



Humanity Link



Christopher M. Hoffman (He, Him)

Founder-CEO, Humanity Link | AI comms + payments infrastructure for NGOs | 500M msgs, \$70M aid delivered | Crisis + UN/World Vision background

Beyond Innovation: Building for Impact, Scale, and Shared Good

Published on 2025-07-01 13:22

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/beyond-innovation-building-impact-scale-shared-good-hoffman-qpbpe/>

We like to talk about *innovation*. It's a word that lights up boardrooms, strategy decks, and grant proposals. It promises fresh ideas and better ways to tackle the world's toughest challenges. But in the social impact and humanitarian space,

we too often fall into the same pattern: we pilot, we publish, we move on. We innovate — but we rarely scale.

When a good idea gets stuck in an endless pilot loop, it becomes less about impact and more about novelty. We get the sense of progress, but not always the progress itself. We launch a pilot, collect some lessons learned, and file the report. The work is “innovative,” but the communities we aim to serve see little lasting change.

If we really want to solve the problems that matter — at the scale they demand — we need to move beyond this cycle. That starts by rethinking our language. What if *social impact* became synonymous not with one-off experiments but with *best-in-class services* that operate at the edge of what’s possible, backed by strong business models, and designed to adapt and grow over time?

This means shifting how we fund, build, and partner — and, crucially, how we design our internal systems to support what works.

From Pilots to Investments

The first shift is seeing new ideas not as “funded pilots” but as *investments*. Pilots tend to come with short timelines, limited funding, and little room for the kind of iteration that good ideas need to get better. Investments, on the other hand, come with an expectation of return — not just financial, but social.

They come with a plan to grow, adapt, and deliver lasting value.

For organizations, this means building internal cultures that reward refinement over novelty. It means resourcing the boring but critical work of scaling operations, supporting teams to deliver at higher levels, and maintaining trust with the communities we serve.

Building Smart — Not Alone

Equally important is knowing *what* to build, *what not to build*, and *who to build it with*. In a rush to be seen as innovative, organizations sometimes duplicate tools that already exist — or build from scratch when partnerships could achieve more.

Digital public goods and open source are often thrown into this same conversation, but they're not the same thing. Open source means making your code freely available; a digital public good goes further — it's designed to be *shared, adapted, and reused* for broad social benefit. The best digital public goods come with strong governance, clear pathways for collaboration, and communities that keep them alive and evolving. Open source alone doesn't guarantee that.

So, when we design new tools or platforms, we need to ask:

- Could we contribute to or adapt an existing digital public good instead of starting from zero?

- Will what we're building stay useful — and maintained — after the project ends?
- Who else can benefit from this work, and how can we make that easy?

None of this means an organization has to do everything itself. In fact, the smartest teams are often those that know what *not* to build. They find the balance — investing their time and talent in what only they can do well, and partnering for the rest. This balance frees up resources to go further and invites new ideas that no single actor could develop alone.

Business Models for Real Scale

If we want to break the pilot cycle, we need viable business models behind our best ideas — whether they're nonprofit services, social enterprises, or digital tools meant for global use. Grant funding can spark something new, but it rarely keeps it running forever. If we care about impact at scale, we have to design for sustainability from day one.

That might mean embedding cost recovery models, diversifying funding streams, or building hybrid structures that combine revenue with philanthropic capital. It might mean forging unlikely partnerships — with governments, private sector actors, or other nonprofits — to share infrastructure, talent, or distribution.

None of this is easy. It takes leadership willing to be pragmatic, to invest in the long haul, and to accept that scaling what works is rarely glamorous. But it's the only way to ensure that the ideas we celebrate at launch actually deliver for the people who count on them.

Toward an Impact-First Mindset

At the end of the day, innovation is only as valuable as what it delivers. If it stays stuck in a pilot report, it hasn't done its job.

It's time to make *impact* — not just novelty — our measure of success. That means treating promising ideas like the start of something bigger. It means designing funding and business models that carry ideas forward. It means knowing when to build, when to partner, and when to contribute to the shared digital infrastructure that lifts all boats.

The work ahead isn't about discarding innovation — it's about putting it in service of something more durable: real progress, real scale, and solutions that last.

This is exactly why I built Humanity Link: to move beyond pilots and one-off projects and create systems that help people at scale, day after day. After years in the field, I saw too many good ideas stall because they didn't have the right business models, partnerships, or design for the long haul. Humanity Link exists to prove that the best technology, clear accountability, and steady iteration can make social impact

work like a real service — not just an experiment. Our goal is simple: to help communities get the answers, support, and resources they need — reliably, and at the moments they need it most.

Let's keep talking. And more importantly, let's keep building.