

SALIENT definition of a 'Human-Centred Systems Approach'

Human-Centred Systems Approach as defined by the Building a Secure and Resilient Research and Coordination Hub (SALIENT)

A Human-Centred Systems Approach is essentially a people-first way to understand and improve complex systems through shared mapping, decision-making, and change.

A system is a group of interconnected parts working together for a purpose and embedded in an environment. Systems thinking helps us understand complex issues by looking at how these parts interact from the perspective of different observers. Systems thinking considers the systems boundaries and how they are defined by different stakeholders and informed by value judgements. Systemic elements can be both human and non-human, and we map them based on their roles, functions and interactions and based on the importance stakeholders place on them.

A human-centred systems approach focuses on people's needs, goals, capabilities and wellbeing. This type of approach aims for improvement by involving multiple perspectives, empowering marginalised groups and clarifying values and assumptions behind boundary decisions. This approach encourages collaboration to find ways to improve the system, recognising everyone's mental models, roles and responsibilities as well as systemic and environmental constraints. SALIENT aims to use this approach to put people at the heart of the system, not as problems to be solved.

Advantages of a Human-Centred Systems Approach in Decision Making:

- Ethical: It's morally right to include people in decisions that affect them.
- Instrumental: Involving people with local knowledge leads to better decisions.
- Political: People are more likely to support decisions they took part in.

In this approach, humans are central agents actively included from beginning to end. The system is mapped collaboratively – boundaries, elements and relationships are defined by stakeholders participating in the system and by those affected by it. This means that a wide range of people with different knowledge and roles should be involved in systems mapping and evaluation. People set priorities, take responsibility for the system's design, and manage the changes it brings. This method moves away from pre-determined solutions, starting with people's needs and recognising the diversity of stakeholders while understanding the larger systemic dynamics. Importantly, people are empowered as agents of initiating and sustaining positive change.

Examples of what this might look like in a competitive application for the SALIENT devolved funding call:

- **Ethnographic Research:** Conducting in-depth interviews and observations to understand the experiences, needs, and challenges of the people who will use the system. This helps ensure the design is grounded in real-world contexts
- **Co-Design Workshops:** Engaging users, stakeholders, and multidisciplinary teams in collaborative design sessions. These workshops foster creativity and ensure diverse perspectives are considered in the design process
- **Iterative Prototyping:** Developing and testing prototypes with users in multiple iterations. This allows for continuous feedback and refinement, ensuring the final design meets user needs effectively
- **Systems Mapping:** Creating visual representations of the system, including its components, interactions, and dependencies. This helps identify potential areas for improvement and ensures a holistic understanding of the system
- **User-Centred Evaluation:** Conducting usability testing and gathering feedback from users to assess the effectiveness and usability of the system. This ensures the design is driven by user experiences and insights
- **Scenario Planning:** Developing and analysing different scenarios to anticipate future challenges and opportunities. This helps design resilient systems that can adapt to changing conditions

What we think doesn't go far enough for a competitive SALIENT devolved funding call application:

- **Pre-defined tech-led fixes:** pre-defining what the solution is and not sufficiently engaging users.
- **Lack of Contextual Understanding:** Designing a system without understanding the context in which it will be used, such as the environment, cultural factors, or specific workflows. This can lead to a system that is not practical or effective in real-world settings.
- **Top-Down Decision Making:** Implementing decisions made solely by executives or designers without consulting the actual users, or only consulting users at the end of the project. This often leads to solutions that do not address the real needs or challenges faced by users.