

David Laing

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Summary

Collaborative engineering leader who thrives in high-trust environments with fast feedback loops, authentic direction-setting, and clear accountability structures. Passionate about learning loops, structured decision-making, and data-informed leadership - built Decision Copilot to help teams make better choices together. Excels at leading initiatives I believe in and have helped shape, bringing genuine conviction rather than organizational theater. Values long-term thinking over quarterly theater and fixing root causes over chasing new shiny objects. Requires supportive leadership and clear decision frameworks to enable bottom-up innovation. Specializes in data reliability engineering, platform SRE, cross-functional team leadership, and pioneering work as Principled Context Engineer for AI agent orchestration.

Education

University of Cape Town, Bachelor of Business Science (Honours) in Information Systems Jan 1997 – Dec 2000

- Information Systems
- Statistics

Experience

Staff Software Engineer - AI Context Engineering Lead, Mechanical Orchard – San Francisco, CA Sept 2023 – present

- Pioneered AI agent orchestration for Kubernetes/Terraform automation - creating environments where AI agents collaborate and self-correct
- Continued Decision Copilot development through collaborative IP sharing agreement
- Built and maintained cloud infrastructure on GCP and AWS for Imogen modernization platform
- Applied behavior-driven transformation to legacy system modernization

Co-founder, Make Time Together Ltd – Dublin, Ireland Aug 2023 – present

- Built Decision Copilot - open-source tool for structured team decision-making (started 2023-08)
- Developed full-stack applications using NextJS, React, and TypeScript for decision-making tools
- Applied platform engineering principles to financial systems architecture and data reconciliation
- Established IP sharing agreement with Mechanical Orchard enabling collaborative development while retaining ownership

Senior Staff Reliability Engineer, Shopify Ltd May 2022 – July 2023

- Maintained platform reliability during \$3.5M/minute peak traffic (BFCM) through data-driven monitoring
- Pioneered data reliability engineering practices for 100PB data lake infrastructure
- Applied long-term reliability thinking to commerce platform serving millions of merchants

Staff 2 Software Engineer (Data), VMware Ltd May 2020 – Apr 2022

- Built and maintained dagster.io data pipelines for cross-portfolio analytics
- Established telemetry gathering and data curation practices for R&D insights
- Created data-driven feedback loops for business unit strategic decisions

Director of Engineering/SRE, Pivotal Software Ltd Dec 2015 – Apr 2020

- Orchestrated balanced leadership team driving shared outcomes across ~80 R&D teams globally
- Built SRE team from scratch to operate Cloud Foundry and Kubernetes platforms
- Established reliability practices for pivotaltracker.com (1M active users) and UK charity donation platforms (£1B+ donations)
- Created data-driven understanding of enterprise customer upgrade challenges
- Collaborated with Google SRE engineers on SLI/SLO design and error budget implementation

Co-founder, StayUp.io Ltd Mar 2015 – Dec 2015

- Created open-source ELK distribution handling 2TB daily log ingest for Cloud Foundry ecosystem
- Built product from concept to acquisition in 7 months

R&D Team Leader, City Index Ltd – London, UK

Dec 2008 – Mar 2015

- Led LogSearch open source project for Cloud Foundry ecosystem log aggregation
- Established TDD & Agile practices across development teams
- Led organizational transition to open-source software adoption
- Pioneered migration to public cloud infrastructure

Agile Developer, BBC Worldwide – London, UK

May 2008 – Oct 2008

- Learned foundational XP, TDD, and pair programming practices
- Contributed to Kangaroo digital media platform development

Senior Developer, Lucid Communications Ltd – London, UK

Aug 2003 – Apr 2007

Developer, Vardus Internet Solutions – Cape Town, SA

Jan 2001 – Aug 2002

Publications

From Values to Velocity: Building Momentum Through Aligned Systems

Feb 2024

David Laing

Unpublished Thoughts - Exploration of how shared values create alignment frameworks that enable sustainable team momentum - with practical examples from engineering leadership

Staying up-to-date with Kubernetes

David Laing

Web Publication - Explorable model for understanding enterprise software upgrade challenges and long-term maintenance practices

SRE & the Vulnerability Budget

Mar 2019

David Laing

SRECon AMER - Using Error Budget model to balance security patching with feature development - applying structured decision-making to operational priorities

Projects

Decision Copilot Development

2023

- Open-source tool for structured team decision-making, addressing the gap between individual expertise and collective decision quality. Developed under Make Time Together Ltd with collaborative IP sharing enabling continued development at Mechanical Orchard.
- Built framework for transparent, repeatable decision processes
- Created learning loops for decision quality improvement
- Established sustainable development model through strategic IP sharing agreement
- Growing community around structured decision-making practices

Technologies

Context Engineering & Orchestration: AI Agent Orchestration, Team Environment Design, Cross-functional Collaboration, Decision Framework Design

Financial Systems & Platform Engineering: Financial Data Reconciliation, Small Business Finance Applications, Platform Engineering for Finance, Investment Company Operations

Modern Web Ecosystem: TypeScript, NextJS, Firebase, TurboRepo, Full-stack Architecture Patterns

Cloud Infrastructure & Platform Engineering: GCP Networking, Kubernetes, Terraform, Golang, Bash, Platform Architecture Patterns

Data Engineering & Analytics: BigQuery, Python, SQL, dagster.io, Data Pipeline Architecture

Leadership & Methodology: Authentic Leadership, Long-term Systems Thinking, Learning Loops, TDD, Collaborative Development

Personal: Father, Roblox, Minecraft, Dad-jokes