

Out of Control

Jeffery Payne, Coveros

Sometimes our testing process spins a bit out of control. Defects start appearing after release. Testing activities aren't finding bugs anymore. Testing cycles are taking too long to complete. When this happens, what do we do? How do we take back control?

First, take a step back, a deep breath, and assess the situation. What has changed to make this happen? Was there a reduction in knowledgeable staff or budget size? Is the product more complex now and needs a more rigorous testing approach? Or has the market changed such that a higher level of assurance is now necessary? Understanding this business context will help you determine what to do to fix the problem.

Next, identify the best way to restore order quickly. Use the 80/20 rule to identify 20% of things you can do that will fix 80% of the problem. Benchmark your testing process against industry standards and best practices to see where you are misaligned with what others are doing. Develop a plan to incrementally implement your solution starting with the highest impact items first. Assessment models such as Test Process Improvement (TPI) or Test Maturity Model (TMM) can provide a framework for determining what to do.

Finally, implement your solution. Test out new process changes on a small component of the product before implementing it across your entire organization. Measure its effectiveness and adjust accordingly. If all systems are go, roll out this new process change everywhere.

All of this work is something you are capable of doing yourself. However, sometimes it makes sense to hire external consultants to help you through this process. There are several advantages to using consultants:

- They often have industry data that can be used to compare/benchmark your process against others
- They utilize proven models for assessing and improvement testing practices
- They have significant expertise in testing best practices that can help you identify the right set of improvements to make
- Management will often listen to consultants as they are viewed as objective

Start now improving your testing process!