

THE VALUE OF A HUMAN CENTRED PROJECT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

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What is Human Centred Project Management

Human Centred Project Management (HCPM) is an approach to managing projects that puts the needs, experiences and well-being of people involved first. This includes team members, stakeholders and end users, throughout the entire project lifecycle. This approach prioritises empathy, collaboration, inclusion and adaptability to ensure that the delivery and the outcomes of the projects are aligned with people's needs.

How can Human Centred Project Management be used

HCPM can be used to deliver many different types of projects e.g., IT, policy, construction, legislative reform and infrastructure. I have delivered projects using the HCPM approach including large, complex and high-profile Commonwealth projects such as the Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) Review which reviewed the 5700 MBS items to align them with contemporary clinical evidence and practice, and the Vaping Regulation Reform and Smoking Cessation Program which supported new and amended legislation to control e-cigarettes, reduce youth vaping, and making it illegal for non-pharmacy retailers to sell any vapes.

I have also delivered some smaller, less visible, but still impactful projects using HCPM. While working for the CSIRO, I designed and delivered vegetative propagation training for the Papua New Guinea Forest Research Institute, I project managed the Australian Low Rainfall Tree Improvement Group - a collaborative initiative involving stakeholders from government, research, and industry sectors to develop and improve tree growth and timber traits in low rainfall regions, and I managed the Commercial Seedling Seed Orchard Project which established seed orchards for selected native Australian tree species with improved desirable traits.

The Human Centred Project Management Principles and How to Use Them

Empathy First - Understanding and valuing different perspectives, experiences and needs of everyone involved in the project. Actively listening to everyone. Considering design solutions and workflows that support human well-being.

Take the time to learn about team members, their needs, challenges and what motivates them. Better engagement from team members comes from a greater understanding of what drives them.



Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement - Involvement of a wide range of stakeholders early and often. Prioritising transparency and open communication. Ensuring diverse voices are heard and respected throughout the project lifecycle.

Early and frequent involvement of stakeholders makes a huge difference by bringing people along on the project journey. Diversity of thought is a valuable way to innovate and it makes team members feel needed and heard. You do not need to use every idea that is shared, most people are OK with this as long as they had the opportunity to share, and they understand why their idea was not used (if it is not used).

Collaboration over Command - It is about teamwork and co-creation rather than top-down control. Empowering individuals. Fostering a culture of trust, psychological safety and mutual respect.

This can be difficult in high-paced and stressful delivery environments, but I believe that you need to go slow, to go fast. Empower individuals through sharing, there are no silly ideas, everything on the table. Foster a culture of trust, psychological safety, and respect so team members feel confident to collaborate.

Ethical Responsibility - Consideration of the social, environmental, and long-term consequences of decisions. Promoting fairness, accessibility and sustainability. Avoiding harm and respecting privacy and autonomy.

Much of my recent project management has supported delivery of new or amended policy change or legislation. Long-term consequences must be considered during the policy or legislation design to limit unintended consequences. And they must be sense checked and confirmed throughout the delivery period to ensure risks haven't changed or new risk emerged, that will impact long-term outcomes.

Adaptability and Flexibility - Being responsive to change and evolving human needs. Using iterative methods to refine approaches. Encouraging continuous learning and feedback loops.

Projects never get delivered exactly the way they are planned. As project managers we expect this, so it is not a big jump to expect human needs to change as well. Use iterative methods to refine approaches. This might be through an Agile approach, design thinking or co-design. Or in smaller or less complicated projects it could be through workshops with as many of the team as possible. Encourage continuous learning and feedback loops. This needs to be done regularly and in real-time wherever possible.

Clarity of Purpose and Meaning - Aligning project goals with values and human-centered outcomes. Ensuring everyone understands not just what is being done, but why. Creation of a shared vision that motivates and guides the team.

I support delivery of policy change which can have widespread impacts. Ensuring everyone understands the what and the why. I have found that even in situations



where people don't necessarily agree on the what, if they understand the why, they are more likely to get behind the project. Create a shared vision that motivates and guides the team.

Well-Being and Work-Life Balance - Recognition of the human limits of time, energy and attention. Design of processes that support sustainable work practices. Promotion of mental health and inclusive work environments.

The limits of time, energy, and attention are often overlooked. Human energy limitations are a hugely important consideration. We only have so much energy in our bucket, so we need to be aware of where we chose to use it. Design processes that support sustainable work practices – schedule regular team meetings after 9 am so that team members can complete school drop off, where teams work in a hybrid arrangement schedule a day where the team works from the same location. Promote mental health and inclusive work environments – this can be harder to do working remotely or in hybrid times, so there must be a deliberate effort to make this a priority.

Value Delivery, Not Just Task Completion - The focus is on delivering meaningful outcomes, not just hitting deadlines.

Taking time to deliver quality can be more important than on-time delivery. In a recent delivery role, I convinced the Program Board to allow the delivery team to present their updates directly. The team had increased visibility of the areas the Program Board focused on and they got to answer the questions from Board members directly. This gave delivery ownership back to the project team and increased their understanding of the need for reporting.

Benefits for Team Members

The human centred project management approach offers powerful benefits across team performance, stakeholder engagement, and project outcomes:

Increased Team Engagement and Motivation - Team members who feel valued are more involved in decisions, boosting ownership and commitment. Acknowledging individual and group contribution improves morale. Connecting daily work to meaningful goals increases motivation.

Better Communication and Collaboration – Team members who feel safe to express ideas and concerns are more positive. HCPM encourages regular check-ins, feedback and collaborative planning. Empathy and mutual respect help manage differences constructively reducing conflict.

Improved Problem-Solving and Innovation - Encouraging diverse input from team members in different roles empowers them to share insights. A supportive environment boosts experimentation and innovation. Mistakes are seen as opportunities to grow, not as failures.



Stronger Ownership and Accountability - Team members are trusted to take initiative and make decisions. There is a shared responsibility with everyone contributing to success, not just the project manager. There are clear roles and expectations reducing confusion and overlapping efforts.

Higher Resilience and Lower Burnout - HCPM is more workload aware and considers team capacity, avoiding overload. It emphasises well-being, leading to healthier work habits and better team support. It encourages realistic deadlines and respect for work-life balance.

Professional Growth and Satisfaction - Team members gain leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills and job fulfillment and career satisfaction are boosted.

Benefits for Accountable Project Executives

For sponsors, directors, or senior leaders responsible for project outcomes HCPM offers strategic benefits that align with leadership responsibilities, risk management and organisational goals.

Improved Project Outcomes and Success Rates - HCPM ensures deliverables meet real stakeholder and user needs, reducing rework and increasing impact. It reduces the mismatch between expectations and outputs, leading to higher quality outcomes and projects that solve the right problems deliver greater value.

Reduced Risk and More Informed Decision-Making - Early and continuous engagement with users and teams helps surface issues sooner. Human-centred insights reduce blind spots in planning and execution. Stakeholder needs are understood and addressed, increasing project buy-in and reducing resistance to change.

Stronger Stakeholder Relationships and Trust - Demonstrating empathy and responsiveness builds trust and credibility with clients and partners. Open communication reduces surprises and builds confidence in leadership. HCPM promotes a social licence to operate, this is especially important in public or community-focused projects.

Enhanced Team Performance and Accountability - Human-centred teams are more motivated, productive and resilient. Empowered teams take initiative, freeing executives for strategic focus. Teams understand the “why” behind the work, which supports goal-focused execution.

Positive Organisational Culture and Reputation - Executives who support people-first projects are seen as forward-thinking and ethical. Cultural alignment reinforces values such as respect, inclusion, and collaboration. Human-centred environments are appealing to top performers and have increased retention rates.



Strategic Agility and Innovation - Responsive planning based on real human needs allows for greater agility. A human centred culture supports innovation, experimentation and continuous improvement. This builds organisational capacity to handle uncertainty and complexity and leads to future proofing.

Benefits for Consumers

HCPM puts people at the core of project planning and delivery, directly enhancing the consumer experience and the value they receive.

Products and Services That Truly Meet Their Needs - Consumers are involved through feedback, testing and research, so outcomes match real needs—not assumptions. The final product fits into consumers' lives more naturally, solving actual problems.

Improved Usability and Experience - Human centred project management prioritises intuitive interfaces and user-friendly experiences. A more inclusive design ensures people of all abilities can use the product or service effectively. Consumers feel understood and respected, improving brand connection.

Faster Resolution of Pain Points - Human-centred approaches involve ongoing consumer input, allowing teams to identify and fix issues early. Solutions are crafted from a deep understanding of user frustration and needs.

Increased Trust and Loyalty - When users see that their feedback is acted on, trust grows. HCPM encourages honest, responsive engagement with consumers. People are more likely to stay loyal to a brand or product that "gets" them.

More Ethical and Inclusive Outcomes - By considering the human impact, HCPM avoids building features or systems that exclude or disadvantage users. It supports inclusive practices that reflect a diverse range of users and experiences. And respecting human needs and values builds a sense of agency and respect.

Better Long-Term Value - Leads to products and services that are more future-proof when built with long-term human needs in mind. Well-designed, user-informed solutions reduce the need for constant updates or overhauls and consumers spend less time troubleshooting or adapting workarounds.

Conclusion

This people-centric approach improves collaboration and ideation across all stakeholders. It gives everyone involved in the project more opportunity to have a voice, to be heard and to influence the projects direction. This ultimately has a positive impact on the project delivery, frees up project executive, it improves the project's success and leads to fit for purpose deliverables and outcomes that are better suited to the consumer.