

PUBLICATION 02

Human-Centred Quality in Practice

The Test Manager

Professional Expression 01 | Working Practice v0.1

Purpose

A working expression of Human-Centred Quality through the role of a Test Manager. It is intended to be used, challenged and improved through practice - not merely read.

Observe -> Interpret -> Understand -> Judge -> Improve -> Steward

This is not a job description, competency framework or maturity assessment. It does not replace established Test Management practice. It proposes a simple pattern for making the development of quality understanding visible and durable.

1. The working proposition

Human-Centred Quality asks a Test Manager to consider not only whether sufficient testing has been completed, but whether the people responsible for decisions have sufficient understanding of quality, uncertainty and consequence to make those decisions responsibly.

The six Practices below are not six additional phases of testing and should not become workflow gates. They describe the development of understanding through work that already exists.

Practice is not Capability

Practice describes how Human-Centred Quality is expressed. Capability concerns how effectively and consistently people and organisations are able to express those Practices. This working expression begins with Practice; it provides evidence from which capability can later be understood.

2. Test Manager expression at a glance

Practice	Test Manager expression	Make it visible
OBSERVE	Notice significant behaviour, evidence, uncertainty, recurrence, contradiction and consequence - not merely execution status.	Record what was actually observed, its context, contributor and references to supporting evidence.
INTERPRET	Encourage plausible explanations without allowing explanation to silently become fact. Invite perspectives capable of changing meaning.	Record interpretations separately from observations. Preserve alternatives and material uncertainty.
UNDERSTAND	Bring evidence, interpretations, experience and context into the best current coherent explanation. Make what remains unknown explicit.	Record current understanding, what supports it and significant remaining uncertainty.
JUDGE	Help decision-makers understand evidence, consequence and uncertainty sufficiently to act responsibly.	Record judgement or recommendation, rationale, consequence, uncertainty and contributors.
IMPROVE	Ask what should become better because of what has been learned - then return later to discover what actually happened.	Record intended change, intended outcome and, when known, actual outcome.
STEWARD	Decide what learning deserves to survive the immediate situation and make it reusable without turning every observation into organisational knowledge.	Preserve reusable learning with provenance and identify where or with whom it should be shared.

3. The HCQ Record

Where the development of understanding matters, make enough of it durable that it can be examined, challenged, continued and learned from. The HCQ Record is an information model, not a mandated tool. Existing test, defect, telemetry, requirements and governance systems can remain authoritative sources; the record connects what matters.

Selective durability

Do not record everything. A record is particularly useful where a concern is consequential, uncertain, contested, recurrent, cross-disciplinary, important to a decision, likely to develop over time, or potentially reusable.

Practice	Question	Capture / complete as understanding develops
OBSERVE	What did we notice?	Observation; context; evidence/reference; contributor/date
INTERPRET	What might it mean?	Interpretation(s); alternatives; uncertainty; contributor(s)
UNDERSTAND	What do we currently understand?	Current explanation; supporting evidence; what remains uncertain; last updated
JUDGE	What does this mean for action?	Judgement/recommendation; rationale/consequence; uncertainty; contributors/decision owner
IMPROVE	What should become better?	Action/change; intended outcome; actual outcome when known; residual concern
STEWARD	What deserves to survive?	Reusable learning; share/preserve with; related evidence/records; candidate pattern

The record may begin incomplete. Do not manufacture entries simply to fill the structure.

4. Worked example - one concern developing over time

This example is intentionally continuous. It shows how one concern can develop without forcing the six Practices into a linear workflow.

OBSERVE	Three attempts to complete the same transaction timed out during representative peak-load testing. The same journey completed within expected time outside the peak-load window. <i>Evidence: test run RUN-8241; performance log PERF-LOG-20260813-0735.</i>
INTERPRET	Interpretation A: possible capacity degradation under concurrency rather than a functional failure. Interpretation B: delayed confirmation may cause users to assume failure and submit again. <i>Uncertainty: the test does not reproduce the complete production infrastructure.</i>
UNDERSTAND	Current evidence suggests the transaction can be accepted while confirmation is delayed under load. The significant concern is therefore not only response time: users may be unable to determine whether their action succeeded and may repeat it. <i>Remaining uncertainty: production-equivalent concurrency and downstream acknowledgement behaviour have not yet been fully demonstrated.</i>
JUDGE	Do not treat the timeout only as an isolated performance defect. Treat it as release-relevant uncertainty affecting a time-sensitive user journey until acknowledgement behaviour is

understood.

Recommendation: extend targeted testing and seek operational agreement on acceptable mitigation before release recommendation.

IMPROVE

Validate duplicate-submission safeguards and include explicit submission-state feedback in the affected journey.

Intended outcome: users can distinguish delayed confirmation from failed submission. Actual outcome: complete after follow-up evidence is available.

STEWARD

Candidate reusable learning: delayed acknowledgement can transform a performance symptom into a user-decision and duplication risk.

Share with: performance testing, UX, product, operations and relevant safety disciplines. Preserve provenance to the originating evidence.

5. What should a Test Manager do next Monday?

Do not launch an HCQ programme. Choose one quality concern for which developing understanding could genuinely improve a decision.

1. Start with what you actually know.

Capture the observation without manufacturing an explanation merely because the record has somewhere to put one.

2. Keep evidence and interpretation distinct.

Invite alternative explanations and record material uncertainty.

3. Bring in the perspectives that can change meaning.

A Test Manager does not need to originate every contribution. Shared understanding may sit between disciplines.

4. Make consequential judgement visible.

Record enough rationale that somebody returning later can understand why the judgement made sense at the time.

5. Follow improvement to outcome.

An action is not an outcome. Return later and record what actually happened.

6. Steward selectively.

Preserve only what deserves to travel: a pattern, lesson, reusable question, unresolved concern or practice worth sharing.

One-week experiment

One meaningful observation. One durable record. More than one perspective where appropriate. An honest account of uncertainty. One consequential judgement if required. An eventual return to discover what happened.

6. Leadership behaviours that enable the Practice

The Test Manager should not become the administrator or owner of every HCQ Record. Their leadership lies partly in creating conditions in which people can contribute to developing understanding.

Leadership behaviour	What it enables
Make it safe to say "I observed something"	An observation need not arrive with an explanation.
Make it safe to say "I interpret this differently"	Alternative interpretations are evidence of inquiry, not obstruction.
Make it safe to say "We do not yet understand"	Uncertainty can be responsible professional judgement.
Make it safe to revise understanding	New evidence should be able to challenge previous conclusions without erasing their provenance.
Ask what decision the evidence must support	Reporting should expose meaning and uncertainty, not merely status.
Ask what should survive	Leadership includes preserving useful understanding beyond the immediate project and people.

7. Guardrails - what this must not become

Not six workflow gates: The arrow describes development, not approval states. New observations can challenge understanding; outcomes can reopen judgement.

Not another repository for everything: Reference existing evidence rather than copying every test result, defect, log or requirement.

Not a record-count target: The number of HCQ Records says little about the quality of Practice. Two consequential records may be more valuable than two hundred administrative ones.

Not a substitute for professional responsibility: AI or tooling may surface patterns and relationships, but judgement remains attributable and challengeable.

Not a fixed standard: v0.1 is deliberately a working expression. Practice should challenge the model; the role must not be distorted to protect it.

8. Try it. Challenge it. Contribute.

This is the first professional expression of the emerging Human-Centred Quality Practice Model. It starts with the Test Manager because the role provides a useful leadership perspective across evidence, people, risk, governance and decision-making. It is not presented as definitive.

The contribution question

Did making the development of understanding visible improve anything? If it did, what? If it did not, why not? What would you change about this Practice?

Useful contributions do not need to be essays. They may be practical observations such as:

- "For this aspect of Observe, we already use an existing tool; the missing part is preserving the interpretation."
- "Interpret works differently in our environment because..."
- "There is something important between Judge and Improve that this model does not capture."

- "This field became administration and added no understanding."
- "We returned to the record and discovered our original judgement was wrong."

Those contributions become evidence for the next expression of the Practice and for later role-aware capability work.

9. What follows

The Test Manager expression provides a working reference against which other testing roles can now be explored. The objective is not to rewrite the same model four times, but to discover what remains common and what changes when professional responsibility shifts to the Test Analyst, Test Lead and Test Architect.

Only after the Practice has been expressed and challenged should HCQ ask the capability question: how effectively and consistently can people, teams and organisations express these Practices?

Working proposition

Before assessing capability, make the Practice visible. Before declaring maturity, develop understanding of what is actually being practised.