

Increase Organizational Learning and Business Agility with Strategic Goal Setting and Innovation in your Testing Program

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Abstract

Organizations function like living organisms, dynamic and interconnected, with various components that must work together to thrive and grow. Each function plays a role in its overall longevity, requiring adaptability and responsiveness to change; organizations must exhibit the capacity to learn from experiences and processes and innovate. Much like the living organisms of a central nervous system, which evolves with evolution and time, the customers who use your products and the market in which your products deliver value are ever-changing and dynamic. As functional experts, adopting agile practices that support learning and growing business is a matter of when rather than why.

This paper targets testing practitioners or those in a senior testing role looking to influence, drive, or create a learning culture within your testing program. We'll start by discussing why a learning culture is so influential and how the five key disciples of a learning organization can help align and strive toward business agility and shared outcomes. Next, we explore the opportunities of becoming partners with your leadership, finding your role as both guide and servant leader, and introducing them to the journey of continuous improvement and innovation in your testing program. Then, we do a deep dive into the five key disciplines of a learning organization and identify the critical ways in which these can be used to increase organizational knowledge and inform organizational intelligence.

Finally, I'll share three next steps you can take to implement these critical competencies in your testing program. By empowering your team members to master the functional craft of testing and establishing a differentiating quality program, you can intentionally create a learning culture, aligning quality with business outcomes to dominate the competition and delight your customers.

Biography

Kristine O'Connor spent several years in the US Navy before entering the software industry in 1998. Starting her journey at the help desk for a hotel software company, she quickly moved into software testing, finding a home for her process-driven thought process, a customer-centric mindset, and knack for tools. For over 18 years, Kristine has filled various software quality roles, from manual software testing to a Sr. QA Project Manager and Agile and DevOps practitioner in a Fortune 4 organization. In 2018, she dipped her toes in the coaching water and transitioned into the role of a certified Agile Coach, ultimately achieving her Scaled Agile Practice Consultant (SPC). Kristine has supported organizations Aetna, CVS Health, Bank of America, Northrop Grumman, NASA, and more.

Kristine is a Sr. Agile Transformation Consultant with Agile Rising, where she works as an Agile Coach, Agility Health facilitator, and SPC, helping people, teams, programs, and organizations adopt Agile and Scaled Agile practices and processes. She is also currently enrolled at Arizona State University, working on her Master of Organizational Leadership. Her passion is enabling a learning organization in a mindful and intentional way.

1. Introduction

Any organization seeking to differentiate itself from its competition to achieve long-term sustainability must engage in the constant pursuit of higher performance. Each business and functional area of your organization needs to continuously explore and be curious, seeking to understand and improve how they plan and do their work, approach value, and embrace strategic goal setting. Only then can the independent components of your organization begin to grow together and thrive, moving the larger organization forward as a single organism, running towards long-term survival. When it comes to your testing program, intentionally creating opportunities to refine our practices and identifying ways to foster a culture of continuous learning allows you to build on your organizational knowledge and inform organizational intelligence.

Let's start by creating a shared understanding of a learning culture by defining it as one that engages in "generative learning, learning that enhances the ability to create" (Oosterwal 2010, 47). A learning culture is one where its processes and behaviors mindfully target the five key disciplines of a learning organization, which is supported by the dimensions of organizational intelligence and organizational knowledge. By exploring the competencies and disciplines needed to create a learning culture, we identify the benefits of maintaining a constant state of urgency and curiosity, implementing feedback loops to learn and grow, and allowing for purposeful and intentional risk-taking. Our goal is to be intentional in the foundations we put in place. Hence, we are more successful in achieving the specific business outcomes we believe the improvement items we work on for our testing program will achieve. This propels your testing program and your functional testing team to proactive and strategic components of the larger organizational system, intentionally driving your organization toward greater levels of business agility.

What is business agility? We can define this as "the ability to compete and thrive in the digital age by quickly responding to market changes and emerging opportunities with innovative, digitally enabled business solutions" (Knaster, 2023). To still answer what business agility is, we must ask ourselves what it means for our organization to compete. What are the specific things you can do to make your test program stand out as a trusted partner, not just by validating changes to your software products but by understanding the needs and outcomes that your customers desire? How can your testing program become a proactive change agent within your organization to reduce time to market, delight customers, and enable the autonomous mastery of your functional testers? Business agility requires a learning culture; by focusing on the practices and disciplines that we'll talk more about, you can transform your testing team into agile learners, and "agile learners move quickly, adjust skillfully, and drive innovation.... organizations that get this right are 46% more likely to be first to market, 37% to be more productive, and 92% to be more likely to innovate" (Businesses by edX, 2023).

If business agility requires a learning culture, let's explore the different disciplines and dimensions which a learning organization and learning culture support.

1.1 Creating a Learning Culture

Margaret Wheatley, an organizational theorist, identified the ability to generate new knowledge and for it to be freely shared as two organizational capabilities required for long-term survival (Wheatley 2006, 92). If we say this a little differently, the ability to learn, reflect, create shared understandings, and grow our knowledge can be used to inform intelligence when we share this information and knowledge freely. A learning culture is one where there is an intentional focus placed on exploring opportunities to influence the five key disciplines of a learning organization, which include systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision, and collective team learning. Why is a learning organization important? A learning organization supports the two key disciplines that Margaret Wheatley said are required for long-term sustainability: organizational knowledge and organizational intelligence, so understanding how to transform your testing program into a learning organization, supports the greater organizational learning culture.

Let's look at the first dimension of a learning organization: organizational knowledge. Let's create a shared definition of this as the accumulated knowledge of "principles and maxims of practice, images of mission and identity, facts about the task environment, techniques of operation, stories of past experience which serve as exemplars for future inquiry" (Schön, 1983, 242). This is the collective wisdom, insights, and expertise of an organization, accumulated over time, and includes lessons learned from past testing endeavors, best practices adopted, and the embedded knowledge within our team on why and how we approach testing the way we do, and tactically how it's done. We use this knowledge as our guide forward, helping us make better decisions, avoiding the repeating of mistakes, and finding efficiencies and improvements to the flow of value through our software testing processes.

The second dimension of a learning organization is organizational intelligence, which is the capacity to gather, analyze, and interpret data and information related to the software testing activities of your program. It challenges you to use data-driven insights to identify patterns, detect potential risks, and strategically optimize your testing practices for enhanced outcomes and impact, which allow you to better deliver on business outcomes. Organizational intelligence is "the mental capacity and ability to perform a task or important activities" (Bahrami et al. 2016, 191) and is made up of seven key components: strategic vision, shared fate, desire to change heart, alignment, knowledge application, and performance pressure. By harnessing the power of organizational intelligence by addressing these components, you can proactively identify emerging trends, make strategic decisions, and align your testing strategy and efforts with broader organizational objectives. This supports an environment for the analysis and understanding of practices, behaviors, and beliefs so you and your functional testers can align and address any differences or deviations from the shared understanding so that, collectively, you can learn and grow. We'll talk more about ways to do this throughout the paper.

As you build your organizational knowledge and grow your understanding of the various practices and behaviors of your testing program, you can leverage these insights to envision possible new ways of working and develop a vision for what that might look like, along with identifying the business outcomes, or shared fate, that you seek to impact. Sharing this vision and outcomes creates an urgency for change amongst your functional testers and is a necessary input for your functional testers to see how they fit into the more significant value delivery picture. The desire to change, heart, alignment and knowledge application, and performance pressure are internal motivators activated as you provide your functional testing practitioners with the autonomy to continue to master their functional expertise.

Before you begin on a journey of improvement, let us talk about the critical support and engagement needed from your leadership and ways to strategically align for impact.

1.2 Leadership Engagement and Commitment

Leadership engagement and commitment are vital for creating an environment that provides the space for creativity, collaboration, and empowerment. Empowered team members strive for innovation, propose strategic goals aligned with the organizational vision, and contribute significantly to the success and growth of the organization. Leading the change for transformation requires a comprehensive approach involving data, analyzing behaviors, and exploring practices, but everything must begin with an alignment with leadership. Change begins with a clear vision of what can be, instilling a sense of urgency around working differently and focusing on sustainable, incremental improvements.

This sense of urgency and communicating the vision for change is the responsibility of leaders, becoming a catalyst for establishing a culture that values creativity and experimentation. A culture that fosters innovation is essential for the success of any testing program, and looking for ways to actively promote and reinforce this allows for the generation of new ideas to solve problems and the open sharing of knowledge and feedback. Supporting the growth of your testing team members with

skill development, training, and embracing agile practices for continuous learning and improvement to grow, learn, experiment, and try. Daniel Pink shared in a TED talk that people are motivated to high performance because they feel like they are a part of something meaningful, and this requires autonomy, or the urge to direct their own lives, and mastery, which is the desire to get better and better at something that matters, and purpose, the yearning to do what we do in service of something larger than ourselves. People do their best work when given the autonomy to do so and master how they do their work (Pink, 2009).

In my experience working in the software quality industry, there have been only a handful of times where my direct leader had a background in software quality or testing; I made the mistake of assuming my leaders had a working understanding and knowledge of the processes which their team members followed, tools and practices which we employed, and challenges we encountered; this assumption caused us to all have our own mental models on how our testing practices and processes were functioning for us. Today, given a similar situation, I see it as my responsibility to inform and uplift the knowledge of my leadership, helping them understand where the pain points and opportunities are to. As that functional expert, I missed taking my stakeholders along the journey to understand how the testing program could work in the future and how the outcomes and outputs produced now align with business goals and outcomes. When the testing team identifies improvement opportunities, marries those to business outcomes, and defines a strategy that aligns the ideas to the vision and business outcomes, you intentionally propel your testing program forward toward those goals. Business agility requires this of us, and your leadership has a responsibility to provide the capacity to learn and grow as a team of functional SMEs. Sharing this knowledge with your leadership team is your responsibility; taking them along this improvement journey with your testing team members is critical in them seeing the value, communicating that effectively, and providing necessary support to help remove impediments and guidance on the next steps.

With a knowledge of business agility and learning culture, recognition of leadership support, and engagement, let's now do a deeper dive into each of the key disciplines of a learning organization.

2. Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is a holistic approach to understanding how different components and processes within a system interact and influence one another; remember, an organization functions much like an organism: dynamic and interconnected, consisting of various components that must work together to thrive and grow. If an organization is dynamic and interconnected, systems thinking enables an understanding of the larger software development ecosystem in which we operate, as well as how we operate within the more specialized and siloed functional area of software testing. Systems thinking is crucial for comprehensive understanding, enabling you to understand how testing activities interact with development or operation activities, and this learned intelligence is further informed by knowledge from user feedback and deployment activities. This comprehensive understanding helps us identify potential bottlenecks, dependencies, and areas of improvement that may be overlooked when we take a more narrow, siloed focus and approach to our thinking. In software testing, root cause analysis is a long-lived practice; issues and defects often have underlying causes that may originate from various parts of the development process or precede the work before it funnels into the product backlog. Systems thinking allows you to trace problems back to their source, helping you address root causes rather than just addressing symptoms; applying lessons learned systematically drastically reduces the recurrence of similar issues is a critical application of systems thinking.

Much like organisms and organizations, software systems are inherently complex, and as testing professionals, you recognize that understanding this complexity is essential for effective testing. When we practice systems thinking, we manage this software complexity by breaking down our products into interconnected parts and developing test strategies to tackle intricate problems. It also helps you identify feedback loops within the testing processes, allowing your testing program to pivot and adjust your testing strategies and approach due to customer feedback or business needs. Remember, we are seeking to implement a holistic approach to understanding and viewing the

system in which your testing program operates, how it relates to the larger software development ecosystem, and the levers to pull to deliver on business outcomes.

Systems thinking is what provides us with a framework for practicing root cause analysis, allowing us to better manage complexity, see options, optimize our processes, foster adaptability, and nurture a culture of continuous learning. It enables teams to anticipate and respond to changes in the market, whether it's new ways in which your customers use your products, new technologies, tools to support testing activities, or identifying new market trends. This adaptability is essential for staying competitive and relevant, but for testing programs getting started on their transformation journey, the pathway forward can be murky. If our goal with this discipline is to see options, optimize processes, and foster adaptability, an important tool to put in your continuous learning toolbelt is a journey map.

A journey map helps us visualize the different scenarios your functional testers engage in as they execute scenarios, such as developing automated test cases or testing mobile applications. A journey map should include (Gibbons, 2018):

Actor	This is the point of view of the persona or user which the journey map is about; the person or role who experiences the journey.
Scenario + Expectations	The scenario is the situation the map addresses, associated to an actors goal/need/specific expectation. Scenarios can be real or anticipated. Journey maps are best for scenarios that involve a sequence of events, or describe a process.
Journey Phases	The different high-level phases of the journey, and help organize and support the actions, thoughts, and emotions throughout the map. For example, with a testing a new Feature, the stages <i>might</i> be: Align (on the ask for the new Feature) Create (testing assets) Execute (test assets) Inform (update test assets, team) Reflect (feedback loops)
Actions, Mindsets, and Emotions	These are the behaviors and thoughts of the Actor throughout the journey phases on the map. Actions are the actual behaviors and steps taken by users written in narrative form. Mindsets are the thoughts, questions, motivations, and information need at each journey phase; information is gained by research. Emotions are plotted as single line across the journey phases, literally signaling the emotional “ups” and “downs” of the experience. Think of this line as a contextual layer of emotion that tells us where the user is delighted versus frustrated.

Creating a shared understanding of all the steps that your testing team members encounter while approaching and doing their work can help surface pain points and highlight opportunities for improvement. Using journey maps is one way to be aware and mindful of the entire system in which the process occurs. A learning organization thrives on continuous learning and improvement, and systems thinking fosters a culture of curiosity and inquiry, encouraging us to explore how different components interact and how understanding these interactions leads to better outcomes, and become proactive in seeking opportunities for improving and innovation. Through continuous learning, adaptability, and optimization of processes, you will begin shifting the mindset of your testing program.

3. Mental Models

The second discipline of a learning organization is mental models, and these are the assumptions, generalizations, and deeply held beliefs that influence how we understand the world around us (2010, p.53). It is the cognitive framework and belief that we use to make sense of the world and solve problems; they are essential for enhancing decision-making in the sense that they shape how people and teams perceive situations and make decisions. Our mental models have protective barriers, requiring us to share how and why we think the way we do (2010, p.54). In a learning organization where informed decision-making and adaptability are crucial, diverse mental models encourage a broader range of perspectives and lead to more well-rounded, effective solutions. Existing mental models can either stifle or foster innovation and the encouragement of diverse and flexible mental models can stimulate creative problem-solving and innovative thinking. People are more likely to generate novel solutions when they consider a wide range of viewpoints; it deepens our understanding and creates empathy for what we do not know.

A learning organization thrives on continuous learning and improvement, and our mental models influence how we approach learning. Openness to new ideas, willingness to challenge existing beliefs, and a growth mindset are all influenced by one's mental models, and a culture that values diverse mental models promotes a stronger culture of learning. Business agility is closely tied to adaptability; we've already talked about learning from feedback, intentional learning, and data-driven decisions. If we learn we are not making the right decisions, we need to be adaptable, pivot, and shift our strategy. This applies to both work on our products and services and improvements we implement in our testing program. As functional testers, it is important to challenge our mental models about the effectiveness of our testing practices and behaviors and allow ourselves to inform our knowledge on what we don't know and grow our intelligence.

You may find resistance to change as people and teams become entrenched in their existing mental models or resistance when presented with new ideas or approaches, things which otherwise would increase the ability of your testing program to adapt and learn. You may also find that there is a cognitive bias that may influence decision-making; recognizing and mitigating these biases is essential for sound decision-making in a learning organization. It's important to keep in mind that different mental models within your testing program can lead to misunderstandings and communication breakdowns. It's crucial to establish effective communication processes that facilitate the sharing and reconciliation of diverse mental models.

One recommendation is for your functional testers to participate in a facilitated agile team self-assessment, which challenges the existing understanding of how each person on your testing team experiences the culture, processes, and challenges in your testing program. The real value of the team self-assessment is not just in answering the various questions being asked (these will vary based on the self-assessment selected) but in the discussions, the team has after each person has completed the self-assessment. When analyzing the results, there will be practices and processes that some team members do not find value in or are incredibly challenging. You'll also find things that your testing team is doing well, and you'll want to make sure you keep doing those things. After discussing the results of the assessment, the team then brainstorms on possible solutions for the identified challenges and opportunities for improvement, aligning these ideas with business outcomes. These ideas all form the strategy for achieving your vision for change, specifically aligned with driving business outcomes! This self-assessment supports each of the key disciplines of a learning organization and is an excellent way to generate urgency for personal mastery, the next discipline.

4. Personal Mastery

That takes us to our next key discipline of personal mastery, which is when we continuously learn and improve our skills, focus on our own growth, and align our personal goals with the objectives of our testing program and overarching organization. We all know that the quality landscape is constantly evolving with new tools and methodologies, and your testing program needs to stay up to date with the latest industry trends and continuously improve its skills to stay informed. Staying competent and adapting to changing requirements swiftly requires an adaptive mindset, more open to learning from experiences, both successes and failures. This adaptability is crucial for responding to shifting project priorities, emerging issues, or sudden shifts in market demand and a requirement of personal mastery.

Improving our skills, focusing on our personal growth, and finding alignment requires internal reflection and developing “deeper insights into personal beliefs, purpose, and vision. Personal mastery is achieved through a set of repeatable strategies and tools that equip individuals to perform at their best... It’s also about the way in which an organization supports such opportunities and helps team members link their efforts to the broader mission of the organization” (Businesses by edX, 2023). The goal of this paper is to help you, the team members of your testing program, and leadership see the benefit of leveraging your testing program as a strategic lever to increase business outcomes. We just talked about the benefits of a facilitated team self-assessment. Now, imagine pairing the strategic goals identified in the team self-assessment with Agile ceremonies that make sense for your functional experts – those are tools and repeatable strategies worth working with your leadership to create the capacity and urgency to implement.

Being a tester with an agile and adaptable mindset requires quick and effective problem-solving skills, and personal mastery equips us with those, including critical thinking, creativity, and the ability to think “outside the box.” These skills are invaluable for identifying and addressing issues that can hinder business agility. Personal mastery also includes leadership development and interpersonal skills. Effective leadership and collaboration within your testing program are essential for fostering a culture of agility and learning, so pairing agile events for your functional experts would help build and support the building of these skills. Strong leadership ensures that decisions are made swiftly, and collaboration enhances teamwork, promoting agility in responding to feedback for strategic improvements. It also encourages a commitment to continuous improvement as team members who are dedicated to their own growth are more likely to actively seek opportunities for process improvement; this mindset aligns with iterative and incremental continuous improvement delivery.

Finding time for personal mastery development while balancing the need for improving skills together with commitments to delivery can be challenging for any team. Some team members may be resistant to focusing on their own personal mastery, but it is a valuable discipline to embrace. Investing in personal mastery equips us with the necessary skills, mindset, and alignment to enhance business agility. It promotes continuous improvement, adaptive thinking, and the development of problem-solving skills. Collaborating with your leadership to provide the capacity for focusing on personal mastery is a critical component of success.

5. Building a Shared Vision

Earlier, I’d mentioned that each person and role must adapt and respond to the ever-changing environment of our organization; your functional testers must exhibit the capacity to learn from experiences through applying practices and processes and innovate. Working together with the leaders of your testing program, you are tasked with developing a compelling vision of what future way of working together as a group of functional subject matter experts, sharing the role each team member has in the journey and what success looks like for both the team and organization. Building a shared vision is a key discipline of a learning organization. While the goal is to align the vision and outcomes with the outcomes and vision of your larger organization, do not allow a lack of larger

organizational goals or published business outcomes to deter you from getting started on creating yours.

Creating a vision means each person is aware of the role they play to get there and the guardrails that are in place to keep us on track; this is necessary for building a shared understanding of how we work as individuals and within a larger functional group of a testing program. Organizational intelligence has components focused on strategic visions and shared fates; while inputs come from many different sources, these are ultimately informed by the knowledge that we've newly developed and is the responsibility of the functional leadership to present a pathway and vision forward. The strategic vision of your testing program makes visible how we intend to build greater levels of quality into our practices and processes, reduce the amount of time it takes us to move work through testing, and the outcomes which we will each benefit from once success is achieved. It makes transparent our reasons for improving specific areas of our quality program, aligning everyone on the tactical activities required to achieve business agility. A well-crafted vision has the power to be inspirational and motivating, encouraging experimentation and innovation, encouraging thoughtful risk-taking, and creating that longer-term view required for systems thinking (Oosterwal,2010, pp. 55-56).

The clarity a vision provides should be an inspiring call to action for your team, challenging us to develop new ideas, think about what future ways of working might look like, and critically think about the business outcomes these ideas support. Empowering your team members to become empowered functional owners means hearing all voices of your testing organization. This diversity of input develops into a shared vision that excites everyone to a common mission, giving leadership a view forward in identifying ways to provide support and assist in mitigating any potential risks.

As you are putting together your strategy for improvement with your functional testers, identifying business goals that the work helps to advance is a way to align leadership on why prioritizing this work is important, and the outcomes which they can expect to see as a result of being completed.

Here are some possible examples:

Problem Statement	Business Goal	Objective	Outcomes
<p>Testing operates as a silo, so when code changes are ready to be tested, we usually are just learning about the work.</p> <p>These changes sit waiting to be tested while we learn about the new feature/change and create our test scripts.</p> <p>We also have other priorities to focus on.</p>	<p>Reduce Time to Market</p> <p>Delight Customers</p>	<p>Reduce the amount of time it takes for work to flow through QA.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parallel team activities occur on work the development team is working on, so that testing assets are created prior to the work being ready for test. 2. Engage leadership for assistance in creating shared priorities for product delivery work.
<p>New changes or enhancements have unintended impacts on the product behavior in production for our customers.</p> <p>This behavior is having a negative impact on our</p>	<p>Delight Customers</p> <p>Build-In Quality</p>	<p>Better understand change and intended outcomes; test in an integrated test environment</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage leadership / Agile Coach / Product Owner for adding scope in terms of which persona or customer does this change impact, clear acceptance criteria and behavior driven acceptance tests.

clients, and in some cases rendered critical features inoperable.			2. Work with leadership to define a strategy for an integrated production-like test environment.
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6. Collective Team Learning

A vision must constantly be updated based on new information learned; our last discipline is collective team learning, where the primary goal is to continuously improve and adapt through shared insights, feedback, and collaboration. One of the foundations of learning is to have a shared meaning, accomplished through dialogue or “the free-flowing movement of ideas,” and requires “the capacity of team members to suspend assumptions and judgment to genuinely “think together””(Oosterwal, 2010, p. 57). Collective team learning challenges us to apply systems thinking, explore existing mental models, and suspend our own personal beliefs and assumptions to listen with an open curious mind.

This discipline is critical for enabling competencies of building organizational knowledge, promoting knowledge sharing, collaborative problem solving, adaptive learning, data analysis, innovation, Agile decision-making, cross-functional collaboration, continuous improvement, risk management, and long-term strategic thinking. Collectively, these contribute to an organization’s ability to achieve sustainability and maintain differentiation in the market. As your testing program begins sharing tacit and explicit knowledge, you’ll begin to observe a broader sharing of information, which will begin enhancing the collective knowledge base of your testing practitioners. As your functional experts learn together and exchange insights, valuable information is spread more effectively throughout the organization. Additionally, teams that are engaged in collective learning are better equipped to collaboratively address complex problems; the diverse perspectives and expertise brought to the table enable teams to approach challenges from multiple angles, leading to solutions that are more effective and comprehensive.

Organizational intelligence relies on the ability to be Agile, to adapt, and to learn from changing circumstances. Teams who learn together are more aware of shifts in the environment, market trends related to their functional area of expertise, and emerging opportunities, such as new automation tools or DevOps. Using this knowledge to become more adaptable and make informed adjustments to its strategies and processes, you are more likely to achieve your goal of continuous testing, reducing time to market, increasing built-in quality, and higher customer delight. Incrementally delivering valuable innovative improvements to your testing program and collectively learning and reflecting on those improvements allows you to measure whether you achieved the hypothesized business impact and guide your next decisions.

Measuring and analyzing the impacts of change will guide you in determining your next steps forward, but making sure you are measuring the right thing helps you know you are on target to achieve the outcomes your team hypothesized it would. Reviewing these data points over time allows you to identify trends and outliers, as already discussed, and it also allows you to question and uncover what may not be so readily visible in your data points. This alignment with business goals and commitment to continuous monitoring allows you to uncover opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of trends and patterns, allowing your testing team to make informed decisions, identify outliers, and uncover insights. This data analysis and collective team learning allows for open discussion, consideration of unknowns, and the ability to challenge assumptions. Make sure there is clear alignment and understanding of the value that the improvement is going to bring and how it should be measured as you are defining and planning these innovation items. The intent is to measure, learn from the measurements, and make informed next step decisions based on data.

Collective team learning fosters a culture of innovation; by sharing ideas, experimenting with new approaches, and learning from successes and failures, you cultivate an environment where innovation is embraced and nurtured. This deepened trust enables your testing team to make agile and well-informed decisions. As knowledge is accumulated through shared experiences, you’ll

observe a testing program better equipped to make choices that align with the organization's goals and objectives. This trust enhances functional team member collaboration and enhances organizational intelligence as it breaks down silos and promotes the exchange of expertise, all leading to long-term strategic thinking in your testing program and increasing business agility.

7. Conclusion

In the journey towards long-term sustainability, a learning culture is critical for differentiation and success; testing programs are not excluded from this. Being able to identify opportunities to improve, measure both the progress and impact of these improvements and share the measured business impact of these improvements is critical for a learning culture. Feedback from end users, stakeholders, and customers becomes the driving force for improvement, and by adopting iterative cycles of feedback, testing programs can evolve and refine strategies to support customer needs and market demands.

Being a change agent is not for the faint of heart; employing an experienced Agile Coach can help you on your journey. However, if you need to get started on your own, here are three tactical recommendations you can begin doing right now to create a culture of learning and curiosity in your testing program and propel your organization forward to greater levels of business agility:

1. Partner with leadership and get agreement to provide capacity for improving and learning and to help with roadblocks or risk mitigation. Share the compelling urgency for improving your testing program, and together, create a vision that allows each functional expert in your testing program to understand their role in strategic improvements and achieving business agility. This vision should be inspiring, focusing on future ways in which the team could be working, defining, and implementing future improvements together.
2. Challenge existing mental models and create shared understandings of how you work together and use this information to inform journey maps and identify improvement opportunities. Leveraging an Agile Coach or certified facilitator in facilitating a team self-assessment can help your team stay focused and engaged in the conversation and be confident in achieving the desired outcomes. This collective team learning allows your team to identify and prioritize strategic improvements based on this information, linking these to outcomes and ways to measure success.
3. Support your functional testers as they define, plan, and execute these strategic improvements, but make sure the team is planning and delivering on these improvements incrementally, sharing with the larger testing program team and allowing for feedback and input. This information is necessary as it is used to make any updates needed to the vision or roadmap of improvement as needed. Remember, using new knowledge to inform future decisions enhances our intelligence as an organization.

If you're just getting started on your strategic improvement journey, you may find you have a lot of technical debt or things you need to explore to understand more;

Getting started takes time, so use your biggest asset to help garner support – your functional testers! Develop an army of volunteers to help as you get started on identifying the why's behind the urgency for change, engage with leadership, and just get started. Implementing change is not for the weak; be brave and reach out for help.

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