

• SINCE 1994

Create your own *luck*.

THE FOUR ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS THAT DECIDE WHETHER A TEST  
TEAM SUCCEEDS · REX BLACK, INC.

# There is *no luck* in testing.

Every successful test team has four things in common.  
Every failed one is missing at least two.

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None of them are about your stack, your domain, or your  
team size.

**All four are under the test lead's influence.**

# In plain English.

Why do some test teams look *lucky* — cooperative developers, early involvement, tools that just work? And others look cursed no matter how hard they try?

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This talk identifies the four organizational factors that separate the two:

- **Who owns what.** Clear roles and hand-offs.
- **When testing gets started.** Day one or too late.
- **Whether tools and artifacts are shared** between dev and test.
- **Whether leadership actually values** what testing delivers.

FACTOR 01 OF 04

Clearly defined  
*roles and interfaces.*

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# Test teams *depend on everyone.*

SUT from developers · environment from sysadmin · bug hand-offs to developers · status reports to PMs.

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**When interfaces are undefined, chaos follows.** Missed hand-offs. Blame games. A test team that quietly absorbs everyone else's failures.

- Define roles and interfaces **in the test plan.**
- Build support for those roles **before** they're needed.
- Reinforce the boundaries tactfully. **Do not absorb** responsibility that belongs somewhere else.

# Same factor. Opposite outcomes.

## UNDEFINED (BAD)

No one owned installable releases from source. Test manager took it by default because she needed builds. Added workload made planned testing impossible. **Test effort blamed for upstream failure.**

## DEFINED (GOOD)

Different test manager defined release + environment processes up front. Builds arrived on time. Install issues were mutual problems, not finger-pointed. **No unanticipated lab downtime.**

FACTOR 02 OF 04

# Early test-team *involvement.*

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# The cost of fixing rises *throughout the project.*

Some test work takes a **long time**. Quality risk analysis. Test tools. Test harnesses. Environment build-out.

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Relationships are easier to build under low stress than under deadline pressure. All of it argues for **day-one engagement**.

- Brief the project on advantages of early involvement.
- Start test-team work on **day one** — not integration, not system test.
- Have the test team review **requirements and design**. Finding errors there is the cheapest

# Timing *decides* contribution.

## LATE (BAD)

Test manager occupied with prior maintenance releases. Free time spent haranguing process. Testers didn't engage with the new release until integration was in progress. **Seen as an extraneous distraction.**

## UP-FRONT (GOOD)

Two test engineers allocated at start of development. Reviewed early specs, **found ~100 errors** before a single module shipped. Full test context ready on day one of integration test. **Seen as a major player.**

FACTOR 03 OF 04

Shared tools,  
*cases, and data.*

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# Shared artifacts compound. *Unshared ones get rebuilt.*

Test tools, cases, and data take **real effort**. When artifacts built for unit or component testing can be leveraged at integration and system test, that effort compounds.

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When they can't — because each team built their own harness in isolation — you will **rebuild everything**. The rebuild never quite catches up.

- Test engineers work **alongside developers** on unit and component tests.
- Design tools, cases, and data **for re-use from the start**.
- Build harnesses out of whatever your team can actually **maintain**.

# Duplication vs. collaboration.

## UNSHARED (BAD)

One dev team built a unit-test harness with no test participation — special-skill tools, not reusable. Another built a load generator over test objections — too intrusive for performance testing. **Over a person-year of duplicated effort.**

## SHARED (GOOD)

Dev + test engineer adapted a harness together for nightly smoke. 200+ queries, baseline comparison, emailed report to both teams. **Regressions greatly reduced. Test cycles shortened. Monthly maintenance releases possible.**

FACTOR 04 OF 04

A culture  
*that values testing.*

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# Culture is *sold, not given.*

Test resources are almost always insufficient. Expectations about what testing actually delivers are almost always unclear.

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A test-friendly culture promotes **important testing**, adequate resources, and use of test results for project tracking. **It is not optional.**

- Pitch in **their language**: risk, cost, schedule, quality — not test-case counts.
- Distinguish **assessing** quality from **assuring** it. You measure the product, you don't insure it.
- Involve **the right stakeholders** in test design and planning.
- Use **FMEA / ISO 9126** so priority is data-driven, not anecdotal.

# The expectations mismatch.

## UNREALISTIC (BAD)

Client wanted a test engineer to plan test process, create test context, build automated harnesses for web and legacy, train developers — at **half her usual rate, in six weeks**. Executive called his test manager "the QA manager" and expected testing to make quality problems go away.

## PERVASIVE (GOOD)

Different test manager clarified expectations first. Used QRA with the project team to define scope. Dev + test built test tools, data, and cases together. Marketing, support, and dev helped define "correct."  
**Test dashboard became the project's quality indicator. Test exit criteria became the ship criteria.**

TAKEAWAYS

Four factors.  
*No luck required.*

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# Clarity and timing.

- **Context-independent.** Stack, domain, team size don't change the four factors.
- **Clarity is the test lead's job.** No one writes your role definitions for you.
- **Get in on day one.** Every week late costs a week of leverage.

# Shared work, sold mission.

- **Shared artifacts compound.** Rebuilt ones never catch up.
- **Sell the testing mission.** In their language, every quarter, forever.
- **Plan, persuade, repeat.**

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*There's no luck involved at all — just careful planning, calm and reasoned persuasion, and lots of attention to organizational details.*

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# Thank you.

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