

CASE STUDY:

THE POWER OF INVESTING IN EMERGING LEADERS



Introduction

This case study explores why Stone & Chalk Group, a leading startup and scaleup business hub and accelerator in emerging technology, chose to invest in a two-day immersive leadership training course with Humanico for a cohort of emerging and new leaders within their organisation.



The study reveals the positive results of this training, which included a remarkable **29% uplift** in employee engagement among the participants. Notably, two individuals in the cohort, who were previously considered flight risks, achieved an exceptional **over 100% uplift** in employee engagement.

The objective of this case study is to examine the benefits of investing in a cohort of emerging and new leaders within Stone & Chalk Group. Specifically, it aims to explore the impact of a two-day immersive leadership training course on employee engagement and overall organisational performance. This case study highlights the organisational overview, objectives, background, cohort design, training and development initiatives, benefits realisation, organisational impact, lessons learned, and recommendations for other organisations considering similar investments.

Organisational Overview

Stone & Chalk Group operates in the Australian technology and innovation industry, providing a collaborative workspace and innovation community that directly assists and supports emerging tech startups and scale-ups.

With a strong commitment to fostering innovation and growth, Stone & Chalk Group aims to cultivate a thriving ecosystem for entrepreneurs and emerging companies. The organisation employs a diverse workforce and operates in multiple locations across the country, serving as a hub for innovation, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing.

At the time of this case study, the organisation had over 70 employees working across three hubs (Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide) as well as several employees who worked fully remotely.



Together we ideate. innovate. impact.

Background + Rationale

In early 2023, Stone & Chalk was launching an organisational redesign and restructure which sought to better position the business for growth and scale and to remove existing geographic silos.

This restructure meant that **over 45%** of the business were either in new roles, or had new teams or leaders. It also led to the creation of new, first time leader positions and put high performing individuals and emerging leaders in greater positions of responsibility.

It was recognised by the Executive team that emerging leaders would play a critical role in the success of the organisational redesign. Specifically the need to invest in its emerging leaders to address existing challenges, embrace new organisational design and ways of working, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

The organisation observed gaps in leadership capabilities, employee engagement, and talent retention which would become significant challenges if not addressed during the restructuring process. Recognising that investing in leadership development and building a high performing team would yield significant benefits, Stone & Chalk Group decided to create a specialised cohort program to enhance the skills and capabilities of its emerging leaders.

Front line people leaders are essential for organisational resilience, change acceptance, and positive workplace culture. They serve as a crucial link between management and employees, providing firsthand knowledge, behavioural role modelling and direct employee support. Front line leaders also drive strategy realisation and change acceptance by championing the rationale behind initiatives, addressing concerns, and promoting openness. Their effective communication and support during transitions contribute to the organisation's agility and adaptability.

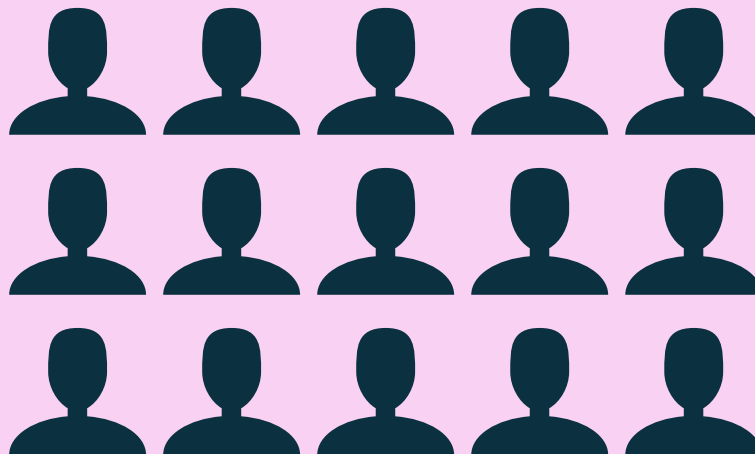
Investing in the leadership cohort was crucial to address the identified four-year gap, as highlighted by Forrester, between individuals in organisations assuming authority positions and receiving specific management or leadership training. Stone & Chalk Group recognised the importance of providing timely development for emerging leaders. By addressing this training gap, the organisation proactively empowered emerging leaders to navigate challenges and maximise their impact. The investment showcased Stone & Chalk Group's commitment to nurturing capable leaders from the start, ensuring they receive the necessary training and support for organisational success.

Overview of Cohort

The cohort consisted of 15 emerging and first time leaders, with 7 men and 8 women.

Individuals who were either first time or new leaders (have had direct reports for less than a year) or those who demonstrated high potential and exhibited qualities that aligned with the organisation's values and strategic direction.

Stone & Chalk Group recognized the importance of nurturing and developing emerging leaders to drive innovation, motivate teams, and achieve organisational strategy. These leaders were pivotal in cultivating a culture of excellence, fostering employee engagement, and ensuring the organisation's sustained growth.



Goals + Reasons for Investment

01

To equip participants with essential leadership skills, strategic thinking abilities, self awareness, and effective communication techniques.

02

To address the flight risks among emerging leaders by increasing their engagement and job satisfaction and through the act of proactively investing in them.

03

To foster a collaborative and supportive environment within the organisation, facilitating knowledge sharing and innovation.

Stone & Chalk also sought to actively create a positive workplace culture through this leadership cohort. The goal was to have a baseline capability throughout the business, and set the cultural standard by promoting collaboration, respect, and inclusivity.

Finally, it was recognised that harnessing personal strengths of this cohort was essential in driving employee development by providing coaching, feedback, and mentorship. This investment in development fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Cohort Design and Implementation

The design and implementation of the cohort program involved a hybrid selection process.



The first category of participants was for first time or new leaders - those who had direct reports for the first time, or for less than a six month period of time.



The second category of participants was a group of high performing employees, determined by their performance, potential, and alignment with the organisation's values.



The last category included those whose duties and responsibilities made them responsible for delivering on key strategic priorities or projects that required significant stakeholder engagement.

A cohort of individuals was chosen to ensure a manageable group size and promote effective collaboration. The program spanned two days, encompassing various training modules, interactive workshops including a Humanico strengths-based leadership focus, mentoring sessions, and networking opportunities.

Program Content + Delivery

The immersive leadership training program offered by Stone & Chalk Group covered three core areas:

DEFINING LEADERSHIP AT STONE & CHALK

The organisation has a deliberate and intentional desire to develop leaders who are both adaptive and empathetic. This section of the training focused on defining what qualities were expected of an adaptive and empathetic leader and how that style of leadership differs from other frameworks.

LEADING THROUGH STRENGTHS

The organisation believes that the development of leadership through the lens of personal strengths is the only effective way to ensure consistent impact and has invested in partnering with Humanico to leverage the Clifton Strengths profiles. Participants learnt the importance of enabling their whole team (including themselves) to understand their strengths and then intentionally fostering an environment where everyone can play to their strengths.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP EVERY DAY

This section focused on developing tools and skills which could assist leaders in ensuring that they practised and developed their leadership on a daily basis. Participants engaged in sessions focused on practical skills development, strategic thinking, project management, effective communication, and fostering innovation.

The material was presented through the use of unique approaches, such as experiential learning activities, case studies, and simulations, which were incorporated to enhance participant engagement and knowledge retention.

Benefits Realisation + Organisational Impact

The investment in the cohort of emerging leaders yielded significant benefits and a strong return on investment

The most notable outcome was the

29% uplift in employee engagement among the participants

Moreover, two individuals who were previously considered flight risks

increased their engagement by >100%

Against a backdrop of economic uncertainty at the time this program was deployed, this is a significant outcome.

The impact was not only felt at an individual level, but also at a team and group level as well. The depth and diversity of content and delivery methods including Humanico's strengths-based leadership workshop meant that participants had a variety of practical tools that could be easily implemented and integrated immediately into their daily practices. The benefits realisation of this ripple effect was captured in the qualitative data and positive sentiment of the subsequent Employee Engagement survey powered by Humanico.

Conclusion

In the past few years, we have collectively been through one of the greatest periods of change and challenge that we will ever experience as humans, from both an employee and an employer's POV. At times like these, you can either lean in or lean out.

The majority of organisations defaulted to top line Leadership initiatives, while Stone & Chalk Group recognised the importance of investing in the next layer of Emerging Leaders. They recognised that emerging leaders would play a critical role in the success of the organisation, specifically in addressing existing challenges, embracing new organisational design and ways of working, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement.

Stone & Chalk also sought to actively create a positive workplace culture through this leadership cohort as well as recognising that harnessing the personal strengths of this cohort was essential in driving employee development by providing coaching, feedback, and mentorship. This investment in development in collaboration with Humanico fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

The benefits of investing in your employees is well documented, however the benefits of investing in those who normally WOULDN'T receive it, purely based on where they sit in the org chart, can yield exceptional outcomes.

#everyonematters