

Issue 20, Free Print Edition

WWW.QUALITY-MATTERS.ORG



QUALITY MATTERS

CONVERSATION WITH AN AI

By OLIVIER DENOO

CRACKING THE CODE OF SMART TESTING: STRATEGIES THAT WORK

By RENE VAN VELDHUIJZEN

TEST DESIGN, ITS VALUE AND THE AI SOLUTION

By Drs. ERIK VAN VEENENDAAL

IMPLEMENTING THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT BEST PRACTICES OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

By GERIE OWEN



WHO NEEDS A BOSS WHEN YOU CAN HAVE FOUR LEADERS?

By NADIA SOLEDAD CAVALLERI, Spain

In software development, we often assume that teams need a clear leader - someone to guide, organize, and make decisions. But what happens when that leader isn't there? Is it possible for a testing team to function well without a designated leader?

That's exactly what I experienced in a professional setting I want to share with you. A testing team that, due to different circumstances, operated without formal leadership, and where a distributed leadership model emerged almost spontaneously.

WHAT IS DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP?

Distributed leadership doesn't mean the absence of leadership. It's an approach where leadership is shared among different team members, depending on the needs of the moment, the skills of each person, and the projects at hand. It's not about everyone leading everything, but rather about each person taking the lead in what they're strongest at.

This model has several key characteristics:

- **Shared responsibility:** Leadership and decision-making are not the sole responsibility of one person but are distributed across the team.



NADIA SOLEDAD CAVALLERI

Asaitec Soluciones Informáticas, Spain

Nadia is an Information Systems Engineer and Psychologist. She has been working in testing and quality for over 19 years, taking on roles such as analyst, tester, consultant, auditor, and leader.

She is also a content creator. Through her courses, she has trained thousands of students, and on her social media channels, she shares her passion for testing and creates Spanish-language content that's easy for everyone to understand. Additionally, she writes for magazines, blogs, and books, and gives conferences.

Nadia co-founded Argenteesting, was a judge for the Software Testing World Cup, and has been part of the review committee for many conferences and certifications.

She has been recognized by Abstracta as one of the most influential women in testing, by Globant as a Digital Leader in Argentina (2021), and by ISTQB as a Global Finalist for the Excellence Award.

- **Leveraging everyone's strengths:** It draws on the knowledge, skills, and experiences of all team members.
- **Horizontal structure:** It minimizes rigid hierarchies in favor of a flatter, more collaborative structure.
- **Flexible roles:** Leadership roles can change depending on the situation.
- **Trust:** A culture of mutual respect and confidence is essential.
- **Adaptability:** The team can respond more effectively to changes in the environment.

Of course, it's not all smooth sailing: processes can slow down, conflicts over power may arise, or coordination can become tricky. The key lies in how it's implemented and what kind of team culture supports it.

A REAL-LIFE TESTING TEAM WITHOUT A BOSS

In the project I worked on, distributed leadership wasn't something we planned, it simply happened. The manager assigned different profiles to the testing team without appointing a leader. This left us as a group of four testers with very different backgrounds:

- A former developer with strong technical skills.
- A functional expert from customer support who deeply understood the business rules.
- An automation specialist.
- And myself, with experience in processes, best practices, and team coaching.
- Instead of a single leader, each of us naturally took the lead on different initiatives:
- The former developer took charge of managing test environments.
- The functional expert led a major legislative change project.
- The automation specialist handled the implementation of the testing framework.
- I led the organization of test processes, tool selection, and knowledge sharing.
- Leadership shifted according to the topic: there was no fixed leader. The person best suited for the challenge would step up, organize the team, run key meetings, set priorities, and communicate with stakeholders.

WHY DID IT WORK?

Looking back, I think several factors made this model successful:

- We knew each other's strengths and weaknesses.
- There was mutual trust and respect: we knew when to let someone else lead.
- There were no ego battles: the team's goals were more important than individual recognition.

Scrum and an agile framework like SAgE helped maintain a horizontal structure.

LEADERSHIP EMERGED ORGANICALLY, NOT BY FORCE.

Of course, not everything was perfect. In other projects, I've seen how poorly implemented distributed leadership can lead to chaos - when multiple leaders manage the same resources with conflicting goals, teams get confused, tensions rise, and decisions stall.

That's why I don't think distributed leadership is a magic solution. It can work very well in certain contexts - like in this team - but it requires the right conditions: a culture of trust, clear roles, strong communication, and a willingness to step in (or step back) as needed.

How many leaders does a team need?

There's no single answer. The real question is: How do we create an environment where people step up to lead when it's needed?

Distributed leadership doesn't mean no leadership - it's a dynamic and situational role that different people can take on depending on the project, the context, and the skills required at any given moment.

Creating the conditions for this to happen means fostering a culture of trust, giving people the space to propose ideas, making strengths visible, and setting an example: showing openness, humility, and a willingness to collaborate.

When a team achieves that, leadership emerges naturally and the results can be surprisingly effective.

