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Wow, that's great but what the heck does being a "Test Automation Engineer" even mean? What do you actually do?



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Ex-aluno de LEI (e de TQS...)



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Wow, that's great but what the heck does being a "...



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Motivation

ME: “Hey welcome! 🙌 My name is Sérgio and I’m a Test Automation Engineer.”

EVERYONE ELSE (literally): Wow, that’s great but what the heck does that even mean? What do you actually do?

Raise your hands if you know the feeling 🙋 Yep, we get that a lot! And, even though that is a weirdo common thing, many of us (me certainly included) still have to take a step back and spin our heads around twice to come up with a proper and concise explanation of what do we actually do — in a nutshell, what is the value of our work?

Thus, let's take that step back to mitigate how can we better enlighten our audience with a proper and concise answer to such a question.

Presenting Test Automation

1. Definition of test automation

In short, test automation is the craft of automating manual processes that perceive to assert if a product is doing what it compromises to be doing. Plain and simple.

2. The 5 C's of a test automation engineer

And, although the definition of test automation might seem pretty straight forward, there's more to it than it meets the eye. One should master a unique set of skills to become a great test automation engineer:

1. **Critical Thinking** — Often underrated. But for us test automation engineers, and since we're a layer in between the implementation and definition of new requirements or features, we must have the ability to think clearly and rationally to understand the logical connection of multiple ideas and their impact on both the business and the customer.
2. **Communication** — Clear and concise communication is one of the most critical skills we need to master. As a tester, within automation or not, it doesn't matter if we find the most defects if we're not able to communicate and articulate them effectively.
3. **Collaboration** — Test automation engineers don't work in silos. Or at least we shouldn't 🙋 We're part of a team and we're most of the time in between developers and product owners alongside business rules and context. Thus, making collaboration a key skill on daily basis.
4. **Creativity** — Truly valuable. Being creative and thinking outside of the box is a skill that often leads us to find out those somewhat unwanted edge cases that

might hugely impact the whole product.

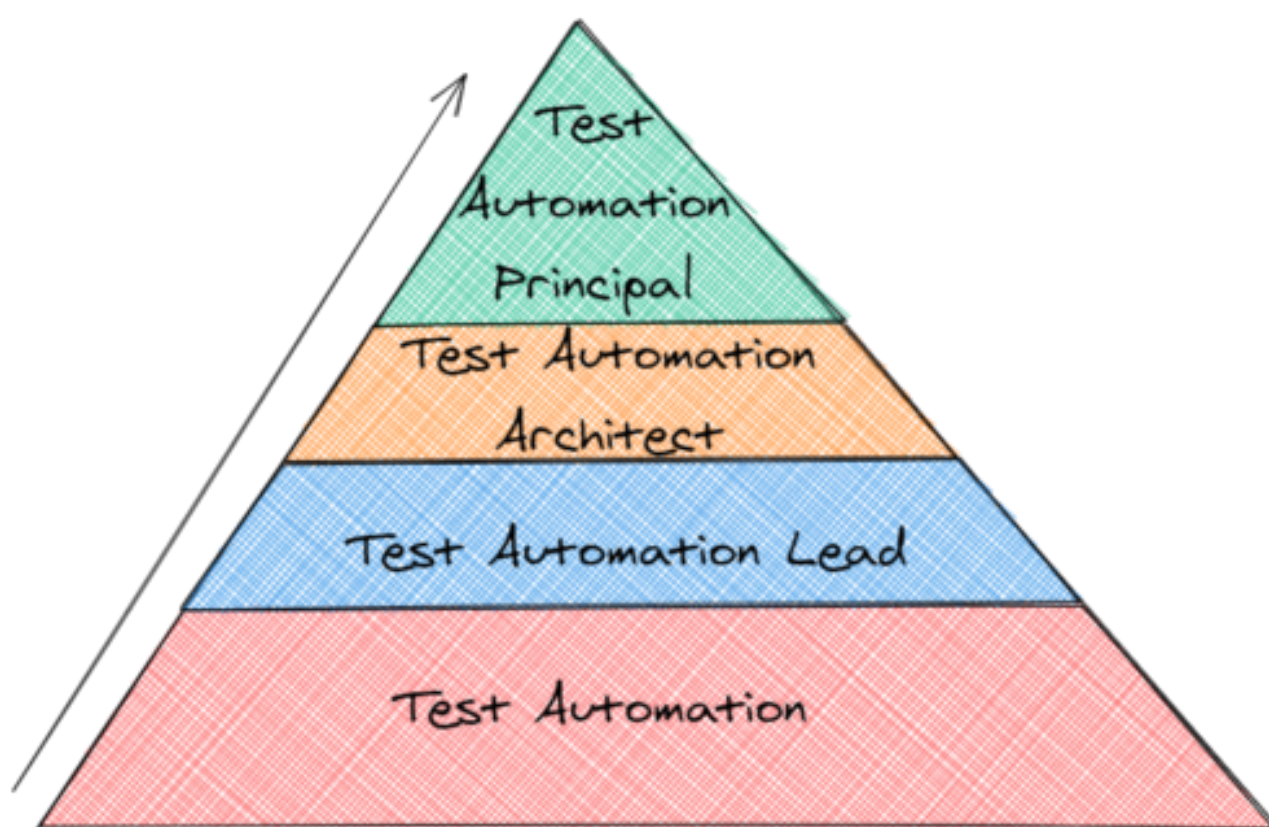
5. **Coding** — A skill that every test automation engineer needs to have to express and articulate the business rules and model its domain easily and quickly.

However, our career is not simply about mastering a handful of skills. So, let's go over the career path of a test automation engineer.

The career path of a test automation engineer

3. How does a test automation engineer's career might look like

Whilst some organizations are more structured and detailed and therefore have more ranks, others not so much... This means that your career path and the title you might be assigned with will most certainly depend from organization to organization. Here's an example for a somewhat detailed structure:



Example of a test automation engineer's career path

If you're starting out, you're probably going to be a plain Test Automation Engineer, then as you become more experienced you might move your way up to be a Test Automation Lead, and then act as a Test Automation Architect for a product or multiple products, and lastly, at the top of the pyramid, you may become one of the

Test Automation Principals for the whole organization you're in.

And, alongside the rank you've been assigned, you usually have different responsibilities. For example, if you're a test automation lead you might be leading a group or a small group of test automation engineers to better split, refine, and guide the work to be done. On the other hand, if you're a test automation principal, you might be the one presenting, discussing, and choosing the right tools, technologies, languages, and automation processes for the whole organization related to testing. So, as expected, as far as compensation goes, you'll most likely get the most out of your career path if you're on the top of the pyramid (despite how it might look like in your organization).

Furthermore, and as expected, as far as compensation 💰 goes, you'll most likely get the most out of your career path if you're on the top of the pyramid (despite how it might look like in your organization).

Money speaking, I'd recommend that you check out the market. Here's an handy compensation calculator for Portugal — [here](#). However, it will also depend on your location; keep in mind that Lisbon is the capital of Portugal and it has the highest payrate on average, nationally.

4. How to get to the top?

"But hey, Sérgio! How would I get to that top of the pyramid?" 😞

Although reaching the top of the pyramid is not the desire nor the ambition of every individual, **the top is as reachable as you want it to be** — don't underrate your mindset; golden advice right here.

Let me give you a couple of cliché pep talks that might make you realize that it's simply up to your hard work, approach, and beliefs.

"Show vs. Tell" — a Hollywood approach

If you want to craft a perfect movie scene, showing is more powerful than telling. For example, instead of simply telling the audience that Superman is the most powerful character within the DC universe, you prove it. This metaphorically means that ultimately you want to use more showing rather than telling, so you better establish your own value.

Thus, how can you show and prove your value to your peers? Let us imagine the

following scenario, *"Your automated testing pipeline found a defect and therefore you were able to confirm it and report it"*:

1. **Tell** — You seize the opportunity within a daily scrum standup (or similar meeting) to tell everyone about the issues that you and your automated testing pipelines have found.
2. **Show** — Similarly to option 1), you seize the opportunity within a daily scrum standup (or similar meeting), and you show everyone the issues that you and your automated testing pipelines have found, but then, and more importantly, **you demonstrate the impact it would cause otherwise.**

This might seem simple, however, the problem is that test automation engineers or testers, in general, are often introverts. We mostly enjoy working quietly, testing features, and writing automation without much fuss, thus, we keep within our comfort zone. And that's ok! everyone has their own way of being, however, **telling by itself will not get us promoted.**

Become a quality advocate

So you tell, and more importantly, you show the value of your work. But, **are you passionate enough to live by it?** ❤️ Doesn't matter if you're the most knowledgeable test automation engineer in your whole organization. Be passionate about your job and spread your passion. **Teach** and support your peers to live quality. To care about the products they're crafting and delivering to the world. And, last but not least, **lead** them. Lead your peers by providing process improvement suggestions and by listening to theirs. Initiate healthy debates and give them the confidence to adopt those ideas. You'll be seen as a positive change agent.

But remember, knowledge is a great leader.

The dreadful, the painful, and the somewhat unwanted question: "What the heck does it mean?"

So, by now you should have an understanding of the big picture. What test automation means, the required skills that make a test automation engineer thrive in his career, and how that career might look like.

So, let me introduce myself (again):

ME: “Hey welcome! 🙌 My name is Sérgio and I’m a Test Automation Engineer.”

EVERYONE ELSE (literally): Wow, that’s great but what the heck does that even mean? What do you actually do?

ME: “Keeping in mind that quality is the responsibility of the whole team, as a test automation engineer, my job is to leverage automation to support developers to deliver higher quality products faster and to help businesses articulate their needs more precisely. I do that by implementing automated mechanisms to ensure that the quality standards are being met throughout the product lifecycle.”

And this is how I’d answer such a dreadful question. How would you?

Support the article, leave a clap 🙌 ❤️ , and share your answer in the comments!

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Do you want to know more about this topic? Perhaps become a Test Automation Engineer? 🏆 Check out the article I wrote together with my good friend and colleague [Ricardo Moura](#) on [Career Tech Overview: Test Automation Engineer](#).

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