

Book Review: Hares J.S.
SSADM for the Advanced Practitioner.
Wiley, Chichester, UK, xvii + 289 pp. (1990).

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This is an excellent book written for experienced practitioners of SSADM. It is also useful in general to software engineers who are experienced in other structured methodologies. It assesses the various features of SSADM, compares it with other approaches, and proposes enhancements and alternative uses of the method in areas where it was not originally designed.

The book is divided into five chapters. A review of the evolution of structured methodologies is presented in Chapter 1. The strengths and weaknesses of SSADM are discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 presents readers with a bag of “pearls of wisdom”, or useful advice on how to handle SSADM in various practical situations.

In Chapters 4 and 5, extensions of SSADM are suggested in realtime systems, distributed systems, conversational systems, expert systems, and object oriented design.

The first four chapters are very useful, and illustrate the author’s sound practical experience on which the recommendations are based. The points covered reinforce the feelings shared by many practitioners who are not totally satisfied with the current version of SSADM, and provide insight into the potential enhancements of the method. Although the pearls of wisdom may be a little controversial in places, they nevertheless give food for thought. The book on the whole is interesting and more than readable. It appears to be the only book on the assessment of SSADM, as against an introductory text or a manual.

There are, however, a few drawbacks:

1. There are points in the book which are erroneous or at best debatable, such as the suggestions that Yourdon and Jackson’s methods were developed specifically for real-time systems (pp. 15, 17, and 189), that the sequence of processes in SSADM data flow diagrams do not reflect their relationship in time (p. 35), and that an object oriented system is simply “an expert system without a knowledge inference mechanism” (p. 221). The presentation of object orientation as logic normalization (pp. 285–289) can also be misleading.

2. The final and longest chapter, covering expert systems and OOD, is based more on text book material than on practical experience. Furthermore, only HOOD was mentioned as an example of an OOD method, but not the work of many others such as Booch, Seidewitz, Wasserman, and Yourdon.
3. No bibliography is provided in the book. Readers who would like to take the advice of the author and venture into expert systems, for example, will not know where to read further.
4. The title of the book may suggest that its main objective is to present the advanced features, of SSADM, rather than to provide an assessment of the method. Perhaps a subtitle is suggested in its second edition.
5. The subsection headings (down to the fourth level) look uncomfortably similar in many places. It would be useful if the major section heading could be printed at the top of every right hand page. In this way, the reader can easily distinguish those pages that cover the strong points of SSADM from those that cover the weaknesses. He can find out at a glance whether we are discussing real-time, distributed or conversational systems, so that he does not have to flip-flop between the table of contents and the main text.

In spite of the shortcomings, this book is strongly recommended to all practitioners who have a fair amount of exposure to SSADM or other structured methods, and would like to increase the breadth or depth of their own experience.