Build Buy-In--Increase QA’s Perceived and REAL Value

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Abstract

QA/testing specialists have always encountered resistance. Recently it seems to have gotten worse. We hear of more and more Agile shops eliminating QA/testing specialists in favor of relying on developers to assure their code has suitable quality.

While effective development indeed puts considerable responsibility on developers for creating quality software, history has shown it’s necessary but not sufficient. Developers typically are less interested in and less informed about QA/testing concepts and techniques, which reduces their effectiveness. Moreover, it’s well-established that there are limits on how well anyone can detect their own mistakes. Surely it should be obvious that independent QA/testing specialists can contribute greatly to creating quality software.

Yet, apparently many managers don’t recognize the value of involving QA/testing specialists. This presentation examines common causes of resistance to QA/testing, including seldom-recognized ways well-intentioned but mistaken QA/testing conventional wisdom often backfires, and suggests more effective ways to gain recognition of QA/testing’s value—and thereby overcome resistance.

Biography

Robin F. Goldsmith, JD is one of the few with legitimate credentials in both QA/testing and requirements/business analysis/value, as well as project and process management/measurement/improvement. Uniquely positioned to help you get REAL value right results right, he works directly with project teams assisting, coaching, and training business, systems, and project professionals on risk-based Proactive Software Quality Assurance™ and Proactive Testing™, REAL requirements, project management and leadership, REAL ROI™, metrics, outsourcing, and process improvement. Go Pro Management, Inc. President and SQGNE past President and current Vice President, Robin is author of the Artech House book Discovering REAL Business Requirements for Software Project Success and the forthcoming Cut Creep—Write Right Agile User Stories and Acceptance Tests.
QA specialists are too familiar with resistance to their quality efforts. Resistance can take many forms and stem from many reasons. If resisted QA specialists don’t understand accurately why they are being resisted, or if the QA specialists try unsuccessfally to convince others of QA’s value and don’t accurately understand why, they are likely to continue ineffective practices and even aggravate resistance.

Ordinarily, such resistance comes from others not recognizing QA’s value or not relating it to themselves. Conventional wisdom within the QA community often attributes resistance to others not caring enough about quality. Some QA specialists acknowledge that perhaps they have not adequately communicated the value QA provides.

To be fair, a certain amount of resistance to QA is understandable. Many encounter QA primarily in the form of defect reports, which are inherently negative and easily can be interpreted as finger-pointing blame, which nobody likes to have happen to them.

Moreover, developers are largely judged on the basis of whether they deliver working code by their deadlines; and QA often is blamed for delaying delivery past deadlines and thus negatively impacting developers’ performance evaluations. Developers often complain they must take added time and effort to comply with bureaucratic and procedural mandates from QA, which developers frequently find mainly to be busywork that seldom adds any real value and actually diverts efforts from activities the developers consider more creative, important, and interesting.

QA specialists seldom recognize how their own behaviors can create resistance and too often equate following QA’s procedural busywork mandates with quality. People do change when they can see the What’s in It for Me (WIIFM). Just telling people something is good for them isn’t sufficient. QA needs to understand the business and development as well as or even better than developer so they can focus on positive quality customers really care about.

Money is the language of business. People have to see the value in money of proposed ideas. Return on Investment (ROI) is a, perhaps the, way to show value. However, too many ROI determinations fall prey to common pitfalls that diminish their credibility. REAL ROI™ is a reliable basis for decisions because it avoids those pitfalls.

ROI can be expressed in several different ways. One is payback period. The other is an annualized percentage of net return (benefits) over investment. Such calculations must be analyzed within the context of risk and other factors.

Some key pitfalls to avoid include calculating benefits too narrowly, equating effects on costs and revenue, ignoring timing effects, not quantifying intangibles, justifying costs, and failing to recognize the real source of value. How one measures and communicates QA’s value affects how persuasive it is.