Letter from India

Dear Reader,

Due to differences in culture with and within each country, outsourcing remains a challenge to both parties. Business model and approach needs to be tailored based on the country a work is being outsourced. I am a tester from India who has been a part of this challenge. I spend a lot time in each project understanding what my North American and European customers are expecting from me and they too spend equal time in understanding what I am trying to understand, adding to the cost and time for both of us. This challenge is dealt by every tester here and so does all customers from North America and Europe.

We have been into testing for quite sometime now and still we are being asked to follow scripts. It is interesting to note that developers here (and probably in other parts of the world) aren't given scripts for developing.

As Jonathan Kohl asked, have you seen a script like:

Step1: Open VC++
Step2: Create a New Project
Step3: Type: #include <stdio.h>
Step4: Press the enter key
Step5: Type: Int a,b;
Step6: Press the enter key

However, you and I have witnessed test scripts like:

Step1: Open the application
Step2: Click on the main menu
Step3: In the drop down list, select the option X
Step4: Close the application

Expected Result: The application should be able to close after doing Step 2 and 3.

As someone who claims to have looked through it, I would want to help clients in North America and Europe to understand what we want today, from you to test better than what we have been doing with scripts.

As we have been testing a lot, we now understand testing a lot better than compared to those days where we relied on your scripts to understand the job we are trying to do and also called that testing. Why don't you tap the learning and knowledge that we have had to get better testing done? You still pay the same :), we are ok with it.

The problem with a script is; you are always doubtful if we understood what you wanted to mean in it. If you have had experience with outsourcing, you would understand and agree with me at least with this point. Let's try to deal with the problem as smart human beings than blaming it on culture and first language problems. Michael Bolton once wrote in his blog, "Pradeep's first language is not English--his first language appears to be testing" in the context of appreciating my work. I am sure there have been many Indian testers even before me who have been shaping themselves to adopt Testing as their first language and as I travel a lot within India, I am convinced that the future is promising.

At a CMMI Level 5 company that I worked for previously, I sought freedom to do exploratory and Rapid software testing that I learned and practiced by the help of James Bach and Michael Bolton. I proposed those approaches as a parallel effort to other testers running scripts. The manager to whom I reported was happy to grant me permission despite the fact that the customer we were delivering our service had demanded metrics such as – Number of test cases executed per hour per tester, number of bugs found per test cycle.

On becoming curious after seeing happiness in my manager's face, I asked him; why were you so excited when I asked for permission to do something beyond the rote procedures? He had to say that he was happy to grant freedom to someone who already had the freedom to explore but was bounded by the scripts.

The value that the client got from that was, he didn't need another test team at his end to verify our work and was pretty happy of important problems being found and fixed. However, the senior management wasn't willing to communicate what we actually did to achieve that and you know what we did – Ignore what CMMI mandates and do things that the context demands us to do. The senior management faked the metrics to show process adherence or in other words wasted time on creating wasteful documentation.

Today, my manager believes a lot on exploratory and rapid testing approaches since the result of combining exploratory and scripted testing. He then moved on to become a test lead in another organization because he wanted to get back to running tests after that experience.

Here is another interesting story I heard. A test manager with whom I spoke to in Bangalore had attained a great reputation from the customers he worked, for delivering a great value for the cost. I could grasp that as I spoke with other managers in that organization and they kept talking about this guy. On questioning the secret, he passed it on to me: 50% of testers were asked to test based on their ideas, exploration and no scripts to guide them. It would surprise you that this secret was not shared with the client by the management and the client was made to think that scripted testing produced great results for them. Let's blame it on the SLA the management of the company and the client signed together.

I hate faking. Testers are hired to speak the truth (and so are others) and if testers co-operate to scams happening in the organization, the ROI is minus thousands of dollars. I got this formula right, isn't it?

For some of the good services you have been receiving from India, we are already doing some exploration **but without informing you** and manipulating the metrics we give you to suit our Service Level Agreements. Why not we think about changing our SLA's, in which you state "*Please do exploratory testing, think, speak truth and we encourage you to do so but do inform us hereafter*"

We understand that you might want to measure us based on something that is rigid enough to measure but at the same time, we also realize you are concerned about the quality of work we do when the project gets to a tough state.

Here is what you might want to experiment: We have become cognizant of structured exploratory testing and Session based test management research work by people like Jon Bach, James Bach, Cem Kaner, Michael Bolton, Elizabeth Hendrickson, Scott Barber and other experts who attended the Exploratory Testing Peer Conference. I have piloted those ideas for the projects in India and know of people who did that and are wanting to do that to serve you better.

Exploratory testing also helps us learn your product better and that helps us to provide better support for your products and faster analysis time. So you get so much ROI. Note that I didn't talk Return in dollars. That also might mean you make more profits and you feel safer as you grow and don't fear being Lehmanized in future.

We love testing and we would be happy to have it as our first language. We are aware that you can help us to do that and here is the letter for the same. Do consider and honor the request.

With anticipation to hear the change in SLA's, mindset and future,

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