

THE RELEVANCE OF CERTIFICATION

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Nobody knows the software testing industry better than Erik van Veenendaal. He is an internationally recognized software testing expert, author of a number of books and has published a large number of papers within the profession. Since its foundation in 2002, Erik has been strongly involved in the International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB). He was vice-president of the International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB) from 2005 until 2009 and is currently a board member of the TMMi Foundation. ISTQB® has recently released a new product road map with new areas of curriculum. Debbie Archer, Managing Director iSQI LTD, met Erik van Veenendaal in Berlin for an interview to discuss the relevance of certification in the future.

Debbie Archer: Erik you have been very involved in the ISTQB® software testing certification scheme for many years. Looking ahead, what's your assessment of the relevance of certification to employers and test professionals?

Erik Veenendaal: Certification has been an important aspect of the “professionalization” of testing by helping to establish common standards, language, an understanding of the core techniques and the role of a tester. If I want to hire a tester I want to know that they have benchmarked their skills, no matter whether a person is at an early stage in their career or further along. I am keen to see a commitment to professional development; it says a lot about the person. As well as ensuring core skills, it also supports career progression, specialization and keeping up to date. As an example, we have seen a significant demand for the ISTQB® Foundation Level Agile Tester extension - agile has been around for a while but people are keen to verify and consolidate their knowledge.

Do you think that the format of the assessment process for certification exams is effective?

More than 600,000 ISTQB® exams have been delivered with more than 500,000 certificates issued; the current format of the exams makes it scalable and accessible around the world. I think there are some incorrect perceptions about multiple choice exams; skilled questions writers, working with a well-developed syllabus, can create an objective and reliable exam that can effectively assess to even Blooms¹ K3 and K4 levels. At expert level in the ISTQB® scheme – we have essay-based questions which are also an effective assessment method. Perhaps in the future there will be more practical based exams.

ISTQB® certification is the most successful certification for testing professionals in the world. What do you think has been critical to that success?

I think that the syllabuses were well written, well-constructed and relevant. Also the scheme structure is important, the core content helped people to learn skills needed for their day to day job and the overall scheme supported career aspirations - to gain the certification was often like an added benefit but not the main reason for taking the course! The other reason I think is the international aspect. This is very important. People work together in projects across the world and international cooperation and a common understanding became increasingly important. ISTQB® provided this underpinned by the local and regional Member Boards and promotion by internationally recognised exam providers such as iSQL.

¹ Blooms "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives". Each section of ISTQB®s syllabuses is allocated a Knowledge (K) level appropriate to the level of assessment for more information go to <http://www.istqb.org/exams-root/what-are-k-levels.html>





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ISTQB® has released a new product road map with new areas of curriculum. Can you give some insight into the new certifications and why they are relevant?

Yes indeed, it is important that the needs of test professionals and employers can be met. The ISTQB® scheme structure is



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based on the “core,” if you like, which consists of the current foundation syllabus and the advanced syllabuses then the expert level. We created a new stream for agile – give the tester the knowledge to be a more effective part of agile teams. And we also created the “specialist” stream with curriculum in Model Based Testing and Usability Testing at foundation level and Automation and Security at advanced. I guess you could say that we are looking to ensure both breadth and depth of knowledge.

What are the key skills and competences you anticipate the testers of the future will need?

For me personally, I think knowledge and skills should be broader than “just” testing for a tester. So I think there should be a closer relationship to other disciplines, for instance, to the requirements engineers and software development. It’s important the testers understand how what they can contribute and why at that stage in the project – training and certification in requirements engineering, as an example, could support that. I think also good communication skills, being able to work in a team – these so-called soft skills are really important.

You mentioned ISTQB® Expert Level. Would you anticipate any new modules at expert level?

Yes, I think there will be other modules in the future but for now, for today, I think we are ok with the existing test management and test process improvements at expert level. It is nice to see that especially the test process improvement module is now really taking off. The new ISTQB® Roadmap is offering knowledge specialisms as well as the career path for testers – the current expert modules support that well.

So, thinking about the expert level module “Improving the Test Process” what would you see as the benefit to a test professional and their organisation?

The main benefit is that it is a very most practical module. It has a lot of what I call very high knowledge levels and “homework” exercises which are challenging but which reinforce the learning and give experience. For instance, you teach people how to do an assessment and as part of the course the student returns to their organization, does an assessment and then reviews it with the course tutor. I think that offers so much added value. Students also have to define a test



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improvement plan; again they learn the theory during the course, go back to the workplace and produce a plan, again they will return to the course and review with the tutor. So it's very practical, it covers actually all I think you should cover and we get very positive feedback. The individual and the organisation get value.

Erik, you've been in the business for about 30 years now, in software development, in software quality, software testing. How did you get involved in the industry?

I started as a programmer, which I think, by the way, is a good background for software testing though not essential. I moved into a project management role; the level of quality we were delivering to our customers was simply not good enough – there were too many dissatisfied customers. So I thought there must be a different way and went to a company that was offering consultancy services in the area of quality and testing and I became a tester again, test manager and then test consultant.

What is your current focus?

My focus is still evolving – creating value for costumers is still very important to me and also ensuring that testing is really understood. People like to run after

buzzwords; I've been there so long... the first course I ran – I remember that really well actually – people were saying “tomorrow we'll get tool XYZ and we can remove testing” – I have heard that so many times! You just need to read the newspapers to see the consequences of defects whether in an airplane, a nuclear system, a banking system, and we have all these mobile apps – it doesn't go away. Testing remains a priority for any organization although it may be organized differently.

Excellent. Erik, you are an international testing expert, you are writing books, you are a highly respected authority and speaker. I also understand, that you're also a successful table tennis player.

E: I am also doing test consultancy and training in the Caribbean, especially on the Island of Curaçao. Table tennis, yes I played at two world championships in the past - I still train two, three times a week for fitness but these days I am moving more into coaching youth teams, sharing my experience.

As you do in the testing world!

Yes, but differently.

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Erik.

You're welcome. █



Erik van Veenendaal (www.erikvanveenendaal.nl) is a leading international consultant and trainer. He is one of the core developers of the TMap testing methodology and the TMMi improvement model. Since its foundation in 2002, Erik has been strongly involved in the International Software Testing Qualifications Board (ISTQB). As a working party chair, he has lead of the ISTQB Expert Level working party for over 10 years. As a co-author he is also involved in writing syllabi at Foundation, Advanced and Expert level. Erik is a frequent keynote and tutorial speaker at international testing and quality conferences. For his major contribution to the field of testing, Erik received the European Testing Excellence Award (2007) and the ISTQB International Testing Excellence Award (2015).

You can follow Erik on twitter via @ErikVeenendaal.