

Transforming Culture from the Inside Out

A Case Study in Emotional Stewardship and Strategic Impact

How experience-based storytelling, AI-powered insight, and leadership alignment fueled transformation at a leading health and wellness organization

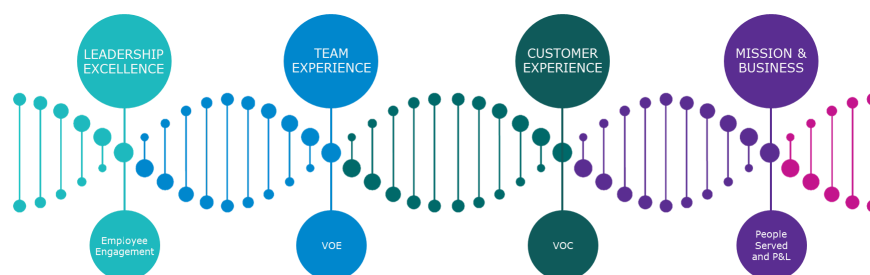
Overview

In 2024, a regional health and wellness organization partnered with [Share More Stories](#) to explore how people experienced the organizational culture -- and whether they were thriving or not. This was an opportunity to benchmark the organization ahead of a period of profound organizational change and intense strategic planning. A significant realignment was soon to be underway. The leadership team had a bold strategic vision. But they also recognized a deeper question emerging beneath the surface of spreadsheets and reorg charts:

What are our people feeling — and what do they need to trust us enough to grow through this?

So they turned to [SEEQ](#), Share More Stories' human experience insights platform, that blends personal stories and AI-powered analytics to deliver engagement-driven insights.

Over twelve months, the organization collected and analyzed over **450 personal stories** from employees, members, donors, volunteers, and program participants, through the SEEQ Platform. The goal wasn't just to hear feedback — it was also to understand and even quantify emotion — the joy, frustration, disconnection, pride, and possibility that define how transformation is truly experienced, and how business outcomes are achieved.



The above diagram illustrates the “chain of excellence,” and the role that employee engagement, voice of employee and voice of customer play in achieving the desired business outcomes.

Through this process, they did more than gather data. They reconnected with their people. They redefined the role of leadership. And they embedded emotional insight directly into their strategic planning, supported by a new impact framework that captured not just participation and performance, but purpose and belonging.

The Challenge

This organization had never lacked a compelling mission -- but it was set to embark on a new vision focused on doubling its impact. This represented a massive level of change in practically every part of the organization, and across the organization's footprint in the marketplace.



The above diagram provides a visual depiction of the organization's multiyear vision: focusing on three impact areas, and three under-development engagement pathways, the organization aims to impact 30% of the households in its service area within six years.

On top of that, the organization had already undergone several changes, including multiple leadership transitions in a short amount of time.

As the organization embarked on this new journey, team members began to feel the strain. The toll of transformation, an evolving culture, and shifting member expectations had left some employees fatigued and disconnected. Customers noticed subtle inconsistencies. Trust wasn't broken — but it wasn't being rebuilt as fast as the pace of change demanded.

Leaders began asking different questions:

From "What do we need to fix?" to "What do our people need to feel safe, clear, and connected again?"

From "how are we performing?" to "what does impact look like?"

And the answers wouldn't come from metrics alone. It would come from stories.

What follows amounts to a *playbook for leaders who want to achieve greater impact – and believe that better experiences are the key.* This is for leaders who are willing to listen, and want to deeply understand employee and customer experiences, so they can make them better.

The Journey

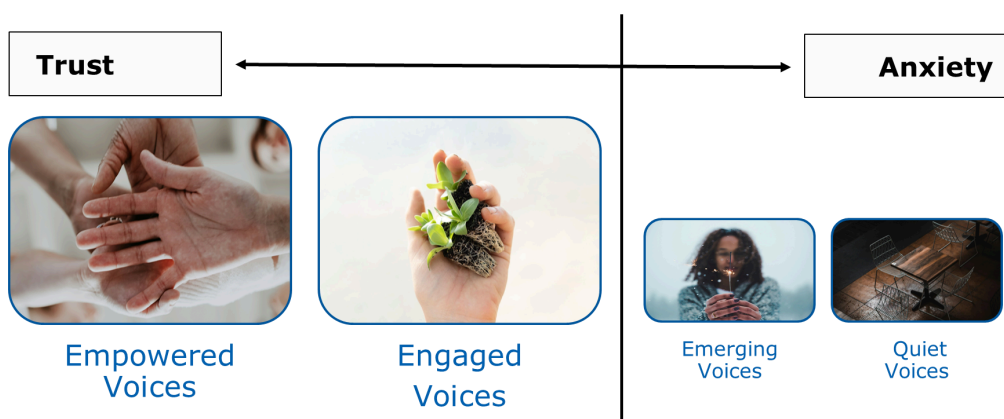
Phase 1: Listening to Employee Experience (Q1 2024)

The journey began when nearly 120 personal stories were shared through SEEQ — stories of onboarding, team transitions, leadership interactions, and moments of impact.

A clear emotional arc emerged: employees often started with anxiety, moved through anticipation and ambiguity, and found moments of achievement when they felt supported, understood, and connected to the mission.

They also wrote about the times when they weren't thriving -- when they needed more from the organization.

People didn't just describe tasks. They described how they felt in the process of doing the work — whether they were stretched too thin, whether their leaders saw them, whether their voices mattered. This emotional texture became the foundation for everything that followed.



The above diagram shows that high levels of trust define much of the culture and the employee experience, correlating with higher levels of empowerment and engagement. However, for some in the organization, anxiety defines much of the experience, along with feeling less heard.

Phase 2: Leadership Exploration and Role Definition (Summer 2024)

Ahead of a major realignment, we facilitated deep dive sessions with the Executive and Senior Leadership Teams. These weren't traditional readouts. They were working conversations focused on reflection, accountability, and emotional clarity.

Leaders began seeing the patterns more clearly: staff uncertainty was tied to unclear communication, role confusion, or perceived inaccessibility of leadership. Some leaders were surprised. Others said it confirmed what they'd felt intuitively. Either way, it prompted a shift: from leading change by telling people what was happening — to owning the emotional impact of how it was happening.

These Are the Issues

- ★ Lack of Feedback and Recognition
- ★ Leadership and Communication Challenges
- ★ Cultural and Inclusivity Challenges
- ★ Operational Inefficiencies
- ★ Commitment to Professional Development and Career Growth

They widen the Culture Gap

As depicted in the above illustration, several issues emerged from the employee experience research, explaining the culture gap between high trust and high anxiety.

We challenged the leadership team members to push beyond "we've heard this before" and to explore *why* they were still hearing it -- and to truly understand how people's experiences felt.

Together, they began drafting new leadership commitments that addressed not just outcomes, but experiences. These commitments focused on three key areas:

1) Increasing leadership capability



2) Focusing on culture growth across the organization



3) Leveraging the organization's executional strength to drive focus and address the employee experience gaps



The three illustrations above explain the leadership commitments that emerged from the first phase of the employee experience research.

Phase 3: Belonging Deep Dive (Fall 2024)

We then focused on inclusion and belonging. Through SEEQ stories and emotional analysis, we explored how employees from underrepresented groups — and those in frontline, part-time, or entry-level roles — were experiencing the organization.

The findings were nuanced. Many employees described feeling proud of the mission and close to their teams, but hesitant to speak up or unsure how their identity fit into the broader culture. Moments of cultural recognition and individual support made a profound difference. But where representation was lacking or leadership presence was uneven, belonging frayed.

This phase reinforced a core truth: belonging isn't a program. It's a pattern of emotionally resonant actions, reinforced by leadership, structure, and everyday behaviors.

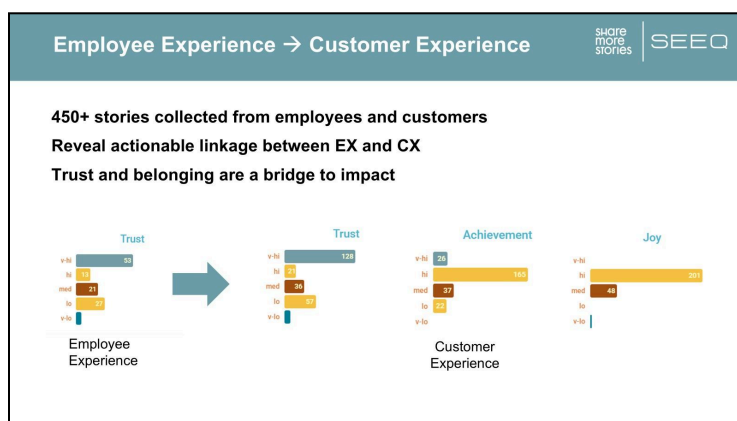
Phase 4: Integrated Employee + Customer Experience Study (Q4 2024 – Q1 2025)

We widened the lens to include over 250 stories from customers — members, donors, volunteers, and participants — and added another round of nearly 100 employee narratives. What we found was both validating and urgent:

When staff were stretched, customers felt it. When staff were supported, customers experienced joy.

Many customer stories reflected loyalty, admiration for staff, and meaningful impact. But others carried frustration around service gaps, unclear communication, or inconsistency. These weren't operational issues alone — they were emotional echoes of the employee experience.

One of the most significant revelations came from seeing just how much employee trust correlated with customer trust -- and how that trust, and the feelings of belonging it created -- enabled customers to experience the outcomes they sought.



The graphic above depicts the relationship between trust in the employee experience (EX) and the customer experience (CX) – and how that correlates with increased achievement and joy.

This phase drew a straight line between EX and CX. Not through abstract correlations, but through real human experiences that revealed the emotional infrastructure of impact.

Phase 5: Leadership Alignment and Emotional Stewardship (Spring 2025)

In the spring, the CEO and senior leaders engaged in a series of immersive leadership summits focused on developing an integrated strategic plan -- that ensured the voices of employees and customers were truly represented throughout the process and the plan.

We didn't just share insights. We continued to center the voices of employees and customers. We worked together to name blind spots, identify key moments of emotional friction, and co-create a new leadership behavior model anchored in:

- **Visibility** — presence that is felt, not just seen
- **Emotional steadiness** — leading with calm and clarity
- **Distributed ownership** — empowering others and listening actively

This was highlighted during an immersive insights session with the organization's CEO, where we arrived at a profound understanding of the employee experience: employees were on a journey from anxiety to achievement – and it was leadership's job to help them navigate it.



This became a turning point. Not only because it revealed the employee journey in a new way, but because it affirmed what many already believed but hadn't named: leadership is emotional work. And emotional alignment is the foundation of real change.

Phase 6: Strategic Planning Integration + Impact Framework (Q2 2025)

Rather than bolt insights onto the plan, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) embedded them from the start. Together, we shaped a Six-Year Leadership + Employee Promise Framework — a living guide for how leaders would support people emotionally and culturally throughout implementation, and in total alignment with the organization's six-year strategic plan focused on doubling its impact.

 Summary: Key Levers for Leaders		
Emotional Stage	What Employees Need Most	What Leaders Should Prioritize
Anxiety	Belonging, safety, connection	Welcome rituals, peer support, leader presence
Anticipation	Clarity, hope, support	Transparent communication, early wins, visible paths
Achievement	Recognition, reflection, growth	Celebrations, stretch roles, mission alignment
Appreciation → Attention	Purpose, influence, legacy	Story-sharing, mentorship, strategic engagement

One senior team member noted that a recent HBR case on *Lean Strategy* echoed the exact approach being taken — particularly around defining a bold performance ambition and pairing it with a grounded multi-year outlook. It was affirmation that emotional strategy isn't soft. It's smart. And it sticks.

 Five Dimensions of Integrated Leadership		
Dimension	Definition	What It Looks Like
Emotional Leadership	Centering empathy, welcome, listening	Managers ask how staff <i>feel</i> , not just what they <i>do</i>
Relational Leadership	Prioritizing connection over hierarchy	Staff lead team huddles and circles, not just managers
Distributed Leadership	Trusting others to lead at all levels	Frontline staff co-lead onboarding or recognition initiatives
Integrated Leadership	Collaborating across functions	Youth Development and Wellness co-create family programs
Mission-Driven Ownership	Connecting work to the organization's purpose	Staff speak confidently about how their work advances equity and belonging

Finally, we developed a SEEQ-informed **Impact Measurement Framework**, designed to capture:

1. **Activity and access** (participation and behavior inside and outside the organization)
2. **Functional outcomes** (what's improving in health and engagement at individual and community levels)
3. **Mission-level impact** (what stories reveal about identity, healing, belonging, and purpose)

Impact Tier	Description	What This Measures
📌 Level 1: Baseline Activity Metrics (Participation & Inputs)	These are foundational measures of how people engage with the organization. They capture breadth of activity, but not yet the depth of impact. They are crucial for reach, equity, and access monitoring.	Enables visibility into “Who, Where, When, and What.”
📌 Level 2: Strategic Functional Impacts (Core Priorities)	These reflect the organization’s impact in its three strategic priorities. These are functional outcomes—what changes in people’s lives because of what they <i>do</i> at and with the organization.	Enables visibility into “How.”
💡 Level 3: Mission/Vision-Level Impacts (Social & Emotional Transformation)	These are the highest-order outcomes—the real reason the organization exists. They reflect lasting emotional and social change, aligned with the organization’s mission.	Enables visibility into “Why.”

Key Outputs and Outcomes

The SEEQ Platform enabled this organization to uncover the real drivers of impact – internally and externally – and develop a robust strategy to increase that impact. It achieves this through a simple yet profound three-step process, led by leadership:

1. **Engage:** Leadership invited people to share stories through SEEQ
2. **Analyze:** Share More Stories worked with the leadership team to score each story by theme, emotion, and mindset
3. **Act:** Develop deep, actionable insights and solutions in a collaborative way



As a result, the organization achieved a number of key outputs and outcomes:

- Over **450 stories** collected across staff, customers, and stakeholders
- Clear emotional map of the transformation journey (Anxiety → Anticipation → Achievement)
- New leadership behavior model anchored in trust and empathy
- Developed a **6-year emotional alignment framework** for leaders and employees
- Built a tiered **Impact Measurement Framework** connecting activities to emotional outcomes
- Reinforced alignment with leading strategy practices (e.g., performance ambition, multi-year planning)

Lessons Learned

Relationships aren't just the result — they're the means.

They're not what happens after the work is done; they're how the work gets done. Relationships shape trust, fuel collaboration, and anchor people during periods of uncertainty. In times of transition, it's the strength of relationships — not just structure or plans — that determines whether people feel safe enough to move forward.

Belonging is a performance driver.

It's not just about how people feel — it's about how they perform, lead, and stay connected to the mission. When people experience a true sense of belonging, they bring more of themselves to their work. They contribute more, innovate more, and commit more. Trust grows, and teams operate with deeper cohesion and shared purpose.

Leadership culture is the emotional climate.

No matter what's written in a strategy document, people will respond to how leadership shows up. Leaders who model empathy, steadiness, and visibility set the tone for the entire organization. Culture isn't built in policy — it's revealed in behavior. And resilient organizations are led by leaders who understand their emotional influence, and hold themselves accountable.

Strategy without emotional insight is just a plan.

A well-written strategy will fall flat if it doesn't account for how people actually experience the organization. Emotional clarity — understanding what people are feeling, fearing, and hoping for — is what transforms strategy into movement. When leaders listen deeply and lead with emotional intelligence, people don't just follow out of obligation — they follow because they believe.

What's Next

This approach is for companies in the health and wellness space — and in every other industry that depends on improving experiences to create value and impact.

It's scalable for any mission-driven entity — whether you're leading a purpose-built brand, a nonprofit or membership-based organization, a school, or a company navigating growth or transformation.

At the heart of this case is a powerful truth: **leaders who listen can transform cultures**. When stories are heard — and acted on — they become the bridge between strategic intent and lived experience. They help organizations see clearly, move intentionally, and lead with emotional clarity.

If you're ready to build a culture of trust, alignment, and belonging for your employees, customers and communities — if you're ready to turn emotional insight into real progress — we invite you to take the next step:

- Learn more about leaders who listen → <https://sharemorestories.com/how-to-listen-to-peoples-experiences/>
- Explore the role stories play in transformation → <https://sharemorestories.com/the-power-of-stories-why-qualitative-insights-are-the-key-to-transforming-experiences/>
- Try SEEQ for yourself → <https://seeq.sharemorestories.com/demo/>
- Book a 30-minute meeting → <https://calendly.com/james-sms/30min>

Together, we can build leadership cultures, organizations, and brands where people thrive — through experiences designed with intention, empathy, and purpose.