

# NORDICS

## Determination to succeed

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# WORLD QUALITY REPORT

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In Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland, which we collectively refer to here as the Nordic countries, we observed last year that, as far as quality assurance (QA) was concerned, there was a focus on test automation, and also on AI and machine learning (ML), but that more progress needed to be made. We noted that there was a general positivity that sometimes strayed into over-optimism – but that, at the same time, there were encouraging signs of determination to succeed.

As we shall see, all these observations can still be made, and in some cases, such as test automation, the pace is increasing.

### A question of strategy

The question that opens this year's survey asks respondents to rate the importance of various aspects of their general IT strategy. Many of the individual Nordic responses are noteworthy. For instance, high ratings were given to the quality of software solutions by 59% of the region's respondents, to enhancing the customer experience (58%), and to enhancing security (57%). By contrast, fewer respondents gave high ratings to achieving a faster time to market (43%) and to optimizing the cost of IT (48%).

While these responses are interesting, it would be wrong to deduce from them that the general principle of an IT strategy can be applied in this region. In our experience, Nordic organizations tend not to have a coherent and well-defined IT strategy. In Sweden, for instance, it's not uncommon to find IT silos for different operational areas within a single business. We should instead welcome individually what several of these responses tell us, including the emphasis on high quality and on customer experience (CX).

We also asked people to rate the importance of various testing and QA objectives. Nordic responses were broadly in line with national averages against QA factors such as quality at speed, ensuring end-user satisfaction, and contributing to business outcomes, all of which is good news – but the perceived importance of supporting everybody in the team to achieve higher quality was markedly lower than average (52% of Nordic respondents, against a global average of 62%). This may be because, as we shall see shortly, many organizations still have some distance to travel in their transition to agile environments, and they still have defined, testing-specific roles. It's not yet an area that is everyone's responsibility.

How well do they think they're doing on application development, in general? The answer is: pretty well. More than half of Nordic respondents give themselves high ratings for testing completeness (57%), for the orchestration and integration of activities across distributed teams (also 57%), for the availability of testing tools and methods (58%), and for clearly defining their own requirements (52%). The lowest-rated criterion was the presence of end-to-end automation, but at 44%, we felt the response was, if anything, still too high. This level of integration across the lifecycle is something for which we simply don't see evidence in the region.

Nordic countries have a pretty good idea about what constitutes good testing efficiency. Factors rated as vital included having adequate staff with the right skills (61% of respondents), shift-left testing (54%), and better communications and collaboration across the lifecycle (53%). They are also pretty clear on where the post-COVID focus needs to be. Highly ranked factors here included CX validation and usability testing (50%) and remote

access to test systems and test environments (46%). At just 38%, the lowest-ranked option was to improve productivity monitoring of remote teams. That kind of potentially intrusive people management is not part of Nordic culture. During lockdown, teams were trusted to keep delivering, and indeed, Sweden, Denmark, and the other countries in this group saw no drop-off in the completion of tasks. Now that things are returning to normal, we're pleased to note that productivity is rising rapidly.

## A road still to travel in agile and DevOps ...

We observed just now that many Nordic organizations still need to make progress in their transition to an agile environment, and it was no surprise to us to see continuing challenges, particularly in professional test expertise (mentioned by 53% of the region's respondents) and also in automating test activities (43%), to which we shall return. Difficulties can also be observed in the extent to which the region uses various approaches to accelerate and optimize testing in agile and DevOps environments. For example, only 30% of them said they implement smart or automated dashboards to enable continuous quality monitoring, against a survey-wide average of 44%.

Separately, it was disappointing to see only about a third (32%) of Nordic respondents saying they always track defect leakage into production. This really ought to be higher. So, too, should the proportion (43%) of Nordic respondents placing emphasis on business priorities as a critical success factor.

However, it's good to see shift-left testing featuring prominently (45%), and in general, the region's respondents reported excellent or very good improvements in software quality, in productivity, in cost of quality, and lastly in speed to market, which was above average.

## ... and also in test automation, AI, and ML

If there are doubts about the extent to which many Nordic organizations have a general IT strategy, there are certainly also doubts about their strategy as far as test automation is specifically concerned. Over a third of them (37%) said they have

the right such strategy, but in our experience, they really don't. Implementation of test automation still has some way to go in this region – which is why the 40% of respondents saying they always get a return on their automation investment is also a difficult statistic to believe. We suspect there is more aspiration than substance here.

By contrast, the low proportion of people in the region saying they have the right skilled and experienced test automation resources is much more believable. The figure was just 30%, against a much higher survey average of 48%. In addition, it's no surprise to see the number of people claiming they have seen benefits from test automation, in terms of better test coverage and of reduced test costs, have gone down since last year's survey.

None of this is to say there is no enthusiasm for test automation, nor a lack of understanding of the advantages it can bring. It's simply that Nordic organizations are, for the most part, still in the early stages of development. The same can be said of the use of AI and ML in quality assurance. This year's survey data shows that high proportions of them have plans in this area, but in our experience, there is little activity here just yet.

## On the road to maturity

The digital transformation inherent in the intelligent industry concept is generating a lot of interest these days, and Nordic countries share the enthusiasm. Some of their drivers for its implementation, including improved service and product quality, the creation of innovation opportunities, and enhanced customer experience, are in fact ahead of global averages.

It's a good point at which to close this year's assessment of Nordic quality assurance, because it illustrates the broader point we've been observing. There is still much to do before countries in this region reach maturity in the adoption of many methodologies and approaches in IT in general, and in QA in particular – but as was also the case last year, one thing that isn't in question is the determination to make progress.

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

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