Authoring Office SharePoint Server Workflows

Like those built solely on Windows SharePoint Services, workflows that use Office SharePoint Server can be created using either Visual Studio 2005 and WF Workflow Designer or Office SharePoint Designer. This section describes both approaches.

**Authoring Workflows with Visual Studio 2005 and WF Workflow Designer**

Using Visual Studio 2005 and WF Workflow Designer to author an Office SharePoint Server workflow is much like using this tool to author a workflow based solely on Windows SharePoint Services. As shown earlier, a developer can drag and drop activities onto a design surface, then write code as needed. Office SharePoint Server doesn’t provide any extra activities beyond those supplied by Windows SharePoint Services, so developers have the same building blocks for workflow logic.

The big difference, however, is that workflows using Office SharePoint Server can use InfoPath workflow forms rather than just ASPX forms. To create these forms, a workflow author uses InfoPath 2007. This tool provides a graphical editor that lets the author define the form’s content. Developers who prefer to work entirely within the Visual Studio environment can use Visual Studio Tools for Office, which allows hosting InfoPath inside Visual Studio.

Once they’re created, InfoPath workflow forms are attached to a workflow via a workflow.xml file, just as with ASPX forms. Unlike ASPX forms, however, developers don’t need to write custom code to move information between InfoPath workflow forms and a workflow. Instead, Office SharePoint Server and InfoPath provide this link, making life simpler for the people who create workflows.

**Authoring Workflows with Office SharePoint Designer 2007**

Just as with Windows SharePoint Services, information workers can use Office SharePoint Designer to author workflows that run in an Office SharePoint Server environment. Unlike workflows created using Visual Studio and WF Workflow Designer, however, those created using Office SharePoint Designer can’t use InfoPath workflow forms. This also means that they can’t be accessed directly from Office 2007 applications. Instead, these workflows must be accessed via a Web browser.

This constraint stems from the way that Office SharePoint Designer handles forms. As described earlier, information workers don’t directly create forms using this tool. Instead, a workflow author sets options provided by the tool, then lets the tool generate the required forms. This makes life easy for the author, but the usual tradeoff between ease of use and power also applies: only ASPX forms are supported.