



# Adopting Agile Across Borders

A Guide to Navigating Cultural  
Complexity in Agile Teams and  
Organizations

---

Glaudia Califano  
David Spinks

**apress®**

# ADOPTING AGILE ACROSS BORDERS

A GUIDE TO NAVIGATING  
CULTURAL COMPLEXITY IN AGILE  
TEAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

---

*Glaudia Califano*  
*David Spinks*

Apress®

# ***Adopting Agile Across Borders: A Guide to Navigating Cultural Complexity in Agile Teams and Organizations***

Glaudia Califano  
Milton Keynes, UK

David Spinks  
Milton Keynes, UK

ISBN-13 (pbk): 978-1-4842-6947-3

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4842-6948-0>

ISBN-13 (electronic): 978-1-4842-6948-0

Copyright © 2021 by Glaudia Califano, David Spinks

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

Trademarked names, logos, and images may appear in this book. Rather than use a trademark symbol with every occurrence of a trademarked name, logo, or image we use the names, logos, and images only in an editorial fashion and to the benefit of the trademark owner, with no intention of infringement of the trademark.

The use in this publication of trade names, trademarks, service marks, and similar terms, even if they are not identified as such, is not to be taken as an expression of opinion as to whether or not they are subject to proprietary rights.

While the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication, neither the authors nor the editors nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions that may be made. The publisher makes no warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein.

Managing Director, Apress Media LLC: Welmoed Spahr

Acquisitions Editor: Shiva Ramachandran

Development Editor: Matthew Moodie

Coordinating Editor: Nancy Chen

Cover designed by eStudioCalamar

Distributed to the book trade worldwide by Springer Science+Business Media New York, 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 100043. Phone 1-800-SPRINGER, fax (201) 348-4505, e-mail [orders-ny@springer-sbm.com](mailto:orders-ny@springer-sbm.com), or visit [www.springeronline.com](http://www.springeronline.com). Apress Media, LLC is a California LLC and the sole member (owner) is Springer Science + Business Media Finance Inc (SSBM Finance Inc). SSBM Finance Inc is a **Delaware** corporation.

For information on translations, please e-mail [booktranslations@springernature.com](mailto:booktranslations@springernature.com); for reprint, paperback, or audio rights, please e-mail [bookpermissions@springernature.com](mailto:bookpermissions@springernature.com).

Apress titles may be purchased in bulk for academic, corporate, or promotional use. eBook versions and licenses are also available for most titles. For more information, reference our Print and eBook Bulk Sales web page at <http://www.apress.com/bulk-sales>.

Any source code or other supplementary material referenced by the author in this book is available to readers on GitHub via the book's product page, located at [www.apress.com/9781484269473](http://www.apress.com/9781484269473). For more detailed information, please visit <http://www.apress.com/source-code>.

Printed on acid-free paper

*For everyone who helped us on our journey*

# Contents

---

About the Authors .....	vii
Forewords .....	ix
Acknowledgments .....	xiii
Introduction .....	xv
Part I: Getting Started .....	I
Chapter 1: Welcome to the World .....	3
Part II: South America .....	23
Chapter 2: Argentina .....	25
Chapter 3: Chile .....	41
Chapter 4: Colombia .....	57
Chapter 5: Uruguay .....	79
Part III: Asia .....	97
Chapter 6: India .....	99
Chapter 7: Indonesia .....	121
Chapter 8: Japan .....	141
Chapter 9: The Philippines .....	169
Chapter 10: Singapore .....	183
Chapter 11: United Arab Emirates (Dubai) .....	217
Part IV: Europe .....	223
Chapter 12: Germany .....	225
Chapter 13: The Netherlands .....	249
Chapter 14: Poland .....	267
Chapter 15: United Kingdom .....	283

<b>Part V: Africa</b> . . . . .	303
<b>Chapter 16: South Africa</b> . . . . .	305
<b>Chapter 17: West Africa</b> . . . . .	319
<b>Part VI: Survival Guide</b> . . . . .	333
<b>Chapter 18: The State of the World</b> . . . . .	335
<b>Chapter 19: Unite and Move Forward</b> . . . . .	363
<b>Index</b> . . . . .	395

# About the Authors

---

**Glaudia Califano** and **David Spinks** are Agile practitioners, coaches, and trainers at Red Tangerine.



**Glaudia Califano** was aware of cultural differences from an early age, growing up in the Netherlands with a Dutch mother and Italian father. She moved to the United Kingdom in 2005 and started working with Agile teams. Her experience has spanned roles in testing, business analysis, Product Ownership, Scrum Master, and Agile and Lean coaching.



**David Spinks** has been in the IT industry since 2001, starting in software development and team leadership roles. In 2012 his journey into Agile started when he became a Scrum Master, and he has worked with dozens of Agile teams since then.

Together, Glaudia and David have experience that spans the fields of ecommerce, higher education, finance, insurance, and social housing. They are active members of the Agile community, regularly attending meetups and speaking at conferences around the world. They are active bloggers on their company website at [www.redtangerine.org/blog](http://www.redtangerine.org/blog).

Glaudia and David are both Scrum.org Professional Scrum Trainers (PST), Accredited Kanban Trainers (AKT) with Kanban University, and ICAgile Authorized Instructors.

Glaudia is also a trainer of the Cross Cultural Competence course which was developed based on the work of Richard D. Lewis. She is also a facilitator of Lego® Serious Play®.

David enjoys the outdoors and spending quality time with his guitar. Glaudia enjoys karaoke and ice-cream. They are both keen travelers and enjoy taking part in volunteering projects.

For more information, visit [www.redtangerine.org](http://www.redtangerine.org).

Or find us on:

Twitter at @RedTangerineOrg

Instagram at [www.instagram.com/redtangerineorg/](http://www.instagram.com/redtangerineorg/)

Facebook at [www.facebook.com/RedTangerineOrg/](http://www.facebook.com/RedTangerineOrg/)



# Forewords

---

I'm writing the foreword for this book in times when travel has been restricted and countries face great uncertainty due to the COVID-19 outbreak. It is hard to imagine now how fortunate Glaudia and David were to travel the world when it was safer, and I trust that one day in the future, when you read their book, all this sorrow will be gone for good.

Glaudia and David embarked on a quest that took them from continent to continent to prove that culture matters when we talk about Agile teams. I've found their book immensely valuable because, as a product of different cultures myself, I have always thought that culture plays an essential role in Agile.

I'm a South American, and I'm very fortunate to have met some of the people whose stories are being told in this book. I haven't yet met Eugenio – the Chilean accountant-turned-developer – whose story is personal, moving, and full of encouragement.

The 10Pines' story, about a company with no managers, is living proof that there is such a thing that we all, as agilists, can look to as an exemplar of an Agile company. I am fortunate to be friends with Federico Zuppa, and I visited 10Pines on multiple occasions, so I can say it is true that this happy place does exist.

This book presents a very accurate description of differences and commonalities in South American cultures. I had never looked at it this way before, and thanks to Glaudia and David, I now have a better appreciation of what I've intuitively learned from my interaction with people from my neighboring countries.

This book is making another great contribution to the Agile community at large: it proves that Agile does exist in all corners of the world. In cognitive science there's a bias for only trusting the things that we see. Well, Glaudia and David are our eyes, and through them we can see now that Agile has expanded, and has taken different forms as local cultures mold it.

I missed the opportunity to meet Glaudia and David in person. We were supposed to meet in Buenos Aires where I was also supposed to participate in the event that the Agile Alliance co-organized. Back then, I was an Agile Alliance Board Member, and a very distracted one too – I missed my plane for the first time in my career all because I was at the wrong gate: a demonstration of cultural behavior, as we Bolivians don't normally read monitors.

Marco Polo explored the Silk Road several centuries ago and mankind benefited from his discoveries that opened the doors for trading and knowledge transfer. I'm anticipating that Glaudia and David's book will similarly help to create bridges among Agile practitioners globally.

—Juan Banda, Agile trainer, speaker, coach, and Community Developer  
for Latam at Agile Alliance (April 2020)

Many of the readers of this book know Japan as an eastern country and are familiar with its unique cultures/subcultures like Zen, Tea ceremonies, Manga, Karaoke, Sushi, and other fun parts. People who visit Japan become fans of Japanese culture ... but don't know deeply about our psychological dynamics.

Glaudia and David visited our company in Fukui city (a four-hour train-ride from Tokyo) in addition to other companies in Tokyo (from small software firms to large enterprises), and also attended conferences to gather insights and actually feel the high-context psychological dynamics of the Japanese people. With their affable personalities, they met, talked with, and got to know many people described in this book. This is the secret of this book; their experience makes it so vivid, lively, and full of wonders, and it comes from their curiosity not only for theory but also for people.

—Kenji Hiranabe, Agile software development practitioner,  
book writer/translator, and winner of the 2008 Gordon Pask  
Award Recipient for contributions to Agile practice (May 2020)

Agile adoption isn't just about organizational transformation. It's a cultural change; and cultures tend to be disposed to change – or not – in unusual ways.

Many organizations will create grand statements around their values and how they would like to work, but here we can read about organizations which truly live them, like the Argentinian companies putting the well-being of their people above short-term profit; the Columbian retailer prepared to abandon traditional hierarchy; the Indonesians using phrases like, "The higher up you go, the more you serve"; the Scrum Teams of Singapore demonstrating true respect through listening, patience, and gentle but forthright language.

Agile transformations are assisted or constrained by a multitude of aspects: existing systems and processes, organizational structure, commitments both internal and external, and above all the culture. David and Glaudia have combed the world, bringing us not only authentic stories from around the globe, but also a portfolio of ways of looking at the problem differently and of things we might try – things that those of us in Western countries with our focus on individual excellence might not have considered. Even when aspects of culture provide a poor match for Agile, the stories invite us to reflect on whether our own organizations might be similarly suffering.

The stories also contain the patterns that all Agile transformations have in common: the need for change, the difficulty of communication and dependence on each other, the surprise and delight or despair of discovery. In the detail of the stories I found a rich treasure trove of practices, many of which were new to me: the result of human beings everywhere trying to solve the same problems as the clients I work with here at home.

Dave Snowden, creator of the Cynefin framework, once described humans to me. “We’re not *Homo Sapiens*,” he said. “We’re *Homo Narrans*. We’re story-telling apes.”

The stories are told well and worth reading.

—Liz Keogh, Independent consultant,  
Lean/Agile coach and trainer (Nov 2020)

# Acknowledgments

---

We owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to all of those people that contributed to this book, not only for the time spent writing contributions (in almost all cases in a second language) but also for the hospitality shown in agreeing to meet and discuss Agile with two people contacting them out of the blue.

So an enormous thanks goes out to the community that shaped this book and the shared learning behind it.

Thank you to all of those that contributed their stories to this book: Gonzalo Barbita, Pawel Brodzinski, Kiran Divakaran, Nono Donsa, Mercy George-Igbafe, Rez Hardityia, Daniel Hauck, Martin Hinshelwood, Sander Hoogendoorn, Liliana Zuluaga Hoyos, Elroy Jumpertz, Ilona Kędracka, David Leach, Donna Marie Lee, Eugenio Lopez, Yves Lin, Pranshu Mahajan, Sylvain Mahe, Antony Marsh, Hugo Messer, Khwezi Mputa, Futhi Mthupha, Resmi Murali, Renato Otaiza, Andrés Peñailillo, Sebastián Pérez Jiménez, Jon Pheasey, Juan Rucks, Ziryan Salayi, Suwilo Simwanza, Boris Steiner, Sarah Toogood, Rhea-Luz R. Valbuena, Claudia Liliana Toscano Vargas, Jean-Baptiste Vasseur, Danny F. Wuysang, Federico Zuppa.

Thanks to those that encouraged all of the writers above. A special shout-out to Alfredo Feibig and Liliana Reyes of Continuum; Emilio Gutter and Jorge Silva of IOPines; Chandra Setiadji, Joanna Zhan, and Jean Ho Min of Titansoft; Regiane Folter, Gustavo Clemente, and Waldemar Lopez of UrulT.

Thanks to those whom we spoke to that inspired many of the stories and discussions in this book: Ernesto “Boogie” C. Boydon, Kenji Hiranabe, Satomi Joba, Martin Kearns, Mirko Kleiner, Dominic Krimmer, Yoshinobu Okazawa, Avi Schneier, Tushar Somaiya, Leo Soto, JJ Sutherland, Keisuke Wada, Ferdinan Wirawan. We also owe a tremendous debt of gratitude to the many more people that we met on our journey that helped to shape our perception of their cultures and Agile in their part of the world.

Thanks to all of those who reviewed and shared their feedback: Lavaneesh Gautam, Kenji Hiranabe, Liz Keogh, Antony Marsh, Satomi Joba, Edo Suryo Pamungkas, Boris Steiner.

Many thanks to Tasia Graham and Haroon Khalil for creating some truly beautiful illustrations for the book.

Thanks to Michael Gates for reviewing the book and helping to ensure we did justice to presenting the great work of Richard D. Lewis. Thank you to Ric Lewis and Blaga Mileva for reviewing our descriptions of the CultureActive platform.

Thank you to Dr. Douglas Robinson of Université Paris-Est Marne-la-Vallée (LISIS) and University College London (UCL) for guiding us as we carried out the research for the book.

An extra special thanks to Edith Wortley for helping us to properly organize and arrange the content of the book. We may never have finished it without you.

Thank you to the team at Apress – Shiva Ramachandran, Matthew Moodie, Nancy Chen, and Rita Fernando – for their support, patience, and guidance. You helped us to create a better book and make it a reality.

And a massive thank you to Juan Banda, Kenji Hiranabe, and Liz Keogh for writing the forewords to the book.

We really were – and continue to be – blown away by the courage, commitment, focus, openness, and respect shown by the global Agile community.

# Introduction

---

Let us start by what this book *is not*. This is not a text on any of the Agile frameworks. There are many great resources out there to gain an understanding on the basics, such as the Scrum Guide (<https://scrumguides.org/>) and the Agile Alliance ([www.agilealliance.org/](http://www.agilealliance.org/)) website.

This is not a guidebook to tell you how to be Agile. We would be suspicious of any book that claimed this! While Agile methods are beautifully simple, their adoption and implementation are anything but easy.

While we used cultural models to hypothesize behaviors of Agile teams in different parts of the world, this book is not presented as a scientific study of cultural impact on Agile adoption.

Instead, this book is intended as a source of inspiration for team members, Agile Coaches, Scrum Masters, Product Owners, stakeholders, managers in Agile organizations, or anybody working in an Agile setting. This book includes a collection of contributions from people across the world. Our aim is to share real-world tips and techniques that other people are using in the global community. We hope it will give you valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges Agile ways of working can bring within and across different cultures.

Perhaps one of the stories resonates with you. Perhaps someone from another part of the world has faced similar challenges that you are facing and their story will inspire you. Maybe your team spans the globe, contains many different first languages, values, and cultural behaviors, and you are curious to learn how to avoid team misunderstandings. Our hope is that this book will encourage the global community to share experiences for greater continuous improvement in all of us.

As with everything we do in life, with any decision we take, any choice that we make, context is king. We believe that no two people, no two teams, and no two organizations are alike. There are always going to be differences in our core values and behaviors as people, be it due to our upbringing, nationality, political beliefs, socioeconomic background, or any combination of the many other factors that make up our culture. Understanding the impact that these differences have on Agile adoption was the inspiration that took us on the journey that led to this book.

While we present some of our observations and thoughts on Agile adoption around the world, this book is not about us. The community of writers that have contributed to the book are who should be center stage. This book is our thank you to all of the people that we met, the individuals and organizations that took the time to meet with us to discuss and demonstrate their adoptions of Agile. The global community generously shared their Agile stories with us; now we want to share these experiences with the rest of the world.

—Glaudia Califano and David Spinks

## Using the Book

Part I of this book serves as an introduction where we discuss culture and why we think its impact on Agile adoption warrants attention. We explore cultural models and explain their basis for the research that led to this book.

In parts 2, 3, 4, and 5 we focus on countries in the continents of South America, Asia, Europe, and Africa in turn. In each chapter by country, we include the following sections:

**History:** A brief history on the country with events relevant to Agile adoption today

**Insights:** Our main discoveries about Agile and teams in the country

**Getting On and Around:** Our tips if working in, or with people from, the country

Each chapter is interspersed with stories, case studies, and tips from Agile practitioners.

In part 6, we conclude with discussions on the culture shift needed to adopt Agile, the motivation for adopting Agile, and dealing with diversity in our teams and organizations.

---

**Takeaway** In these sections, we share general takeaways discovered during our journey that we have added to our own toolbox as Agile practitioners. We hope that you can add some of these takeaways to your own toolbox.

---

This book includes numerous contributions from Agile practitioners around the world. The following demonstrates the format of such contributions:

Contributions in the forms of stories, case studies, and tips from Agile practitioners around the world are presented as text blocks like this.

PART

I

# Getting Started

---

*There is more that unites us than divides us.*

—Mauricio Macri, President of Argentina from 2015 to 2019



# Welcome to the World

---

Thousands of teams from all around the world have been building products using iterative and incremental methods since the 1990s, with traces of the techniques going back as far as 1957.<sup>1</sup> A number of lightweight frameworks such as RAD, DSDM, XP, and Scrum subsequently emerged, and in 2001, 17 pioneering figures in the field of software development met at a resort in Snowbird, Utah, to discuss these development methods. Out of this historical meeting, this group published the *Manifesto for Agile Software Development*:<sup>2</sup>

Individuals and interactions over processes and tools

Working software over comprehensive documentation

Customer collaboration over contract negotiation

Responding to change over following a plan

---

<sup>1</sup>Weinberg, G as quoted in Larman & Basili. (2003). [www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Iterative-and-incremental-developments.-a-brief-Larman-Basili/058f712a7dd173dd0eb6ece7388bd9cdd6f77d67](http://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Iterative-and-incremental-developments.-a-brief-Larman-Basili/058f712a7dd173dd0eb6ece7388bd9cdd6f77d67) (pp. 47–56 “We were doing incremental development as early as 1957, in Los Angeles, under the direction of Bernie Dimsdale at IBM’s Service Bureau Corporation”)

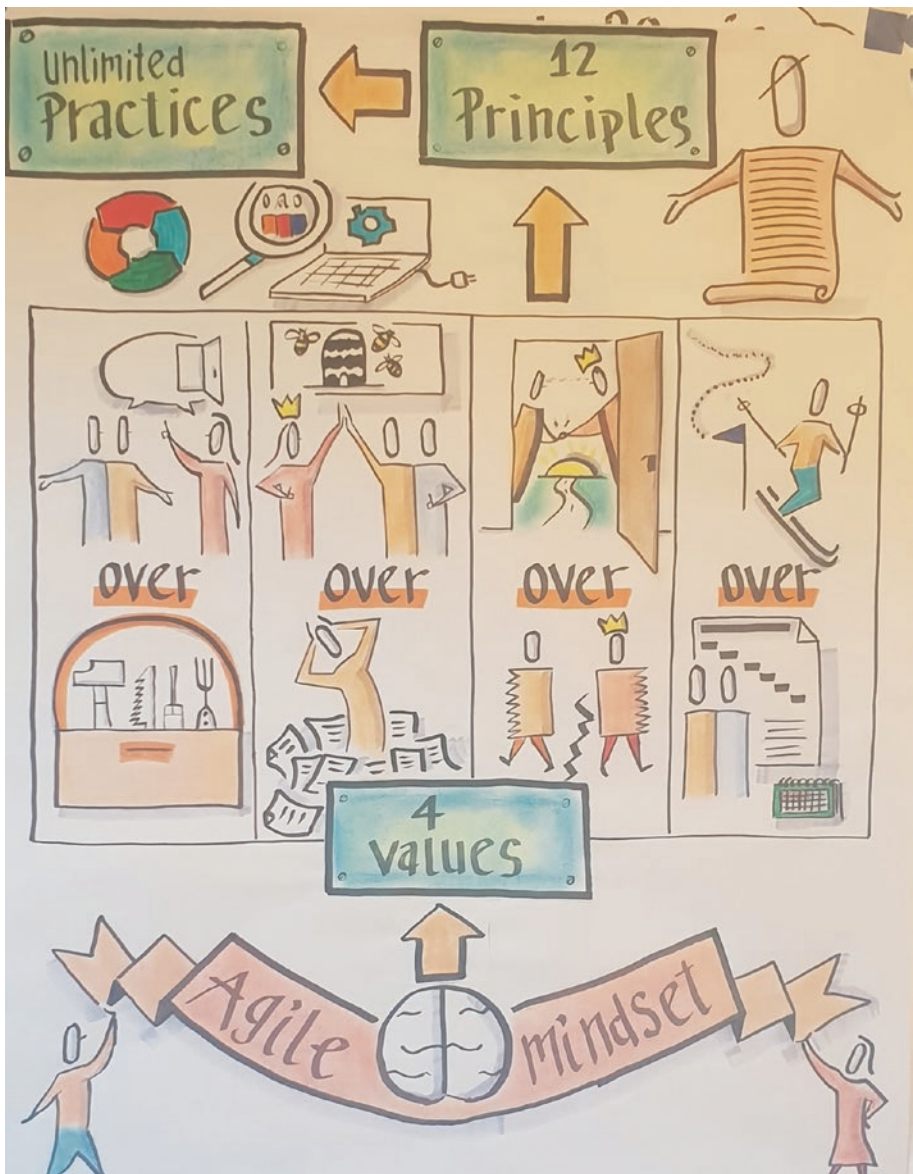
<sup>2</sup>Beck et al. (2001). *Manifesto for Agile Software Development*. <https://agilemanifesto.org/>

Seldom can a group of statements have had such a profound impact on the way we work and tackle problems as those of the Agile Manifesto. The pace of change in recent years has increased exponentially, and innovation spans just about every industry. The way we communicate, how we shop, the means of doing business, when, how, and where we work have all changed and continue to evolve. We are in the midst of a revolution, and Agile is at the core of it. And the revolution is global.

As visualized in Figure 1-1, the 4 values of the Agile Manifesto, together with the accompanying 12 Agile Principles<sup>3</sup> are embodied in what seems like an unlimited number of practices, tools, and processes. Without the mindset at the core though, the tools and practices achieve little.

---

<sup>3</sup>Beck et al. (2001). *Principles behind the Agile Manifesto*. <https://agilemanifesto.org/principles.html>



**Figure 1-1.** The Agile Mindset is described and defined by the Manifesto for Agile Software Development and implemented by an almost unlimited number of practices (image courtesy of Haroon Khalil)

Adopting Agile then requires a shift in mindset. But what impact do national, organizational, and people's own values have on their interpretation of the values and principles of the Agile Manifesto? And how does this affect attempts at the implementation of Agile practices?

Given the range of circumstances in politics, economics, and history across the world, can it really be true that ideas emanating from Japan and developed in the United States can find acceptance and be effective in all cultures of the world? National cultures have evolved over hundreds of years with different values, behaviors, and belief systems. How and why has Agile gained such popularity in such a relatively short space of time? Are some cultures naturally more suited to adopting an Agile mindset than others? What impact do national cultural behaviors have on the adoption of Scrum and Agile methods as they have spread across the world? Is there such a thing as an “Agile culture” that results from adopting Agile ways of working? Or will aspects of national cultural behaviors prevail?

These are the questions that prompted us to begin the journey that led to this book.

## Top Ten Experiences

### The Heart of Agile Teams at 10Pines (Page 32)

10Pines, a software development services company in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is also known as “la empresas sin jefes” (translated as “the company without managers”). But how does this work in reality? In this story, 10Pines partner, Federico Zuppa, discusses how 10Pines has a focus on creating great teams by putting people at the heart of everything they do.

### Glad, Mad, Sad in Japan (Page 157)

Agile Coach Donna Marie Lee, originally from the Philippines, tells a story that demonstrates that techniques that work in one culture will not necessarily work well in another culture, as she recounts her first use of the Glad, Mad, Sad retrospective technique while working with a team in Japan.

### Building Trust, Learning, and Understanding: An Agile Approach to Project Discovery (Page 81)

There is much uncertainty at the start of a project, and the Agile mindset of emphasizing discovery and learning can be disconcerting to those of a more traditional mindset that seek the comfort of defined budget, scope, and timelines upfront. Juan Rucks, Senior UX/UI Designer at UrulT, a software development company in Uruguay, explains the Agile approach to project discovery from his and UrulT’s own experience.

## **Agile Organizations Set the Stage for Emergent Leaders (Page 252)**

Elroy Jumpertz is a professional software engineer who started his career in his home country of the Netherlands. Elroy discusses his experience of working in companies that support individual's development, and he shares what he believes are the traits of organizations and leaders that enable leadership to emerge naturally.

## **Finding My Voice (Page 308)**

Courage is one of the Scrum values and a core behavior for any Agile adoption. What courage means is going to be context specific. In her story, Khwezi Mputa, a Certified Scrum Master/Agile PM Practitioner in South Africa, talks about the courage needed to stand up and speak out.

## **Trust: The Basic Building Block of Agile Teams (Page 115)**

While building trust is fundamental to any Agile team, in some cultures it takes on extra significance. In his story, Pranshu Mahajan, a Scrum Master with many years of experience working in a number of different roles in India, shares his experience of trust as the basic building block of Agile teams in India.

## **Forced Fun (Page 278)**

Knowledge work requires people to work collaboratively, thus the need to build trust and understanding. But every team is different and some team-building activities or meeting formats that work for one team may backfire when used with other teams. Ilona Kędracka, based in Poland and Product Owner/Blogger at [Poczatkujaca.pl](http://Poczatkujaca.pl), shares her own experiences and examples that she has encountered when teams become frustrated or uncomfortable with activities designed to be “fun,” but have questionable practical value.

## **Accelerating the Supply Chain of Goods and Services (Page 62)**

Agile ways of working are not just for software development. Claudia Liliana Toscano Vargas, Agile Coach at EPM, tells the story of the approach she used to help non-IT teams implement Agile ways of working. Claudia shows us how

she presented the adoption of Agile as an experiment to be tried with hypotheses on expected improvements that could be tested. Taking this approach, she gained buy-in from the teams involved and was able to work with them to achieve success.

## Retrospectives at Every Level (Page 51)

Change should be embraced across the whole of an organization. The retrospective is an effective tool to instigate change, yet many organizations see retrospectives as something that is done at the team level. Renato Otaiza, Agile Practitioner and Coach at Scotiabank, shares his experiences on the importance and effectiveness of running retrospectives at every level of an organization.

## Learntor: On a Mission to Create a Level Playing Field for Africa (Page 325)

Mercy George-Igbafe has the mantra, “True greatness is not in being great but in the ability to make others great.” She shares her personal story where, despite a life of adversity, she achieved a university education and went on to found Learntor, a digital consultancy and training company based in Nigeria that is on a mission to create a level playing field for women and youths in Africa.

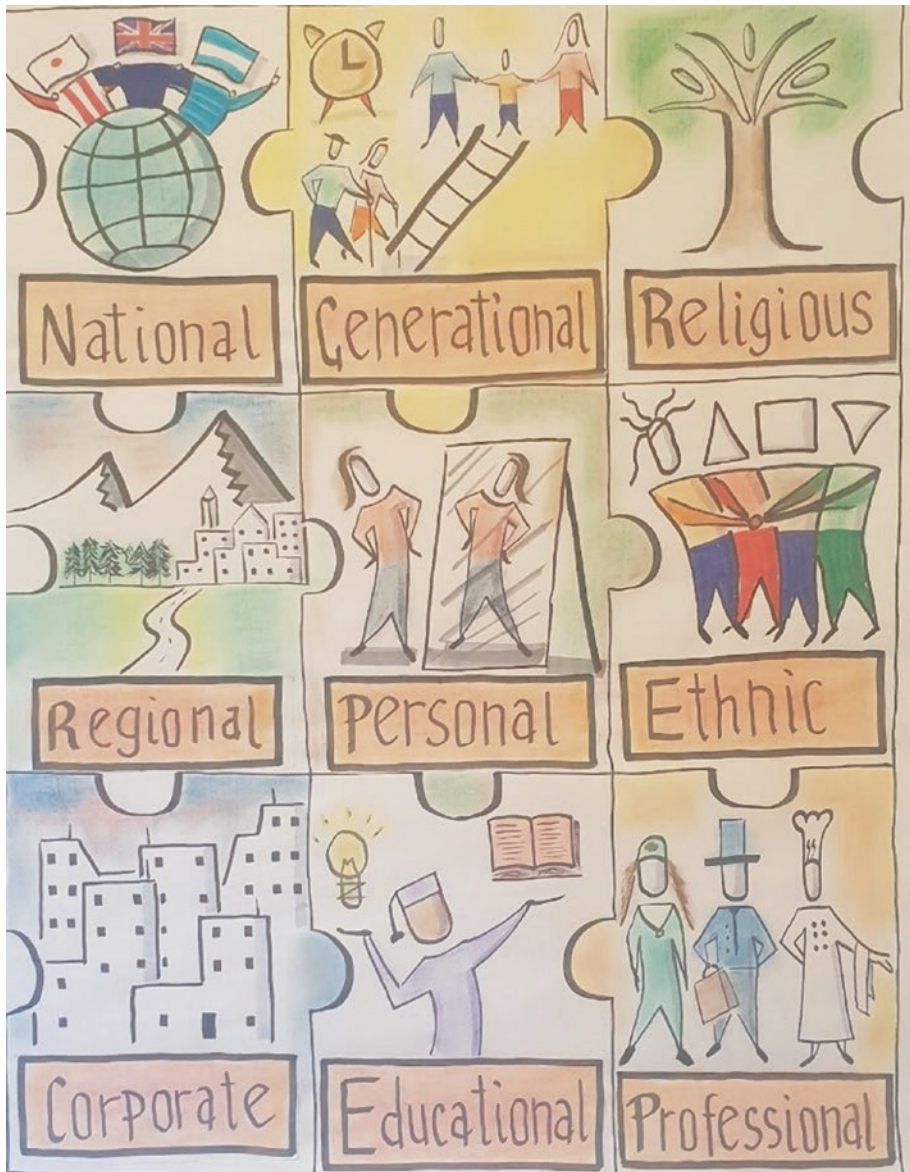
## Understanding Culture

As the world becomes more globalized, with increases in mobility and migration, finding tools to help us to understand each other is becoming evermore important. This is as relevant in the field of software development as in any other industry, where many teams have members distributed across different geographical locations and are made up of people from a number of different nationalities.

## When Cultures Collide

Our nationality, region, language, religion, generation, political persuasion, economic status, gender, profession, and many other factors feed into what makes up our culture as an individual. Some of these various factors are illustrated in Figure 1-2.





**Figure I-2.** Some of the many layers of culture (image courtesy of Haroon Khalil)

Many of the misunderstandings that we have with others arise when we have a clash of culture. One of the greatest sources of frustration is as a result of us being unable to relate to one another culturally. We know that good collaboration is a critical part of the success of Agile teams. If we are to have highly performing teams and organizations, the ability for individuals to

interact successfully is essential. Awareness of each other culturally is key to this, both within teams and across our organizations as a whole.

The different components of culture also make up the layers that influence a corporate culture. After all, companies are made up of individuals. However, often companies have, over time, built up a unique identity and their own corporate culture, diluting the influence of some of the layers of individuals' own cultural aspects. This may not always be the case though. For example, there are significantly different perceptions of organizational wrongdoing, such as sharing passwords or piracy of software, depending on where you come from.

A study focusing on South Korea<sup>4</sup> found that different cultures may have differing influences on the occurrence of misuse, and differing perceptions on the seriousness of it. In the United States, organizational rules are communicated, with IT security and HR departments “laying down the law” of what is permissible. However, the opinion of people in someone's social network has a higher influence in South Korea. Here, embarrassment and the loss of face caused by the discovery of misuse is of greater concern than any organizational policy. At the same time, in a South Korean organization, someone seeing others committing an offence and getting away with it is far more likely to commit the same offence. In this example, the importance of harmony in South Korea is so important that actions that appear unethical to people in the United States are fully justified to people in South Korea if they prevent conflict and discord.

It is these alternative perspectives that are based on individual values and may be at odds with one another that lead to tensions, arguments, disengagement, apathy, and many other negative behaviors to the detriment of collaboration. We would argue that clashes of culture are at the very heart of most of what holds teams and organizations from fulfilling their potential.

## At the Risk of Stereotyping

German people are efficient. The Swiss are always on time. Dutch people are direct. Americans are loud. Japanese are shy and quiet. Italians are always late.

These are sweeping, stereotypical statements. Surely we should not group people in this way because not all people categorized into groups based on nationality are going to behave in the same way. We need to be careful with our generalizations about culture. As we have discussed, culture consists of so many layers and we as humans are all complex individuals.

---

<sup>4</sup>Hovav, A. (2017). *How Espoused Culture Influences Misuse Intention: A Micro-Institutional Theory Perspective* <https://scholarspace.manoa.hawaii.edu/handle/10125/41891>



When we began our research into the topic of Agile adoption in different countries, we found a number of generic statements from often frustrated Agile practitioners who expressed doubts that the society they worked in would be able to adapt to more Agile ways of working. Commentary came up such as if Agile would ever really be embraced in a country where traditional hierarchical structures and the behavior of top down control are embedded. Or where the cultural preference is for keeping harmony above having transparency.

When we started our journey to find out how culture impacts Agile adoption around the world, we quickly found ourselves treading a minefield. There were the dangers of stereotyping by national cultural categorizations and having biased opinions. Identifying groups based on data can be a useful starting point though. When developing a product, be it software or some other product, using archetypes or personas is a common way for designers to build empathy with the potential users of their product. Empathizing with our customers is an essential aspect of Design Thinking.<sup>5</sup> However, this is just a starting point. Our knowledge and understanding of user behavior develops over time, allowing adaptation to their needs as we learn more about them.

Just like designers looking for a starting point to build empathy with their users, models can be part of the starting point to build empathy with people from other cultures.

Such a model would help us for the purpose of social study, something that would give us a cultural reference point and allow us to form hypotheses on how Agile may be used in different contexts. This could then form a basis for analysis and testing of our hypotheses to validate or invalidate the assumptions we and our fellow Agile practitioners make.

## Categorizing Behaviors

Given the number of factors that could feed into a definition of culture, any attempt at categorization could result in the creation of dozens, if not hundreds of different groups. The dilemma is clear: for a cultural model to be useful, it needs to provide a level of succinctness while also taking into account the complexity involved. There have been many attempts by sociologists in creating cultural models. We give a brief introduction and overview of two such models that have emerged: the Hofstede Model and the Lewis Model.

---

<sup>5</sup>What is Design Thinking? Interaction Design Foundation. [www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-is-design-thinking-and-why-is-it-so-popular](http://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/what-is-design-thinking-and-why-is-it-so-popular)

## The Hofstede Model

The Hofstede Model<sup>6</sup> is one of the best-known models of national cultural behavior in the workplace. It is based on the extensive research carried out by Professor Geert Hofstede, Gert Jan Hofstede, Michael Minkov, and their research teams. The research was carried out between 1967 and 1973 and was based on data returned from some 116,000 questionnaires from more than 70 countries.

The model consists of six “dimensions,” each dimension representing a preference for one state of being over another. Countries are given a quantitative score indicating the degree to which their culture exhibits these preferences.

The six dimensions consist of:

- Power distance index

The power distance index is a measure of how less powerful people in society accept and expect power to be distributed unevenly. High power distance index scores indicate a higher acceptance of hierarchical structures.

- Individualism vs. collectivism

Individualism refers to loosely knit societies where individuals look after themselves. Collectivism refers to societies where groups will unquestioningly look after each other.

- Masculinity vs. femininity

Masculine societies display characteristics such as rewarding achievement, heroism, and assertiveness, whereas feminine societies show characteristics such as cooperation, modesty, and valuing a good quality of life.

- Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance is a measure of how much a society is comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. It includes the extent to which the society believes in trying to control the future.

---

<sup>6</sup>Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. ISBN-13: 978-0803973244

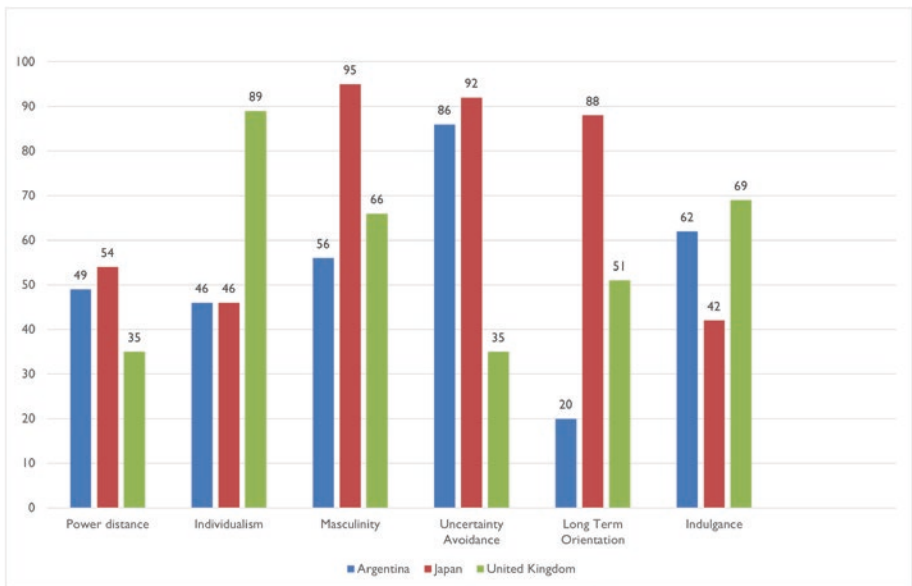
- Long-term avoidance vs. short-term normative orientation

This category refers to a societal preference to established, long-term traditions as opposed to its willingness and pragmatism toward change. Low scores indicate a preference to adhere to traditions and a suspicion of change, while high scores indicate societies that take a pragmatic approach to prepare well for the future.

- Indulgence vs. restraint

This is a measure of the level of restraint that a society shows in gratifying their needs and desires.

There is an online tool at [www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/](http://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/) where different countries can be compared according to the Hofstede dimensions. For example, Figure I-3 shows comparison between Argentina, Japan, and the United Kingdom.



**Figure I-3.** Hofstede six-dimensions comparison between Argentina, Japan, and the United Kingdom

According to the Hofstede Model, we can see that the United Kingdom has a much more individualistic culture compared to those of Argentina and Japan. The United Kingdom scores much lower in the category of uncertainty avoidance, meaning people are comfortable with ambiguity and relaxed with the fact that the future can never be known. Japanese culture is very long-term oriented, while Argentina's is at the other end of the scale, with the United Kingdom in the middle. Japanese culture stands out as being very masculine yet significantly less indulgent in nature by the Hofstede Model's dimensions definitions, when compared to the other two countries.

The Hofstede Model has been used across the world for a multitude of purposes. It has been used in industry for management and leadership strategies. It has been applied as a basis for further research and study. We found that there has been some study of the effect of culture on Agile adoption using the Hofstede Model as a guide. These include those by Bas Vodde,<sup>7</sup> co-creator of the LeSS framework, and Jaakko Palokangas<sup>8</sup> for his MSc thesis at the University of Tampere.

## The Lewis Model

The Lewis Model was developed by Richard D. Lewis who published his work in the book *When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures*.<sup>9</sup> This book has now sold more than 1 million copies worldwide and it has been published in 15 different languages.

Lewis formed his cultural categorizations from data gathered during visits to 135 countries. He spent significant time working in more than 20 of these countries. Data gathered from 50,000 leaders and executives on residential courses and 150,000 online questionnaires across 68 countries provided the basis for the Lewis Model.

Lewis considered other cross-cultural experts were at risk of creating confusion due to the number and types of categorizations that were being produced. Lewis wanted to go beyond academic thinking and supply business leaders with a simple model to avoid this confusion, provide succinctness, and something for use in the real world.

---

<sup>7</sup>Vodde, B. (2012). *Scrum doesn't work in China*. [www.odd-e.com/material/2012/10\\_scrum\\_barcelona/culture.pdf](http://www.odd-e.com/material/2012/10_scrum_barcelona/culture.pdf)

<sup>8</sup>Palokangas, J. (2013). *Agile Around the World – How Agile Values Are Interpreted in National Cultures?* <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/94766/gradu07165.pdf>

<sup>9</sup>Lewis, R.D. (2006). *When Cultures Collide: Leading Across Cultures* (Third Edition). First published in hardback by Nicholas Brealey Publishing in 1996. ISBN-13: 978-1-904838-02-9

The model created by Lewis is based not on nationality, but on observations of human *behavior*. Lewis came to the conclusion that humans can be divided into three clearly distinct categories. This was an extension of established expert opinion at the time which included the definitions of “monochronic” and “polychronic” of the Northern and Southern hemispheres that had not recognized a very different set of behaviors in Asia. Lewis named his three categories as *Linear-active*, *Multi-active*, and *Reactive*. Lewis identifies a common set of behaviors for each of his three categories. These can be seen in Table I-1.

**Table I-1.** Common behaviors of Linear-active, Multi-active, and Reactive categories (copyright Richard D. Lewis)

Linear-active	Multi-active	Reactive
Talks half the time	Talks most of the time	Listens most of the time
Does one thing at a time	Does several things at once	Reacts to partner's action
Plans ahead step by step	Plans grand outline only	Looks at general principles
Polite but direct	Emotional	Polite, indirect
Partly conceals feelings	Displays feelings	Conceals feelings
Confronts with logic	Confronts emotionally	Never confronts
Dislikes losing face	Has good excuses	Must not lose face
Rarely interrupts	Often interrupts	Doesn't interrupt
Job-orientated	People-orientated	Very people-orientated
Uses mainly facts	Feelings before facts	Statements are promises
Truth before diplomacy	Flexible truth	Diplomacy over truth
Sometimes impatient	Impatient	Patient
Limited body language	Unlimited body language	Subtle body language
Respects officialdom	Seeks out key person	Uses connections
Separates the social and professional	Interweaves the social and professional	Connects the social and professional

The Linear-active category contains behaviors that include a tendency for logical thinking and argument. Linear-active behavior consists of making detailed, step-by-step plans. It includes respect for job-titles, officialdom, and hierarchy. Social and professional lives are largely kept separate.

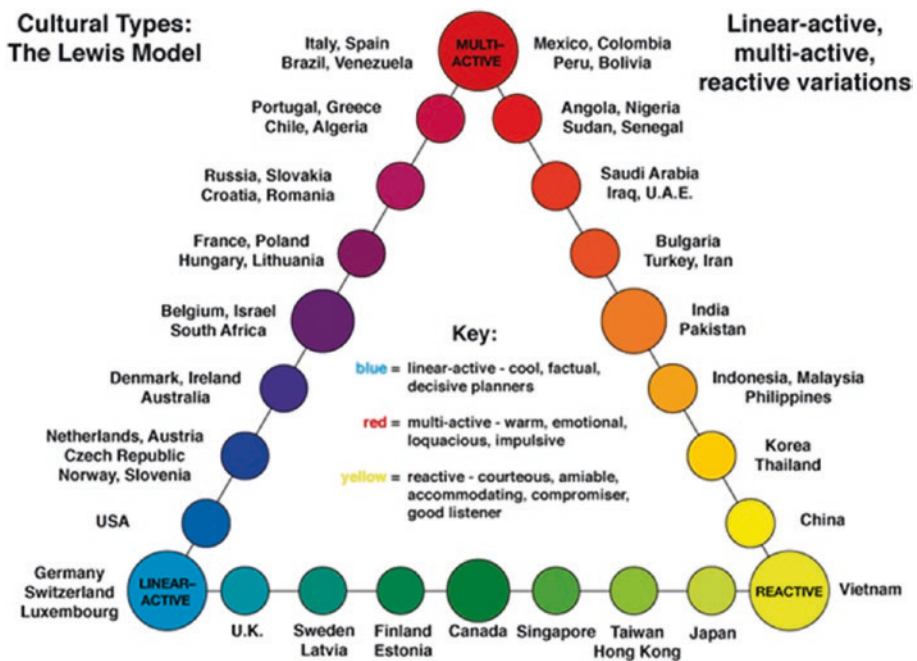
The Multi-active category includes traits of being highly verbally communicative, showing a comfort, and often even a preference, for multitasking. Openly displaying feelings and emotions is evident in confrontations.

In the Reactive category, behaviors include attentive listening, politeness, and the tendency not to display feelings and emotions in public. It is very important to avoid both confrontation and losing face.

While each category is distinct, it is important to note that no one set of behaviors will apply in its entirety to a particular individual or group. While one category’s behaviors may dominate in an individual or group, there will always be elements of behaviors from the other two categories present. It is a question of which behaviors are dominant and by how much.

The behaviors in each of the categories should not be judged as either positive or negative. Making such a judgment is an indication of our own cultural bias. An individual that exhibits the behavior of being flexible with the truth may be doing so because they value diplomacy over candor given the context of their situation and environment they are in.

Based on his research, Lewis created a visualization of his three categories, plotting nations onto the model depending on how strongly the behaviors of each category are exhibited. This is shown in Figure 1-4.



**Figure 1-4.** The Lewis Model Triangle (copyright Richard D. Lewis [www.crossculture.com/](http://www.crossculture.com/))