

Determining Business Risks for Testing

When software fails or has significant bugs, people and organizations suffer. Financial loss, damaged reputations, consequences to human health and safety—even just additional work—are some of the impacts businesses deal with. Good testers try to base testing strategies on risk: typically, the probability that something will go wrong in an application, and the severity of the consequences if it does.

But even if we have a good idea of the technical risks, testers aren't always best placed to understand the business impacts.

The best way to find out what matters to business stakeholders is to ask them. But unless we ask the right questions, most business people will tell us practically every feature is equally important—and equally risky if it has bugs. And we need to ask the right people: not only users, but ideally, representatives of everyone who could be impacted.

Involving business stakeholders in assessing their risks gives them ownership of the result. It helps to achieve business buy-in for a risk-based test strategy, and it also provides guiding principles for business stakeholders to determine the severity of the bugs we find and decide the priority for fixes.

This workshop will be primarily interactive. We'll examine strategies for identifying the stakeholders who own different business risks. We'll discuss the kinds of questions to ask and look at sample questions for different contexts. Finally, we'll explore a process for conducting a risk assessment workshop that has proven useful on large projects for customers in banking, retail, and health care.