

HAZEL NGCOBO
STRATEGY, RESEARCH & INNOVATION LEAD

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

HUMAN INSIGHTS.AFRICA - BRICS WBA PARTNER
Lead Research, Strategy, and Design

Johannesburg, South Africa
May 2023-Present

Responsibilities

Lead multi-disciplinary research, strategy, and design initiatives that integrate human-centered design, systems thinking, and digital transformation. Provide end-to-end guidance from discovery to execution, ensuring solutions are user-centric, scalable, and aligned with socio-economic development goals.

- Set the strategic direction for research, innovation, and design initiatives, translating high-level visions into actionable frameworks, programmes, and delivery models.
- Lead in-depth qualitative and quantitative research to understand social, economic, behavioural, and institutional dynamics, informing evidence-based strategy and decision-making.
- Synthesize research insights into clear strategic narratives, concept notes, policy-aligned frameworks, and investment-ready proposals.
- Design and oversee programme architectures, ecosystems, and operating models that connect stakeholders, capital, technology, and delivery partners.
- Guide the application of human-centred and UX methodologies as enabling tools to support strategy, service design, and system improvement rather than standalone design outputs.
- Collaborate closely with directors, developers, designers, and external partners to translate strategy and research into scalable digital platforms, services, and implementation plans
- Lead stakeholder engagement across government, private sector, development partners, and innovation ecosystems to align interests and enable coordinated delivery.
- Ensure that all initiatives remain grounded in inclusion, usability, and real-world constraints while prioritising sustainability, scale, and measurable impact.

Selected Project Experience

- **BRICS Partnerships:** Currently playing a key role in research initiatives designed to leverage the BRICS framework for South African growth.
- **Pan-African Trade House:** Leading the research, systems thinking, and creative-strategic framing of a pan-African trade facilitation model, aligning policy, trade, and digital infrastructure into a clear, implementable architecture.
- **Greenfields Africa Agri-Trade Platform:** Lead strategist and researcher for a government-backed export platform aggregating smallholder farmers for high-value beef and crop exports. Directed ecosystem mapping, digital platform design, and market expansion into Kenya.
- **KwaZulu-Natal Women's Advancement Fund (KZNWAF):** Directed analysis of 3,000+ funding applications and developed a digital grant-aggregation dashboard and investor-facing strategy to mobilize billions in women-led enterprise financing.
- **Phemba Africa Renewable Energy:** Refined the 1 GW Solar and Mixed-Energy Concept Note with a women-centered economic impact strategy, integrating solar, wind, hydro, and waste-to-energy solutions.
- **Digital Transformation Strategy for KZN Government:** Authored a province-wide strategy for digital governance and "Government as a Platform" (GaaP), including citizen engagement apps and data-driven service delivery models.
- **Innovation Valley (KDIV):** Designed and launched a full digital ecosystem (website, social media, and program architecture) to accelerate entrepreneurship and digital skills for youth and women in KZN.
- **Financial Inclusion Research (Old Mutual NEXT176 & GROW ECD/OYSTAR):** Led mixed-methods research on intergenerational financial behaviors and early-childhood development app adoption, delivering actionable insights on brand identity, UI/UX, and product-market fit.

Responsibilities

- Conducted user research and usability testing to uncover valuable insights that drive user-centric design improvements across digital channels.
- Led cross-functional collaboration with product managers, designers, and developers to align research objectives with business goals, ensuring the development of customer-focused solutions.
- Applied various research methodologies, including interviews, surveys, card sorting, and user journey mapping, to deeply understand customer needs and behaviors.
- Championed accessibility and inclusivity in all digital products, working closely with the design and development teams to create inclusive banking experiences for diverse users.
- Communicated research findings through compelling presentations and reports, facilitating productive discussions with stakeholders at all levels.
- Collaborated with designers to create intuitive user interfaces based on research insights, resulting in improved user experiences.
- Led usability testing sessions and gather feedback from users to optimize key features and discover new product opportunities.
- Developed and maintained user personas and journey maps, guiding the development team to empathize with end-users and build intuitive customer experiences.

Selected Project Experience

- Conducted user research to assess the usability of the bank's API marketplace prototype for a designated user group, focusing on their ability to achieve defined goals effectively and efficiently.
 - Evaluated information organization to improve user experience in categorizing individual APIs and product APIs.
 - Generated valuable insights and recommendations that significantly improved the Central Standard Bank API marketplace, benefiting a larger community and enhancing overall user satisfaction.
- Designed and conducted research on feature parity between banking app and online banking platforms, utilizing NPS survey data analysis to identify key areas for improvement.
 - Prioritized enhancements to ensure a consistent and seamless user experience across both platforms, aiming to eliminate confusion and frustration for customers transitioning between the app and online banking.
 - Developed a Best Practice Guide for feature parity and made recommendations that significantly enhanced user experiences.
- Designed and executed a comprehensive research plan to evaluate the usability of the bank's Mobile Network site.
 - Conducted user interviews and surveys to gather valuable insights into user preferences and priorities.
 - Evaluated user interactions and feedback to identify pain points and opportunities for improvement in the customer journey.
 - Analyzed data to develop actionable recommendations aimed at enhancing the user interface and optimizing the overall user experience.
 - Collaborated with cross-functional teams to implement recommended changes and improve the site's usability and functionality.
 - The research findings and recommendations played a pivotal role in refining the customer journey on the Mobile Network site.
- Designed and conducted in-depth research to understand the psychology of vishing victims and their experiences with scams. Key objectives included exploring victim experiences, assessing the impact on victims' perceptions of the bank, and unraveling mental models and emotional responses.
 - The research-led recommendations resulted in improved security measures and enhanced customer support, ultimately strengthening the bank's ability to protect customers from vishing scams and provide a more secure and responsive banking experience.

REACH DIGITAL HEALTH (FORMERLY PRAEKELT.ORG)
User Experience Designer

Johannesburg, South Africa
March 2022-February 2023

- Collaborated with team members and partners to deliver essential information and services through seamless chatbot services.
- Designed and implemented multiple user-facing products, including the WHO health alert, MomConnect, Contact NDoH, MenConnect, and B-Wise by Young Africa Live.
- Expanded and integrated AI-powered personal health guides and behavior change tools and services through cross-functional work with product and development teams.
- Conducted UX research through focus group discussions, co-creation workshops, and user testing exercises.
- Created research summaries and presentations, effectively communicating research findings to stakeholders.
- Distilled findings into concise insights, and engaged and excited stakeholders about our research and product development.
- Developed wireframes, prototypes, and user flows to deliver high-quality end-to-end designs.

AMRS
Change Management and Human Resources Consultant

Mbabane, Eswatini
March 2021-February 2022

Responsibilities

- Coordinated scheduling and delivery of multiple client projects, ensuring compliance with client specifications and needs
- Monitored and updated project timelines and expectations with internal and external teams
- Worked with finance to ensure timely and accurate client billing
- Provided strategic solutions for client issues
- Collaborated with operational teams to improve workflow and enhance client experience
- Performed other related tasks as assigned
- Provided high-level solutions and recommendations to management teams to meet HR needs
- Conducted performance management system and organizational design reviews and development
- Designed and deployed employee satisfaction surveys and skills audits for municipalities and regulatory authorities
- Analyzed survey data and presented findings and recommendations to executive teams
- Facilitated focus group discussions, workshops, and training based on survey results
- Conducted change impact and readiness assessments, stakeholder analysis, and defined success metrics
- Monitored change progress, identified risks and issues, and facilitated discussions with clients to improve processes

Selected Project Experience

- Coordinated HR projects for regulatory bodies and parastatal organizations in Eswatini
- Designed and facilitated customer experience (CEX) training workshops for insurance (Lidwala Insurance) and mobile network providers (Eswatini Mobile)
- Coordinated skills audit for Energy Regulatory Authority (ESERA) and improved performance management systems for Financial Services Regulatory Authority (FSRA)
- Administered change management process for Eswatini Post and Telecommunications Corporation (EPTC)

MATCHBOXOLOGY
Research Associate & Junior Human Centered Design Practitioner

Johannesburg, South Africa
May 2019-February 2021

- Co-developed and implemented human-centered design solutions for public health sectors in multiple African countries
- Designed messaging and communications to promote sexual health awareness
- Conducted data collection and management for a 3-year project with over 2000 men in South Africa to improve HIV testing and treatment behaviors
- Organized and facilitated HCD workshops exploring clinical trials in emergency settings and epidemics
- Worked with partners to synthesize findings from HCD workshops and immersions
- Conducted HCD research to understand attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of South African youth on mental health

- Co-designed and facilitated workshops to find solutions for demand creation and uptake of contraceptive products
- Generated over 80 articles and activities for the Vuka+ app (beta), designed to support Adolescent Girls and Young Women (AGYW) with health and wellness information and resources
- Successfully piloted "Coach Mpilo," a prototype solution improving HIV treatment behaviors for over 2000 men in South Africa
- Co-designed and facilitated HCD workshops to yield prototype solutions for demand creation and uptake of AVAC's Dual Prevention Pill
- Collected and analyzed workshop outputs for women's sexual reproductive health products in Project ACTION
- Actively participated in the Lyndra Pill project for the launch of a once-a-month contraceptive pill.

SHANEDI PROJECTS
Project Coordinator

Johannesburg, South Africa
November 2018-May 2019

- Coordinated all aspects of events for the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) during the South African National and Provincial elections.
- Managed event logistics including scheduling, staff management, program development, and budget management.
- Worked with the event planning team to develop and schedule various aspects of the events.
- Communicated regularly with clients to provide updates on project status and compiled daily status reports for clients.
- Collaborated with the IEC team to ensure a seamless and successful project outcome.
- Implemented and continually improved essential performance management structures both internally and externally.
- Managed projects from start to finish with clear communication on milestones, targets, goals, budgets, and deadlines.
- Oversaw project resources and analyzed their suitability to meet project demands.
- Ensured key service level agreements were met by all parties involved.
- Managed the project's financials and notified stakeholders of critical cost implications, changes to the budget, and cost changes.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

Bachelor of Arts, Major in International Relations and Political Sciences

Johannesburg, South Africa
2015-2019

Post-Graduate Diploma in Public Management (Development and Monitoring & Evaluation)

2023-Ongoing

PENRYN COLLEGE

National Senior Certificate

Mbombela, South Africa
2010-2014

SHORT COURSES AND CERTIFICATES

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

2020

- Fundamentals of Project Management Theory and Practice
- Effective Business Communication
- Digital Marketing

TRAINING AND RESOURCES IN RESEARCH ETHICS EVALUATION (TRREE)

2020

- Adolescent Involvement in HIV Prevention Trials
- Good Clinical Practice
- HIV Vaccine Trials
- Informed Consent
- Introduction to Research Ethics
- Public Health Research Ethics

YOUNG AFRICAN LEADERS INITIATIVE CERTIFICATES

2020

- Effective Communication for Healthy Outcomes
- Strategies for Personal Growth and Development
- Understanding the Rights of Women and Girls

OGILVY

2020

- Behavioural Economics

TOP SKILLS

UX Research & Design: As a UX designer, I conducted user research, usability testing, and created user-centered interfaces using tools like Figma, Lovable, Webflow, Turn.io, WagTail, and Miro. With a deep understanding of user behavior and interaction design, I led a team at Praekelt.org to enhance a mobile screening chatbot, boosting user engagement and completion rates.

Design Thinking: Employing design thinking principles as a change management consultant, I facilitated workshops encouraging cross-functional teams to creatively solve complex problems by empathizing with user needs. At AMRS, a workshop led to a new service, elevating customer satisfaction within three months of launch.

Product Design: As an insights/research associate, I conducted market research and collaborated with various stakeholders to develop product concepts, aligning user needs with business objectives and technical feasibility. At Matchboxology, I worked with healthcare providers and young women to design an advertisement promoting a forthcoming contraceptive pill.

Project Planning & Coordination: In a role as a project coordinator, I managed projects end-to-end, utilizing tools like Asana and Trello to ensure timely, budget-friendly completion and stakeholder satisfaction. Notably, I coordinated Gauteng events for the Independent Electoral Commission at Shanedo Projects during South Africa's elections.

Strategy Development: As a change management consultant, I formulated strategies after analyzing clients' businesses and markets, pinpointing opportunities and challenges to create strategic roadmaps. At AMRS, a strategy I developed fostered tech adoption by minimizing employee resistance.

Proposal Writing: As an insights/research associate, I wrote proposals for clients to secure new business. I used my understanding of the client's needs and the market environment to create compelling proposals that clearly communicated our value proposition.

Workshop/Training Development & Facilitation: Developing and conducting workshops/training as a change management consultant, I educated and engaged employees in new processes/tools. For instance, at Eswatini Postal and Telecommunications Corporation, a training program led to a 90% increase in tech and management adoption among 500+ employees.

LANGUAGES

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| • English | Fluent |
| • isiZulu | Intermediate |
| • siSwati | Intermediate |
| • French | Basic |
| • Portuguese | Basic |
| • Spanish | Basic |

REFERENCES

HumanInsights Africa

- **Name:** Thomas De Ridder
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AMRS

- **Name:** Muzi Mthembu
- **Position:** Director of Strategy
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Matchboxology

- **Name:** Paris Pitsillides
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Shanedi Projects

- **Name:** Koketso Foli
- **Position:** Managing Director
- **Phone Number:** +27 71 562 7922
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