
CS1632, LECTURE 21: INTERACTING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

BILL LABOON



TESTING THEORY

- So far in this class, we've stuck to the "hard science" part of testing: equivalence classes and boundary values, manual vs automated testing, unit testing syntax.
- All very important!

THE "SOFT SCIENCES" ASPECTS OF TESTING

- As a tester, you're often going to be at odds with development, management, and other stakeholders.
- More than a developer, you're going to have to be prepared for conflict resolution with management.
- More than a manager, you'll be discussing edge cases in requirements with project analysts.
- More than an analyst, you'll be dealing with developers on holes in their code.

PEOPLE SKILLS

"I already told you: I deal with the G** d*** customers so the engineers don't have to. I have people skills; I am good at dealing with people. Can't you understand that? What the h*** is wrong with you people?"

-Tom Smykowski, Office Space

PEOPLE SKILLS

- Software development as a whole is much more social than many non-developers think.
- The best software in the world will not be successful if nobody knows about it.
- Communication (of one form or another) is vital.

PEOPLE SKILLS

No matter what field you end up in - testing or development, management, or even a non-technical field entirely - people skills will serve you well.

People skills are also something that can be learned.

WHAT IS A STAKEHOLDER?

A person or group who has a direct interest in the completion and/or execution of the system under development.

KINDS OF STAKEHOLDERS

- **Customers** - The people who pay for the system.
- **Users** - The people who will actually use the system (not always the same as the customer!)
- **Project Management** - The people who are actively managing the project to completion.
- **Upper Management** - The people who care about the financial ROI (return on investment) of the development of the product.

KINDS OF STAKEHOLDERS

- **Developers** - The people who write and maintain the software.
- **Testers** - The people who test the software for defects and quality assurance.
- **Support staff** - Administrators of the system and help desk.
- **Assessors** - The people who oversee the legal and regulatory aspects of the system.

CLASSES OF STAKEHOLDER

In software development, the big split is usually between technical and non-technical stakeholders.

Interaction is going to be very different between them.

NOTE

A stakeholder is DIRECTLY, not INDIRECTLY, impacted by the completion and execution of the system.

True, the electrical worker is kind of impacted if more electricity is used to run your software, but they are not a stakeholder.

The janitor may have more pizza boxes to clean up if developers stay late working on the product, but they are not a stakeholder.

NOTE

Although I am specifically talking about software, the term "stakeholder" and the rest of the terminology I'm using is pretty standard across corporate project management.

INCLUDING RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS

- Try to include all relevant stakeholders in the development process
- Software does not get developed in a vacuum.
- Even if you are developing it yourself, it's for a reason, even if it's just to learn a new technology.

SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF THE STAKEHOLDERS

- Software developers speak in terms of technology.
- Testers will speak in terms of quality.
- Project managers in terms of deadlines.
- Upper management in terms of financials.
- Care enough to know and understand what they care about. Ideally, you should care about it, as well!

ENGAGE EARLY, ENGAGE OFTEN

- "Engagement" is more than just talking.
- Give the stakeholder a chance to let you know their opinions. Avoid coloring them with your own.
- Get their feedback early on in the process and as often as possible.

BE EXPLICIT ABOUT PROBLEM, BENEFITS, DRAWBACKS

- Be as clear as possible when giving status updates.
- It is always better to let stakeholders know of problems early.
- If you're ever wondering whether or not you should communicate something, do it.

MANAGING STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

- UPOD - Under Promise, Over Deliver
- Be reasonable.
- Keep in mind that unexpected problems will occur.

IDENTIFY AND MANAGE RISK

- Be upfront with the fact that there are certain factors beyond your - or sometimes anyone's - control.
- You can *mitigate* but never *avoid* risk.

THE BIG JUMP: TECHNICAL VS NON-TECHNICAL

- Interacting with developers and other testers tends to be simpler than dealing with non-technical personnel.
- This is because you share a common frame of reference.
- The manner in which you think of the system will depend on your familiarity with the system, your background, and your role.

THE PROBLEM IN A NUTSHELL

- It's an issue of translation.
- Remember that different stakeholders speak different languages. Your job is to translate into their language.

EXAMPLES

- **Upper Management** - How does this impact the financials of the product?
- **Product Management** - How does this impact the scope or timeline of the project?
- **Users** - How does this impact the functionality important to me?
- **Customers** - How does this impact what I'm getting or how much I'm paying?

CARE ENOUGH TO SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

- Don't talk about impact on quarterly earnings with developers.
- Don't talk tail-call optimization with managers.

BE SUCCINCT, BUT PREPARED TO DIVE DOWN

- Keep in mind how much time and energy the person to whom you are reporting has for this topic.
- However, be prepared for questions.

A TEMPLATE FOR DEALING WITH MANAGEMENT

- **Red** = This system or subsystem has extremely serious issues which will almost certainly impact the timeline or financials unless they are remediated.
- **Yellow** = There are some warning flags, but they can be dealt with. Some outside help may be necessary.
- **Green** = Everything is A-OK, or there are only minor issues.

EXAMPLE

Login/Security System One minor SQL injection issue found, currently being worked.

Database Storage Latency on sharded Item databases is very high. Will require some research to fix.

User Interface No non-trivial issues. On schedule.

System Performance All KPIs in nominal range.

System Administration Some shell scripts left to write and automate, but on schedule.

EXAMPLE

- **Login / Security System** - Numerous flaws. Outsiders have achieved superuser access thirteen times last week.
- **Database System** - System does not scale past 100 bytes of storage.
- **User Interface** - Choice of vi or Emacs keybindings popular among Computer Science students, but not for our target audience of first and second graders.
- **System Performance** - Web page currently takes 20 minutes to render, and no known way to remove the 27 MB of JavaScript currently being loaded.
- **System Administration** - Currently all tasks are being done manually by one person, who has repeatedly threatened to quit and has refused to document any processes.

WHEN REPORTING TO MANAGEMENT

- Respect their time.
- Respect their (different) skillset.
- Respect them.

WHEN DEALING WITH USERS AND CUSTOMERS...

- Talk about how what you're doing impacts them.
- Think about Steve Jobs presenting the iPod... don't mention storage size, processor speed, etc., but talk about "1,000 songs in your pocket."
- Respect their input.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

- In general - respect people. They have different and valuable insights.
- That's ninety percent of a successful career in this field.

YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF TESTING A NEW FUNCTION

- **SYS-ACOUNT** - The subsystem shall accept text and return the number of A's in the text.



Any questions?

QUESTIONS

1. Is the string ASCII, UTF-8, EBCDIC, other?
2. Does this count capital and lowercase?
3. What about a's with accent marks?
4. Are there performance requirements?
5. How does the text get in (network, Unix pipe, prompt)?
6. What's the return type? (int, BigInt)
7. Does it need to be distributed?
8. What size data is going in?
9. What architectures does it need to run on?
10. Is the data coming from a trusted source?
11. What to do in the case of exceptions?
12. Do I need to worry about thread safety?

MORE COMMUNICATION IS BETTER



You should develop a good relationship with project managers, customers or users (if appropriate), and developers.

ON BEING THE BEARER OF BAD NEWS

- Be prepared to give bad news without being a pessimist.
- Testers often see a system at its worst. Don't let this color your view of the product.
- Be respectful when clarifying requirements. Don't belittle people not being clear... it's difficult work.

THAT BEING SAID

A great way to clarify requirements is to write scenarios, THEN go back to project management or the requirements analysts and ask if the tests are testing the right thing.



It's often easier to talk about a concrete issue and what can be done to modify the tests than just discuss things in the abstract.