



## Microsoft Solutions Framework - Overview

The Microsoft® Solutions Framework (MSF) is a flexible, interrelated series of concepts, models, and best practices that lays the foundation for planning, building, and managing technology projects. MSF principles and practices can guide an organization through assembling the resources, managing the people, and implementing the processes necessary for technology solutions and infrastructure to meet changing business objectives.

A disciplined approach is critical to successfully creating the right business solution on time, in scope, and within budget. The success of most technology projects depends on project management, business objectives, and development processes as much as writing quality code. It is not sufficient to merely decide what technologies to use; true business success is achieved by maximizing the effectiveness of the technologies selected.

Originally based on best practices within Microsoft product development and IT organizations, the Microsoft Solutions Framework was created in 1994 and developed into standardized training courses to promote consistency and effectiveness within the Microsoft Consulting Services (MCS) organization. Research and customer feedback has contributed to the improvement of the MSF models, principles and best practices as well as the evolution of the MSF course offerings.

### **A framework for success**

*"Without MSF . . . we would have been wandering in the dark."*

Stephen Gesner

Vice President, Alternative Delivery Channels

Toronto Dominion Bank

Since 1994, companies have been using Microsoft® Solutions Framework (MSF) models, principles and practices to achieve the maximum business value when successfully managing distributed technology projects. MSF structures projects for success by aligning business and technology objectives, proactively managing risk, and optimizing resources and processes. The potential rewards of using MSF in your organization are better business solutions developed in less time by fewer people. This is why Microsoft Consulting Services (MCS) consultants widely use MSF techniques on projects. In fact, many enterprise clients send their entire staff for MSF training after seeing the results from MCS.

### **Building relationships between Information Technology departments and users**

MSF defines a project team environment and creates an office dynamic in which the Information Technology department, business decision-makers and end users are all part of the team. This helps the project team to manage the customer's expectations from the inception of the project. Customers are involved in prioritization of features and resolution of issues.

### **Keeping projects on track by proactively managing risk**

MSF understands that sometimes projects go off-track. Resources may be reallocated, budgets get cut, business focus might shift, mergers and acquisitions occur, vague features get added and the deadline gets pushed up. MSF teaches techniques for proactive risk management and how to track your projects with clear milestones so that your projects don't spin out of control when issues arise. Once an issue has been identified, it can be resolved and the project can be modified accordingly or continue as planned. MSF practices can keep your projects on track.



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### **Making smart tradeoffs**

*"Now we know when we're going off course. Is the feature in or out? This has made a tremendous impact in our ability to get our jobs done. In the old days, we'd never be at the point we are now."*

Vita Naples

Manager of Dev. Process and Release Mgmt  
HBOC

MSF shows you how to deliver the best possible solution at the right time to meet business needs by finding the balance between feature set, schedule and resources. All too often, projects get started with unrealistic expectations: extravagant feature sets, impossible schedule and limited resources. These projects can avoid disaster by using MSF best practices to set priorities and make smart tradeoffs so that the business objectives will be achieved.

### **Taking advantage of business opportunities**

MSF helps organizations understand their business requirements and opportunity costs. By implementing versioned releases of products, customers can realize the most important business benefits sooner and add increased functionality over time.

### **MSF helps IT departments overcome obstacles and achieve business goals**

Because MSF is based on best practices from technology projects, it addresses the most pressing issues facing Information Technology departments today. MSF can help your organization achieve the following goals: Speed up development and deployment cycles. Lower the cost of owning technology. Improve execution on planned events. Improve reaction to unplanned events. Create scalable and reliable technology solutions. Improve core information technology competencies. Achieve short-term results while maintaining a long term planning strategy. Manage project risks. Improve morale.

### **More Than Just Theory**

The MSF courses offer more than theories and lectures; they offer scenario-driven labs and activities that demonstrate how to use MSF techniques in real-life project management tasks. Participants receive a resource kit that contains samples, templates, checklists and white papers on the topics covered in the course. For example, course participants discuss the importance of a risk management to a project, they discuss the challenges and opportunities of using a risk management document in their organizations, and they receive sample risk management documents as part of the resource kit. MSF courses make it easy to use the techniques taught in class on the job every day.

### **The Building Blocks of MSF**

The Microsoft® Solutions Framework (MSF) is a collection of models, principles, and practices that helps organizations be more effective in their creation and use of technology to solve their business problems. It does this by providing rigorous guidance that is flexible enough to be adapted to meet the needs of the project and the organization. The core building blocks for this MSF-based solutions guidance are the six major MSF models: the Enterprise Architecture Model, the Team Model, the Process Model, the Risk Management Model, the Design Process Model and the Application Model. Each model is briefly described below.

**The Enterprise Architecture Model** provides a consistent set of guidelines for rapidly building enterprise architecture through versioned releases. The model aligns information technology with business requirements through four perspectives: business, application, information, and technology. Using this model will help shorten your enterprise architecture planning cycle.



**The Team Model** provides a flexible structure for organizing teams on projects. It emphasizes clear roles and responsibilities, clear goals for team success and increases team member accountability through its structure as a team of peers. Its flexibility means that it can be adapted depending on the scope of the project, the size of the team, and the skills of the team members. Using this model and the principles and practices that underlie it will help you have more engaged, effective, resilient, and successful teams.

**The Process Model** provides project structure and guidance through a project life cycle that is milestone based, iterative, and flexible. It describes the phases, milestones, activities and deliverables of a project and their relationship to the Team Model. Using this model will help you improve project control, minimize risk, improve quality, and shorten delivery time.

**The Risk Management Model** provides a structured and proactive way for managing risk on projects. It sets forth a discipline and environment of proactive decisions and actions to assess continuously what can go wrong, determine what risks are important to deal with, and implement strategies to deal with those risks. Using this model and the principles and practices that underlie it will help teams focus on what is most important, make the right decisions, and be better prepared for when the unknown future becomes known.

**The Design Process Model** provides a three-phase user-centric continuum that allows for a parallel and iterative approach to design for the greatest efficiency and flexibility. The conceptual, logical, and physical design phases provide three different perspectives for the three different audiences-user, team, and developers. Moving through conceptual design to physical design will show the translation of user-based scenarios to services-based components so that application features can be traced back to end-user requirements. Using this model will help you ensure that your applications are created not just for the sake of technology, but to meet your business and user needs.

**The Application Model** provides a logical three-tier services-based approach to designing and developing software applications. The use of user services, business services, and data services allow for parallel development, better use of technology, easier maintenance and support, and the greatest flexibility in distribution as the services that make up the application could reside anywhere from a single desktop to servers and clients around the world.