UNITED KINGDOM

Quality: a goal in itself

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WORLD QUALITY REPORT

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THE CLOSER YOU LOOK
THE MORE YOU SEE

In last year's assessment of the UK, we noted that economic pressures had increased the need for quality at speed. This year, even though the challenges to the economy are growing, we feel the sense of urgency has reduced. The "at speed" part has diminished, and what's left is the general commitment to quality.

That isn't just a turn of phrase, either: it is a general commitment. In our experience, now more than ever, people in quality assurance and testing have pushed hard to ensure that quality is regarded as everyone's responsibility. There is a consensus to ensure that every voice is heard, and collaboration within and between teams is an essential element in its chances of success.

An appetite for innovation

Organizations are keen to progress and try new things. For instance, we see a greater appetite for analytics, and in particular for the use of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) in risk-based testing and test automation. Whereas last year the prime aim of test automation was to achieve value, this year the increasing use of smart tools is helping more strategically in determining what needs automating in the first place.

We're also seeing an increased willingness to consider the creation and use of synthetic data – not just in financial services, but in other markets, such as the public sector. What's heartening about this is that interest is not merely the result of hype, but of greater understanding. People have seen what can be achieved, so they feel more confident in taking a risk.

Quality drivers

What's driving this determination to pursue quality? In some cases, it's the usual suspects. A case in point is customer experience (CX). For example, financial services organizations developing trading platforms realize that strengths in testing alone are insufficient and that their quality engineers need domain knowledge too so they can understand how customers will engage with the systems under development.

Another usual suspect is security. It's a perennial requirement in every quality proposition we see and, as the number of fraud and cyber-attacks continues to rise, it's a need that's sure to increase.

But there's one quality driver that's a relative newcomer – and that's environmental awareness. Organizations are starting to measure sustainability as part of their quality assurance (QA) routines, and it's a metric that's regularly included in requests for proposals (RFPs).

End-to-end quality – and skills

The survey that forms part of this year's World Quality Report includes questions about value stream mapping. It's not a term we've heard being discussed in the UK, but it does implicitly raise the question of the value that can be brought into quality assurance, and the extent to which it can be introduced earlier in the cycle. Indeed, in our view, value needs to be assessed from end to end. QA processes need to be integrated, standardized and orchestrated. Value stream mapping as a principle will help with this.

As ever, skills represent the greatest challenge. In agile development environments, where there is less central control, some organizations assume or expect familiarity with every tool and language. That's unrealistic, because tools are proliferating, and some of them are very niche. It's rather a question of providing the permutations of the toolchains that work in different contexts, as well as the associated domain knowledge.

In addition, as organizations move to the cloud – and many of them are these days, even in the financial services sector – we're seeing a growing need for infrastructure testing skills.

Continuing commitment

In summary, we've seen a shift in the UK. Last year, the emphasis was on quality at speed, and the use of smart tools was something that appealed to organizations in principle, if not in practice.

This year, the focus is on quality as a business-driven goal, and businesses are much more comfortable with trying new approaches involving the use of AI, ML, and synthetic data.

It's going to create further and greater demands for skills. There are so many variations of tools and technologies, and each combination is conditioned by the domain in which it operates. But are skills gaps really such bad news? In a way, they may be welcome. They're certainly a good indicator of determination and dynamism: after all, organizations that have all bases covered have no new worlds to conquer.

Survey watch: Agile Quality Maturity of UK organizations

64% of agile teams have professional quality engineers integrated

64% of agile teams have test automation implemented

58% of teams achieved better reliabiity of systems through test automation

57% of teams achieved faster release times through test automation

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