



## Quardev Monthly

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### Welcome!

Welcome to the Quardev Monthly!

We look forward to sharing insights and helpful information in the areas where we know a thing or two - testing, quality assurance, technical writing and documentation, project management, and consulting.

This month we look at why you might want to outsource a project and when it makes sense to do so.

The article outlines the questions you can ask yourself about whether to do something yourself, enlist help, or do nothing. Each is a strategy that can be implemented based on what is best for a given scenario.

Enjoy the newsletter with our compliments and please contact us with questions, comments, or article ideas.

-The Quardev Crew!!

### Do It Yourself or Farm It Out?

*By Jon Bach.*

If you're reading this, you might have a problem. Maybe it's what drew you here. Since life is often about how we respond to problems, especially in the technical world that surrounds professionals like us, we're happy to see if we can help.

First, some philosophy: a problem (like a bug) is the difference between what is *desired* and what is *actual*. If Desire matches Actual, you have no problem. So, faced with a problem, you have three choices: live with it, change your Desire or change your Actual.

In this article, it's about two questions: solve it in-house? or farm it out to someone else?

We're hoping this article can help you decide which way to go. What follows is a deconstruction of some elements we think are inherent in decision-making.

Let's take a really simple problem: you're the Director of Testing and you just got an email from your Program Management Office. They want to know what the test strategy is for the next release so they can plan the release date.

You have 3 options:

- Reply to them yourself
- Have someone else reply
- Do nothing.

Here are some reasons to create the email reply yourself:

1. Time – you have time or can make time. Maybe it's a short "Still in progress..." or a longer reply that gives them every meaningful detail about mission, scope, and tactics.
2. Domain – you reply yourself because you know the subject well or good enough to be credible.

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## Do It Yourself or Farm It Out, Continued

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3. Skill – you reply yourself because you know exactly what to say and how to say it.
4. Cost – it would be cheaper and faster to reply yourself. It also may be that you can afford to fail by sending a bad reply, written hastily. Replying yourself would also build confidence, establish authority, win respect, or would relieve stress on the PMO team. In other words, whatever cost there is in replying may be quickly offset in dividends.
5. Experience – you reply yourself because you've made this response before and it worked out well.
6. Tools – you reply yourself because your computer is up and running and connected to the mail server, and your keyboard and operating system are working.
7. Materials – you reply yourself because the data you need is right at your fingertips, or convenient to get.
8. Motivation – you reply yourself because you want the experience or the results of having sent it.
9. Availability – you reply yourself because you are right there at your keyboard.

It seems silly to use such a simple example like this to help with a really big decision like using an outsource vendor, but the same elements are in play. No matter the size of the problem or the decision, you'll likely consider factors of time, domain, skill, cost, experience, tools, materials, motivation, and availability.

Let's go a step further.

Using the example "should I reply to the test strategy email myself" example above, there ARE times you would NOT want to do it.

1. No Time – Your company policy is for QA to reply to all incoming emails from PMO with a follow-up email, but you are the Test Director and have too many other things to do. No policy says it has to come from YOU, so you delegate. But even your delegate may be too busy, so they might delegate to an engineer to create the details.
2. No Domain Expertise – You're not sure what they mean by "test strategy." Is it the same as test plan, test outline, test cases? Instead of replying

yourself, you wait until the next meeting to get more context.

3. No Skill – You're not sure how best to reply given all of the considerations.
4. Too Costly – The cost of getting it wrong is too high, so you arrange a meeting and collaborate before sending the best response.
5. No Experience – It's your first day as a Test Manager and you've done a test strategy, but not one that would be in the right format as the PMO knows it to be. Instead of replying, you defer to someone with the answer, for now.
6. No Tools – You're not able to reply because of a technical problem. But you must reply, so you have a reply sent on your behalf by someone else.
7. No Materials – You're not able to reply because you don't have the materials in front of you right now. You must reply, so you might find an internet kiosk and see if you can connect to the server with the data on it to craft your reply.
8. No Motivation – Maybe the email is the third reply this week and you sent two other ones you felt had the right granularity for the PMO. In short, the costs of replying outweigh any benefits you'd get from it, so you decide to delegate it.
9. No Availability – You're not there to reply yourself. You're not feeling well, you've broken your typing hand, or are otherwise not up for the task of a reply.

So here you are with a decision on whether or not to farm out some project work. A good consultant can help you sort out the problems by asking questions, just like testers do. The saying "I don't know what I don't know" has to do with one simple aspect even before the decision-making process can begin – and that is, awareness. These nine elements aren't hard-and-fast rules, but ideas to consider. You may have your own factors to consider that weren't listed here, but the right person can come in with either a checklist, a toolbox, or a long resume of experience to help get you on the road.

Oh, and there's always that third option that we're always free to choose – sometimes doing nothing can be the perfect decision, just do it with an awareness of what CAN be done.