Unlocking the value of QA teams

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In the last 10 years, business has imported concepts and solutions from Agile, Lean and Kanban into industries such as retail, travel, healthcare, government, and financial services. In the past five years, this has accelerated with the introduction of Scaled Agile framework for enterprises (SAFe) that delivers a set of organisation and workflow patterns intended as a guide to scaling Lean and Agile practices.

Organisations in many of the above mentioned industries have used the framework to deliver more value, faster to their

customers after deploying it to simultaneously unlock essential improvements across many areas including productivity improvement, and customer and work experience.

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In some cases, the test organisation has not adapted to the new methods of Agile, Lean, Kanban that are integrated into the model. Instead it is still structurally based on the Waterfall model with the same processes and tools. At best these test organisations can deliver some short-term value, but not the breakthrough performance that enables the organisation to change the way it competes.

Test organisations that embraced the new world used this opportunity to consider how their organisation would look in the next 5 to 10 years. For example, what is the need for a daily test status report if the test organisation can perform multiple deployments a day.

So how do you deliver the future test organisation that aligns with company goals? Here are some areas to consider:

Changing role of leadership and the team

Due to the Agile structure, the leader of the testing team has less direct control over resources that are part of scrum/squads, however, this doesn't mean their role is less important. He or she needs to act as a virtual leader who delivers vision, boundaries and direction to the team. The role can cross multiple business units and projects and must bring the teams together to drive quality in the deliverables.

The team members will become part of the value stream and need to act as the pride owners of a new house. They are the seasoned players that understand the system, business processes and culture of the organisation. They will continuously learn, improve and share knowledge to ensure

they can deliver a high-performance output. The test analyst will be recognised by the organisation and crucial for the success of the new test organisation.

The delivery model

Lean focuses on the waste in the process, and traditional test management processes are full of it. A perfect example is the creation of test strategy and test plans. Why write pages full of standard information that is copied from another document when you can change the test strategy in a set of layered guidelines that cover the activities from build to delivery. Centralise the control and reporting across the QA and Test activities to monitor and adjust the delivery. Use dashboards stakeholders can access as needed. This removes the stress of having to send out a report at the end of the day that is outdated by the time the stakeholder reads it.

It is also important to consider how to transform low-value activities into a high-value outcome. An example is the build of manual test scenarios to automation that can be integrated as part of the continuous integration and continuous delivery (CI/CD) model. Other examples are: automatic code quality checks, continuous testing for unit tests, the application performance interface (API), and monitoring performance and security.

When an organisation has a CI/CD model, it should be managed as an enterprise system like enterprise resource planning (ERP). Assign a product owner and monitor the performance. This is important because it is the nerve system of the IT development cycle. The same applies to any automation model and setup.

The measurement

Implementing SAFe is not about cost reduction; it is about delivering better and faster. Companies gain a competitive edge and improved customer relationship. The focus is on the velocity, throughput, efficiency improvement and quality of the delivery stream. For example, some organisations use the feedback from the support portal to measure the squad as a group and not as individuals.