PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. XII, Issue III – March 2023
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Put People First
Making a Modern Project Manager
by Yasmina Khelifi

Making a Modern Project Manager [1]

Put People First [2]

Yasmina Khelifi

In the March episode of my podcast, my guest Manuel Ancizu said something that stuck with me: 'People First and everything will work'. It made me think of the Agile Manifesto for software development published in 2001. One of the principles is: 'Individuals and interactions over processes and tools'.

Let's have a look at two successful companies' stories of people-centric approaches.

The Human Magic at Best Buy by Hubert Joly

There are so many takeaways from this very 35-minute insightful video conversation between Hubert Joly, former Best Buy CEO, and Adi Ignatius, Editor in Chief at Harvard Business Review. Hubert Joly explained how he applied people-centric leadership to make performance skyrocket. His first week as a CEO was in a store wearing a blue shirt, khaki pants and a badge that said "CEO in training", to just listen to workers on the front line.

I'll provide you with a summary but I recommend you watch the rest of the conversation, which you can see in its entirety here.

[7:21] Don't miss the story of the sick dinosaur that illustrates what human magic is

[13:44] His thoughts about flexible work

[19:17] His advocating for diversity and inclusion

[22:05] His point of view about hiring, leadership and happiness at work

[26:01] His vision for the coming 50 years

---

[1] Editor's note: This series of articles is by a middle age (I think you put another adjective last time?) project manager for other Gen X, Y and Z project professionals. The author Yasmina Khelifi is an actual project manager with a large multinational telecom in France while also an active PM professional, authoring articles, interviews and a popular LinkedIn blog as well as a podcast with a global audience. Also active in PMI France for many years, she has been an international correspondent for the PMWJ since 2021. We are delighted that she has agreed to author a series of articles based on her personal experiences over the last decade.

[2] How to cite this paper: Khelifi, Y. (2023). Put People First, Making a Modern Project Manager, series article, *PM World Journal,* Vol. XII, Issue III, March.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. XII, Issue III – March 2023
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Put People First
Making a Modern Project Manager
by Yasmina Khelifi

The Human Leader at Marriott International

A people-centric approach is also the cornerstone of Marriott International, according to Rasmus Hougaard, the founder and CEO of Potential Project, global research, leadership development and consulting firm that is on a mission to create a more human world of work.

In this Forbes article, Rasmus explained how Marriott has done it.

Cultivate More "Human" Leaders

Marriott leaders visit hotels and talk to employees (just as Hubert Joly went to talk to the frontline employees). It provides a role model for other managers, by showing that they are humble leaders.

Balance Stakeholders

At Marriott, employees are valid stakeholders deserving of consideration in every major decision, even if it is difficult. This was Hubert Joly's strategy when he was advised to cut costs: he balanced the interests of different stakeholders.

Demonstrate Commitment

A people-centric organization explicitly values the happiness and well-being of its people and takes concrete actions to achieve them.

Easier said than done? Well, you can take action at your own level.

What can you do to put people first?

I don't advocate for abandoning processes and governance completely. One misinterpretation of the Agile principle is that 'processes are not needed', but this is not true: processes are tools to facilitate work but not an aim per se. We have to balance the outcomes with the efforts of implementing new processes.

We may face some obstacles due to layers of management, strong matrix organization, or bureaucracy. The organizational culture may impose tools or governance entities to report to. It implies we need to report the same information but to different people in different ways at different times. And it might be difficult to bypass these processes.

Avoid these two sentences

In the workplace and volunteer projects, I often hear these two sentences:

- Let's be professional

- Let's be organized

Personally, I think that these two sentences are sometimes used as a pretext for imposing changes with no clear rationale behind them.

A few years ago, I was in a team where we needed to deliver applications on mobile devices. Each of us was responsible for an application and liaising with the application provider. We set up an excel file in shared storage with one tab per application. We all filled the file regularly with lessons learned and changes to the application. It was not a fancy tool but it worked. Then a new manager came and decided it wasn't professional. And it was better to have knowledge software. Two people outside of our team were responsible for collecting the information and updating the tool. What do you think happened? Feedback was not given regularly and after three years the tool was discontinued and all the knowledge was lost.

Reflect on your ways of working

For instance, if a new process is needed, do you ask the team for their input and feedback about the process? Do you stop implementation if the team raises red flags? If a team struggles to apply a new process, do you revisit it and improve it?

Can some procedures be automated? Do you have a trial period for new processes?

Do you take time to think of the right processes to follow? Do you carry out spring cleaning of the processes?

A few weeks ago, we wanted to create a survey after a meeting: so, I told the team to provide their feedback using a shared tool. When I explained it to them verbally, I then thought aloud: 'Why do we need to set up such a process for a short survey?' Then I told them they could send it to me by email and I would consolidate it for common review.

Reflect on your ways of interacting

Each week, I set aside time to journal about the ways I have behaved: What worked well? What can I improve? What did I regret? It's a routine that helps me to keep my feet on the ground. Other people talk to their mentors or an accountability buddy.

Thinking of developing regular feedback from your team members or coworkers (I'll write about this in a future newsletter) will help you remain humble with a learning mindset.

Taking the time to exchange with people on work-related topics (if they want to and are open to it) also gives you hints on how your team is feeling.

How do you put people at the centre? Please feedback in the comments.

PM World Journal (ISSN: 2330-4480)
Vol. XII, Issue III – March 2023
www.pmworldjournal.com   Series Article

Put People First
Making a Modern Project Manager
by Yasmina Khelifi

You can download your call to action memo. You'll learn, you'll move forward, you'll thrive.

Human magic is when at scale you have employees that do things for each other and for customers that nobody has told them to do. - Hubert Joly

About the Author

Yasmina Khelifi

Paris, France

🇫🇷

Yasmina Khelifi, PMP, PMI- ACP, PMI-PBA is an experienced project manager in the telecom industry. Along with her 20-year career at Orange S.A. (the large French multinational telecommunications corporation), she sharpened her global leadership skills, delivering projects with major manufacturers and SIM makers. Yasmina strives for building collaborative bridges between people to make international projects successful. She relies on three pillars: project management skills, the languages she speaks, and a passion for sharing knowledge.

She is a PMP certification holder since 2013, a PMI- ACP and PMI-PBA certification holder since 2020. She is an active volunteer member at PMI France and PMI UAE, and a member of PMI Germany Chapter. French-native, she can speak German, English, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and she is learning Arabic. Yasmina loves sharing her knowledge and experiences at work, in her volunteers' activities at PMI, and in projectmanagement.com as a regular blogger. She is also the host and co-founder of the podcast Global Leaders Talk with Yasmina Khelifi to help people in becoming better international leaders.

Yasmina can be contacted at https://yasminakhelifi.com/ or LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/yasminakhelifi-pmp-telecom/. Visit her correspondent profile at https://pmworldlibrary.net/yasmina-khelifi/

To view other works by Yasmina Kehelifi, visit her author showcase in the PM World Library at https://pmworldlibrary.net/authors/yasmina-khelifi/