Workflow and Windows SharePoint Services 3.0

Both WF and Windows SharePoint Services are useful on their own. The ability to create human workflow applications built on the document-oriented features of Windows SharePoint Services would be even more useful, however. Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 makes this possible. Built using WF, this new release will be included with the forthcoming version of Windows Server code-named “Longhorn”, and will also be freely available as an optional update for Windows Server 2003 via Windows Update.

**Combining Windows Workflow Foundation and Windows SharePoint Services**

As described earlier, the WF runtime engine can be hosted in any Windows process. Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 takes advantage of this, acting as a host for this engine. One or more workflow templates, each containing the code that defines a particular workflow, can be installed on a server. Once this is done, an association can be created between a specific template and a document library, list, or content type. This template can then be loaded and executed by the Windows SharePoint Services-hosted WF runtime engine, creating a workflow instance. The figure below shows how this looks.

Like all WF workflows, those based on Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 rely on WF’s runtime services. To better support workflows hosted in Windows SharePoint Services, however, Version 3.0 replaces some of those built-in services. WF’s standard persistence service has been modified, for example, to allow the state of a persisted workflow to be linked with the document or item with which that workflow is associated.

Having an architectural view of how the parts fit together is useful, and it’s an essential aspect of understanding workflows in Windows SharePoint Services 3.0. The best way to understand what’s really going on, however, is to look at a typical scenario using this technology. The next section walks through a simple example of using a Windows SharePoint Services workflow.