


te testing experience

The Magazine for Professional Testers

Outsourcing



什么文化，费用和成果？
What about the culture, costs and results?

Outsourcing; what does it mean for us?

by Erik van Veenendaal

I'm still struggling with outsourcing, or should I say offshoring? What is its real business value; is there business value? There are many conflicting reports. It is certainly more than just a trend. Most large financial institutes, industrial companies and ICT companies are at least considering some kind of outsourcing. Quite often they already have some practical experiences; some are just in the transition phase and others have already been outsourcing to, for example India, for over 10 years. Although one often hears complaints, I by now also know of many success stories. Whether we like it or not: outsourcing/offshoring is inevitable!!

What does outsourcing mean for the professional tester and for the testing process? A lot, but perhaps slightly less than for the professional software engineer. The number of software engineers will go down in the US and Europe over the next decennia. However, the need for specialists in areas such as requirements engineering and architecture will grow. Of course outsourcing implies that some day (.....) the product will return, meaning that acceptance testing will certainly 'survive'. Not only survive, it will become essential and more formal since it will be a main input to discharging the party that developed the outsourced software system.

Understanding the Culture

Working with companies from India, China, Singapore, South-Africa or Eastern-Europe means above all collaboration with people with a different cultural background. We should start to study the way we best co-operate and not just impose our processes on "them" and then be surprised the outsourcing didn't work. Many companies nowadays send their em-

ployees involved in an outsourcing process to workshops and training to understand the different cultures. Perhaps the biggest challenge is in this area; more and better communication skills are needed for ICT-staffing. Not all ICT-staff possess these skills by nature.

Agreed Requirements on Development Testing

In addition to outsourcing the development of software systems, part of the testing of the software (at a minimum component testing) is also outsourced. Often this happens implicitly without strict and formal requirements for component testing. In many cases, this is already changing; requirements are being set for the test process of the party that develops the outsourced software system. For example, test logs and (code) coverage measurements shall be reported. Also test process improvement and formally reaching a certain TMMi level will become more important for these companies. Already there is a huge interest in the developments regarding the TMMi Foundation from countries such as India. Outsourcing will only be done to companies that possess a certain CMMI or TMMi level. It is no guarantee for success, but it certainly will help. (By the way it does help, to say the least, if the company doing the outsourcing has some level of maturity as well. You cannot just outsource your problems away). We have to learn how to define meaningful and strict requirements for development testing, to improve the co-operation between parties. Having a universal test terminology from ISTQB, the ISTQB Glossary, will support this.

Step by step Outsourcing

Although many companies also "discuss"

outsourcing integration and system testing (test outsourcing), I'm not always convinced regarding the added value. If outsourcing software development is not always successful, isn't it at least sensible to get some more positive experiences on this before outsourcing the quality assurance process as well? (Of course, there are exceptions such as outsourcing an automated regression test.) Do things step by step is my advice, don't go too fast. Of course the outsourcing service providers will tell you a different story, but looking at my own real-life working environment I see many companies that have been working with outsourcing for years. Those that are most successful are most often still in charge of integration – and system testing. For them this is only the second step in the outsourcing process. These are also core skills that need to be developed right now. How much do most testers know and understand about integration testing?

Core Competences

To me, requirements, architecture, integration, and black-box testing are the core competences that need to be further developed and the ones in which one needs to become "world class". If we can do these things well, we can successfully outsource the actual development. I now see many companies taking outsource and/or offshore decisions without a thorough requirements process. And of course why not outsource the system test at the same time? Unbelievable!! And later on they start complaining about it not meeting the expectations. Let's first make sure we are mature enough to outsource and are able to control what we outsource. Sometimes this will lead to a different decision. See you at a requirements engineering course



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