FRANCE

Realistic confidence

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In a number of respects, France gave itself a pretty mixed report card last year. The headline news for the country this year is that the picture is both clearer and better. In terms of overall IT strategy, it was very encouraging to see that as many as 70% of French respondents saw enhancing customer experience as vital. In this case, and indeed for almost all other aspects of IT strategy, the French figures were higher than average. Another high scorer was responsiveness to business demands (66%). Taken together, this increased focus on CX and business outcomes is a clear indication that French QA is becoming more outward-facing.

A similar pattern emerges in relation specifically to testing and QA objectives. All responses are high, and the balance has shifted. Last year, achieving quality at speed was the third-highest-ranked response; this year, it came top, rated as vital by two-thirds (66%) of French respondents. Test automation was ranked joint fourth last year; this year, it was joint third.

The achievement of application development targets is a little more mixed. As was the case last year, the highest-rated response was "Our testing is complete (we cover all that is needed)" – but at 59% of respondents this year, we feel the result is more realistic than the very high number in 2020. It's corroborated by the rising number of French people saying their requirements are always or almost always clearly defined (57% this year, up from 45% last year).

However, we felt the number of French respondents saying the necessary testing tools and methods are sufficient and available was rather low this year. So, too, was the number saying activities across distributed teams are well orchestrated and integrated. This last point is highly likely to be linked to the fact that in another question, more than half (51%) of French respondents said that lack of alignment across cross-functional teams was a major challenge.

Last year's high numbers reporting success in achieving targets for testing key applications have fallen this year – but the good news is that the optimism has been replaced by realism. For example, last year, a massive 80% of French respondents claimed they always or almost always meet their quality goals, but this year, a much more likely 53% made that claim. Similarly, a lower but more representative number of them this year said they have the right QA and test expertise, and that enough time is available for testing. This new realism may be a positive by-product of the COVID and post-COVID experience.

Progress in agile and DevOps adoption

Agile and DevOps adoption seem to be delivering significant benefits for French organizations. Around a third of those polled reported improvements of over 30% in respect of productivity (33% of respondents) and cost of quality (32%). Interestingly, for Benelux respondents, the figures for productivity and cost of quality were 23% and 14% respectively. These are big gains for France: these two metrics combined are a measure of value, rather than merely of cost-efficiency.

The new realism we noted just now in another context is also in evidence in relation to people's assessments of the critical success factors for agile and DevOps adoption. Last year, the numbers were in general considerably higher than the survey-wide averages, but this year, responses for factors such as business priorities, executive support, the skill set, and the organizational culture, were all consistent not only with our survey as a whole, but with what we ourselves observe in the field in France.

Investment delivers benefits in test automation

In other areas of our assessment of French responses this year, signs of increased consistency have been welcome. But the section on test automation, there is one question where uniformity seems odd.

It's in relation to the split of automation volumes across different testing types. Typically, we would expect test automation by type to take the form of a pyramid, with unit testing taking place in volume at its base, tapering to user acceptance testing at its apex. But in these figures, we see only a two-percentage-point difference between the two, with every other testing type, including the automation of system tests and regressions tests, in the same vicinity. What's more, this is the case not just for France, but for the global survey averages. It's a little puzzling.

We do see realism once more in relation to the perceived benefits of test automation. More than half of French respondents reported a reduction in overall security risks and security-related issues in their code (58%); the detection of defects early in the testing lifecycle – in other words, shift left (57%); and better test coverage (55%). By contrast, only 41% of them reported reductions in test costs. This, we feel, is as it should be. It's a recognition of the truth that in order to achieve those higher benefits, organizations need to make the investment.

Growing confidence in AI, ML, and test environments

Another area of potential investment is in skills. The extent to which they are judged to be important is generally higher this year, and French respondents are looking to the future. For example, 59% of them said AI and machine learning (ML) skills are vital.

Indeed, there are some notable use cases for AI and ML. Significantly higher-than-average numbers of French respondents mentioned fit-for-purpose test data provision as extremely relevant (25%, against a survey average of 19%), and almost as many mentioned fit-for-purpose test environment provision (23%, versus an average of 16%). We see evidence of this activity in the field. In addition, three-quarters of them said that the use of AI to generate test environments and test data was part of their plans. Even more (81%) of them said they were planning to use AI systems to store and reuse important domain knowledge. There are signs of real confidence here. It's no surprise that 78% of French respondents said the use of AI in testing is changing their overall test strategy.

What is perhaps a little more surprising – but welcome – is that French organizations seem happy with the progress they are making in test environments. In every category bar one, their average satisfaction levels are higher than those for our survey respondents as a whole. Respondents are satisfied with their ability to set them up, with their cost efficiency, with their availability, with the robustness of their configuration, and more. This may well be because they tell us in response to another question that they are in many cases applying good test data practices to a higher degree than average.

Intelligent Industry: looking to the future

We have enough room for a brief look at French developments in Intelligent Industry. As we would expect, respondents judged its key drivers to be improved productivity and efficiency (49%), better agility and flexibility (also 49%), and enhanced customer experience (48%). To a much greater degree than average, they felt that team skills and test tools would be key to its success in a QA context.

To get there, the skills they judged to be the most relevant included of course AI and ML (ranked high by 47% of respondents), cybersecurity (45%), advanced simulation (41%), and big data and analytics (38%). Do they feel they need to put new testing infrastructure in place in order to address it? More than half of them think not: 53% said they would be upgrading their existing test lab instead.

This is a further sign of French confidence this year. In many cases throughout this article, we've noted a new realism in the country's self-assessment. Let's hope that's the case here, too.

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