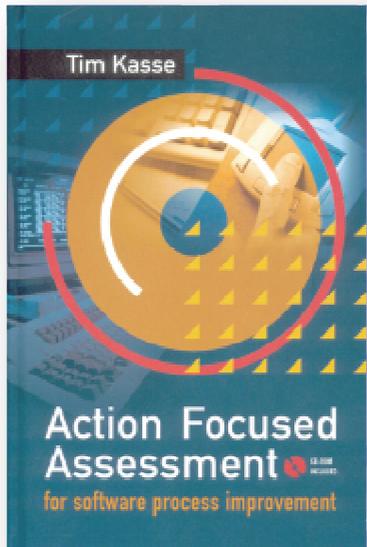


Action Focused Assessment for Software Process improvement, by Tim Kasse

A Book Review by Ian Jay

For organisations that develop or maintain systems or software, the SEI CMM model offers the prospect of greater effectiveness.

Knowing how to evaluate what the current state of the operation is and where it needs to be improved is a problem that this book addresses. The approach can be adapted to meet other standards such as SPICE and TickIT.



A key problem this book highlights is that the goal of an assessment is to provide a foundation for further process development. Achieving assessment 'scores' is not a goal in itself. A good assessment provides a view of current strengths, gaps and weaknesses in the processes employed.

The book begins by setting out some pointers to look for when planning an assessment. These help managers to decide if an assessment is feasible, or appropriate. Basic issues need to be considered at this stage. These include the level of organisational knowledge about software engineering methods. If these are not understood or utilised, the author advises that process improvement should be set aside, whilst these practices are implemented.

An assessment project needs to be supported by a business need. The exercise requires resources, facilities time and equipment, so should be treated like any other business project. It needs to be aligned to the overall

business direction to be of value. The resulting actions represent organisation change and provision for this has to be made.

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The focus of the book is the assessment project itself. It provides detailed guidance on setting up the assessment team and formulating the project strategy. It also provides details on team deployment, this includes practical advice drawn from the authors own painful experiences. A CD accompanies the book. This has MS Word, PowerPoint and Excel files that support the methodology that the book presents. The spreadsheets are set up as a database to assist in managing the data collected by the question sets. The PowerPoint slides are intended for use in workshops and management reviews. The CD thus represents real value add when compared with many other texts offering CD support. A detailed activity flow is set out in the book. This is supported with extensive text describing each of the activities. Requirements for facilities and equipment are described, as well as roles and skills needed. There is structured guidance on how and when to use the various checklists and question sets provided on the CD. The way that responses are evaluated and scored in the spreadsheets is also described in detail. Apart from the CMM related questions, there is also material to evaluate how ready for change the organisation is. This is useful as change is a probable consequence of an assessment such as this. The book concludes with a chapter dealing with management commitment to follow on action.

This requires a program of process improvement. An approach to achieving this, which the intervention team can adopt, is described. This is critical if improvement is the goal! The appendix provides additional information about various maturity models and related initiatives that have followed from the original CMM work. The text is very straightforward and easy to read. In practice, it would serve as a useful reference or user manual for a department head or project leader who wishes to get the benefits that CMM offers.

The author, Tim Kasse, spent four years at the SEI where he worked on the development of the original CMM. This book is his response to subsequent experiences encountered when conducting assessments or implementing process improvements.

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