shift has changed the tone. Instead of engagement being something "the organisation" does to people, leaders at all levels are actively involved in understanding the data and shaping the response. The impact can be seen in stronger results around managers encouraging teamwork, communicating effectively and demonstrating values in everyday behaviour.

4. Strengthening accountability, practice and people management

Indicator: The performance appraisal system is effective, **+10%**

Indicator: This organisation's chosen values and behaviours are demonstrated every day in my work group, **+8%**

Survey feedback reinforced that employees value support and kindness – but they also want clarity and fairness. People expect managers to set clear expectations, address issues early and ensure everyone is contributing.

There has been a stronger emphasis on building people-management capability. Managers are being supported to have timely conversations about performance, workload and behaviour, rather than avoiding or delaying difficult topics. The clear message is that:

“*Care and accountability go hand in hand: supporting someone includes being honest with them.*”

The performance appraisal system has also been reworked. A new platform has been implemented and is now being tailored to different occupational groups, recognising that a generic template doesn't work equally well for a case worker, a support worker, a cleaner or a researcher. The goal is to make these conversations more meaningful and relevant to the work people actually do.

While there is more work to do, the improvement in survey results around the effectiveness of performance appraisals, and the visibility of values in work groups, suggests that this combination of clear frameworks and better conversations is starting to pay off.

5. Tailoring communication and listening to local realities

Indicator: Different work groups provide good customer service to each other, **+10pts**

Indicator: I understand how my role contributes to our mission, **+14pts**

Over several survey cycles, the organisation has consistently invested in clear, transparent communication from the executive – particularly during COVID and the major restructure. Employees are now accustomed to hearing directly from senior leaders about key decisions and the rationale behind them.

What has become more apparent over time is that many communication challenges are now local rather than organisational. The latest survey results, combined with follow-up discussions, have highlighted the importance of:

- regular team meetings;
- better day-to-day updates within particular divisions;
- more visible presence from senior leaders at certain sites.

Rather than responding with a one-size-fits-all campaign, the organisation now uses the survey to identify hot spots and support local leaders to problem-solve in their own context. An office-based administrative team will need different communication rhythms and channels than a dispersed, community-based workforce.

The survey is also increasingly seen as the starting point, not the end point, of listening. Results prompt deeper questions:

Why might this be the case in this team?

What's changed since last time?

What's getting in the way?

This ongoing dialogue is helping to keep improvements grounded in the realities of frontline work.

6. Investing in environments and wellbeing

In parallel with the cultural and leadership work, the organisation is investing in the physical environment as another way of signalling care for employees.

One major project has focused on redesigning a key office building – refreshing employees spaces and client-facing areas and involving employees throughout the process. Employees have been invited to share how they actually use the space, what would help them feel safer, more comfortable and more able to focus.

Draft layouts have been shared and refined based on feedback, and similar principles are gradually being applied at other sites. For employees, this has been another tangible sign that their wellbeing matters and that the organisation is willing to invest in making their working environment better.



What employees value most

Across open-ended survey responses, several themes consistently appear when employees talk about what they value most about working there. People often mention:

- the chance to make a real difference in the lives of clients and the broader community;
- being part of supportive, caring teams and having managers who “have their back”;
- working for an organisation whose values and mission align with their own; and
- opportunities to learn, grow and balance work with family and other responsibilities.

In many ways, these have always been strengths. The work of the past few years has been about aligning structures, systems and leadership practice with those strengths, so that the day-to-day experience of work matches the reasons people joined in the first place.

Ongoing success

For this organisation, the improvement in survey results is encouraging – but it’s not the finish line. Leaders see it as confirmation that the direction is right: investing in leadership, listening carefully, acting on feedback and being prepared to make difficult decisions in a values-aligned way.

The focus now is on maintaining momentum: continuing to refine leadership practice, deepening local ownership of action, investing in environments and wellbeing, and keeping the connection to mission strong, even as the external environment remains challenging.

“ *The core insight is simple but powerful: when you genuinely listen, focus, and follow through, engagement becomes less about chasing scores and more about building a place where people can do great work and feel proud of it.* ”

Lessons for other organisations

While every organisation operates in its own context, several lessons from this journey are broadly applicable:

1

Prioritise the few things that matter most

Use employee voice to focus effort, rather than trying to fix every lower-than-hoped-for score. Depth beats breadth.

2

See change as a chance to demonstrate your values

How you treat people during restructures and other big shifts sends powerful signals about what you really stand for.

3

Build a genuine leadership community

Smaller, more active forums can create far more ownership and collaboration than large, presentation-driven events.

4

Balance care with high standards

Employees want to feel looked after and they also want to see that performance and behaviour are taken seriously. Both matter.

5

Treat the survey as the beginning of the conversation

The numbers tell you where to look; the real value comes from the conversations and decisions that follow.

About Insync

Insync is a leading provider of employee engagement and culture solutions, partnering with organisations to unlock their full potential through clear, actionable insight. We work with clients across sectors, including not-for-profit and community services, where purpose-driven work and complex frontline environments make the employee experience both vital and uniquely challenging.

Using our validated Alignment & Engagement Surveys and trusted benchmarking, we help leaders understand what their people are experiencing, where to focus effort, and how to create meaningful, sustainable change. Our approach goes beyond “measuring” engagement – we support organisations to translate employee voice into practical priorities that strengthen leadership, communication, collaboration and wellbeing.

Our team collaborates closely with executives, HR and local leaders to interpret results in context and build ownership at every level. For NFPs in particular, we’re passionate about helping organisations protect and amplify what matters most: connection to mission, a culture of care, and the capability to lead through ongoing change so people can keep doing their best work for the communities they serve.



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