

EASTERN EUROPE

Reasons for optimism

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WORLD QUALITY REPORT

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Our assessment of quality assurance (QA) in Eastern Europe is based once again this year on the views of respondents in Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, as well as on our own observations. Last year, we noted that progress overall had been patchy, and that this was partly because the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic had obliged many organizations in the region to put their plans on hold.

The hiatus we observed at the time continued after publication, but we are now seeing signs of growth in the field once more.

Business focus

We see those signs in this year's data, too. For example, the region's respondents deemed that the most important aspects of their IT strategy include the higher quality of software solutions (rated highly by 57%), and enhancing customer experience (59%), which can together be taken to indicate a renewed determination to improve the business offer.

In fact, even more people (64%) gave a high rating to increased responsiveness to business demands via the increased flexibility of the underlying IT. We've seen much evidence of the business pressures on IT in the region during the pandemic, especially in sectors where it has had a major impact, such as retail and pharma. In our view, the competitiveness implicit in this response is not just about flexibility, but about the capacity to innovate, too.

Objectives specific to testing and QA also provide evidence of a commercial focus. The 61% of Eastern European respondents who said quality at speed was vital are a case in point: time to

market is key in business, and we often see the same emphasis among the region's organizations that we meet in the field. An even higher proportion (67%) gave a high rating to the importance of end-user satisfaction and the customer experience (CX). Almost as many (64% – higher than the survey average) said it was vital to support everybody in the team to achieve higher quality, which can be taken to indicate the growing prevalence in Eastern Europe of an agile mindset.

Respondents seemed fairly confident about the extent to which they were achieving their targets for applications development. An above-average 64% of them said that activities across their distributed teams are well integrated and orchestrated. In addition, more than half of them (51% – also above average) said their testing is optimized in terms of speed and cost. In our experience, Eastern European organizations seek quality as rapidly as possible, and many of them are working with delivery partners to achieve it – hence the perceived importance of distributed teams, which is perhaps a further indicator of agile thinking at work.

An especially high proportion of the region's respondents said that a vital factor in testing efficiency was having adequate staff with the right skills (72%, against a survey average of 65%).

Other key factors in testing efficiency were the need for better communications and collaboration across the lifecycle (60%), shift-right testing (also 60%), and enhancing test data generation and provisioning solutions for teams. This last factor was rated highly by 59% of the region's respondents. In this case, we feel the response is too low: we see a great deal of focus on this area in Eastern Europe.

We observed in our introduction that the pandemic put much QA activity on hold in Eastern Europe, so it's instructive to see where the region's respondents thought the focus should be in the post-COVID world. The highest-ranked response was the security validation of applications, which may point to concerns about remote working and BYOD (bring your own device). Working from home was highly likely also to have prompted other high responses, including for better collaboration tools, and also for remote access to test systems and test environments.

Growth in agile and DevOps

We've noted our empirical experience of growing familiarity with agile in Eastern Europe, and it's interesting to see signs of this trend in survey data on this subject. A healthy proportion of respondents reported excellent or very good improvements as a result of adopting an agile or DevOps approach. Two-thirds of them (66%) said this about the quality of their software, almost as many said the same of productivity, and a higher-than-average 72% saw significant improvements on the cost of quality. However, the category in which most people saw major improvements was speed to market. Over three-quarters (78%) of the region's respondents highlighted this benefit, which was substantially above the global average of 64% – and, as we saw earlier in this article, this is a market in which time to market is highly valued.

Which special approaches to accelerate and optimize testing are being used in agile and DevOps environments in Eastern Europe? Half (50%) the region's respondents said they always or almost always implement smart dashboards to enable continuous quality monitoring, which is what we also see in the field. We also see shift left being used in this way, and the high rating by only 41% of respondents seems low to us.

Working in agile and DevOps isn't without its challenges, though. Once again, we find that the optimism we saw earlier in relation to QA and test expertise is contradicted: almost half (48%) of Eastern European respondents said that a lack of professional test expertise in their agile teams was a problem – as indeed it was last year. It's a challenge that is unlikely to go away any time soon, because agile and DevOps need multi-skilled teams, and so the operational models needed to deliver them will have to change.

If you desire more information about testing tools, please contact:

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Challenges with test environments – but an improving picture for intelligent test automation

Another significant challenge in an agile context, ranked highly by over half (54%) of Eastern European respondents, was the difficulty of getting the right test environments and test data. In our conversations with people in the region, we often hear of this issue, and in particular of a shortage of test data tools.

On test environments in particular, we often see teams facing access challenges, and so when over half (54%) the region's respondents said they are highly satisfied that they have sufficient facilities, we were frankly surprised.

The prospects for intelligent test automation are more encouraging. Over three-quarters (76%) of Eastern European respondents said they are benefiting from better control and transparency of their test activities, against a survey-wide average of 68%. Another leading benefit was the reduction of test costs. It's been said before that test automation improves the process more than it does the outcome, and these responses tend to support that argument.

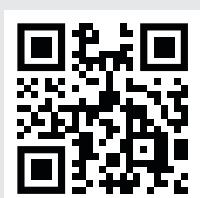
Given the increased efficiency that test automation can deliver, we were surprised to find lower-than-average numbers of respondents in the region saying they were extremely likely to use various automation techniques in the coming year. We ourselves see the use of such techniques increasing, and we're aware of many organizations that feel it delivers a great return on investment – for example, by automatically generating test data, which can save on overall test costs. Intelligent test automation is one area of the QA scene where Eastern Europe is slowly catching up.

Taking stock

In general, we might say that while the QA landscape hasn't changed greatly in Eastern Europe, the climate is improving. Yes, resources are still tight, and yes, more investment is needed, but we see the market is developing. In the increasing adoption of agile and DevOps, and in the growth of test automation, the region is adapting to new ways of working, and there is competition between organizations to improve both practices and results. All in all, we feel, there are grounds for optimism.

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