Testers: Get Out of the Quality Assurance Business!
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I’m Michael Bolton
Not the singer. Not the guy in Office Space. No relation.

Updates
• This presentation is ALWAYS under construction
• Updated slides at http://www.developsense.com/past.html
• All material comes with lifetime free technical support

Let’s Start With a Simple Question:
What is "quality"?

The Quality Answer
• Quality is “value to some person(s)” – Jerry Weinberg
• “…who matter.” – James Bach and Michael Bolton
• Decisions about quality are always political and emotional
  – made by people with the power to make them
  – made with the desire to appear rational
  – yet ultimately based on how those people feel

Do you…
• design the product?
• write the code?
• decide which bugs to fix?
• fix problems in the code?
• allocate training budgets?
• fire some programmers?
• set the schedule?
• decide on raises?
• set the product scope?
• allocate staff?
• produce manuals?
• choose the development model?
• control the budget?
• set the company’s strategic direction?
No?

Then how, exactly, do you assure quality?

How Can You, Tester, Assure Quality?

YOU CAN’T.
But not to worry.
That’s not our job.

We Can’t Assure Quality

but we can
TEST.

So What Is Testing?

• “Questioning a product in order to evaluate it”
  – James Bach
• “Gathering information with the intention of informing a decision.”
  – Jerry Weinberg
• “A technical, empirical investigation of a product, done on behalf of stakeholders, with the intention of revealing quality-related information of the kind that they seek.”
  – Cem Kaner

Testing Isn’t Just Checking

• Checking is a process of confirming and verifying existing beliefs
  – Checking can (and I argue, largely should) be done by automation
  – It is a non-sapient process

Oh no! What Does “Non-Sapient” Mean?

• A non-sapient activity can be performed
  – by a machine that can’t think (but it’s quick and precise)
  – by a human who has been instructed NOT to think (and that’s slow and erratic)
What Is Sapience?

- A sapient activity is one that requires a thinking human to perform
- We test not only for repeatability, but also for adaptability, value, and threats to value

This kind of testing CAN NOT be scripted

But...

- A good tester doesn't just ask Pass or Fail?
- A good tester asks Is there a problem here?

Testing Isn’t Just Checking

- Testing is an ongoing, continuously re-optimizing process of exploration, discovery, investigation, and learning

What Is Testing?

Software testing is the investigation of systems composed of people, computer programs, and related products and services.

- Excellent testing is not a branch of computer science
  - focus only on programs, and you leave out questions of value and other relationships that include people
- To me, excellent testing is like anthropology
  - highly multidisciplinary
  - doesn’t look at a single part of the system
- Anthropology focuses on investigating
  - biology
  - archaeology
  - linguistics
  - cultures

So What Are We Testers?

Skilled investigators

The tester doesn’t have to reach conclusions or make recommendations about how the product should work. Her task is to expose credible concerns to the stakeholders.

- Cem Kaner, Approaches to Test Automation, 2009 (my emphasis)

We’re not here to enforce The Law.
We are neither judge nor jury.

We here to add value, not collect taxes.

We’re here to be a service to the project, not an obstacle.

We Are Sensory Instruments

Software Development Is Not Much Like Manufacturing

- In manufacturing, the goal is to make zillions of widgets all the same.
- Repetitive checking makes sense for manufacturing, but...
- In software, creating zillions of identical copies is not the big issue.
- If there is a large-scale production parallel, it’s with design.

Software Development Is More Like Design

- If existing products sufficed, we wouldn’t create a new one, thus...
- Each new software product is novel to some degree, and that means a new set of relationships and designs every time.
- New designs cannot be checked only; they must be tested.
Testing of Design Is Like CSI

- There are many tools, procedures, sources of evidence.
- Tools and procedures don’t define an investigation or its goals.
- There is too much evidence to test anything like all of it.
- Tools are often expensive.
- Investigators are working under conditions of uncertainty and extreme time pressure.
- Our clients (not we) make the decisions about how to proceed based on the available evidence.

These ideas come largely from Cem Kaner, Software Testing as a Social Science
http://www.kaner.com/pdfs/KanerSocialScienceSTEP.pdf

Other Relevant Comparisons

- Investigative reporters and journalists
  - What’s actually going on? What’s the story?
- Anthropologists
  - What do people in the real world actually do?
- Historians
  - What can we learn from the past?
- Field botanists
  - Why does this thrive here, but not over there?
- Philosophers
  - What do we know? How do we know we know it?
- Film critics
  - Will this movie appeal to its intended audience?

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Viewing Testing as a Service Solves Many Problems

- "Managers asked me a simple question: ‘is it good enough to go live?’ When I answered that question ‘yes’ or ‘no’, I gave my personal opinion about quality.
- ‘To my managers I had become an oracle’–like all oracles a fallible one. I didn’t have all the information. I didn’t know the whole context. And I surely didn’t test every possible situation in the product (which even is impossible).
- ‘However, my managers didn’t acknowledge my opinion as an oracle. As they knew me and my professionalism for a long time they accepted my comments as factual.”

- Michel Kraaij,
An oracle is a fallible means or method of solving a problem or making a decision.
Testers provide technical information, but shipping decisions are business decisions.

Can’t We Help With Quality Tasks?

- Sure; (to me, at least) development teams should be autonomous and self-organizing
  - when you’re providing other services to your team, that might be good…
  - but you’re not testing
- To the extent that your work is
  - requested by your colleagues
  - appreciated by your colleagues
  - not busy work
  - not busbody work
  …rock on! Help out! But also test.

Where Do We Go From Here?

We must build knowledge and skills
What Skills and Knowledge?

- Critical thinking
- General systems thinking
- Design of experiments
- Visualization and data presentation
- Observation
- Reporting
- Rapid learning
- Programming

What Skills and Knowledge?

- Measurement
- Anthropology
- Teaching
- Risk analysis
- Cognitive psychology
- Economics
- Epistemology

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