

Who is agile?



In South Africa

Who is agile in South Africa?

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This book is for sale at
<http://leanpub.com/WhoisagileSouthAfrica>

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About this book

Greetings in all 11 official South African Languages: Sanibonani (isiZulu); Molo (isiXhosa); Hallo (Afrikaans); Thobela (Sepedi); Dumela (Setswana); Lumela (Sesotho); Abusheni (Xitsonga); Sanibona (SiSwati); Avuwani (Tshivenda); Salibonani (isiNdebele); and Hello (English)

This book is based on the original Who is Agile? In South Africa book which was published in 2016. This version has been adapted to highlight a view of Who is Agile in South Africa that is more representative of our country's diverse demographics.

We are at a pivotal time in history, where, as a society, we need to make a concerted effort to create a more diverse and tolerant society. We need to redress the imbalances of the past, not only from a global perspective, as is evident from the "Black Lives Matter" movement, but importantly, from a South African perspective. We must do this, not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is explicit in the preamble of our constitution:

We, the people of South Africa, Recognise the injustices of our past; Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.

We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic so as to:

Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; Improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person; and Build a united and democratic South Africa able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.

May God protect our people.

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika. Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso. God seën Suid-Afrika. God bless South Africa. Mudzimu fhatutshedza Afurika. Hosi katekisa Afrika.

The idea for the book evolved after numerous conversations around racial inequity in the SA Agile Industry. To ensure alignment with what we wanted to achieve, a brainstorming session was held, and a vision was set out to build a more transformed community of practitioners, where “Race is no longer a concern in the Agile industry” and where everyone, regardless of race, gender, sexuality or social class feels welcome, supported, heard and included in the agile community.

It was recognised that, while the original book features some of the most impressive minds in the industry, however, the book, being a “South African” version, was not representative of the demographics of the country.

This iteration of the book will strive for more inclusion but will remain a community effort which aims to highlight bright minds, both new and old, who are striving to create better businesses, more engaged teams, improving value delivery, and making work more enjoyable; where people come to work not

because they have to, but instead because they want to make a difference through more purposeful businesses.

It is said that South Africa is “Alive with Possibilities”. This great nation has an incredibly rich heritage filled with difficult times and times of greatness. As a nation, we have had our share of challenges but through sheer will and determination, we repeatedly rise to fight the good fight.

South Africa has some of the most scenic places on earth, such as Table Mountain, which has proudly been included in as one of the official new 7 natural wonders of the world. There is also the Kruger National Park, which is one of the largest game reserves in Africa, covering just under 20,000 square kilometres (7,500 sq/miles) and housing the most iconic wildlife, including the Big Five, that include the Lion, Leopard, Rhinoceros, Elephant and the Cape Buffalo.

South Africa also has some of the most delicious food in the world. This may be attributed to the spice route in the 15th to 17th centuries, where European countries such as Portugal and Spain were transporting spice from India by ship. The trip had to circumnavigate Africa and rounded the Cape of Good Hope (Cape Town), where some of the spices were traded for precious metals such as Gold. This has influenced South African cuisine, which is rich with flavour and aromas. To pair all the delicious food, South Africa also has some of the most stunning wines in the world. Given our fertile South African soil, we created our unique varietal of wine, the Pinotage, which is a cross between a Pinot Noir and Cinsault and is an earthy yet deliciously dark fruity wine.

Besides the natural beauty, South Africans love adventure and

South Africa is home to interesting extreme activities such as one of the Gold Reef City Roller Coasters, the Tower of Terror, which is ranked 1st in the world in terms of the highest number of G-forces the ride pulls on your body (6.3G) as well the Bloukrans Bungee Bridge, which is the highest commercial bungee jump, at 216 meters (709 ft).

Most importantly, South Africa has some of the smartest, warmest and friendliest people across the globe. Some of whom we will showcase in this book.

A key ethos of this book is that it is written by the community, for the community.

All proceeds from the sale of this book will go towards improving transformation within the South African Agile community.

Who is Samantha Laing?



Sam

Sam¹ was proposed by [Aslam Khan](#).

Here is what [Karen](#) has to say about Sam:

I met Sam when I interviewed her for a ScrumMaster position. I walked straight out of the room and made the offer. I knew she “got” agile. A few years later we started a business together. I love the fact that she gives me constant feedback on things she observes, and I know it is always intended to help me improve.

What is something people usually don't know about you but has influenced you in who you are?

I'm a dog person. I have 3 dogs and 1 cat. The dogs remind me to always forgive quickly (5 minutes!) and then be wagging my

¹<https://twitter.com/samlaing>

tail again. And should I forget - my wife reminds me to wag my tag.

On a more serious, vulnerable note. I worry. A lot. About everything. I'm a control freak by nature. Especially around time. I **need** to be 5 minutes early to everything - otherwise I feel like a total failure. [Karen](#) and my wife tease me about it all the time. I'm getting better ... I think ... :)

Oh, and in case you missed the above references - I'm gay and happily married to a woman. While I don't hide this, some people are really surprised when they realise it - so perhaps less people are aware than I think.

What would have become of you, if you were not doing the job you do today?

Sjoe! Its hard to think about not doing the job I'm doing now. I think I would probably have become a Software Dev Manager at a little company somewhere. Or a school teacher.

What is your biggest challenge and why is it a good thing for you?

My fitness level and smoking. Both are with me sporadically. I work hard on both - in spurts. Its a continuous give and take that hopefully oneday will find calm and balance.

What drives you?

My curiosity. I always wonder if there is a better way, an easier way, a more fun way. I don't believe life needs to be difficult - its us that makes it difficult. (Well, us and computers).

What is your biggest achievement?

Thus far its having “BeBrave” as a resolution for a year and vowing to always take the path I don’t know. It led me to my job, my wife and so much more!

Is there a piece of music that has a special meaning for you?

Not really. I love breaking into song - just a sentence or two at usually weird times :) I never remember all the words to a song or the artists or anything - I’m really bad with things like that.

What is the last book you have read?

mmm some romance pulp whilst on honeymoon ;) I am currently reading [The Peoples Scrum by Tobias Mayer](#)².

What question do you think we should also ask and what is the answer?

My favourite dessert is Tirumisu.

Whom do you think we should ask next in South Africa?

[Joanne Perold](#)³ - a Scrum Master in Johannesburg who amazes me with her insights.

²<http://www.amazon.com/Peoples-Scrum-Revolutionary-Transformation-ebook/dp/B00CO8CRDY>

³<http://za.linkedin.com/pub/joanne-perold/6/608/809>

Whom do you think we should ask next, not in South Africa?

[Geoff Watts](#)⁴ - A Coach and trainer in the UK that has a similar (to me) fun outlook on life.

How would you define your relation to the South African Agile community?

Symbiotic. I strive to give as much as I have received over the last few years. Its the reason [Growing Agile](#)⁵ started [Agile Breakfasts](#)⁶, and things like the agile bookswap. We have such a rich community and we can all learn so much from each other.

Cape Town, April 2013

Mmm not sure I have much of a relationship anymore. I keep in touch with a few people in the community and support them via retweeting things or having zoom chats. Mostly I am trying to create a community in NZ that is as awesome as the SA community. It is a rare and beautiful thing. Covid has brought a deeper connection to the worldwide community as most events are happening online still - so that has been a great way to mix and mingle with people you might only see at large international conferences. I like that the global community has become richer because of this crisis. I wonder how we can keep the excitement and energy of large international community events in an online format whilst supporting and encouraging local in person group events.

New Zealand, October 2020

⁴<http://uk.linkedin.com/in/geoffwatts>

⁵<http://www.growingagile.co.za>

⁶<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Cape-Town-Agile-Breakfast-4403532/about>

How to connect with Sam

Twitter: [@samlaing](https://twitter.com/samlaing)⁷

Linked In: za.linkedin.com/in/samlaing⁸

⁷<https://twitter.com/samlaing>

⁸<http://za.linkedin.com/in/samlaing>

Who is Karen Greaves?



Karen

Karen⁹ was proposed by [Aslam Khan](#).

Here is what [Sam](#) has to say about Karen:

Karen is my business partner and best friend. Neither of us thought that working together would turn out the way it has. Somehow we manage to bring out the best in each other. I don't think I would be brave enough to do my day job without Karen. She supports me and constantly challenges me to be more and grow more. We share many thoughts, traits and even middle names ;)

⁹https://twitter.com/karen_greaves

What is something people usually don't know about you but has influenced you in who you are?

One of the most influential things in my life was burning out twice. I am a workaholic and an overachiever, and in the software industry that can often lead to insane hours and stress. It took me 2 attempts and about 5 years to really change who I am, and accept that more than about 35 hours a week leads to crap work, even if you don't think so at the time.

What would have become of you, if you were not doing the job you do today?

Although I started off studying Astrophysics, I think nowadays I would be an accountant :) People think I'm kidding when I say this, but I love numbers, accounts, budgets, ledgers, investments and anything to do with that. [Sam](#) calls me the Financial Director for our company because I love dealing with all that stuff.

What is your biggest challenge and why is it a good thing for you?

Keeping quiet :) I love to talk, and I'm a natural extrovert. However being a good facilitator and coach requires both being comfortable with silence and giving people space to talk. It's a constant struggle for me not to talk, but every time I do, I learn very valuable things and connect better with people.

What drives you?

When I hear about the impact I had on other people's lives for the better. e.g. they have stopped working overtime, or started

to appreciate others more, that's confirmation for me of why I do what I do.

What is your biggest achievement?

Following my heart and starting [Growing Agile¹⁰](#) with [Sam](#). It has been a fantastic ride so far, and it's only just beginning. I think everyone should work for themselves, it's an amazing discovery about what really motivates you, and what you enjoy doing.

Is there a piece of music that has a special meaning for you?

Not really. I think I'm musically challenged :) I am pretty much tone deaf, and most of the time if music is playing I tune it out. I am one of those people who drives my car without music playing, without even noticing it.

What is the last book you have read?

[Lean Thinking by Womack and Jones¹¹](#). It was also one of the best books I have read, kinda life changing and now I think about lean all the time. I see so much waste around us, and we are definitely conditioned into batch and queue thinking, it's hard to break that.

¹⁰<http://www.growingagile.co.za/>

¹¹<http://www.amazon.com/Lean-Thinking-Corporation-Revised-Updated/dp/0743249275>

What question do you think we should also ask and what is the answer?

What are you currently playing (on xbox)?

Just bought Bioshock Infinite, hope to start this weekend!

Whom do you think we should ask next in South Africa?

Otto Behrens¹² and Walther Behrens¹³. I first met them in 2001 when I was working as a developer. They were at Equinox¹⁴ and were the first people I met doing eXtreme Programming. Earlier this year our paths crossed again. They are now at FINworks¹⁵ and still doing agile really well.

Whom do you think we should ask next, not in South Africa?

The two people who have had the biggest impact on me from an agile point of view:

Boris Gloer¹⁶ who made me realize that Scrum was a lot more than the mechanics I perceived it to be and started me on the journey of being an agile coach.

Lyssa Adkins¹⁷ (although I think she's been featured). She fundamentally changed my view of coaching and management, which has made me a much happier person and a better coach.

¹²<http://za.linkedin.com/pub/otto-behrens/5/89/924>

¹³<http://za.linkedin.com/in/waltherbehrens>

¹⁴<http://www.equinnox.co.za>

¹⁵<http://finworks.biz/>

¹⁶<http://borisgloer.com/>

¹⁷<http://www.coachingagileteams.com/about/>

How would you define your relation to the South African Agile community?

Starting to let go! I got very involved in the [Scrum User Group \(SUGSA\)](#)¹⁸ the first year it started after my husband roped me in. After that I was on the committee for 4 years, and made it my own. I'm terrible at delegating and so I took on a lot of the work myself. But with help from the rest of the committee I finally let go. This year I left the committee and am excited to see it blossoming on it's own. Now I see my role as connecting others to the community and starting other community events like [Lean Coffee](#)¹⁹ and [Agile Breakfast](#)²⁰. I have learned so much from the global agile community, and helping create a local community is my way of giving back. I'm proud the South African community is so vibrant and active.

Cape Town, April 2013

“Divorced :) Lol - it was an amicable divorce, and South Africa got full custody of the children :) I moved to New Zealand in 2018 and as a result don't really have anything to do with the South African agile community anymore. What was interesting when I first moved here was how noticeably different the South African agile community (at least at the time I left) was to the New Zealand community. The SA one is MUCH larger, and more closely knit. If a company was looking to hire a Scrum Master there were 10 people I could easily and confidently recommend. And when I was recruiting Scrum Masters myself I would have recognised most of the applicants from agile meetup or conferences. In New Zealand I found while there is a small

¹⁸<http://sugsa.org.za/>

¹⁹<http://capetown.leancoffee.org/>

²⁰<http://www.linkedin.com/groups/Cape-Town-Agile-Breakfast-4403532/about>

community that is like this, most people who work in agile teams, don't really participate in the community. Mostly Scrum Master is not even a role title here, it's a part time job someone on the team or a project manager fills. Interestingly Product Owner is a more common role title here than in South Africa, and the Product Management community seems larger than the agile community. In terms of the agile I've seen in companies I actually think South Africa is much further ahead than New Zealand in it's agile adoption journey and I think the strong community is a big part of that. I do miss the community and I especially loved how each year there was a new wave of people who had discovered agile and were looking for growing themselves and learning and how they found their way to the community.”

New Zealand, October 2020

How to connect with Karen

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²¹https://twitter.com/karen_greaves

²²<http://za.linkedin.com/in/karengreaves>