

THE *FEAR FACTOR* IN SOFTWARE TESTING

Recognize it, Address it, Transform it

Suzanne Kraaij

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About me

Suzanne Kraaij

- Lead Quality and Testing Expert @ Sogeti The Netherlands
- 15 years experience in testing
- Core team member for the testing community
- People Manager
- Trainer / Conference speaker
- MSc. In Psychology
- Mentor: introverted leadership
- Sketchnoting



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Testing should be risk-based, right?

So why do smart teams end up testing everything?



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Three-part arc



Fear

Fear-based testing
Consequences

What is happening?



Understanding

Early warning signs
Root causes

How and why is it happening?



Confidence

Prevention
Recovery

What can you do about it?

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Fear enters the room

And in its wake, a range of unwanted consequences.



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When fear takes the driver's seat

Fear-based testing is testing driven primarily by anxiety, distrust or a constant need for reassurance, rather than by informed decisions based on risk, business value, and evidence.

RISK-BASED QUESTION

What matters most, and what evidence do we need?

FEAR-BASED QUESTION

What if something goes wrong and someone asks why we did not test it?

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The problem starts when reassurance becomes the goal, rather than the result.

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Limited reach. Executive-level heat.

"I'm being given the runaround by webcare. The Samsung TV app still isn't remembering login details. Is this the kind of service you stand for?"



"You stated on TV that service is a priority, yet we're still dealing with a glitchy app on our Samsung TV. When is the fix coming?"



"If the helpdesk can't solve it, hopefully the CCO can? The TV app on Tizen (Samsung) is failing to launch yet again."



"Fine words about customer focus, but when are you actually going to properly fix the Samsung TV app?"



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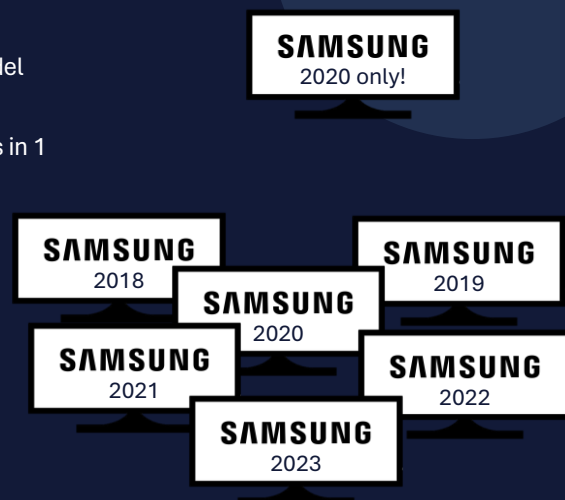
A knee-jerk reaction

THE ANALYSIS

- Only occurs on Samsung and only on the 2020 TV model
- Affects a subset of users
- One of the very rare occasions where a bug only occurs in 1 model on 1 brand

THE BACKLASH

In addition to the regular testset, for Samsung:
A full regression test on all models we support
FOR ALL FUTURE RELEASES



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More testing can create less confidence

Bloated testing

Every incident adds more checks; very little is removed.

Exhausted testers

People carry impossible responsibility for preventing all risk.

Loss of trust

Nobody really understands what is covered or why.

Slower delivery

More evidence, more sign-offs and more friction.

False confidence

The same assumptions and blind spots can remain.

Risk thinking disappears

The question becomes "what else can we test?"

Fear adds activity faster than it creates value!

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Understanding takes over

A production incident may be the spark, but the fuel is often already there.



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Fear has crept in when...



“Test everything” becomes the default answer



Every escaped bug adds permanent regression weight



Test strategies get overruled, and test expertise ignored



Tests get repeated at different levels: Integration, FAT, UAT, etc.



Automation/Testset grows, but clarity does not



Stakeholders ask for reassurance instead of insight

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What do we fear?

Common triggers fall into two categories:

- Phobias
- **Uncertainty (or fear of the unknown)**

*Fear of the unknown refers to anxiety around unpredictable situations or events. Individuals are likely to experience fear of the unknown when there is a **lack of information**.*

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Too many combinations, too little overview

(MOBILE / SMART TV / WEB) × OS × VERSIONS × DEVICES × ACCESSORIES

Landscape too big to see the full picture

Device selection was not discussed with the business

Risks were not always translated beyond the technical viewpoint

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**Fear often points to missing visibility,
information or trust.**

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What fuels the fear?

Complexity

No shared model
Lack of overview

Invisible choices

Reasoning stays inside the test team
No clear test strategy

Communication gaps

Coverage is described, not understood
Missing feedback loops between test levels

Opaque automation

Volume without confidence
No translation from technical side to business value

Fear is not irrational. It grows for a reason.

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Responding to fear

DON'T START WITH

“The business is overreacting.”

Dismissal leaves uncertainty untouched.

ASK INSTEAD

“What are we afraid might happen?”

Then ask about impact, evidence, assumptions and the missing information.

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Confidence returns

Confidently steering back to risk-based testing.



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5 steps to making choices visible

01

Make risks visible

Use a risk map showing risks and usage.

02

Explain test choices

Share why, not only what.

03

Translate automation

Describe confidence, not counts.

04

Calibrate regularly

Revisit risk as the product changes.

05

Accept risk explicitly

Name gaps, owners and revisit signals.

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Transparency is cheaper than reassurance

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Make risks visible

Device group	Customer use	Risk	Coverage	Decision
iOS phones	High	Medium	Good	Keep
Android phones	High	High	Partial	Add risk-based tests
Smart TV A	Medium	High	Thin	Review
Smart TV B	Low	Unknown	Ad hoc	Accept / monitor

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Say what you are not testing



NOT TESTED

Rare smart-TV +
legacy audio
combinations

WHY

Low usage; high
setup cost

RISK REMAINS

Playback issues for
a small segment

WHO ACCEPTS

Product and release
owner

REVISIT WHEN

Usage, defects or
architecture
changes

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Coverage is not the only path to confidence

RECOVERY PRINCIPLE

A new test is one possible
response, not the
automatic one.

WE NEED MORE COVERAGE!!!



MORE TESTS ARE ONLY ONE OPTION

Monitoring & alerting

Real-time alerting for quick
response-time

Logging & observability

See what actually happens.
And turn uncertainty into evidence.

Rollback strategy

Reduce impact when risk
materializes.

Clear ownership

Make response decisions faster.

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Back to risk-based testing

Fear is not the enemy. Ignored fear is.
Uncloak the unknown and be the guide back to the risk conversation.



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Make risks visible



Make decisions visible



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Make risks visible



Make decisions visible



Translate technical information



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Recognize it

Spot the warning signs before "just to be safe" becomes the strategy.



Address it

Find the root cause for the fear and turn it into an explicit risk.



Transform it

Make risks, choices, gaps and automation value visible again.

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Thank you for joining!

Q&A

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FEAR-BASED TESTING

ON TOUR




TOUR DATES 2026

16-09	MoTaCon pre-party	NL
01-10	MoTaCon	UK
06-10	HUSTEF	HU
16-10	BREWTCO	BE
28-10	TestNet	NL

DON'T MISS OUT

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