

Testing Best And Worst Practices

What Works and What Doesn't, Part 1



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Introduction

- ❖ There are good ideas...and there are bad ideas
- ❖ Good ideas that typically produce good outcomes are best practices
- ❖ Bad ideas that typically produce bad outcomes are worst practices
- ❖ In this two-part series, we examine best and worst practices of testing
- ❖ Let's start by explaining the concept better...



Clarifying the Term

- ❖ Best practice: a method that generally shows better result than other methods
- ❖ Or: a damn good idea, most of the damn time
- ❖ Best practices can get better over time
- ❖ A few exceptions don't mean it's not a best practices; it's not science, it's management
- ❖ Best practices are not the same as Taylor's "one best way"



Best Practices Don't Mean Stop Thinking

- ❖ Here's a meta-best-practice
- ❖ Think of best practices as similar to documentation templates
 - ❑ Useful as a source of ideas
 - ❑ Dangerous as a replacement for thinking
- ❖ Slavishly applying other people's ideas in situations where those ideas don't fit is a worst practice



Choose Your Words Carefully

- ❖ As a tester or test manager, you are a source of information
- ❖ So, why step on your message with an off word?
- ❖ Know the words that could offend
- ❖ If in doubt, avoid a sketchy word
- ❖ This is especially important in multicultural teams, where offensive words can vary



Don't Lecture Your Boss

- ❖ Here's an example of a conversation not to have
 - ❖ Executive: "What are some current testing best practices?"
 - ❖ Test Manager: "There are no best practices, only good practices in context."
 - ❖ Executive: "Thanks for the smart-aleck non-answer. You remind me of my teenager."
- ❖ Communicating effectively with important stakeholders is a best practice
- ❖ Acting superior and being sarcastic towards important stakeholders is a worst practice



On-going Process Improvement

- ✚ True professionals are always looking for ways to get better
- ✚ For test process improvement, use the word “perfect” as a verb
- ✚ Don’t think of “perfect” as an adjective or adverb
- ✚ Put a structure in place to constantly look for ways to improve
- ✚ Don’t settle for “good enough”



Use Risk to Focus Test Effort

- ❖ If you think you've tested everything, you have a very weak understanding of everything
- ❖ The number of potential tests is infinite
- ❖ Requirements are only one dimension of necessary test coverage in most cases
- ❖ Remember that each test selected represents an enormous number of tests de-selected
- ❖ Use a smart, cross-functional team to identify and assess risk to allow for smart selection of tests



Coordinate Your Test Activities

- ❖ There are often three levels of testing, each owned by different groups
 - ❖ Unit
 - ❖ System
 - ❖ Acceptance
- ❖ These activities are related but often not coordinated
- ❖ Collaborate cross-functionally to avoid gaps, overlap, and confusion about test results



Select, Adapt, and Blend Test Strategies

- ✚ There are no “schools of testing,” just test strategies
- ✚ Each strategy has its strengths and weaknesses, enablers and disablers
- ✚ Know the strategies and when to use them
- ✚ Know how to adapt the strategies for your situations
- ✚ Know how to blend multiple strategies



Praise Publicly; Criticize Privately

- ❖ People will do great things, and not-so-great things
- ❖ As a manager, you should praise the great things publicly
- ❖ If someone's mistakes need criticism, do that privately
- ❖ All feedback must be specific, constructive, and actionable
 - ❖ Don't say: "Heckuva job, Brownie"
 - ❖ Do say: "I like the way you convinced the business analysts to attend the risk analysis session"



Not Just Anyone Can Test

- ✚ It's a common misconception that anyone can test
 - ✚ Skills matter
 - ✚ Experience matters
- ✚ When the wrong people are assigned, testing often results in false confidence, meaningless test results, and post-release surprises
- ✚ Know the skills that your testers need, and build those skills into your team



Show 'Em the Forest, not the Trees

- ✦ It's a good idea to help your stakeholders know what you'll test
- ✦ However, they need to know what you'll test (i.e., test conditions)
- ✦ They don't really need to know how you'll test (i.e., test cases)
- ✦ So, have test stakeholders review at a high level, looking at the test conditions



Address the Risks at the Joints

- ❖ Testing activities sit right in the middle of a web of upstream and downstream activities
- ❖ Each of these activities has associated touchpoints and handsoff
- ❖ These organizational joints are places where mistakes are more likely
- ❖ Be careful to understand all upstream and downstream touchpoints and handoffs
- ❖ Identify and manage the risks associated with them



Don't Over-rely on a Single Metric

- ❖ All too often, people over-rely on a single metric to tell the story
 - ❖ Reporting test status based entirely on test case metrics
 - ❖ Using bug severity counts as the sole measure of product quality
- ❖ A single metric is inherently unbalanced
- ❖ A single metric inevitably causes behavioral distortions, suboptimization



Don't SPAM the Stakeholders

- ⊕ Brevity is the soul of wit
- ⊕ When giving information, keep it pithy
 - ⊞ Don't copy-paste test cases into the “steps to reproduce” section of a bug report
 - ⊞ Don't send managers 30 page detailed analyses of test case status every day
- ⊕ Most testers and test managers get this wrong, so don't assume you're doing it right
- ⊕ Regularly survey your stakeholders about the quality of your information



To Be Continued...

- ❖ This winds up the list...for this part
- ❖ In the next part, we'll examine another batch of best and worst practices...





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