

3-in-3 SDLC Framework (3SF)

A relationship-aware software delivery framework that unites client, vendor, and product/service into one coherent system of collaboration.

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3SF Quick Start – From Context to Practice

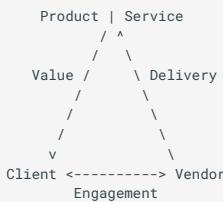
"3SF is not another delivery method – it's the operating system that connects them all."

What Is 3SF

The **3-in-3 SDLC Framework (3SF)** is a **relationship-aware delivery system** that unites **Client**, **Vendor**, and **Product / Service** into one coherent ecosystem.

Where most frameworks describe *how teams deliver*, 3SF explains **how organizations align** – showing how engagement, delivery, and value form an integrated system of trust and flow.

At its core lies a simple triangle:



Each side of this triangle represents a **relationship line**:

- **Engagement** – how Client and Vendor collaborate.
- **Delivery** – how Vendor and Product interact to produce outcomes.
- **Value** – how Product results satisfy Client goals.

When all three sides evolve together, delivery becomes aligned, predictable, and continuously learning.

3SF User Onboarding Checklist

Start here before using any tools or methods.

| Step | Action | Why This Step Is Necessary | Primary Reference |
|-------------|--|--|--|
| 1. Orient | Read the Vision, Principles & Beliefs to align mindset. | This is the cultural DNA. Without shared principles, tools cannot create alignment. | Vision, Principles & Beliefs |
| 2. Identify | Find your Composite Functional Role in the Role Responsibility Snapshot . | Defines your accountability within the joint system – who you co-own outcomes with. | Role Snapshot |
| 3. Ground | Complete the Engagement Context Canvas (ECC) . | Enforces Context before Method – this defines the system's environment and constraints. | Engagement Context Canvas |
| 4. Govern | Co-sign the Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter . | Establishes Trust before Control – formalizes decision rights and escalation paths. | Boundary Charter |

Once these four steps are done, the 3SF Operating System is **initialized**.

You can then safely apply any methodology – Agile, Lean, or hybrid – within a coherent relational context.

Why 3SF Exists

3SF emerged from real-world experience across hundreds of projects where success or failure was rarely technical. It almost always came down to **misaligned expectations, responsibilities, and maturity** between client and vendor teams.

3SF was designed to fix that by:

- Making **relationships inspectable and measurable**.
- Providing **shared tools** that connect strategy to execution.
- Replacing blame with **systemic learning**.
- Turning transactional projects into **strategic partnerships**.

How to Navigate 3SF

The framework is structured like an **operating system**:

| Layer | Purpose |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Theory (OS) | Explains <i>why</i> 3SF exists and <i>how</i> it structures relationships. |
| Practice (Apps) | Show <i>how</i> to use 3SF tools in real projects. |
| Contracts (Interfaces) | Define how principles become measurable agreements. |

Each section builds on the previous one – but you don't need to read it linearly.

If you know your **role** or **current problem**, you can jump directly to the right guide below.

Where to Start

The 3SF Navigator – Tool Finder

Find the right 3SF Practice Tool for your current situation – from defining engagement rules to diagnosing delivery friction.

Role Responsibility Snapshot – Dual-Sided Accountability

See how Client and Vendor roles align, what each is accountable for, and which 3SF artifacts they co-own.

When You're Ready

Continue to the **3SF Theory – Purpose and Layers** to understand how the system works underneath – the **Contextual Drivers, Stable Rules**, and **Maturity Integration** that make 3SF resilient by design.

3SF begins with people, not process. Start with your context – then pick the right principle and tool to match it.

The 3SF Navigator – Context-Driven Tool Finder

"Start with your situation, not the method."

Purpose

The **3SF Navigator** helps you quickly find which 3SF Practice Tool to use for your current situation.

Instead of reading the full framework, this guide starts with **your context** – what you are trying to achieve – and leads you directly to the right artifact or diagnostic.

It complements the **3SF Practice Architecture** by acting as a lightweight *user interface* for the 3SF operating system.

How to Use

1. Identify **your current need or challenge** below.
2. Find the **matching situation** in the table.
3. Open the linked **3SF Tool** to apply immediately.
4. Use the associated **3SF Principle** as your guiding mindset.

1. Find Your Situation

| My Current Situation (Need) | SDLC Stage | Primary Tool | Target 3SF Principle |
|--|--------------------|--|--|
| "We need to define the project's rules of engagement." | Discover / Setup | Engagement Context Canvas | <i>Context before Method</i> |
| "We need to set the boundaries for approval authority." | Shape / Governance | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter | <i>Trust before Control</i> |
| "We need to define what success looks like." | Discover / Shape | Outcome-to-Accountability Map | <i>Outcome before Output</i> |
| "Our delivery is messy. We need to find the systemic cause." | Build / Run | Delivery System Diagnostic | <i>Learning before Blame</i> |
| "We need to align on key architectural trade-offs." | Shape / Build | Architectural Trade-Off Contract | <i>Shared Accountability</i> |
| "We need a shared Definition of Done." | Build / Validate | Shared Definition of Done (DoD) Matrix | <i>Quality before Speed</i> |
| "We need to identify what slows us down." | Build / Run | Flow Constraint Identification | <i>Flow before Speed</i> |
| "We need to evaluate partnership and delivery maturity." | Run / Evolve | Quarterly Delivery & Relationship Assessment | <i>Transparency Enables Adaptation</i> |
| "I need to prepare a report on partnership health." | Run / Evolve | Maturity Dashboard & Metrics Consolidation | <i>Visibility Builds Trust</i> |
| "We want to learn from delivery issues without blaming." | Evolve / Reflect | Learning Before Blame Protocol | <i>Learning before Blame</i> |

2. Quick Reference by SDLC Stage

Discover

- [Engagement Context Canvas](#) – align on environment and rules of engagement.
- [Outcome-to-Accountability Map](#) – define measurable success.

Shape

- [Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter](#) – define decision-making rights.
- [Architectural Trade-Off Contract](#) – agree on NFR trade-offs.

Build

- [Shared Definition of Done Matrix](#) – ensure cross-functional quality.
- [Flow Constraint Identification](#) – locate top systemic blockers.

Run

- [Delivery System Diagnostic](#) – analyze systemic friction.
- [Quarterly Delivery & Relationship Assessment](#) – track relationship health.

Evolve

- [Learning Before Blame Protocol](#) – conduct constructive retrospectives.
- [Maturity Dashboard & Metrics Consolidation](#) – visualize maturity trends.

3. When in Doubt

Start with one of these entry points:

- **If your project hasn't started:** use the [Engagement Context Canvas](#).
- **If you're already delivering:** use the [Delivery System Diagnostic](#).
- **If you're closing or scaling:** use the [Quarterly Assessment](#).

When clarity improves, connect these tools through the [3SF Practice Architecture](#) for full lifecycle alignment.

Summary

3SF Navigator = Context → Principle → Practice

It's the entry point into the 3SF Operating System – guiding users to the right tool, at the right time, for the right reason.

Role Responsibility Snapshot – Dual-Sided Accountability

"Every 3SF role exists in pairs – one defines the value, the other delivers it."

Purpose

The **Role Responsibility Snapshot** helps both **Client** and **Vendor** teams understand their joint accountabilities within the 3SF system. It serves as a bridge between the **Functional Role Model** and **Practice Tools**, showing what each role contributes and owns at every stage of delivery.

Use this guide when forming teams, preparing for workshops, or validating who brings what into a 3SF tool.

How to Use

1. Find your **role** (Client or Vendor side).
2. Review the **primary accountability** – your “WHY.”
3. See which **artifact** you provide input to and which one you are expected to **own or co-sign**.
4. Use these as checkpoints in the **Engagement Context Canvas**, **Outcome Map**, or **Boundary Charter**.

1. Core Joint Roles

| Functional Role | Primary Accountability (The WHY) | Key Tool Input (What I Bring) | Key Tool Output (What I Own) |
|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Client Product Owner | Define and prioritize business outcomes and user value. | Context and business needs → Engagement Context Canvas | Outcome-to-Accountability Map |
| Vendor Product Manager | Translate outcomes into coherent solution strategy and backlog. | Outcome-to-Accountability Map | Validated product backlog and release plan |
| Client Project Manager | Manage flow, dependencies, and approvals on the client side. | Client-side constraints → Engagement Context Canvas | Flow Constraint Identification |
| Vendor Delivery Lead | Manage delivery flow, maturity, and systemic friction. | ECC, Boundary Charter | Delivery System Diagnostic |
| Client Solution Architect | Ensure architectural coherence and risk awareness. | Technical constraints and policies | Architectural Trade-Off Contract |
| Vendor Solution Architect | Design system trade-offs balancing cost, risk, and feasibility. | Outcome Map | Architectural Trade-Off Contract |
| Client Technical Integrator | Validate operational readiness and integration quality. | Environment setup details, deployment dependencies | Shared Definition of Done (DoD) Matrix |
| Vendor Technical Integrator | Execute integration and ensure system operates end-to-end. | DoD Matrix | Verified delivery pipeline readiness |
| Client Requirements Analyst | Clarify business intent and domain logic. | Business inputs for ECC and OAM | Refined acceptance criteria for Shared Definition of Done |
| Vendor Requirements Analyst | Translate business context into development-ready scope. | ECC | Finalized scope specification for backlog execution |
| Experience Designer (Client/Vendor) | Own usability and user value translation. | User research insights | Prototype or design specification linked to Outcome Map |

2. Client-Only Fixed Roles

| Functional Role | Primary Accountability | Key Engagement |
|--------------------|---|---|
| Executive Sponsor | Own strategic intent, funding, and highest-level trust decisions. | Approves Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |
| Vendor Manager | Manage commercial relationship, contracts, and maturity evaluation. | Uses Maturity Dashboard |
| Governance Officer | Ensure regulatory and internal compliance adherence. | Reviews Architectural Trade-Off Contract and DoD Matrix |

3. Vendor-Only Fixed Roles

| Functional Role | Primary Accountability | Key Engagement |
|------------------------|---|--|
| Account Lead | Own overall commercial health and client relationship maturity. | Consolidates Maturity Dashboard and Quarterly Assessment |
| Engineering Director | Manage delivery capacity and systemic maturity across teams. | Oversees Delivery System Diagnostic |
| Practice Lead | Maintain discipline standards and systemic improvement. | Reviews outputs of Architectural Trade-Off Contract and DoD Matrix |
| Engineering Specialist | Deliver hands-on technical implementation and quality verification. | Contributes to DoD Matrix |

4. How It Connects

Each pairing of Client ↔ Vendor roles aligns to a **specific 3SF Principle**:

| Principle | Typical Role Pair | Supporting Tool |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Context before Method | Client Product Owner ↔ Vendor Delivery Lead | Engagement Context Canvas |
| Trust before Control | Executive Sponsor ↔ Vendor Account Lead | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |
| Outcome before Output | Client Product Owner ↔ Vendor Product Manager | Outcome-to-Accountability Map |
| Learning before Blame | Client Project Manager ↔ Vendor Delivery Lead | Learning Before Blame Protocol |
| Shared Accountability | Client & Vendor Solution Architects | Architectural Trade-Off Contract |

These alignments make **joint accountability visible and inspectable** – every tool has an owner pair, every decision has a shared signature.

5. Summary

Dual-Sided Accountability = Joint Clarity × Shared Learning

The **Role Responsibility Snapshot** transforms abstract collaboration into actionable co-ownership.

It ensures every 3SF artifact has a **client counterpart**, a **vendor counterpart**, and a **shared purpose** – turning roles into an integrated system of responsibility, not hierarchy.

3-in-3 SDLC Framework (3SF)

Introduction

The **3-in-3 SDLC Framework** – or **3SF** – is a relationship-aware software delivery framework that unites **client**, **vendor**, and **product/service** into one coherent system of collaboration.

It was created to help organizations design, execute, and evolve delivery systems that are **aligned, predictable, and continuously learning**, regardless of project type or commercial model.

Where most delivery frameworks describe *what happens inside a vendor organization*, 3SF explains **how success depends on the relationship between all three system elements** – *Client ↔ Vendor ↔ Product* – and how alignment across them determines value realization.

Purpose

The 3SF was designed to:

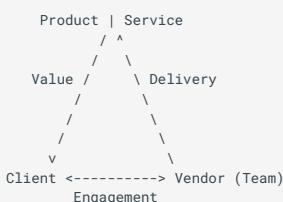
- **Connect strategy and delivery** by translating goals, constraints, and context into practical delivery configurations.
- **Expose and close maturity gaps** between client and vendor through shared understanding of responsibilities and decision-making.
- **Balance structure and adaptability** – combining predictable delivery with continuous learning and feedback.
- **Enable contextual decision-making** – showing how commercial, organizational, and technical drivers shape the right delivery approach.
- **Build partnership maturity** over time, turning transactional engagements into strategic collaborations.

It serves both as:

1. **A delivery design framework** – guiding how to configure projects before execution.
2. **A diagnostic tool** – helping leaders assess delivery health and identify systemic improvements.
3. **A learning model** – supporting continuous improvement and leadership development.

Core Idea

Every delivery system operates within a triangle of relationships:



Each side of this triangle represents a **relationship line**:

- **Engagement (Client ↔ Vendor)**: defines collaboration and trust.
- **Delivery (Vendor ↔ Product)**: defines execution and quality.
- **Value (Product ↔ Client)**: defines outcomes and impact.

Healthy delivery emerges only when all three sides evolve together.

Framework Overview

The **3-in-3 SDLC Framework (3SF)** organizes delivery into **eight systemic layers**, each serving a distinct purpose within the client–vendor–product ecosystem.

Together, these layers form a complete system of alignment, flow, and learning – connecting strategy to execution and collaboration to maturity.

| # | Layer | Purpose |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | 3-in-3 Model | Defines the delivery ecosystem – the relationships between Client, Vendor (Team), and Product / Service through Engagement, Delivery, and Value lines. |
| 2 | SDLC Stages | Describes how value flows through seven delivery stages – Discover, Shape, Build, Validate, Release, Run, and Evolve. |
| 3 | SDLC Practices | Provide technical, quality, and governance disciplines that sustain flow and reliability across all stages. |
| 4 | SDLC Stage Dimensions | Define configurable decision spaces and conditions that determine how each stage operates in context. |
| 5 | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) | Identify external and internal forces – commercial, organizational, or technical – that shape delivery decisions. |
| 6 | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) | Encode universal system rules (R1–R12) that maintain coherence and balance under changing conditions. |
| 7 | Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) | Provide a structured method for evaluating delivery health, rule adherence, and improvement priorities. |
| 8 | Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC) | Translate the framework into actionable playbooks for specific delivery contexts (e.g., Fixed-Bid, Co-Delivery, Continuous Evolution). |

The **3-in-3 Maturity Layer** overlays the entire framework – describing how **relationship trust and shared responsibility evolve** as the delivery system matures from **Transactional Trust** to **Strategic Partnership** through aligned autonomy, feedback, and learning.

Evolution

3SF evolved from repeated real-world observations in client–vendor engagements where:

- Projects struggled not because of technical complexity, but due to *mismatched expectations and responsibilities*.
- Vendors assumed clients handled early discovery or sustainment functions, leaving unowned gaps.
- Delivery methodologies (Agile, Waterfall, Hybrid) failed when context and relationships weren't considered.

The framework emerged as a **unifying model** – connecting strategic, operational, and adaptive layers into one ecosystem of delivery understanding.

Resilience by Design

3SF acknowledges that **delivery systems fail not only because of bad execution but because of systemic resistance** – competing incentives, unclear accountability, or organizational inertia.

To remain realistic and resilient, the framework was designed with *anti-fragility* in mind:

- Each layer contains **diagnostic and corrective mechanisms** (CDL, SRL, RAC) to detect and respond to friction before it becomes failure.
- The **relationship maturity model** exposes illusionary progress – when processes appear mature but trust and ownership remain shallow.
- The **Stable Rules Layer** acts as a safety net – ensuring that adaptation never breaks coherence.
- And through **feedback-driven learning**, every mistake becomes a data point for system evolution, not evidence of personal failure.

In practice, 3SF doesn't eliminate risk – it **makes risk visible, discussable, and manageable** across both client and vendor organizations.

When to Use 3SF

| Use Case | Typical Goal |
|----------------------------|---|
| Before a project starts | Design the right delivery system based on context and commercial model. |
| During delivery | Diagnose bottlenecks, misalignments, and maturity gaps using RAC and CRC. |
| After release | Guide retrospectives, learning, and relationship improvement across projects. |
| For leadership development | Train Delivery Leaders to think systemically and lead through context, not process. |

Benefits

- **Clarity:** Shared language across client, vendor, and leadership levels.
- **Alignment:** Connected view of strategy, delivery, and value realization.
- **Predictability:** Systematic handling of uncertainty and governance.
- **Learning:** Built-in reflection loops to prevent repeated failures.
- **Scalability:** Applicable to individual projects or portfolios.

Reading Structure

The theory section introduces 3SF from **philosophy to application**:

1. **Vision, Principles, Beliefs** → Why the framework exists.
2. **3-in-3 Model & Maturity** → Core relationship foundation.
3. **SDLC Model** → Phases and practices.
4. **Stage Dimensions** → How each stage is configured.
5. **Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)** → What shapes delivery decisions.
6. **Stable Rules Layer (SRL)** → Universal rules of systemic integrity.
7. **Rule Audit Checklist (RAC)** → Diagnostic and assessment method.
8. **Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC)** → Practical playbooks for different contexts.
9. **Relationship and System Maturity Integration** → Integration of partnership growth into SDLC.

Summary

3SF connects technical delivery with relationship maturity — aligning structure, behavior, and learning into a single, living system.

It is not a new methodology; it is a **meta-framework** that ensures any methodology fits its context and grows trust between organizations.

Vision, Principles & Beliefs

Vision

We envision a world where **client, vendor, and product** teams collaborate as one delivery system – driven by shared purpose, transparent flow, and continuous learning.

Software delivery should not be a negotiation between parties but an **ecosystem of mutual value creation**.

3SF exists to make this possible: to replace process compliance with contextual alignment, and to transform transactional engagements into partnerships built on trust and adaptability.

However, **not every organization that uses 3SF language achieves its spirit**.

Without the underlying mindset shift, structures can imitate maturity while behaviors remain transactional – creating the illusion of transformation. 3SF treats this *"maturity mirage"* as a signal, not a success, guiding leaders to inspect how intent, trust, and accountability truly manifest in action.

Principles

3SF is grounded in a set of **delivery principles** – systemic behaviors that connect context, structure, and trust.

They are not rules to enforce but **lenses for decision-making** that preserve alignment and flow under change.

Core Principles

| Principle | Meaning |
|--|---|
| Context before Method | Every process, tool, or practice must serve the context, not the other way around. |
| Flow before Speed | Predictable progress matters more than motion without direction. |
| Outcome before Output | Value is defined by impact, not activity. |
| Trust before Control | Alignment and autonomy are stronger than oversight; trust is earned through transparent flow and proven competence. |
| Learning before Blame | Every issue is a feedback signal, not a failure of character. |
| Shared Accountability | Responsibility for value and quality extends across client and vendor boundaries. |
| Transparency Enables Adaptation | Information symmetry is the foundation of trust and continuous improvement. |
| Balance over Rigidity | Sustainable delivery emerges from equilibrium between structure and flexibility. |

Principles in Action

Each principle represents a **systemic antidote** to common failure patterns:

| Failure Pattern | Counteracting Principle |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Fragmented delivery and unclear ownership | Context before Method |
| Reactive decision-making | Flow before Speed |
| Feature-driven planning without impact assessment | Outcome before Output |
| Micromanagement and escalation culture | Trust before Control |
| Fear of retrospectives or feedback | Learning before Blame |
| Siloed goals between client and vendor | Shared Accountability |
| Information asymmetry or selective reporting | Transparency Enables Adaptation |
| Over-reliance on rigid processes | Balance over Rigidity |

Principles Under Pressure

Principles do not operate in isolation — real delivery systems expose **tensions between them**.

For example, “*Outcome before Output*” may conflict with “*Trust before Control*” in regulated environments that demand auditable processes.

In such cases, 3SF prioritizes principles hierarchically:

Context → Alignment → Flow → Learning

When conflicts arise, decisions should return to higher-order principles:

- **Context** defines boundaries.
- **Alignment** ensures coherence.
- **Flow** maintains momentum.
- **Learning** preserves adaptability.

By making these trade-offs explicit, teams prevent principle collision from devolving into politics or paralysis.

Beliefs

3SF operates from a set of shared beliefs — the **cultural DNA** that supports system maturity.

| Belief | Description |
|--|---|
| People build systems, not processes. | No framework compensates for missing trust or unclear purpose. |
| Clarity enables autonomy. | When everyone understands why, they can decide how. |
| Collaboration scales faster than control. | Distributed trust accelerates adaptation and decision speed. |
| Transparency multiplies learning. | Open systems self-correct faster than closed ones. |
| Every failure is data. | Problems are feedback — essential to evolution, not obstacles to avoid. |

Beliefs are also the **first layer to erode under pressure** — often replaced by performance metrics or process compliance.

3SF uses reflective rituals and maturity assessments to **surface this erosion early**, turning it into learning rather than cultural decay.

Systemic Balance

Vision, Principles, and Beliefs form the **human foundation** of 3SF.

They sustain coherence when context shifts and prevent the framework from becoming a set of mechanical practices.

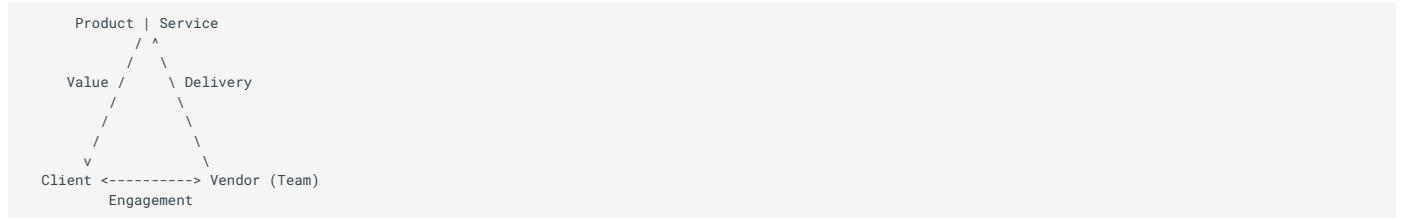
When one element dominates – **vision without principles**, or **principles without belief** – coherence breaks, and the system reverts to control.

Together, they define the **why, how, and who** behind every 3SF decision.

3-in-3 Model

The 3-in-3 Model

The **3-in-3 Model** defines the entire delivery ecosystem as a system of three entities – **Client**, **Vendor (Team)**, and **Product / Service** – connected by three relationships: **Engagement**, **Delivery**, and **Value**.



Each side of the triangle represents a vital relationship that must evolve for sustained delivery success.

When any side becomes weak or unbalanced, the system loses integrity – resulting in friction, rework, or loss of trust.

The Three Relationship Lines

1. Engagement – *Client ↔ Vendor*

Defines the **working relationship and trust** between those who need the solution and those who build it. It determines how decisions are made, how transparency is maintained, and how collaboration scales.

Healthy Engagement enables:

- Shared understanding of goals and constraints.
- Clear governance, communication cadence, and risk ownership.
- Trust that empowers autonomy and reduces friction.

When weak:

- Misaligned expectations or conflicting priorities.
- Reactive communication, scope disputes, and politics.
- “Us vs Them” behavior that blocks collaboration.

2. Delivery – *Vendor ↔ Product / Service*

Defines the **execution system** that transforms ideas into working outcomes.

It represents the vendor team’s capability, flow, and technical integrity.

Healthy Delivery enables:

- Predictable progress and measurable quality.
- Architecture and engineering aligned with product intent.
- Continuous feedback between design, build, and validation.

When weak:

- Over- or under-engineering due to unclear direction.
- Hand-offs that break accountability.
- Quality or automation gaps that erode trust.

3. Value – Product / Service ↔ Client

Defines the **outcome connection** – how the work contributes to business goals and user needs.

Healthy Value enables:

- Clear problem–solution alignment.
- Defined success metrics and value validation.
- Regular learning loops between users, client, and team.

When weak:

- Delivered features without measurable outcomes.
- Lack of user validation or impact tracking.
- Value assumptions never revisited post-release.

The 3-in-3 Dynamic

The triangle functions as a **system of balance and tension**:

- **Engagement** builds alignment and trust.
- **Delivery** ensures capability and flow.
- **Value** validates outcomes and relevance.

When one side strengthens, the others benefit:

- Strong Engagement improves Delivery coordination.
- Reliable Delivery builds confidence and strengthens Engagement.
- Proven Value reinforces both partnership and autonomy.

3SF ensures that every decision across the SDLC protects this systemic equilibrium.

When the Triangle Collapses

If any relationship line weakens, the 3-in-3 system contracts – often reverting to a transactional pattern.

For example, when the **Value** connection breaks (no client product ownership or user insight), Delivery continues but meaning is lost.

When **Engagement** fails, trust erodes and coordination turns contractual.

These imbalances signal a system collapse, not a team failure – recovery begins by restoring the missing relationship, not by adding more process.

Summary

The **3-in-3 Model** represents *what the system is*:

a triangle of **Client**, **Vendor**, and **Product** connected through **Engagement**, **Delivery**, and **Value** lines.

3-in-3 Model Maturity

Shared Responsibility & Relationship Maturity

Client and Vendor maturity grow **together** through progressive collaboration and shared ownership of decisions.

This maturity expresses how responsibility, trust, and autonomy evolve between both sides.

| Maturity Level | Client Focus | Team Focus | Shared Responsibility |
|------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Transactional Trust | Provides requirements and approvals. | Acts as Trusted Executor – follows plan, ensures quality within scope. | Defined by contracts and control; limited feedback. |
| Aligned Autonomy | Frames outcomes, clarifies success measures. | Becomes Autonomous in Execution – self-manages within agreed direction. | Alignment grows through transparency and predictable delivery. |
| Shared Ownership | Owns vision and intent, participates in decision shaping. | Owns Shaping and Execution – proposes options and trade-offs. | Decisions become co-created; priorities discussed openly. |
| Strategic Partnership | Entrusts business risk and direction. | Co-defines and Co-navigates Path – contributes to vision and strategy. | Full partnership; joint accountability for outcomes and value. |

Progression along this curve is gradual and reversible – it must be earned through reliability, openness, and continuous feedback.

Assessing Relationship Maturity

In 3SF, relationship maturity is measured not by duration but by **quality of collaboration** across three relationship lines:

1. **Engagement (Client + Vendor)**: Trust, transparency, and clarity of collaboration.
2. **Delivery (Team + Delivery)**: Capability, agility, and self-management in achieving goals.
3. **Value (Product + Client)**: Alignment of product outcomes with real business impact.

Each can be evaluated as:

- **Reactive → Managed → Proactive**, or
- **Transactional → Aligned Autonomy → Strategic Partnership**, depending on project depth.

Tools such as the *3-in-3 Maturity Self-Assessment* help teams reflect on their current and target levels in each dimension.

Why Relationship Maturity Matters

Traditional SDLC frameworks assume delivery success depends solely on process quality.

In client–vendor environments, **relationship quality is equally structural**.

A technically correct system can still fail when:

- Governance is one-sided or unclear.
- Communication is filtered or delayed.
- Outcomes are validated separately by each side.

3SF closes this gap by embedding **dual accountability** and **shared responsibility** – ensuring that both client and vendor evolve together toward aligned autonomy and partnership.

When Maturity Stalls

Relationship maturity can regress when reliability or transparency erode.

Common signals include defensive communication, parallel decision-making, or focus on protecting scope instead of outcomes.

Such reversals do not mean failure – they reveal where trust and accountability need reinforcement.

3SF treats these moments as diagnostic opportunities to restore balance rather than assign blame.

Summary

The **Relationship Maturity Model** represents *how the system grows* –

a trajectory from **Transactional** to **Strategic Partnership**, embedded in how collaboration, trust, and shared ownership evolve over time.

Together, they make the 3-in-3 ecosystem a **living model of partnership evolution**, ensuring that as the product matures, so does the relationship that builds it.

SDLC Stages

Overview

The **3SF SDLC Stages** define the full flow of software product delivery as a **continuous system of understanding, creation, validation, and improvement**.

They describe *how value moves through the system* – from the first discovery of a problem to the ongoing evolution of the solution.

Each stage represents a distinct purpose but connects through feedback loops, ensuring learning never stops and every delivery cycle strengthens both product and partnership maturity.

The Seven SDLC Stages

| Stage | Purpose | Outcome |
|-----------------|---|--|
| Discover | Understand the problem, align on goals, and explore solution directions with stakeholders. | A validated understanding of the problem space and desired outcomes. |
| Shape | Define the product scope, architecture vision, and delivery feasibility based on real constraints. | A feasible and outcome-aligned delivery plan with known assumptions and trade-offs. |
| Build | Design, develop, and integrate software components with automation and quality at the core. | A working, testable product increment that demonstrates tangible progress and reliability. |
| Validate | Test functionality, performance, usability, and security to ensure the solution meets expectations. | Verified confidence that the product delivers the intended experience and quality. |
| Release | Package, approve, and deploy the solution for users through reliable and repeatable pipelines. | A stable release available to users with traceable approvals and predictable deployment. |
| Run | Monitor and support the live system, ensuring reliability, scalability, and fast issue resolution. | Reliable operations, user satisfaction, and data-driven visibility of system health. |
| Evolve | Learn from outcomes and feedback to continuously improve product, process, and team effectiveness. | Actionable insights leading to better products, stronger relationships, and organizational learning. |

SDLC as a System of Flow and Learning

The stages form an *adaptive flow* of intent, delivery, and feedback:

Discover → Shape → Build → Validate → Release → Run → Evolve ↗

- **Discover & Shape** establish clarity and feasibility before investment.
- **Build, Validate, and Release** create and deliver tangible value.
- **Run & Evolve** close the learning loop, informing future discovery.

Each iteration through the loop increases **delivery maturity** and **relationship trust**, evolving both the system and the collaboration that sustains it.

Relationship-Aware SDLC

Each SDLC stage also represents a **relationship checkpoint** between Client and Vendor — defining how shared responsibility matures as delivery progresses.

| Stage | Relationship Focus | Shared Ownership Example |
|-----------------|--|---|
| Discover | Transparency and alignment on problem space. | Joint definition of goals, assumptions, and success criteria. |
| Shape | Trust and outcome-based planning. | Co-design of roadmap, architecture, and estimation. |
| Build | Autonomy and visibility in execution. | Shared sprint reviews and delivery metrics. |
| Validate | Confidence and mutual accountability. | Joint acceptance and performance evaluation. |
| Release | Predictable and transparent delivery. | Shared approval and communication to users. |
| Run | Stability and operational trust. | Shared monitoring dashboards and escalation paths. |
| Evolve | Partnership and learning continuity. | Joint retrospectives and improvement backlogs. |

Relationship maturity increases as both organizations learn to rely on one another for clarity, delivery, and learning — turning the SDLC into a **partnership growth mechanism**, not just a technical lifecycle.

Flow Characteristics Across the SDLC

| Characteristic | Early Phases (Discover-Shape) | Middle Phases (Build-Validate-Release) | Late Phases (Run-Evolve) |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| Focus | Alignment and feasibility | Execution and verification | Continuity and learning |
| Feedback Loops | Qualitative (people, intent) | Quantitative (metrics, performance) | Systemic (value, outcome) |
| Risk Profile | High uncertainty | Managed risk | Controlled adaptation |
| Leadership Mode | Facilitative and consultative | Operational and technical | Strategic and reflective |
| Ownership Distribution | Client-driven collaboration | Vendor-led autonomy | Shared strategic renewal |

Run vs Evolve: Stability vs Learning

In many organizations, the **Run** phase is mistaken for the end of delivery — focused purely on uptime, cost control, and SLA adherence. While stability is vital, stopping there creates a **false plateau of success** where no new learning enters the system.

The **Evolve** phase exists to prevent that stagnation.

Its metrics differ from Run:

- Run measures reliability (uptime, MTTR, operational cost).
- Evolve measures adaptability (validated learning, feature adoption, customer feedback integration).

When evolution is skipped, operational excellence turns brittle — systems stay available but stop improving.

A mature delivery culture measures both: **Run for stability, Evolve for growth**.

Using the SDLC Stages

The SDLC Stages act as a **map, not a prescription**.

Each project can emphasize different stages depending on context – for example:

- In R&D or early product discovery, *Discover* and *Shape* dominate.
- In modernization or migration work, *Build*, *Validate*, and *Release* take the lead.
- In product sustainment, *Run* and *Evolve* become the main engines of improvement.

3SF's value lies in enabling **conscious adaptation** – choosing how deep each stage goes based on commercial, organizational, and technical realities.

Summary

- The SDLC Stages define **how value flows** through seven interconnected phases.
- Each stage contributes both to **delivery outcomes** and **relationship maturity**.
- 3SF turns the SDLC into a **system of alignment, flow, and feedback** – ensuring that what we build is valuable, feasible, and continuously improving.

SDLC Stages Maturity

Purpose

The **SDLC Stages Maturity** model describes how delivery systems evolve in capability, alignment, and learning across the seven SDLC stages. It reflects how a project grows from *controlled execution* to *adaptive partnership* — connecting delivery performance to relationship trust.

Each SDLC stage not only defines what to do but also how **maturely** it can be done:

- **Structurally**, by having clarity and consistency.
- **Operationally**, by enabling flow and feedback.
- **Relationally**, by building trust and shared responsibility.

Maturity Levels Across the SDLC

| Level | Name | System Characteristics | Collaboration Behavior |
|-------------------------|---|---|------------------------|
| 1. Controlled Execution | Reactive and rule-bound. Processes exist but are applied rigidly; success depends on individuals. | Client controls; vendor executes. Communication transactional and status-based. | |
| 2. Coordinated Flow | Processes repeatable and partly adaptive. Feedback loops appear, but learning not yet systematic. | Client and vendor coordinate. Transparency increases, autonomy conditional. | |
| 3. Empowered Delivery | Delivery system self-regulating; quality and risk controlled by teams. | Teams own execution; governance focuses on outcomes. Collaboration proactive. | |
| 4. Adaptive Partnership | System continuously learns and adapts; governance and delivery fully integrated. | Client and vendor co-own outcomes, plan jointly, and innovate together. | |

Each stage can operate at a different maturity level — for example, *Build* may perform at Level 3 while *Evolve* remains at Level 2. The goal is not uniform maturity, but **balance** between flow, governance, and relationship depth.

SDLC Stage Maturity Map

| SDLC Stage | Stage Purpose | Minimum → Target Maturity | Client Role | Vendor / Team Role | Shared Focus |
|------------|---|--|---|--|--|
| Discover | Understand the problem, align on goals, explore solution directions. | Transactional → Aligned Autonomy | Provides context, goals, and stakeholder access. | Facilitates discovery workshops, defines problem space, validates insights. | Shared understanding of goals, assumptions, and constraints. |
| Shape | Define product scope, architecture vision, and delivery feasibility. | Aligned Autonomy → Shared Ownership | Frames outcomes and priorities. | Co-creates solution architecture, estimates feasibility, defines delivery model. | Outcome-based planning and governance clarity. |
| Build | Design, develop, and integrate components with automation and quality at the core. | Shared Ownership → Strategic Partnership | Owns vision and validates increments. | Delivers autonomously with transparency and technical excellence. | Continuous feedback, visibility, and trust in progress. |
| Validate | Test functionality, performance, usability, and security. | Shared Ownership → Strategic Partnership | Participates in acceptance testing and user validation. | Integrates quality and measurement practices. | Mutual accountability for outcomes and experience. |
| Release | Package, approve, and deploy through reliable pipelines. | Strategic Partnership (sustained) | Approves and communicates business impact. | Operates reliable CI/CD and rollout procedures. | Shared decision on readiness and release timing. |
| Run | Monitor and support the live system. | Strategic Partnership → Aligned Renewal | Defines SLAs and improvement goals. | Manages operations and transparency. | Joint visibility of system health and user experience. |
| Evolve | Learn from outcomes and feedback to improve product, process, and team effectiveness. | Aligned Renewal → Strategic Partnership | Sponsors roadmap and innovation. | Leads improvement cycles, proposes experiments. | Continuous learning, data-driven value refinement. |

Maturity across the SDLC reflects **how well flow, accountability, and learning are synchronized**.

Gaps between stages reveal where governance or communication must adapt.

Structural, Operational, and Relational Dimensions

| Dimension | Definition | Observable Indicators |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Structural Maturity | Clarity of process, ownership, and decision boundaries. | Roles and responsibilities are defined, governance cadence is predictable. |
| Operational Maturity | Effectiveness of practices and flow in maintaining stability and quality. | Stable velocity, working automation, consistent delivery predictability. |
| Relational Maturity | Quality of collaboration and transparency between Client and Vendor. | Trust indicators, open communication, joint problem-solving behaviors. |

The **Structural** dimension establishes order,
the **Operational** dimension sustains flow,
and the **Relational** dimension drives long-term value.

Assessing SDLC Stage Maturity

Maturity can be assessed per stage or holistically through:

- **RAC (Rule Audit Checklist)**: Structural and operational rule compliance.
- **Feedback Indicators**: Lead time, quality metrics, risk signals.
- **Relationship Health**: Trust and alignment feedback between Client and Vendor.

Each stage's maturity score feeds into a *delivery health profile* that highlights which capabilities enable or block overall system flow.

When Maturity Plateaus

Some stages evolve faster than others – for example, Build may reach high autonomy while Shape or Run remains reactive. Such asymmetry often indicates systemic bottlenecks, not team incompetence. 3SF views these plateaus as signals to inspect **interfaces between stages** – where ownership, feedback, or governance may still operate transactionally.

Summary

- SDLC Stages Maturity connects **delivery quality** with **relationship growth**.
- Each stage advances from controlled execution to adaptive partnership.
- Balance across structural, operational, and relational dimensions ensures the system remains stable and learning-driven.
- Maturity is not about perfection – it's about **adaptive coherence**: the ability to stay aligned while continuously improving.

SDLC Practices

Overview

The **SDLC Practices** represent six cross-cutting disciplines that sustain quality, predictability, and learning throughout all stages of delivery. Each practice complements the others – forming the behavioral and technical foundation of a reliable delivery system.

These practices act as the *horizontal layer* of the 3SF – spanning all SDLC Stages (Discover → Evolve) to ensure alignment, quality, and continuous improvement.

The Six SDLC Practices

| Practice | Definition | Core Focus |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Product Thinking | We co-create clarity and direction with clients by defining goals, value, and outcomes before committing to delivery. | Shared understanding of <i>why</i> we build. |
| Architecture & Design | We shape scalable, secure, and adaptable solutions by aligning technical design with product intent and constraints. | Fit-for-purpose design and feasibility. |
| Engineering & Quality | We build maintainable, high-quality software through craftsmanship, automation, and shared responsibility. | Consistency, reliability, and craftsmanship. |
| DevOps & Delivery | We enable fast, safe, and repeatable delivery by integrating automation, environments, and monitoring from day one. | Speed and stability through automation and visibility. |
| Governance & Risk | We manage complexity and protect value by embedding compliance, security, and accountability into every step. | Transparency, predictability, and responsibility. |
| Feedback & Learning | We continuously improve by listening to signals from users, systems, and teams – turning insight into better outcomes. | Growth, reflection, and adaptability. |

Practices as the Delivery Backbone

These practices work across all SDLC Stages – ensuring continuity from discovery to sustainment.

They **stabilize delivery flow** by balancing speed, quality, and adaptability.

- **Product Thinking** brings clarity of purpose.
- **Architecture & Design** ensures technical feasibility.
- **Engineering & Quality** secures craftsmanship and maintainability.
- **DevOps & Delivery** provides automation and reliability.
- **Governance & Risk** maintains control without bureaucracy.
- **Feedback & Learning** closes loops between product, people, and outcomes.

Together, they form the **delivery backbone** of 3SF – connecting intent (why), structure (how), and learning (what next).

Practices Across SDLC Stages

Each SDLC Practice manifests differently depending on the stage of delivery.

The table below shows how every practice supports the system throughout its flow.

| Stage → | Discover | Shape | Build | Validate | Release | Run |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|---|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Product Thinking | Define goals, outcomes, and user needs. | Align scope and priorities with value. | Keep user outcomes visible during development. | Validate value and user satisfaction. | Communicate impact to stakeholders. | Monitor and adapt. |
| Architecture & Design | Explore high-level approaches and constraints. | Define architecture vision and feasibility. | Implement patterns and integrations. | Validate non-functional requirements. | Harden deployment architecture. | Ensure stability and reliability. |
| Engineering & Quality | Evaluate feasibility and risks. | Prepare automation and QA strategy. | Build with test coverage and code quality. | Run functional and security tests. | Stabilize and fix regressions. | Handle bugs and performance issues. |
| DevOps & Delivery | Define automation vision and environments. | Configure pipelines and CI/CD baselines. | Automate builds and integration. | Integrate testing and staging. | Execute deployments and rollback. | Monitor infrastructure and uptime. |
| Governance & Risk | Define governance and decision cadence. | Validate feasibility vs. budget and compliance. | Track progress and scope change. | Ensure acceptance and compliance sign-offs. | Control approvals and audits. | Manage operational risk. |
| Feedback & Learning | Capture assumptions and unknowns. | Validate feasibility and stakeholder feedback. | Collect delivery metrics for improvement. | Measure outcomes and quality. | Gather user feedback post-release. | Analyze user feedback and usage data. |

This table visualizes how practices **connect horizontally** across the lifecycle, while SDLC Stages define the **vertical flow** of value.

Mature systems maintain consistency of these practices even when the project emphasis shifts between stages.

Practice Interdependence

No single practice guarantees success; the system works when all are balanced:

| When practice X is weak... | Resulting system effect |
|----------------------------|---|
| Product Thinking | Misaligned priorities, wasted effort. |
| Architecture & Design | Fragile or over-engineered solutions. |
| Engineering & Quality | Unpredictable releases, rework cycles. |
| DevOps & Delivery | Manual bottlenecks, low feedback speed. |
| Governance & Risk | Unclear accountability, unmanaged debt. |
| Feedback & Learning | Stagnation and repeated mistakes. |

A mature team develops *healthy tension* among practices – trading off intentionally instead of neglecting one dimension.

When Practices Compete

In practice, organizations often over-optimize a single discipline — seeking efficiency, control, or speed at the expense of balance.

Common patterns include:

- **DevOps & Delivery** dominating Engineering & Quality, resulting in automated deployment of unstable code.
- **Governance & Risk** overshadowing Product Thinking, leading to compliance without innovation.
- **Architecture & Design** overemphasized early, creating rigidity that slows later adaptation.

Such competition signals **systemic imbalance**, not bad intent.

The corrective action is to revisit the shared outcomes and ensure every practice still serves the product's purpose, not its own metrics.

Practices as a Foundation for Maturity

As projects evolve, each practice demonstrates maturity through visible behaviors:

| Practice | Early Maturity Behavior | Advanced Maturity Behavior |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Product Thinking | Feature focus, limited validation. | Outcome focus, evidence-based decisions. |
| Architecture & Design | Ad-hoc patterns, reactive fixes. | Intentional evolution, transparent trade-offs. |
| Engineering & Quality | Manual testing, quality owned by QA. | Shared quality ownership, automation first. |
| DevOps & Delivery | Manual deployments, unstable environments. | Full CI/CD automation, continuous observability. |
| Governance & Risk | Escalation-based control, unclear roles. | Embedded governance, proactive risk sharing. |
| Feedback & Learning | Occasional retrospectives. | Continuous data-driven learning loops. |

These behaviors become inputs to the **RAC** and **CRC**, ensuring maturity assessments reflect *system reality* — not just process compliance.

Summary

- SDLC Practices are the **operating disciplines** that make each stage reliable and adaptive.
- The **Stages–Practices Matrix** shows how these disciplines interact through the lifecycle, ensuring flow and stability.
- Balanced practices ensure that progress is **fast, visible, and sustainable**.
- Together, they form the continuous backbone of the **3SF delivery system**, enabling predictable execution and continuous learning.

SDLC Practices Maturity

Purpose

The **SDLC Practices Maturity** model describes how each of the six practices develops from isolated effort to an integrated discipline that sustains the entire SDLC system.

It provides a lens for evaluating delivery integrity and learning capability across projects, portfolios, or teams.

Practice Maturity Levels

| Level | Description | Behavioral Characteristics |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1. Foundational Awareness | Practice exists but is inconsistent or reactive. | Knowledge varies by person; success depends on heroics; quality unstable. |
| 2. Defined and Repeatable | Practice has structure and shared understanding. | Common templates, predictable routines, partial feedback usage. |
| 3. Embedded and Measurable | Practice embedded in day-to-day delivery; outcomes tracked. | Teams self-correct using data; governance observes trends, not incidents. |
| 4. Adaptive and Evolving | Practice continuously improves through feedback and innovation. | Cross-practice learning loops; teams experiment and adjust intentionally. |

A project or team can mature unevenly – for example, strong in **Engineering & Quality (L3)** but weak in **Governance & Risk (L1)**.

The goal is not uniformity but **functional balance**.

Maturity by Practice

| Practice | Early Maturity Behavior | Advanced Maturity Behavior | Indicators of Growth |
|----------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Product Thinking | Focus on features and deadlines; limited validation of user value. | Focus on measurable outcomes; hypotheses validated through feedback. | Documented goals, value metrics, user feedback cycles. |
| Architecture & Design | Decisions implicit or reactive; tech debt grows unnoticed. | Design evolves intentionally; decisions made transparently with trade-offs visible. | Architecture review cadence, traceability of technical rationale. |
| Engineering & Quality | Manual testing; fragmented ownership of quality. | Quality automated and shared; engineering metrics drive improvement. | Test coverage, defect trends, build stability. |
| DevOps & Delivery | Manual deployments, unreliable environments. | Automated pipelines, stable environments, real-time observability. | Deployment frequency, MTTR, lead time for changes. |
| Governance & Risk | Bureaucratic or absent governance; unclear accountability. | Embedded governance with lightweight controls and shared responsibility. | Decision logs, compliance checks, escalation lead time. |
| Feedback & Learning | Retrospectives rare; insights not tracked. | Continuous feedback loops inform roadmap and process design. | Improvement actions tracked and completed, system metrics evolve. |

Cross-Practice Synergy

Maturity in one practice reinforces others:

| If this practice matures... | It strengthens... | By... |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Product Thinking | Architecture & Design | Aligning solution design with user value. |
| Engineering & Quality | DevOps & Delivery | Creating reliable automation and faster feedback. |
| Governance & Risk | All others | Ensuring decisions remain transparent and aligned. |
| Feedback & Learning | The entire SDLC System | Turning insights into next-cycle improvements. |

High-performing teams reach **cross-practice coherence**, where decisions made in one discipline positively impact all others.

When Maturity Inverts

Sometimes, a practice advances faster than its supporting ecosystem – for example, sophisticated DevOps automation in a project lacking Product Thinking or Governance clarity.

This **maturity inversion** can produce friction: faster delivery of unclear value, or automation that amplifies misaligned priorities.

3SF treats these cases as alignment gaps, not regressions – the goal is to synchronize maturity across disciplines rather than maximize any one in isolation.

Assessing Practice Maturity

Assessment combines **qualitative feedback** (behaviors, attitudes) and **quantitative indicators** (metrics, cycle data):

- **RAC linkage:** Stable Rules (R1–R12) mapped to practice maturity signals.
- **CRC linkage:** Contextual archetypes define target maturity profiles for each practice under different project types.
- **Self-assessment cadence:** Quarterly reflection on practice evolution per project or team.

Outputs form a **Practice Maturity Radar**, helping visualize strengths, gaps, and next improvement actions.

Summary

- SDLC Practices Maturity defines *how deeply* each discipline shapes delivery success.
- Practices evolve from awareness to adaptability, reinforcing one another.
- Balanced maturity across practices ensures the SDLC system is **self-correcting, transparent, and learning-oriented**.
- Continuous improvement of practices equals sustained organizational resilience.

SDLC Stage Dimensions

Purpose

The **SDLC Stage Dimensions** define the configurable decision spaces within each stage of delivery.

They help Project Leads, Product Managers, and Architects **diagnose, design, and adjust** how each SDLC Stage operates in context – aligning delivery mechanics with project realities.

Each dimension represents a set of *variables* that influence how work flows through the system.

By understanding and tuning these dimensions, teams can balance speed, quality, and adaptability while maintaining system integrity.

What Stage Dimensions Are

A **Stage Dimension** is a lens for examining *how a stage is executed* – not *what activities occur* within it.

Each dimension captures a set of interdependent conditions such as scope definition, estimation strategy, feedback loops, or risk handling.

Dimensions can be viewed as **levers**:

- When pulled in one direction, they improve stability or predictability.
- When pulled in another, they enable adaptability or speed.

The right balance depends on context, constraints, and maturity.

The Role of Dimensions in 3SF

Within the 3SF structure:

| Layer | Purpose |
|------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Define what happens across the lifecycle. |
| SDLC Practices | Define how quality and flow are sustained across all stages. |
| SDLC Stage Dimensions | Define <i>how each stage behaves</i> – the adjustable parameters and decision patterns. |

Dimensions translate abstract principles (like “governance clarity” or “learning loops”) into **practical, observable variables** that can be inspected or tuned.

They also serve as the **bridge between Contextual Drivers (CDL)** and **Stable Rules (SRL)** – the place where external conditions meet internal system design.

Dimension Categories

Each stage has its own unique decision areas, but all Stage Dimensions fall under **five universal categories** that describe different aspects of delivery configuration:

| Category | Definition | Typical Examples |
|--|--|---|
| Strategic Alignment | Ensures that stage activities connect to the project's purpose, value, and goals. | Vision clarity, outcome definition, success metrics. |
| Planning & Flow | Defines how work is scoped, estimated, sequenced, and tracked. | Backlog depth, WIP limits, cadence of planning. |
| Collaboration & Communication | Governs information flow, stakeholder involvement, and decision-making transparency. | RACI, ceremony design, escalation paths. |
| Quality & Risk Management | Defines how uncertainty, testing, and verification are handled within the stage. | Definition of done, testing scope, approval criteria. |
| Learning & Adaptation | Enables reflection, improvement, and responsiveness to change. | Feedback cadence, review structure, continuous improvement loops. |

These categories apply to **every stage**, but the specific decisions and trade-offs within each depend on stage purpose and context.

Example: How Dimensions Interconnect

For instance, in the **Shape** stage:

- *Strategic Alignment* defines outcomes and prioritization.
- *Planning & Flow* translates them into epics and estimates.
- *Collaboration* defines how client and vendor make trade-offs.
- *Quality & Risk* determines acceptance conditions and architectural feasibility.
- *Learning & Adaptation* captures feedback from early discovery or prototypes.

When these dimensions align, Shape provides a stable foundation for Build.

When they misalign, Build inherits ambiguity, rework, and unvalidated assumptions.

Why Dimensions Matter

Without dimensions, delivery tuning becomes guesswork.

Projects often fail not because teams lack competence, but because their stages are configured incorrectly for the environment.

Common failure modes:

- Discovery too narrow → Shape inherits false assumptions.
- Build too rigid → Validation discovers issues too late.
- Run disconnected from Learn → No systemic improvement.

Stage Dimensions bring **diagnostic clarity** – enabling teams to identify not only *what's broken*, but *why* it behaves that way.

Relationship to Maturity

Maturity across the SDLC is visible through the **health of Stage Dimensions**:

- *Immature* stages show fragmented, reactive, or unowned dimensions.
- *Mature* stages show integrated, stable, and continuously improving dimensions.

When assessing maturity through the **RAC** or **CRC**, each rule and contextual archetype ultimately maps to one or more Stage Dimensions. For example:

- **Stable Rule R3 – “Decisions are transparent and reversible”** → affects Collaboration and Quality dimensions.
- **Contextual Driver – “Fixed bid contract”** → constrains Planning & Flow, influencing estimation and governance.

Applying Stage Dimensions

Use Stage Dimensions for:

1. **Design:** Before execution, define the configuration per stage (e.g., estimation depth, backlog readiness, governance model).
2. **Assessment:** During delivery, inspect dimension health through metrics, signals, and team reflection.
3. **Adaptation:** After retrospectives or milestones, adjust dimension design to improve flow and maturity.

Teams can document stage dimensions in simple templates or dashboards – linking them to risks, metrics, and improvement actions.

When Dimensions Become Bureaucracy

Stage Dimensions are diagnostic lenses – not checklists to be filled or enforced.

A common failure pattern is **over-engineering**: documenting every parameter without actually improving flow or clarity.

When dimensions turn into reporting artifacts, they lose their adaptive power.

The goal is not to manage the framework – it is to manage the system it describes.

Structure of Stage Dimension Files

Each stage has a dedicated section detailing:

- The stage's **core purpose and outcomes**.
- Its **dimension breakdown** under the five categories.
- Typical **configuration options, failure patterns, and improvement strategies**.

| Stage | Purpose |
|--------------|---|
| Discover | How to frame problems and align understanding before shaping. |
| Shape | How to define scope, feasibility, and delivery models. |
| Build | How to structure flow, engineering quality, and visibility. |
| Validate | How to manage verification, acceptance, and joint confidence. |
| Release | How to manage approvals, risk, and deployment readiness. |
| Run & Evolve | How to sustain and improve systems post-launch. |

Each file builds upon this overview, creating a **consistent pattern** that allows readers to trace the evolution of alignment, flow, and learning across the SDLC.

Summary

- **SDLC Stage Dimensions** describe how each stage functions in context – the levers and trade-offs teams must balance.
- They provide **diagnostic visibility** and **design flexibility**, connecting strategy, delivery, and governance.
- Dimensions bridge contextual forces (CDL) and systemic stability (SRL), serving as the *operational DNA* of the 3SF delivery system.
- Mastering dimension design is the key to transforming projects from reactive execution into adaptive, learning systems.

SDLC Stage Dimensions – Discover

Purpose

The **Discover Stage** establishes the foundation for the entire delivery system.

Its goal is to **understand the problem**, align stakeholders on goals, and explore possible solution directions before committing to execution.

Discovery defines *what success means, for whom, and why*.

It transforms assumptions into shared understanding — reducing uncertainty, building trust, and shaping realistic next-stage decisions (Shape, Build).

When done well, Discover prevents most downstream delivery issues: unclear scope, missing validation, misaligned expectations, and low confidence in estimates.

Core Outcomes

| Outcome | Description |
|------------------------------|---|
| Clarity of Purpose | A shared understanding of the problem, goals, and expected value. |
| Context Map | Documented business, user, and technical context (constraints, systems, dependencies). |
| Validated Assumptions | Key unknowns identified and tested via interviews, prototypes, or data. |
| Discovery Artifacts | Early deliverables such as user journeys, high-level architecture options, and estimation boundaries. |
| Stakeholder Alignment | Agreement on next steps, ownership, and engagement model for the Shape stage. |

Discovery Dimensions

1. Strategic Alignment

Defines how well the problem and goals are understood and connected to business outcomes.

| Aspect | Low Maturity (Reactive) | High Maturity (Proactive) |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Problem Definition | Vague, solution-driven (“we need an app”). | Clearly defined, measurable business problem. |
| Goal Alignment | Conflicting stakeholder objectives. | Shared outcomes defined in measurable terms. |
| Value Hypothesis | Assumed benefits, no validation. | Explicit value model with metrics and dependencies. |
| User Understanding | Minimal or second-hand knowledge. | Direct discovery with users, empathy-based insights. |

Improvement Strategies

- Use *Product Thinking* workshops to define outcomes and KPIs.
- Apply *Value Mapping* and *Wardley Mapping* to connect goals and capabilities.
- Ensure goals are validated with both business and delivery stakeholders.

2. Planning & Flow

Defines how discovery activities are structured, timeboxed, and prioritized.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-----------------------------|--|--|
| Discovery Approach | Unstructured discussions or scattered workshops. | Timeboxed discovery plan with clear goals and outputs. |
| Work Sequencing | Parallel ideation without validation. | Incremental exploration: learn → converge → define. |
| Estimation Readiness | Estimation done without validated scope. | Feasibility and complexity assessed through validated artifacts. |
| Decision Cadence | Decisions deferred or made ad hoc. | Defined checkpoints with documented assumptions. |

Improvement Strategies

- Apply *Double Diamond* or *Dual Track* discovery frameworks.
- Visualize discovery backlog and outcomes (e.g., Notion, Miro, Jira).
- Include estimation boundaries early – treat estimates as hypotheses.

3. Collaboration & Communication

Defines how teams, clients, and stakeholders interact to co-create understanding.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Stakeholder Engagement | Sporadic meetings, information silos. | Inclusive workshops, active participation from both sides. |
| Roles & Responsibility | Undefined – discovery “owned” by one party. | Shared accountability between Client and Vendor teams. |
| Communication Cadence | Irregular, reactive. | Scheduled sessions with outcomes shared transparently. |
| Decision Logging | Verbal agreements only. | Structured documentation (decisions, rationale, next actions). |

Improvement Strategies

- Establish *Engagement Agreement* – define discovery ownership, cadence, tools.
- Use a shared *Decision Log* or *Discovery Journal*.
- Align technical and product language – reduce translation gaps.

4. Quality & Risk Management

Defines how uncertainty and validation are handled during exploration.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Assumption Management | Risks and unknowns undocumented. | Key assumptions identified, tracked, and tested. |
| Feasibility Validation | Technical feasibility assumed or skipped. | Feasibility validated via quick prototypes or proof-of-concept. |
| Scope Boundaries | Discovery expands uncontrollably. | Clear timebox and prioritization of discovery goals. |
| Risk Sharing | Risks pushed to the next stage. | Risks explicitly shared and mitigation planned jointly. |

Improvement Strategies

- Maintain an *Assumptions Board* (risks, evidence, actions).
- Introduce *Rapid Feasibility Tests* (technical spikes, data validation).
- Use a fixed discovery budget with a prioritized scope to maintain focus.

5. Learning & Adaptation

Defines how feedback is captured and turned into better decisions.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Feedback Loops | None or informal ("we'll figure it out later"). | Frequent validation with stakeholders or users. |
| Knowledge Capture | Insights lost in meeting notes. | Structured summary: what we learned, what changed. |
| Retrospective Practice | Post-discovery review skipped. | Retrospective held to evaluate discovery effectiveness. |
| Transition Readiness | Shape starts with unvalidated backlog. | Clear handover including context, validated artifacts, and assumptions. |

Improvement Strategies

- Document *Discovery Learnings* with impact level and next-step recommendation.
- Run a short *Discovery Retrospective* before Shape.
- Ensure all findings are summarized in a *Discovery Report* template for reuse.

Common Failure Modes

| Failure Mode | Root Cause | Correction |
|--|--|---|
| "We started building too early." | Discovery cut short or skipped. | Enforce discovery exit criteria before Shape begins. |
| "We didn't know this dependency existed." | Missing system or stakeholder mapping. | Include dependency identification as a required discovery artifact. |
| "The client expected X, but we delivered Y." | Goals misaligned or undocumented. | Introduce measurable success metrics and stakeholder review. |
| "Estimates were way off." | Estimation based on unvalidated scope. | Validate assumptions and establish uncertainty range in estimates. |

Over-extending discovery can be as harmful as skipping it — excessive exploration delays learning and erodes stakeholder confidence.

Measuring Discovery Health

Indicators of a healthy Discovery stage:

| Signal | Description |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Stakeholders can articulate the same goal in one sentence. | Alignment and clarity achieved. |
| All key assumptions are documented and validated or prioritized for testing. | Systemic thinking established. |
| Feasibility validated with quick technical or design prototypes. | Confidence increased for Shape. |
| Discovery report reviewed and accepted by both Client and Vendor. | Mutual commitment achieved. |

Quantitative indicators may include:

- % of validated assumptions vs. total identified
- Time spent in Discovery vs. number of unresolved questions
- Confidence score in estimate readiness (self-assessed 1–5 scale)

Discovery and Relationship Maturity

Discovery is where **Transactional Trust** evolves into **Aligned Autonomy**.

Transparency, open communication, and early co-ownership set the tone for the entire engagement.

High-maturity discovery:

- Establishes **shared understanding** instead of deliverables only.
- Builds **trust through visibility**, not control.
- Creates **momentum for partnership** before contractual delivery begins.

Summary

- The **Discover Stage** is about learning, not committing – converting uncertainty into clarity.
- Its five dimensions (Strategic Alignment, Planning & Flow, Collaboration, Quality & Risk, Learning & Adaptation) ensure balanced exploration.
- Discovery maturity is measured by *how well understanding, alignment, and validation are achieved together*.
- A disciplined, collaborative discovery is the single most powerful predictor of downstream delivery success.

SDLC Stage Dimensions – Shape

Purpose

The **Shape Stage** defines how the *vision becomes feasible* – transforming ideas and validated insights from Discovery into a **delivery-ready plan**. It establishes **scope, architecture vision, delivery approach, and feasibility**, aligning all parties on what will be built, how, and under which constraints.

Shape is where **strategy meets execution**.

It converts the “why” and “what” discovered earlier into “how” – preparing teams, stakeholders, and systems for sustainable delivery flow.

When done well, Shape minimizes delivery risk, sets realistic expectations, and becomes the contract of shared understanding between Client and Vendor.

Core Outcomes

| Outcome | Description |
|--|---|
| Delivery Vision | A coherent, outcome-aligned vision that translates business goals into tangible delivery objectives. |
| Scope Definition | A prioritized backlog or roadmap describing what will be built, when, and why. |
| Architecture Vision | A documented target architecture and rationale aligned with scalability, security, and maintainability. |
| Feasibility & Estimation | Validated assumptions, complexity estimates, and resource forecasts. |
| Delivery Model & Governance | Clear engagement model, communication cadence, and decision-making process. |

Shape Dimensions

1. Strategic Alignment

Defines how well Shape connects the validated Discovery findings to actionable scope and measurable outcomes.

| Aspect | Low Maturity (Reactive) | High Maturity (Proactive) |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| Goal Translation | Discovery outputs not reflected in scope. | Goals translated into product outcomes and acceptance metrics. |
| Prioritization Logic | Everything is “must-have.” | Prioritization driven by value, risk, and effort balance. |
| Outcome Traceability | Delivery tasks disconnected from strategic goals. | Each backlog item traces to a defined business outcome. |
| Vision Communication | Technical or business bias dominates. | Shared, human-readable vision understood by all stakeholders. |

Improvement Strategies

- Use VMOSA (Vision, Mission, Objectives, Strategies, Actions) or *Impact Mapping*.
- Apply *Outcome-based Roadmapping* – link objectives to measurable impacts.
- Create a *single-page delivery vision* reviewed jointly with all key stakeholders.

2. Planning & Flow

Defines how scope, estimation, and delivery model are structured to balance feasibility with adaptability.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Scope Definition | Overly detailed or incomplete. | Balanced between high-level themes and well-shaped backlog. |
| Estimation Method | Based on assumptions, not validated data. | Multi-method estimation (PERT, T-shirt sizing, story points) with uncertainty range. |
| Delivery Model Choice | Model dictated by contract or inertia. | Model adapted to context (Fixed-Bid, Time & Material, Co-Delivery). |
| Roadmap Structure | Dates arbitrary, dependencies unclear. | Milestones based on value increments and dependency analysis. |

Improvement Strategies

- Introduce *progressive estimation* – refine scope iteratively.
- Use *Scenario Planning* for budget and timeline alignment.
- Align delivery model choice with Contextual Drivers (commercial, organizational, technical).

3. Collaboration & Communication

Defines how decisions are co-created and communicated between client and vendor roles.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|
| Decision-Making | Centralized, delayed, or ambiguous. | Distributed decisions within defined RACI and escalation paths. |
| Stakeholder Involvement | Limited to approvals. | Stakeholders actively contribute to trade-offs and prioritization. |
| Communication Flow | Channel chaos, undocumented agreements. | Clear communication map, meeting cadences, and shared documentation. |
| Cross-Discipline Integration | Product, design, and engineering operate separately. | Joint shaping sessions, shared artifacts, and synchronized priorities. |

Improvement Strategies

- Define *Governance Cadence* – e.g., weekly sync, bi-weekly steering.
- Maintain a *Shape Log* capturing decisions, rationales, and risks.
- Use *Collaboration Maps* to visualize stakeholder engagement and information flow.

4. Quality & Risk Management

Defines how feasibility, architecture, and delivery risks are identified and controlled before Build starts.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Architecture Vision | Implicit or over-engineered; lacks trade-offs. | Architecture designed collaboratively with rationale and constraints. |
| Feasibility Testing | Feasibility assumed, not validated. | Risk spikes and POCs used to confirm critical assumptions. |
| Technical Debt Awareness | None – “we’ll fix it later.” | Debt potential logged with mitigation options. |
| Definition of Ready | Missing or vague. | Agreed entry criteria for Build with clear acceptance boundaries. |

Improvement Strategies

- Apply *Architecture Decision Records (ADR)* and *Architecture Runway*.
- Create *Feasibility Register* – track technical risk, cost, and decisions.
- Align readiness checklist with Build expectations (DoR, environments, design assets).

5. Learning & Adaptation

Defines how discovery insights, decisions, and risks evolve into an adaptive delivery mindset.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Feedback Integration | Discovery learnings ignored. | Discovery insights explicitly embedded into scope and architecture. |
| Reflection on Trade-offs | Decisions made without review. | Retrospective held to assess shaping quality and stakeholder alignment. |
| Adaptability to Change | Contract or timeline blocks adjustments. | Scope change process defined and integrated into governance. |
| Knowledge Continuity | Handovers inconsistent or undocumented. | Shape artifacts consolidated in accessible, shared repositories. |

Improvement Strategies

- Conduct a *Shape Retrospective* after final sign-off.
- Maintain a *Decision Register* – track what changed, why, and impact.
- Use *Knowledge Handover Packages* (vision, architecture, roadmap) for Build readiness.

Common Failure Modes

| Failure Mode | Root Cause | Correction |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| “We’re shaping while building.” | Discovery incomplete, Shape rushed. | Separate timeboxes and exit criteria for each stage. |
| “The backlog is too vague to start.” | Missing DoR and architecture clarity. | Enforce readiness validation and backlog refinement. |
| “Estimates keep changing.” | Scope or assumptions not validated. | Document estimation assumptions and uncertainty ranges. |
| “Client expects more than planned.” | Value and scope poorly communicated. | Present scope through outcomes, not features; revalidate alignment. |

The illusion of precision – detailed plans built on unvalidated inputs – is a recurring trap. Shape aims for confidence, not certainty.

Measuring Shape Health

| Signal | Description |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Shared delivery vision and roadmap approved by both Client and Vendor. | Alignment achieved. |
| Architecture and feasibility validated via ADRs and POCs. | Technical confidence established. |
| Prioritization matrix links outcomes, effort, and risk. | Informed decisions made. |
| Definition of Ready checklist accepted by Build team. | Clear transition into Build. |

Quantitative indicators:

- % of backlog items meeting DoR criteria.
- Estimation confidence range (\pm deviation vs. actual).
- Stakeholder alignment score (via feedback survey).

Shape and Relationship Maturity

The Shape stage moves the relationship from **Aligned Autonomy** toward **Shared Ownership**.

Here, trust grows through *joint decision-making* and *transparent trade-offs*.

High-maturity shaping:

- Builds shared accountability for both outcomes and constraints.
- Replaces handovers with collaboration.
- Aligns product ambition with delivery feasibility.

Summary

- The **Shape Stage** translates understanding into a feasible, outcome-driven delivery plan.
- Its five dimensions – Strategic Alignment, Planning & Flow, Collaboration, Quality & Risk, Learning & Adaptation – ensure scope, architecture, and delivery model coherence.
- Mature shaping ensures Build starts with confidence, autonomy, and transparency.
- When Shape fails, all later stages pay the cost – when it succeeds, the system flows.

SDLC Stage Dimensions – Build

Purpose

The **Build Stage** is where ideas, designs, and plans turn into a working product.

Its purpose is to **design, develop, and integrate** software components with automation, quality, and shared ownership at the core.

Build is not only about coding – it's about maintaining **flow, visibility, and alignment** across teams, ensuring each increment delivers measurable progress and validated value.

When executed maturely, Build becomes the engine of both **technical excellence** and **relationship trust** between Client and Vendor.

Core Outcomes

| Outcome | Description |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Working Product Increments | Functional, testable software aligned with scope and goals. |
| Predictable Delivery Flow | Stable sprint or iteration cadence with transparent progress tracking. |
| Quality Built In | Testing, automation, and validation integrated into daily development. |
| Visible Progress | Delivery transparency through demos, metrics, and shared dashboards. |
| Engineering Feedback Loops | Continuous feedback on quality, velocity, and technical debt. |

Build Dimensions

1. Strategic Alignment

Ensures that Build execution remains connected to business outcomes and product intent.

| Aspect | Low Maturity (Reactive) | High Maturity (Proactive) |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Goal Visibility | Teams focus on tickets, not outcomes. | Developers understand why features matter to users. |
| Scope Discipline | Frequent scope creep and unclear priorities. | Stable, prioritized backlog tied to objectives. |
| Value Focus | Progress measured by volume of work. | Progress measured by value delivered or validated. |
| Decision Context | Engineers disconnected from product strategy. | Engineers involved in trade-off and design discussions. |

Improvement Strategies

- Share *Product Vision Boards* and outcome maps with delivery teams.
- Use *Story Mapping* to link user flows to business goals.
- Include engineers in scope and backlog refinement sessions.

2. Planning & Flow

Defines how work is decomposed, planned, and executed to maintain a sustainable pace and predictable outcomes.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Backlog Readiness | Incomplete or unclear stories. | Clear DoR (Definition of Ready) and consistent backlog grooming. |
| Iteration Planning | Overcommitted or ad hoc scope. | Predictable velocity and adaptive capacity planning. |
| Work in Progress (WIP) | Too many parallel tasks, context switching. | Limited WIP and visible flow management (Kanban boards, flow metrics). |
| Dependencies | Managed reactively. | Dependencies identified, visualized, and mitigated early. |

Improvement Strategies

- Apply *Kanban* or *Scrum with Flow Metrics*.
- Use *Cumulative Flow Diagrams* to spot bottlenecks.
- Introduce *Sprint Capacity Planning* and WIP limits by team role.

3. Collaboration & Communication

Defines how the team synchronizes, collaborates, and manages feedback during execution.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Team Communication | Silos between roles; issues discussed too late. | Daily visibility, open problem-solving culture. |
| Stakeholder Updates | Irregular or one-way reporting. | Regular demos, transparent dashboards, two-way communication. |
| Cross-Functional Collaboration | Developers, designers, testers operate separately. | Integrated squads collaborating around features or epics. |
| Decision Transparency | Decisions undocumented or repeated. | Decisions visible and logged in shared tools (ADR, issue trackers). |

Improvement Strategies

- Encourage *pair programming*, *mob testing*, and *cross-role reviews*.
- Establish a *shared status dashboard* visible to Client and Vendor.
- Maintain a *Team Working Agreement* covering communication, review, and escalation norms.

4. Quality & Risk Management

Ensures that the system remains stable and maintainable while progress accelerates.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Testing Approach | Manual, end-stage QA only. | Continuous testing: unit, integration, end-to-end automated pipelines. |
| Code Quality | Inconsistent standards, unreviewed code. | Shared coding standards, code review culture, linters and static analysis. |
| Defect Management | Bugs found late or ignored. | Early detection, visible defect metrics, root cause analysis. |
| Technical Debt Management | Reactive firefighting, no refactoring time. | Debt logged, prioritized, and managed as part of delivery. |

Improvement Strategies

- Adopt *Test Automation Pyramid* and *Shift-Left Testing*.
- Use *SonarQube* or similar tools for code health tracking.
- Schedule *Tech Debt Sprints* or allocate engineering capacity for refactoring.

5. Learning & Adaptation

Defines how the team inspects performance, learns, and improves during the Build cycle.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Retrospectives | Irregular or unfocused. | Regular, data-informed retrospectives with actionable outcomes. |
| Metrics Utilization | Metrics collected but not used. | Metrics analyzed and drive measurable process adjustments. |
| Knowledge Sharing | Isolated expertise. | Knowledge documented and spread through pairing, wikis, and reviews. |
| Continuous Improvement | Process changes reactive to crises. | Improvement backlog prioritized and tracked continuously. |

Improvement Strategies

- Use *Team Health Checks* and *Agile Metrics Dashboards* (lead time, defects, predictability).
- Rotate responsibilities to spread system knowledge.
- Introduce *Learning Hours* or short technical demos during sprints.

Common Failure Modes

| Failure Mode | Root Cause | Correction |
|--|--|---|
| "Velocity fluctuates wildly." | Unclear backlog, overcommitment, or interruptions. | Limit WIP, improve backlog readiness, stabilize team focus. |
| "Quality issues pile up near release." | Testing deferred or manual only. | Shift-left automation, enforce DoD with test coverage. |
| "Developers disengaged from product goals." | Poor communication or siloed decision-making. | Include engineers in planning and stakeholder reviews. |
| "Integration issues late in cycle." | Lack of CI/CD or shared environments. | Adopt trunk-based development and continuous integration. |

When flow metrics become performance targets, teams start optimizing numbers instead of outcomes. 3SF treats metrics as feedback, not judgment.

Measuring Build Health

| Signal | Description |
|--|--|
| Stable velocity and flow metrics across iterations. | Predictable delivery pattern achieved. |
| High automation coverage and quick CI/CD feedback cycles. | Engineering efficiency increasing. |
| Low defect escape rate between environments. | Quality maturity improving. |
| Transparent backlog and demo cadence maintained. | Alignment and visibility ensured. |

Quantitative metrics may include:

- Lead time and cycle time stability.
- % of automated tests and deployment success rate.
- Ratio of refactoring vs. new feature work.
- Sprint predictability (committed vs. delivered).

Build and Relationship Maturity

The Build stage matures the relationship from **Shared Ownership** to **Strategic Partnership**.

It's where autonomy is proven through reliable delivery, and trust deepens through transparency and quality.

High-maturity Build means:

- Teams operate with **clarity and independence**, not isolation.
- Delivery decisions are **coordinated, not dictated**.
- Transparency builds confidence – enabling Client and Vendor to plan forward together.

Summary

- The **Build Stage** is where structure meets execution – converting vision into reality with precision and accountability.
- Its five dimensions – Strategic Alignment, Planning & Flow, Collaboration, Quality & Risk, Learning & Adaptation – define the maturity and stability of delivery.
- Build maturity determines system reliability and organizational trust.
- Strong Build practices create a foundation for fast validation, smooth releases, and long-term partnership success.

SDLC Stage Dimensions – Validate

Purpose

The **Validate Stage** ensures that the product or increment delivered during Build truly meets its intended goals, quality standards, and user expectations.

It verifies that **functionality, performance, usability, and security** align with the outcomes defined in the earlier stages — and that the system is ready for release and adoption.

Validation provides the critical link between **engineering output and business value**.

It transforms delivery confidence from internal assumptions to **evidence-based assurance** — proving that what has been built actually works, delivers value, and is safe to deploy.

When mature, the Validate stage enables short feedback loops, measurable confidence, and shared accountability between Client and Vendor.

Core Outcomes

| Outcome | Description |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Functional Assurance | All intended features verified and behaving as expected. |
| Quality Confidence | Reliability, performance, and usability validated against standards. |
| Risk Mitigation Evidence | Known risks tested, mitigated, or consciously accepted. |
| User Acceptance | Product validated with users or proxies for real-world readiness. |
| Release Readiness | Delivery team and stakeholders jointly confirm deployment confidence. |

Validate Dimensions

1. Strategic Alignment

Ensures that testing and validation activities map back to business outcomes and user intent — not just requirements coverage.

| Aspect | Low Maturity (Reactive) | High Maturity (Proactive) |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Validation Purpose | Focused on finding bugs. | Focused on confirming business value and usability. |
| Traceability | Test cases disconnected from goals. | Requirements, tests, and metrics linked to outcomes. |
| User Perspective | Validation done by developers or QA only. | Validation includes real users, personas, or user proxies. |
| Acceptance Criteria | Defined vaguely or retroactively. | Established early and verified continuously. |

Improvement Strategies

- Create *Test-to-Value Mapping* linking acceptance criteria to user outcomes.
- Use *Example Mapping* and *BDD (Behavior-Driven Development)* to bridge business and technical validation.
- Include *Product Owners* and *Clients* in validation sessions.

2. Planning & Flow

Defines how validation activities are integrated into the overall delivery flow – balancing thoroughness with speed.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Validation Timing | Done at the end of the iteration or project. | Continuous and iterative throughout development. |
| Test Environment Management | Unstable or inconsistent. | Dedicated, reliable, and automatically provisioned environments. |
| Validation Cadence | Ad hoc, untracked. | Defined test cycle integrated into CI/CD pipeline. |
| Regression Handling | Manual or skipped due to time pressure. | Automated regression suite maintained and monitored. |

Improvement Strategies

- Introduce *Continuous Testing* within CI/CD pipelines.
- Automate environment provisioning using *Infrastructure as Code (IaC)*.
- Establish *Validation Gates* for build quality before release.

3. Collaboration & Communication

Defines how validation activities are shared, reviewed, and acted upon across disciplines and organizations.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Client-Vendor Involvement | Validation owned by one side only. | Validation co-owned with shared metrics and sign-offs. |
| Defect Communication | Blame culture, unclear priorities. | Collaborative triage, root cause analysis, and transparency. |
| Feedback Channels | Issues discussed late or inconsistently. | Real-time communication via dashboards, alerts, or shared tools. |
| Validation Reporting | Reports hidden in tools or manual spreadsheets. | Automated, visual dashboards integrated into governance cadence. |

Improvement Strategies

- Host *Joint Quality Reviews* after major validation cycles.
- Share *QA Dashboards* with live status for Client and Vendor.
- Define *Defect Escalation Path* in governance structure.

4. Quality & Risk Management

Defines how quality is measured, controlled, and used to inform decisions before release.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| Test Coverage | Limited or unknown. | Comprehensive across unit, integration, end-to-end, and non-functional levels. |
| Risk-Based Testing | Testing all equally or at random. | Focused testing based on impact and likelihood of failure. |
| Non-Functional Testing | Skipped or manual. | Automated and benchmarked (performance, security, accessibility). |
| Release Confidence | Based on opinions. | Data-driven confidence supported by evidence and metrics. |

Improvement Strategies

- Apply *Risk-Based Testing* for prioritization.
- Use *Performance Baselines* and *Security Scanning* early.
- Track *Defect Trends* and *Defect Escape Rate* across environments.

5. Learning & Adaptation

Defines how validation results contribute to learning and continuous improvement across teams and stages.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Defect Learning | Same issues reoccur across sprints. | Root cause analysis feeds into backlog and process improvement. |
| Metrics Utilization | QA metrics collected but ignored. | Quality metrics discussed in retrospectives and governance. |
| Validation Retrospectives | Skipped or informal. | Dedicated reflection on test coverage, efficiency, and confidence. |
| Cross-Stage Feedback | Lessons lost post-release. | Findings from Validate feed directly into Evolve and future discovery. |

Improvement Strategies

- Introduce *Quality Retrospectives* after major releases.
- Maintain a *Defect Knowledge Base* with lessons and examples.
- Link validation learnings to *Continuous Improvement Roadmaps*.

Common Failure Modes

| Failure Mode | Root Cause | Correction |
|---|--|--|
| "We found critical bugs right before release." | Late or skipped validation cycle. | Shift validation left, integrate with CI/CD. |
| "Client says quality is poor despite passing tests." | Validation disconnected from user value. | Reconnect tests to user outcomes and business scenarios. |
| "Test environments never match production." | Manual setup or outdated configurations. | Automate provisioning and synchronization. |
| "Validation team overloaded." | Testing not integrated into delivery flow. | Embed testing ownership across development teams. |

Measuring Validation Health

| Signal | Description |
|--|--|
| High regression automation coverage. | Quality controlled continuously, not reactively. |
| Stable defect escape rate across environments. | Fewer production surprises, mature QA process. |
| Joint validation sign-offs by Client and Vendor. | Shared accountability achieved. |
| Quality metrics used in retrospectives and decisions. | Continuous improvement mindset in place. |

Quantitative metrics may include:

- Defect density and escape rate.
- Regression automation coverage (%).
- Test cycle duration and stability.
- User acceptance satisfaction rating.

Validate and Relationship Maturity

Validate reinforces **Shared Ownership** and advances toward **Strategic Partnership**.

It transforms quality from a contractual deliverable into a **shared mission of excellence**.

High-maturity validation means:

- The Client and Vendor assess readiness together, not separately.
- Confidence is built through transparency, not persuasion.
- Feedback is used for continuous learning, not blame assignment.

Summary

- The **Validate Stage** ensures confidence and alignment between product functionality and intended value.
- Its five dimensions – Strategic Alignment, Planning & Flow, Collaboration, Quality & Risk, Learning & Adaptation – provide a systemic approach to testing and assurance.
- Mature validation replaces inspection with prevention and shared accountability.
- Validation done right creates trust: *evidence replaces opinion, collaboration replaces control*.

SDLC Stage Dimensions – Release

Purpose

The **Release Stage** is where validated increments are prepared, approved, and delivered to users.

Its purpose is to ensure that deployment is **reliable, transparent, and reversible** – maintaining confidence across all stakeholders.

Release represents the intersection of **technical readiness, business timing, and operational control**.

It is not just a one-time action but a repeatable system of governance, automation, and communication that turns delivery into value.

When mature, Release enables safe, frequent, and visible deployments that sustain trust between Client and Vendor.

Core Outcomes

| Outcome | Description |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Release Readiness | Product increments meet Definition of Done (DoD) and pass all validation gates. |
| Deployment Reliability | Automated, monitored, and reversible deployment pipelines in place. |
| Governance Alignment | Approvals, communication, and documentation aligned between Client and Vendor. |
| Change Transparency | What, when, and why changes happen is clearly visible. |
| Operational Continuity | Release executed without disruption or surprise for users or teams. |

Release Dimensions

1. Strategic Alignment

Ensures that the release strategy supports business objectives, user expectations, and risk appetite.

| Aspect | Low Maturity (Reactive) | High Maturity (Proactive) |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Release Strategy | Treated as a technical event. | Planned as a business milestone with measurable outcomes. |
| Timing & Cadence | Ad hoc or delayed until “everything is ready.” | Predictable cadence aligned with value delivery (e.g., continuous or monthly). |
| Stakeholder Readiness | Client notified late or post-deployment. | Stakeholders aligned with communication plan and expected impact. |
| Business Impact Awareness | Impact assumptions unverified. | Business readiness checklist validated before go-live. |

Improvement Strategies

- Use *Release Calendar* integrated into governance and roadmap planning.
- Define *Release Goals* that link technical changes to measurable value.
- Align *Release Cadence* with feedback and validation cycles.

2. Planning & Flow

Defines how release preparation, approval, and deployment are coordinated and automated.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| Pipeline Automation | Manual steps and human dependencies. | Fully automated CI/CD with pre-deployment validation. |
| Approval Flow | Bureaucratic or unclear ownership. | Streamlined, traceable approvals in tools and dashboards. |
| Change Management | Reactive to issues, unplanned changes. | Structured change process with risk classification. |
| Rollback Procedures | Non-existent or untested. | Reversible releases validated regularly. |

Improvement Strategies

- Automate deployment steps via *CI/CD pipelines*.
- Integrate *Change Management Automation* (ServiceNow, Azure DevOps, Jira).
- Test *Rollback Plans* as part of regression testing.
- Maintain a *Release Checklist* for every environment.

3. Collaboration & Communication

Defines how coordination between Client, Vendor, and Operations ensures smooth release flow and visibility.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Client-Vendor Coordination | Information shared post-release. | Joint release planning and readiness reviews. |
| Operations Involvement | Brought in only during incidents. | Operations co-own release readiness and monitoring. |
| Communication Plan | Email notifications or chat pings. | Structured release communication with who/what/when/impact. |
| Transparency | Changes poorly visible. | Single release dashboard showing release scope, status, and outcomes. |

Improvement Strategies

- Establish *Joint Release Reviews* with Client and Vendor stakeholders.
- Maintain *Release Notes* in standardized, automated format.
- Use *Live Dashboards* or ChatOps to broadcast release status in real time.

4. Quality & Risk Management

Ensures release confidence through proactive quality control, security, and risk mitigation.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------|---|--|
| Release Testing | Regression and smoke tests skipped or rushed. | Automated validation in staging or pre-prod environments. |
| Security Checks | Manual or post-release. | Integrated security scans in the release pipeline. |
| Risk Assessment | Done informally or retroactively. | Risk classified and approved through governance process. |
| Release Criteria | Ambiguous or undocumented. | Formal Definition of Done and Definition of Ready for release. |

Improvement Strategies

- Implement *Release Gates* in pipelines for test and security validation.
- Conduct *Go/No-Go Reviews* with risk-based criteria.
- Maintain a *Release Risk Register* and monitor risk trends.

5. Learning & Adaptation

Defines how the organization learns from each release to improve stability, cadence, and confidence.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Post-Release Review | Only held after major incidents. | Conducted after every release – focus on wins and learnings. |
| Metrics Utilization | Success judged by “no issues.” | Success measured by stability, feedback, and recovery time. |
| Continuous Improvement | Repeated release problems tolerated. | Improvement backlog maintained and prioritized after every release. |
| Knowledge Sharing | Release learnings lost in chat threads. | Centralized release documentation and lessons learned. |

Improvement Strategies

- Schedule *Release Retrospectives* as part of governance cadence.
- Track *Deployment Frequency*, *Change Failure Rate*, *MTTR*, and *Lead Time for Changes*.
- Feed learnings into *Run* and *Evolve* stages for system improvement.

Common Failure Modes

| Failure Mode | Root Cause | Correction |
|---|---|--|
| “Releases are unpredictable and stressful.” | No cadence, manual steps, unclear approvals. | Automate pipeline, define release rhythm, clarify roles. |
| “Client wasn’t ready for changes.” | Poor communication and no business readiness check. | Align release planning with stakeholder communication. |
| “Rollback failed.” | Plan untested or absent. | Simulate rollback in lower environments and automate recovery. |
| “Post-release issues damage trust.” | Lack of validation and incident transparency. | Create shared incident process and visible metrics. |

A common hidden risk is release heroics – dependency on a few experts to ‘save’ the deployment. Sustainable maturity eliminates heroes by institutionalizing reliability.

Measuring Release Health

| Signal | Description |
|--|--|
| Releases are regular, safe, and predictable. | Cadence aligned with business needs and system capacity. |
| Automated deployments and rollback tested successfully. | Reliability established. |
| No “surprise” changes for users or stakeholders. | Communication and readiness mature. |
| Incident recovery within agreed SLA. | Operational resilience proven. |

Quantitative indicators may include:

- Deployment frequency (per environment).
- Change failure rate (% of releases causing incidents).
- Mean Time to Recover (MTTR).
- Lead time from commit to production.
- Number of manual release steps remaining.

Release and Relationship Maturity

The Release stage embodies **Strategic Partnership in action** – where Client and Vendor coordinate as one delivery organism.

Release is not a technical event but a **moment of shared accountability** for value, risk, and experience.

High-maturity release culture:

- Operates with **mutual trust and transparency**.
- Treats incidents as **shared learning opportunities**, not blame moments.
- Builds **confidence in continuity**, enabling faster cycles and innovation.

Summary

- The **Release Stage** is the bridge between delivery and real-world value.
- Its five dimensions – Strategic Alignment, Planning & Flow, Collaboration, Quality & Risk, Learning & Adaptation – ensure releases are reliable, visible, and reversible.
- Mature release management replaces heroics with automation, chaos with cadence, and anxiety with confidence.
- Successful releases make trust tangible – every deployment reinforces partnership.

SDLC Stage Dimensions – Run & Evolve

Purpose

The **Run & Evolve Stage** closes the delivery loop by ensuring the system operates reliably in production and continues to improve over time. It combines two complementary mindsets: **Run** – maintaining stability, performance, and user satisfaction; and **Evolve** – learning from outcomes and feeding insights back into future discovery and shaping.

Where Build delivers features, **Run & Evolve delivers continuity and growth**.

It's the stage where operations, feedback, and innovation merge into a sustainable improvement cycle.

When mature, this stage transforms delivery into a **living system** – capable of adapting, learning, and evolving together with users and business needs.

Core Outcomes

| Outcome | Description |
|---|--|
| Operational Stability | Systems perform reliably under expected loads with minimal incidents. |
| Continuous Monitoring & Feedback | Real-time insights collected from usage, performance, and user satisfaction. |
| Incident Response & Learning | Clear processes for issue detection, triage, and recovery with lessons captured. |
| Value Realization Tracking | Measurement of business outcomes achieved post-release. |
| Continuous Improvement | Product and process evolve based on validated data and feedback. |

Run & Evolve Dimensions

1. Strategic Alignment

Ensures that operational decisions and improvement priorities remain tied to strategic goals and user value.

| Aspect | Low Maturity (Reactive) | High Maturity (Proactive) |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Operational Goals | Focused only on uptime and SLA. | Balance between stability, performance, and outcome value. |
| Feedback Integration | Post-release feedback ignored or delayed. | Feedback regularly reviewed and prioritized into roadmap. |
| Improvement Ownership | No clear accountability for evolution. | Client and Vendor share ownership of continuous improvement. |
| Business Impact Visibility | Success not measured post-release. | Measurable KPIs tracked and reported in governance cadence. |

Improvement Strategies

- Link *Run metrics* (uptime, error rate) to *business KPIs* (conversion, satisfaction).
- Use *Outcome Review Sessions* with Client and Vendor quarterly.
- Define *Continuous Improvement Objectives (CIOs)* tied to roadmap updates.

2. Planning & Flow

Defines how operations and evolution work are balanced, prioritized, and executed without disrupting flow.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| Workload Balance | Operations dominate; no time for improvements. | Planned capacity split between Run (stability) and Evolve (improvement). |
| Incident Management | Reactive firefighting. | Proactive prevention through trend monitoring and capacity planning. |
| Change Planning | Uncoordinated or emergency patches. | Continuous release cycles with clear change windows. |
| Improvement Flow | Ideas logged but never executed. | Continuous improvement backlog integrated into delivery system. |

Improvement Strategies

- Apply *SRE-inspired capacity planning* (e.g., 70/20/10 rule: 70% operations, 20% improvements, 10% innovation).
- Automate *Change Request* workflows integrated with CI/CD.
- Maintain a *Continuous Improvement Board* linking issues to systemic actions.

3. Collaboration & Communication

Defines how support, development, and business teams communicate and learn from production realities.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Ops-Dev Relationship | "Throw over the wall" mentality. | Shared accountability for uptime, quality, and performance. |
| User Communication | Reactive support tickets only. | Active feedback collection and user engagement loops. |
| Transparency | Incidents handled in isolation. | Public incident reporting, shared dashboards, and post-mortems. |
| Stakeholder Visibility | Only technical teams see system health. | Business and product stakeholders informed via clear metrics. |

Improvement Strategies

- Create *Joint Operations Reviews* including engineering and client representatives.
- Implement *ChatOps* for transparency of operations and incidents.
- Publish *Service Health Dashboards* with uptime, incidents, and satisfaction metrics.

4. Quality & Risk Management

Defines how reliability, security, and technical debt are managed over time to ensure resilience and sustainability.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Monitoring & Alerting | Reactive, basic logs only. | Proactive, automated observability with alert thresholds. |
| Security & Compliance | Checked only after incidents. | Continuous scanning and compliance integrated into pipelines. |
| Technical Debt | Ignored until it causes issues. | Managed systematically via backlog and roadmap. |
| Resilience Testing | None or infrequent. | Regular chaos or load testing validating fault tolerance. |

Improvement Strategies

- Implement *Observability Stack* (metrics, tracing, logs).
- Schedule *Resilience Tests* quarterly using chaos engineering tools.
- Track *Operational Risk Index* across environments.
- Automate *Security & Compliance Audits* in pipelines.

5. Learning & Adaptation

Defines how operational data and user insights drive iterative improvement across product and process.

| Aspect | Low Maturity | High Maturity |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Post-Incident Learning | Focus on blame or immediate fixes. | Root cause analysis and systemic improvements logged. |
| Continuous Improvement Culture | Improvements optional or reactive. | Teams actively suggest and experiment with new ideas. |
| Data Utilization | Metrics collected but not analyzed. | Metrics reviewed in governance and retrospectives. |
| Knowledge Continuity | Lessons forgotten between releases. | Knowledge bases maintained, reused in discovery and shaping. |

Improvement Strategies

- Conduct *Blameless Post-Mortems* for all incidents.
- Maintain a *Learning Backlog* shared across teams.
- Include *Run & Evolve metrics* in quarterly business reviews.
- Apply *Kaizen* principles for incremental improvement cycles.

Common Failure Modes

| Failure Mode | Root Cause | Correction |
|---|---|---|
| "We're always firefighting." | Lack of preventive monitoring and improvement time. | Dedicate capacity to continuous improvement and automation. |
| "Users report problems before we notice them." | Missing observability or alerting. | Implement real-time monitoring and alerting. |
| "We never find time for evolution." | No improvement planning or prioritization. | Treat evolution work as roadmap items with time allocation. |
| "Incidents keep repeating." | No root cause learning or follow-up. | Introduce structured post-incident learning process. |

Measuring Run & Evolve Health

| Signal | Description |
|---|---|
| Uptime and performance metrics stable over time. | Operational discipline and reliability proven. |
| Reduced incident recurrence. | Effective root cause learning and system improvement. |
| Regular improvement items delivered each cycle. | Evolution embedded in delivery flow. |
| Business KPIs tracked post-release. | Outcomes continuously validated. |

Quantitative indicators may include:

- Mean Time Between Failures (MTBF).
- Mean Time to Detect (MTTD) and Mean Time to Recover (MTTR).
- % of automated monitoring coverage.
- Number of improvement stories delivered per quarter.
- Customer satisfaction or NPS trend after releases.

Run & Evolve and Relationship Maturity

Run & Evolve strengthens **Strategic Partnership** by proving reliability, transparency, and shared learning over time.

While early stages of SDLC build trust through delivery success, Run & Evolve **sustains** it through dependability and adaptability.

High-maturity operation means:

- Issues are managed collaboratively, not defensively.
- Improvement is a shared habit, not an exception.
- Trust is renewed with every resolved incident and every measurable improvement.

Summary

- The **Run & Evolve Stage** sustains value delivery beyond release – ensuring reliability and driving continuous improvement.
- Its five dimensions – Strategic Alignment, Planning & Flow, Collaboration, Quality & Risk, Learning & Adaptation – close the feedback loop of the SDLC.
- Mature operations turn incident data into insight, insight into innovation, and innovation into renewed value.
- When Run & Evolve thrive, delivery transforms from project management into an adaptive system of partnership and progress.

Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)

Purpose

The **Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)** defines the external and internal forces that shape how the SDLC system should operate in a given environment. It recognizes that **no project exists in a vacuum** — every delivery model is influenced by commercial agreements, organizational structures, product maturity, technical landscape, and relationship context.

By identifying these drivers early, teams can **adapt the SDLC configuration consciously**, not reactively — selecting practices, rules, and decision patterns that best fit the project's constraints and opportunities.

CDL is therefore the **adaptive intelligence layer** of the 3SF framework: it provides the situational awareness necessary to design, diagnose, and evolve any project context.

CDL in the 3SF Structure

| Layer | Purpose |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Define the value flow (Discover → Evolve). |
| SDLC Practices | Ensure quality, automation, and governance throughout. |
| SDLC Stage Dimensions | Describe how each stage behaves in context. |
| Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) | Explain <i>why</i> the system must behave that way — the conditions shaping delivery design. |
| Stable Rules Layer (SRL) | Define universal rules that keep the system coherent. |
| Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) | Measure adherence to those rules. |
| Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC) | Translate CDL + SRL into specific delivery playbooks. |

CDL thus acts as the **input layer** for delivery system configuration and as the **diagnostic layer** for understanding delivery friction.

CDL Categories

The CDL organizes all contextual drivers into **six categories**, each representing a domain of influence.

These drivers can be viewed as *boundary conditions* or *design constraints* that determine how maturity, practices, and decisions should be applied.

| Category | Definition | Examples of Drivers |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Commercial Context | Financial and contractual models defining risk, ownership, and incentives. | Fixed-Bid vs. Time & Material, shared risk, cost of delay, billing structure, vendor competition. |
| 2. Organizational Context | Structure, processes, and decision hierarchy of both Client and Vendor organizations. | Centralized vs. distributed governance, number of stakeholders, matrix structures, delivery dependencies. |
| 3. Product Context | Nature, maturity, and complexity of the product or service being delivered. | New build vs. modernization, MVP vs. enterprise system, technical debt level, release cadence expectations. |
| 4. Technical Context | Technology stack, platform constraints, and delivery environment. | Cloud migration vs. on-prem, CI/CD maturity, legacy integrations, DevOps readiness. |
| 5. Relationship Context | Trust, collaboration, and alignment level between Client and Vendor. | Transactional vs. strategic partnership, communication openness, feedback culture, autonomy. |
| 6. Environmental Context | External or systemic forces beyond direct control. | Regulatory requirements, data privacy laws, time zone overlap, market dynamics, cultural or language barriers. |

Each project operates within a unique combination of these drivers.

Understanding them early allows the SDLC configuration (stages, practices, and rules) to adapt for stability and effectiveness.

CDL as a Diagnostic Lens

Contextual Drivers can be analyzed from two perspectives:

- Influence:** How a driver *shapes or constrains* SDLC decisions.

Example: A *Fixed-Bid* contract limits flexibility in Discovery and Shape – requiring stronger scope definition and risk buffers.

- Signal:** How a driver *manifests symptoms* of stress or misalignment.

Example: Persistent scope creep under a *Fixed-Bid* contract indicates mismatch between commercial and delivery context.

By mapping drivers to affected SDLC Stages and Practices, teams can uncover **root causes** of delivery dysfunction rather than symptoms.

CDL → SDLC Connection Map

| CDL Category | Primary SDLC Stages Impacted | Key Practices Affected | Typical Constraints or Levers |
|------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|
| Commercial Context | Discover, Shape, Validate | Governance & Risk, Product Thinking | Budget model, risk allocation, scope flexibility. |
| Organizational Context | Shape, Build, Release | Collaboration, Architecture & Design | Decision speed, approvals, dependency management. |
| Product Context | Discover, Build, Run | Product Thinking, Engineering & Quality | Product maturity, architecture flexibility, tech debt. |
| Technical Context | Build, Validate, Release | DevOps & Delivery, Architecture & Design | Automation readiness, tooling, environment stability. |
| Relationship Context | Discover, Shape, Evolve | Feedback & Learning, Governance & Risk | Trust, autonomy, alignment maturity, transparency. |
| Environmental Context | Release, Run, Evolve | Governance & Risk, Feedback & Learning | Regulatory controls, operational risk, localization. |

This mapping becomes the foundation for contextual rule generation (CRC) and rule validation (RAC).

CDL Assessment

A **Contextual Driver Assessment** can be done during Discovery or periodically during long-running projects.

Its purpose is to identify **which drivers are stable, volatile, or misaligned**.

Example checklist (simplified):

| Category | Driver | Status | Impact | Action |
|--------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Commercial | Fixed-bid contract | Active | High constraint on flexibility | Define strict Shape governance and risk buffers. |
| Relationship | Low client trust | High risk | Blocks autonomy | Introduce transparency rituals and co-created planning. |
| Technical | Legacy system dependency | Persistent | Medium | Schedule feasibility spikes and rollback plans. |

Drivers with high impact should trigger configuration adjustments (via SRL or CRC).

CDL in Practice

1. During Discovery:

- Identify contextual drivers and classify by category.
- Highlight those that constrain design or delivery models.
- Inform Shape decisions (architecture, governance, estimation).

2. During Delivery:

- Monitor changes in contextual drivers (e.g., contract renewal, new stakeholders, tool migrations).
- Adjust Stage Dimensions and Practices to maintain coherence.

3. During Retrospectives or Audits:

- Review contextual shifts to explain performance or relationship changes.
- Update RAC and CRC mappings to reflect new constraints or opportunities.

CDL and Relationship Maturity

Contextual Drivers determine how much maturity a project can realistically achieve.

For example:

- A highly regulated environment may *limit autonomy* but *increase clarity* – maturity can grow in governance, not speed.
- A flexible, trusted relationship may *allow experimentation* – maturity can grow in feedback and learning loops.

Mature organizations don't fight constraints; they **design within them**.

The CDL enables this by making constraints explicit and manageable.

Principles Failure: Contextual Contradictions

At times, contextual forces directly conflict with system principles – for example, a *regulatory environment* that enforces heavy control contradicts the principle of *Trust before Control*, or a *fixed-bid contract* that prioritizes scope over learning undermines *Outcome before Output*.

3SF treats these contradictions not as violations but as **trade-off boundaries**: situations where local compliance may temporarily override ideal behavior.

When contradictions persist unacknowledged, they lead to silent erosion of trust – teams perform rituals without intent, and principles turn into slogans.

The resolution is transparency: make constraints visible, discuss which principles are constrained, and consciously rebalance the system once conditions change.

Context cannot always be changed – but how consciously we adapt within it defines maturity.

Summary

- The **Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)** captures the forces that shape delivery – commercial, organizational, product, technical, relationship, and environmental.
- It acts as the **input lens** for tuning the SDLC system and explaining why projects behave as they do.
- CDL connects context (why) with system design (how) – forming the foundation for adaptive governance and contextual playbooks (CRC).
- Mastering CDL awareness allows leaders to make informed trade-offs and build delivery systems that thrive under real-world constraints.

Stable Rules Layer (SRL)

Purpose

The **Stable Rules Layer (SRL)** defines the set of **universal principles and systemic constraints** that keep the SDLC delivery system coherent, regardless of context.

While the **Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)** explains *why* a project behaves a certain way, SRL defines *how it must behave* to remain stable, predictable, and trustworthy.

Stable Rules are **non-negotiable system properties** – guardrails that ensure value flow, quality, and learning even when conditions change. They act as the *delivery system's immune system* – maintaining balance between autonomy, governance, and feedback.

SRL in the 3SF Structure

| Layer | Purpose |
|------------|--|
| CDL | Identifies external and internal forces shaping the SDLC configuration. |
| SRL | Defines the universal laws that maintain system balance under those forces. |
| RAC | Audits adherence to SRL rules in specific projects. |
| CRC | Translates SRL rules into actionable configurations under contextual conditions. |

Together, CDL and SRL form the **adaptive core** of the 3SF:

- CDL provides *situational awareness* (context).
- SRL ensures *systemic integrity* (principles).

Rule Design Philosophy

Every Stable Rule represents a **cause-and-effect relationship** critical to delivery stability.

A violation of a rule may not cause immediate failure, but it will always degrade system coherence or trust over time.

Each rule follows the pattern:

If the system condition changes (due to context, scale, or relationship),
then this principle must remain true,
otherwise the delivery system will lose alignment, predictability, or learning capability.

Rules can therefore be applied to **design, audit, or improve** delivery – providing both *governance clarity* and *diagnostic power*.

The Twelve Stable Rules of 3SF

| Rule | Principle | Purpose / Effect |
|---|--|--|
| R1 – Clarity before Commitment | Work must not start until purpose, outcomes, and assumptions are understood and validated. | Prevents waste and misalignment; anchors flow in value, not motion. |
| R2 – One System of Truth | Information about scope, status, and risks must be transparent and shared between Client and Vendor. | Avoids dual realities; enables trust and decision coherence. |
| R3 – Decisions are Transparent and Reversible | All key decisions must be visible, logged, and reversible based on new evidence. | Reduces risk of bias, promotes learning, and supports adaptive governance. |
| R4 – Progress is Measured by Outcomes, not Output | Delivery performance must be assessed through validated results, not activity volume. | Keeps teams focused on value rather than busyness. |
| R5 – Quality is Built In, not Inspected In | Testing, validation, and feedback loops must be integrated from the start. | Ensures reliability, prevents late surprises, and enables continuous delivery. |
| R6 – Flow Requires Limits | Work in Progress (WIP), context switching, and dependencies must be actively managed. | Stabilizes throughput, reduces friction, and improves predictability. |
| R7 – Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Risks and uncertainties must be visible, jointly assessed, and owned across Client and Vendor. | Promotes psychological safety, fairness, and faster mitigation. |
| R8 – Change is a Continuous Signal, not an Exception | Change should trigger adaptation, not escalation. | Builds resilience and prevents process rigidity. |
| R9 – Feedback Completes the Flow | Each stage must include measurable feedback to inform the next cycle. | Ensures continuous learning and value reinforcement. |
| R10 – Governance Enables, not Controls | Governance should clarify ownership and empower action, not slow it down. | Balances autonomy and alignment; accelerates decision velocity. |
| R11 – Transparency Scales Trust | The more visible the system, the faster it learns and the deeper the trust. | Drives partnership maturity and system self-correction. |
| R12 – Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage | Every failure or success must result in actionable learning and process evolution. | Institutionalizes adaptability and long-term growth. |

The Why Behind the Rules

Each Stable Rule exists to prevent a specific type of systemic friction.

Understanding the “why” behind each rule helps leaders detect early warning signs and coach teams before dysfunction escalates.

| Rule | Designed to Prevent |
|---|---|
| R1 – Clarity before Commitment | Prevents strategic drift and scope confusion. |
| R2 – One System of Truth | Prevents information asymmetry and parallel realities. |
| R3 – Decisions are Transparent and Reversible | Prevents bias and irreversible errors under uncertainty. |
| R4 – Progress is Measured by Outcomes, not Output | Prevents false productivity and local optimization. |
| R5 – Quality is Built In, not Inspected In | Prevents late discovery of defects and technical debt accumulation. |
| R6 – Flow Requires Limits | Prevents overcommitment, multitasking, and delivery chaos. |
| R7 – Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Prevents blame culture and hidden escalation loops. |
| R8 – Change is a Continuous Signal, not an Exception | Prevents resistance to adaptation and process rigidity. |
| R9 – Feedback Completes the Flow | Prevents learning delays and repetitive mistakes. |
| R10 – Governance Enables, not Controls | Prevents bureaucracy and decision paralysis. |
| R11 – Transparency Scales Trust | Prevents mistrust and hidden dependencies. |
| R12 – Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage | Prevents stagnation and organizational amnesia. |

Rule Relationships and Hierarchy

The twelve rules form **three meta-groups**, reflecting how 3SF integrates *structure, flow, and learning*:

| Meta-Group | Included Rules | Purpose |
|------------------------|-------------------|---|
| Alignment Rules | R1, R2, R3, R4 | Keep system purpose clear and decisions coherent. |
| Flow Rules | R5, R6, R7, R8 | Maintain stable, adaptive value flow under changing conditions. |
| Learning Rules | R9, R10, R11, R12 | Ensure system feedback, trust, and improvement scale sustainably. |

This grouping enables easier auditing and rule mapping to maturity models and practices.

When Rules Collide

In complex delivery environments, Stable Rules can appear to conflict – for example, **R6 (Flow Requires Limits)** may constrain **R8 (Change as a Continuous Signal)** when too many concurrent adaptations overload the system.

Such collisions are not failures but **tensions to be balanced**.

When conflicts arise:

- Return to **Alignment Rules (R1–R4)** – they define purpose and coherence.
- Reassess which rule serves system stability under current context.
- Revisit decisions once conditions change – rule prioritization is dynamic, not static.

SRL → SDLC Mapping

| Rule | Primary SDLC Stages Impacted | Key SDLC Practices Affected |
|--|------------------------------|--|
| R1 Clarity before Commitment | Discover, Shape | Product Thinking, Governance & Risk |
| R2 One System of Truth | Shape, Build, Validate | Collaboration, DevOps & Delivery |
| R3 Decisions are Transparent and Reversible | Shape, Build | Governance & Risk, Feedback & Learning |
| R4 Progress is Measured by Outcomes, not Output | Build, Validate, Evolve | Product Thinking, Feedback & Learning |
| R5 Quality is Built In, not Inspected In | Build, Validate | Engineering & Quality, DevOps & Delivery |
| R6 Flow Requires Limits | Build, Validate, Release | DevOps & Delivery, Governance & Risk |
| R7 Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Discover, Shape, Release | Governance & Risk, Collaboration |
| R8 Change is a Continuous Signal, not an Exception | Build, Evolve | Feedback & Learning, DevOps & Delivery |
| R9 Feedback Completes the Flow | Validate, Evolve | Feedback & Learning |
| R10 Governance Enables, not Controls | Shape, Release, Run | Governance & Risk, Collaboration |
| R11 Transparency Scales Trust | All stages | All practices |
| R12 Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage | Run, Evolve | Feedback & Learning, Governance & Risk |

This mapping provides traceability from abstract system rules to operational levers — ensuring that every rule has observable effects in delivery behavior.

Violations and Signals

Each rule violation manifests as a **systemic signal** — a pattern of dysfunction visible through metrics or team behavior.

| Rule Violation | Typical Signals | Possible Root Cause |
|----------------|---|--|
| R1 | Teams start work without validated goals. | Missing or ineffective Discovery. |
| R2 | Client and Vendor track different statuses. | Poor transparency, separate tooling. |
| R5 | QA overloaded near release. | Lack of automation and shift-left testing. |
| R6 | Developers multitasking across projects. | No WIP limits, poor prioritization. |
| R9 | Feedback delayed or ignored. | Weak retrospectives, missing monitoring. |
| R11 | Mistrust between Client and Vendor. | Hidden data, lack of open dashboards. |

Recognizing such signals early allows intervention before performance or trust degrade.

Using the Stable Rules Layer

As a design tool:

- Apply SRL when configuring delivery systems to ensure systemic balance regardless of project context.
- Use rules as *design constraints* when defining governance, practices, or automation.

As an audit tool:

- Use SRL rules as checkpoints in the **Rule Audit Checklist (RAC)**.
- Each RAC question should trace back to one or more SRL rules.

As a coaching tool:

- Use rules to guide leadership conversations around responsibility, autonomy, and improvement focus.
- When teams ask “*what should we fix first?*”, use SRL to identify foundational gaps.

SRL and Maturity

Stable Rules evolve from compliance to instinct:

| Maturity Level | Rule Behavior |
|----------------------|---|
| Reactive (Level 1) | Rules followed inconsistently; dependent on individuals. |
| Structured (Level 2) | Rules known and referenced but not yet internalized. |
| Integrated (Level 3) | Rules embedded in processes and automation. |
| Adaptive (Level 4) | Rules lived instinctively; used for self-correction and innovation. |

The goal is not to enforce rules mechanically, but to embed them in system design and organizational culture so that *stability emerges naturally*.

Summary

- The **Stable Rules Layer (SRL)** defines universal laws that preserve system coherence and delivery trust under any context.
- The **12 Stable Rules** form the backbone of predictable, learning-oriented delivery.
- SRL ensures that flexibility never compromises integrity – enabling adaptation without chaos.
- When applied consistently, SRL transforms best practices into **governing principles of maturity**, ensuring every project remains stable, transparent, and continuously improving.

Rule Audit Checklist (RAC)

Purpose

The **Rule Audit Checklist (RAC)** provides a structured way to evaluate how well a project or delivery system adheres to the **Stable Rules Layer (SRL)**. It serves as a **diagnostic and learning instrument**, helping Project Leads, Product Managers, Architects, and Delivery Directors identify where the SDLC system is coherent – and where it may be drifting.

RAC turns the abstract SRL principles into **practical, observable checks** that can be applied across any delivery model, whether fixed-bid, time-and-material, or co-delivery.

It can be used for **self-assessment, peer review, or formal audit**, depending on project maturity and organizational needs.

RAC in the 3SF Structure

| Layer | Purpose |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| SRL (Stable Rules Layer) | Defines the universal principles that keep delivery coherent. |
| RAC (Rule Audit Checklist) | Translates those principles into assessable questions. |
| CRC (Contextual Rules Catalog) | Suggests contextual adaptations when rules need to flex. |

The RAC's job is not compliance policing – it is **delivery sense-making**.

It helps leaders interpret project behavior and choose improvement focus areas based on systemic signals.

Using the RAC

1. **Select a project or program** – ideally after one full delivery iteration (e.g., quarter or milestone).
2. **Interview or survey** participants from both Client and Vendor sides (Product Manager, Project Lead, Tech Lead, QA, Architect, Stakeholder).
3. **Score each rule** from 1–4 based on observed behavior.
4. **Discuss evidence and next actions** – RAC is most effective as a conversation, not a checklist.
5. **Summarize results** in a visual radar or heatmap (rules vs. maturity) for transparency.

Scoring Scale

| Score | Meaning | Interpretation |
|---------------------|---|--|
| 1 – Reactive | Rule often violated or ignored. | Delivery unstable, reactive management. |
| 2 – Defined | Rule recognized but inconsistently applied. | Awareness exists, needs reinforcement. |
| 3 – Embedded | Rule consistently applied and measured. | Predictable delivery, learning in motion. |
| 4 – Adaptive | Rule instinctively followed and improved. | Self-correcting system; maturity embedded. |

RAC Template

| Rule ID | Rule Name | Audit Question(s) | Observed Evidence / Notes | Score (1–4) | Next Action / Owner |
|---------|---|--|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| R1 | Clarity before Commitment | Do all team members understand project goals, value, and success criteria before work begins? | | | |
| R2 | One System of Truth | Is there a single shared source of information (scope, status, risks) between Client and Vendor? | | | |
| R3 | Decisions are Transparent and Reversible | Are key decisions visible, documented, and revisited when assumptions change? | | | |
| R4 | Progress is Measured by Outcomes, not Output | Are outcomes and KPIs used to measure progress instead of just deliverables? | | | |
| R5 | Quality is Built In, not Inspected In | Is testing and validation integrated into development rather than deferred? | | | |
| R6 | Flow Requires Limits | Are WIP, dependencies, and task switching actively managed to maintain throughput? | | | |
| R7 | Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Are risks logged, owned jointly, and addressed collaboratively? | | | |
| R8 | Change is a Continuous Signal, not an Exception | Are scope or plan changes processed through adaptive governance, not escalation? | | | |
| R9 | | | | | |

| Rule ID | Rule Name | Audit Question(s) | Observed Evidence / Notes | Score (1–4) | Next Action / Owner |
|---------|--|--|---------------------------|-------------|---------------------|
| | Feedback Completes the Flow | Are feedback loops between users, systems, and teams continuous and acted upon? | | | |
| R10 | Governance Enables, not Controls | Does governance accelerate decision-making and empower teams rather than slow them down? | | | |
| R11 | Transparency Scales Trust | Are delivery data, metrics, and plans visible to all stakeholders? | | | |
| R12 | Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage | Are lessons learned documented and transformed into actions or system changes? | | | |

(Recommended: keep this table as a shared document or dashboard updated quarterly.)

Interpreting RAC Results

1. Identify Systemic Weaknesses

- Low scores across several rules in the same meta-group (e.g., Flow or Learning) indicate systemic imbalance.
- For example, strong **Alignment** but weak **Flow** may suggest bureaucracy or slow adaptation.

2. Analyze Cross-Role Perspectives

- Compare Client vs. Vendor perceptions – maturity gaps often reveal trust or communication issues.
- Different scores for the same rule are **valuable**, not errors – they highlight where transparency or expectations differ.

3. Track Maturity Over Time

- Conduct RAC every 3–6 months.
- Visualize progress using radar charts grouped by Alignment / Flow / Learning rule families.
- Celebrate upward trends; investigate stagnation or regression.

4. Link RAC to Improvement Planning

- Each low-scoring rule becomes an **improvement opportunity**.
- Select 2–3 rules per cycle for focused improvement, linking them to measurable actions in the delivery plan.

RAC Example Summary Report

| Meta-Group | Rules | Average Score | Interpretation | Suggested Focus |
|------------|--------|---------------|--|---|
| Alignment | R1–R4 | 3.0 | Clear purpose and measurable outcomes. | Maintain stakeholder alignment. |
| Flow | R5–R8 | 2.3 | Quality and risk processes under stress. | Strengthen automation and WIP control. |
| Learning | R9–R12 | 1.8 | Feedback loops and improvement culture weak. | Prioritize retrospectives and shared metrics. |

RAC Application in Practice

Use the RAC to:

- Facilitate *quarterly health checks* for ongoing projects.
- Support *retrospectives* at delivery milestones.
- Align *Client–Vendor steering discussions* around facts, not perceptions.
- Provide *input to the Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC)* for tailored playbooks.
- Serve as *baseline measurement* before initiating major process or relationship changes.

RAC Facilitation Tips

- Conduct as a **facilitated workshop**, not a survey – dialogue matters more than scores.
- Keep each rule discussion time-boxed (~10–15 minutes).
- Encourage evidence sharing (artifacts, dashboards, meeting notes).
- End with **3 actionable insights per meta-group** (Alignment, Flow, Learning).
- Visualize results – transparency itself reinforces trust (R11).

RAC and Relationship Maturity

Rule adherence mirrors relationship maturity:

- **Transactional (1–2):** Rules applied inconsistently; focus on compliance and reporting.
- **Aligned Autonomy (2–3):** Rules accepted and measured; governance collaborative.
- **Strategic Partnership (3–4):** Rules instinctive; system self-corrects via feedback and trust.

Thus, the RAC not only measures system health – it measures **partnership evolution**.

Systemic Failure: The Maturity Mirage

A common risk in mature organizations is the **illusion of progress** – performing RAC reviews, retrospectives, and rule discussions as rituals while the underlying mindset remains unchanged.

This *maturity mirage* creates dashboards that look healthy but conceal disengagement, blame avoidance, or shallow trust.

True maturity is evidenced by visible change in behavior and decision quality, not by consistent high scores.

When results stay static despite visible activity, it signals **measurement without learning** – the system has optimized for appearance, not evolution.

Summary

- The **Rule Audit Checklist (RAC)** operationalizes the 12 Stable Rules into measurable behaviors.

- It enables reflective, evidence-based dialogue about delivery health and maturity.
- RAC results guide improvement focus, governance calibration, and contextual rule selection (CRC).
- Used regularly, RAC turns principles into practice – ensuring the delivery system remains *transparent, adaptive, and trusted*.

Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC)

Purpose

The **Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC)** translates the universal **Stable Rules (SRL)** into **context-specific playbooks**, enabling adaptive delivery under real-world conditions.

Where SRL defines *what must always remain true*, the CRC defines *how it can best be achieved* given the unique **Contextual Drivers (CDL)** of each project.

CRC is therefore the **pragmatic layer** of 3SF – connecting principles to practice, helping leaders adjust their delivery approach without compromising coherence or trust.

It is used when system rules need to flex within stable boundaries – for example, when working under fixed-bid contracts, co-delivery models, or continuous product operations.

CRC in the 3SF Structure

| Layer | Purpose |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| CDL (Contextual Drivers) | Describe external/internal forces shaping delivery. |
| SRL (Stable Rules) | Define non-negotiable systemic principles. |
| RAC (Rule Audit Checklist) | Measure adherence to rules in practice. |
| CRC (Contextual Rules Catalog) | Adapt and operationalize rules for specific delivery contexts. |

CRC allows organizations to move beyond “one-size-fits-all” process design – by **anchoring adaptability in principle, not preference**.

CRC Design Philosophy

Every contextual rule is expressed as a **conditional mapping**:

If (contextual driver X) and if (affected SDLC stage/dimension Y)
then (apply strategy or configuration Z to maintain stability and maturity).

These mappings ensure that project-level adaptations stay consistent with system integrity – **never violating SRL, only expressing it differently**.

CRC Categories (Delivery Context Archetypes)

The CRC defines a small number of **delivery context archetypes** that represent typical real-world configurations of Client–Vendor collaboration. Each archetype modifies how the 12 Stable Rules are implemented across the SDLC stages.

| Archetype | Description | Typical CDL Signature |
|---|--|---|
| A1. Fixed-Bid / Contractual Delivery | Defined scope, fixed timeline and cost; low tolerance for change. | High commercial constraint, low flexibility, often transactional trust. |
| A2. Co-Delivery Partnership | Shared ownership between client and vendor; teams integrated across functions. | Balanced commercial model, aligned autonomy, medium-high trust. |
| A3. Continuous Product Evolution | Ongoing development and optimization of a live product. | Time & material, strong feedback loops, strategic partnership. |
| A4. Rapid Discovery / Innovation Pilot | Short, exploratory engagement with uncertain outcomes. | High uncertainty, high flexibility, fast iteration, trust critical. |
| A5. Managed Service / Sustainment | Vendor responsible for operations, monitoring, and continuous improvement. | Operational stability, predictable cadence, long-term accountability. |

Each archetype inherits all 12 Stable Rules – but expresses them differently depending on constraints and priorities.

CRC Example Mappings

A1. Fixed-Bid / Contractual Delivery

| Rule (SRL) | Implementation in Fixed-Bid Context | Reason / Effect |
|--|--|---|
| R1 – Clarity before Commitment | Discovery and Shape must be separate contracts or phases with exit criteria. | Ensures estimates and commitments are evidence-based. |
| R3 – Decisions are Transparent and Reversible | Changes logged formally via controlled governance (CRs), with impact tracking. | Reduces escalation risk while maintaining traceability. |
| R5 – Quality is Built In | Enforce automated regression testing from sprint one; no manual-only QA. | Compensates for limited change tolerance. |
| R7 – Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Define shared risk buffer in the SOW for rework or unforeseen effort. | Protects both parties under rigid commercial terms. |
| R10 – Governance Enables, not Controls | Steering cadence fixed but focused on evidence-based progress, not reporting. | Keeps governance lean and trust-building. |

Outcome: Predictability and accountability strengthened without over-bureaucratization.

A2. Co-Delivery Partnership

| Rule (SRL) | Implementation in Co-Delivery Context | Reason / Effect |
|--|--|--|
| R2 – One System of Truth | Shared Jira/ADO boards and dashboards visible to both Client and Vendor. | Eliminates dual status versions. |
| R4 – Progress is Measured by Outcomes | Use shared OKRs tied to joint product roadmap milestones. | Aligns performance metrics across organizations. |
| R6 – Flow Requires Limits | Manage WIP jointly per epic, not per team. | Prevents overload in shared delivery responsibility. |
| R8 – Change is a Continuous Signal | Adjust backlog continuously based on data and stakeholder feedback. | Allows agility without renegotiation overhead. |
| R11 – Transparency Scales Trust | Open access to repositories, docs, and incident logs. | Reinforces partnership maturity through openness. |

Outcome: Collaboration operates as one delivery organism with shared visibility and accountability.

A3. Continuous Product Evolution

| Rule (SRL) | Implementation in Continuous Product Context | Reason / Effect |
|---|---|---|
| R1 – Clarity before Commitment | Use rolling quarterly goals and flexible prioritization. | Keeps intent clear while allowing iteration. |
| R5 – Quality is Built In | CI/CD pipelines enforce automated testing and code quality gates. | Maintains delivery speed without degrading stability. |
| R9 – Feedback Completes the Flow | Integrate analytics and user feedback loops directly into backlog grooming. | Ensures real-world insights drive development. |
| R10 – Governance Enables, not Controls | Product councils decide direction based on evidence, not hierarchy. | Keeps governance adaptive and data-driven. |
| R12 – Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage | Post-release reviews treated as mandatory; improvements prioritized in next sprint. | Ensures continuous evolution and innovation. |

Outcome: Stable yet fast-moving system where learning drives value growth.

A4. Rapid Discovery / Innovation Pilot

| Rule (SRL) | Implementation in Innovation Context | Reason / Effect |
|--|--|---|
| R1 – Clarity before Commitment | Define problem statement and validation plan – not fixed deliverables. | Focuses effort on learning, not output. |
| R4 – Progress is Measured by Outcomes | Use hypothesis validation metrics (e.g., # validated assumptions). | Measures learning speed and quality. |
| R6 – Flow Requires Limits | Limit concurrent hypotheses to maintain focus. | Preserves discovery quality and prevents diffusion. |
| R7 – Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Agree on fast feedback loops and shared decision checkpoints. | Enables safe experimentation within timebox. |
| R9 – Feedback Completes the Flow | Include early user feedback sessions before prototype completion. | Validates direction before full investment. |

Outcome: Maximized learning per time unit, reduced risk of building the wrong thing.

A5. Managed Service / Sustainment

| Rule (SRL) | Implementation in Managed Service Context | Reason / Effect |
|---|--|--|
| R2 – One System of Truth | Operational dashboards shared across vendor and client. | Promotes shared situational awareness. |
| R5 – Quality is Built In | Automate monitoring, alerting, and compliance checks. | Ensures stability and efficiency. |
| R7 – Risk Shared is Risk Reduced | Shared SLA ownership and incident root-cause analysis. | Fosters continuous reliability improvements. |
| R9 – Feedback Completes the Flow | Weekly review of incidents and performance trends. | Turns operations data into learning. |
| R12 – Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage | Continuous improvement backlog integrated with run operations. | Evolves service quality and relationship maturity. |

Outcome: Predictable, transparent operations aligned with continuous system evolution.

CRC Mapping Template

To create new contextual playbooks, use this mapping format:

| If CDL Condition... | and SDLC Stage/ Dimension is... | then apply Practice(s)... | to uphold SRL Rule... | Effect / Outcome |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|---|
| Fixed-bid contract limits flexibility | Shape – Planning & Flow | Progressive estimation, explicit risk buffer | R1, R7 | Predictable scope and shared risk mitigation |
| Low relationship trust | Discover – Collaboration | Transparent workshop cadence and visible notes | R2, R11 | Builds early transparency and trust |
| Highly regulated industry | Release – Governance | Automated compliance gates and audit trails | R5, R10 | Ensures quality and control within compliance |
| Continuous product delivery | Evolve – Learning & Adaptation | Ongoing telemetry and user research loops | R9, R12 | Maintains improvement momentum |

This table can be extended for organization-specific contexts and stored in a shared CRC knowledge base (e.g., Confluence, GitHub Wiki, or internal portal).

CRC and Maturity

As maturity increases, projects move from **rule application** to **rule design**:

| Maturity Level | CRC Usage Behavior |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Level 1 – Reactive | Teams rely on predefined CRC playbooks (Fixed-Bid, Co-Delivery). |
| Level 2 – Structured | Teams select and combine playbook elements consciously. |
| Level 3 – Adaptive | Teams co-create custom mappings based on real feedback. |
| Level 4 – Evolutionary | Organization continuously evolves CRC through lived experience and cross-project learning. |

CRC Governance

To keep the catalog effective:

- **Review quarterly** to capture new lessons from projects.
- **Version control** CRC playbooks (v1.1, v1.2...) to track learning.
- **Link** CRC rules to RAC findings — improvement actions should modify or extend contextual mappings.
- **Integrate** CRC into onboarding and project kickoff processes.

Adapting Without Excusing

The purpose of contextual adaptation is **to preserve system integrity under constraint**, not to justify underperformance.

A common misuse of CRC occurs when teams interpret flexibility as permission to ignore stable rules — turning context into an excuse rather than a design factor.

Healthy adaptation always traces back to **which Stable Rule it protects** and **what learning it generates**.

When a contextual rule cannot explain its stabilizing purpose, it signals adaptation drift — a warning that coherence is being traded for comfort.

CRC and Relationship Maturity

CRC operationalizes relationship maturity:

- **Transactional projects** depend on structured CRC playbooks for predictability.
- **Aligned partnerships** use CRC dynamically to adjust governance.
- **Strategic partnerships** co-create new contextual rules, contributing back to the catalog.

Thus, CRC is not just documentation — it's the **institutional memory of delivery intelligence**.

Summary

- The **Contextual Rules Catalog (CRC)** translates stable system principles (SRL) into practical guidance for diverse delivery contexts (CDL).
- It ensures flexibility without chaos — adapting practices to context while preserving systemic integrity.
- CRC acts as the living knowledge base of 3SF — continuously evolving through audit (RAC) and experience.
- When mastered, CRC turns every project into a learning loop — where context refines rules, and rules sustain excellence.

Relationship and System Maturity Integration

Purpose

This section connects the **3-in-3 Relationship Maturity Model** with the **3SF delivery system** – showing how partnership growth is both the cause and result of a mature SDLC.

It also reconciles 3SF with **product-organization dynamics**, identifying capability gaps that commonly emerge when vendor teams operate without shared product ownership or user feedback.

The goal is to present a **unified maturity model** where:

- **Relationship maturity** (trust, autonomy, partnership)
- **System maturity** (delivery, feedback, governance)
- **Product maturity** (user value, sustainment, learning)

all evolve together through intentional practice and feedback loops.

This closing layer turns 3SF from a delivery model into a **growth system** – for both teams and relationships.

The Integrated Maturity Curve

| Maturity Level | Relationship Focus | System Behavior | Client–Vendor Dynamics |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 1. Transactional Trust | Delivery based on control, compliance, and scope. | Processes reactive, success measured by output. | Client dictates, vendor executes; little shared context. |
| 2. Aligned Autonomy | Mutual visibility and transparency built. | Delivery predictable; feedback begins to close loops. | Vendor earns trust through reliability and openness. |
| 3. Shared Ownership | Joint accountability for decisions and outcomes. | System self-regulating; governance collaborative. | Teams act as one delivery unit with shared metrics. |
| 4. Strategic Partnership | Partnership extends to shared vision and innovation. | System adaptive, learning-oriented, continuously improving. | Joint investment in evolution, experimentation, and long-term value. |

Each maturity level requires **specific practices and system configurations** that strengthen both technical and relational resilience.

The Hidden Cost of Transactional Trust

Operating in a transactional state carries invisible costs.

For clients, it means time spent writing detailed contracts, auditing invoices, and resolving scope disputes instead of pursuing outcomes.

For vendors, it means constant justification of estimates, reduced margins, and limited opportunity to influence strategic direction.

Both sides lose energy defending control instead of creating value – a pattern 3SF defines as *trust debt*.

The longer this persists, the harder it becomes to transition toward partnership maturity.

The Six Capability Gap Categories

When comparing vendor-oriented delivery and product-oriented organizations, six recurring capability gaps were identified.

Each gap reflects a missing bridge between **delivery maturity** and **product maturity** – and therefore, between **process** and **partnership**.

| Gap Category | Definition |
|---|--|
| 1. Strategic Alignment | Ensuring that delivery outcomes tie directly to user and business goals. |
| 2. User Insight & Validation | Integrating real user understanding and validation throughout the lifecycle. |
| 3. Outcome-Based Planning | Prioritizing and measuring progress by outcomes, not activities. |
| 4. Feedback & Learning Loops | Establishing fast, actionable learning cycles across system and users. |
| 5. Sustainment Readiness | Ensuring that products and relationships can scale and improve post-release. |
| 6. Governance Clarity | Making ownership, decision rights, and accountability explicit and balanced. |

These six dimensions act as **growth levers** across the maturity curve – from reactive coordination to adaptive partnership.

Capability Maturity Mapping

| Gap Category | Level 1 – Transactional | Level 2 – Aligned Autonomy | Level 3 – Shared Ownership | Level 4 – Strategic Partnership |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Strategic Alignment | Scope-driven work; client defines direction. | Goals visible but not jointly prioritized. | Shared product vision and measurable outcomes. | Strategic co-creation of roadmap and innovation themes. |
| User Insight & Validation | Users absent from decision-making. | Proxy validation via business stakeholders. | Regular user testing and data feedback integrated. | Continuous research and insight loops informing evolution. |
| Outcome-Based Planning | Focus on tasks and deadlines. | Partial use of KPIs or OKRs, inconsistently applied. | Outcomes and value metrics drive backlog prioritization. | Portfolio-level outcome steering aligned with business impact. |
| Feedback & Learning Loops | Feedback delayed until post-release. | Regular retrospectives and sprint demos. | Continuous monitoring, telemetry, and learning backlog. | Data-driven experimentation and innovation culture. |
| Sustainment Readiness | Release = completion. | Support plans defined post-factum. | Ongoing Run & Evolve processes with improvement metrics. | Autonomous, self-improving delivery ecosystem. |
| Governance Clarity | Escalation-based, hierarchical control. | Defined cadences, but ownership fragmented. | Governance enables distributed decision-making. | Shared governance with adaptive decision flow and mutual accountability. |

This mapping creates a **relationship–system symmetry**:

as delivery processes mature, so does the capacity for autonomy, feedback, and innovation.

Relationship Progression Goals (Practices That Move Rightward)

Each maturity transition can be intentionally facilitated through targeted practices.

Below are examples of **key enablers** for each step in the progression.

From Level 1 → Level 2: Building Transparency and Predictability

| Goal | Supporting Practices / Mechanisms |
|--|---|
| Establish common understanding of goals. | Product Thinking workshops, shared goal trees (VMOSA). |
| Replace command-control with clarity. | Working Agreements, Definition of Done/Ready, RACI clarity. |
| Create transparency of work and status. | One System of Truth (shared backlog, dashboards). |
| Build trust through reliability. | Regular delivery cadence, short cycles, evidence-based reporting. |

Focus: predictability, openness, early validation of trust.

From Level 2 → Level 3: Building Co-Ownership

| Goal | Supporting Practices / Mechanisms |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Align delivery and business outcomes. | Joint backlog prioritization, outcome-based roadmaps. |
| Introduce shared decision forums. | Steering cadences with dual representation (Client + Vendor). |
| Embed continuous validation. | Feedback & Learning integration into every stage. |
| Evolve governance into enablement. | SRL Rule R10 – Governance Enables, Not Controls. |

Focus: transition from reporting to co-creation.

From Level 3 → Level 4: Building Strategic Partnership

| Goal | Supporting Practices / Mechanisms |
|---|---|
| Jointly define strategy and product vision. | Strategic alignment workshops, Wardley Mapping. |
| Operate through mutual autonomy. | Cross-organizational squads or Centers of Excellence. |
| Institutionalize learning. | Continuous retrospectives, shared improvement roadmaps. |
| Co-invest in evolution and innovation. | Shared success metrics (ROI, OKRs), innovation sprints. |

Focus: shared accountability, long-term value, and joint evolution.

Systemic Integration Across 3SF Layers

| 3SF Layer | How Relationship Maturity Integrates |
|------------------------------|--|
| 3-in-3 Model | Defines partnership boundaries and responsibilities – the social structure of the system. |
| SDLC Stages | Each stage provides a new maturity checkpoint (Discover builds trust, Build proves autonomy, Evolve sustains partnership). |
| SDLC Practices | Cross-cutting disciplines ensure transparency, quality, and learning – prerequisites for partnership growth. |
| SDLC Stage Dimensions | Provide the configuration levers (planning, collaboration, governance) that influence maturity progress. |
| CDL | Contextual constraints determine how fast or far maturity can grow (e.g., contract rigidity, regulatory environments). |
| SRL | Stable Rules maintain integrity during growth – ensuring adaptation without chaos. |
| RAC & CRC | Measure and guide relationship evolution through evidence and contextual adaptation. |

Together, these layers form a **closed system of evolution** — ensuring that delivery maturity is inseparable from relationship maturity.

Model Failure: The Collapsed Triangle

When one of the three relationship lines weakens, the 3-in-3 system loses balance.

If **Client ↔ Product** fails (e.g., absent product ownership or unclear business vision), the **Vendor ↔ Client** relationship becomes purely transactional.

If **Vendor ↔ Product** fails (e.g., poor engineering quality or limited feedback), trust erodes despite goodwill.

Recovery begins not by enforcing new controls but by **reconnecting the missing relationship** — restoring flow between value, delivery, and engagement.

Example Progression Scenario

"From Fixed-Bid Execution to Strategic Co-Delivery Partnership"

| Stage | Before (Transactional) | After (Strategic Partnership) | Key Shift |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| Discover | Vendor interprets requirements from RFP. | Joint discovery; shared workshops and validation. | Clarity and trust built early. |
| Shape | Vendor estimates scope; client approves. | Teams co-shape scope and architecture. | Co-ownership of feasibility and trade-offs. |
| Build | Vendor delivers to spec; client reviews. | Continuous delivery with shared metrics and transparent progress. | Trust through visibility and predictability. |
| Validate | QA owned by vendor; sign-off by client. | Joint validation and user acceptance. | Mutual accountability for quality. |
| Release | Hand-off to client operations. | Shared release management and change communication. | Transparency and confidence. |
| Run & Evolve | Vendor disengages post-release. | Continuous product improvement with shared goals. | Partnership renewal through learning. |

Result: trust scales into autonomy, autonomy into shared ownership, and shared ownership into innovation.

Measuring Relationship Maturity in Practice

To make partnership growth tangible, measure indicators across three lenses:

| Lens | Example Indicators | Tools / Data Sources |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Behavioral | Response speed, feedback participation, escalation frequency. | Meeting logs, stakeholder surveys. |
| Systemic | Shared KPIs, backlog visibility, governance adherence. | RAC scores, dashboard audits. |
| Outcome | Product impact, stability, improvement velocity. | Delivery metrics, post-release performance. |

These metrics form the **Relationship Maturity Dashboard**, ideally reviewed in the same cadence as delivery retrospectives.

Behavioral Failure: The Scapegoat Culture

In immature systems, shared accountability can degrade into shared blame — a culture where every issue seeks a culprit instead of a cause.

This **scapegoat culture** destroys psychological safety, making transparency impossible.

Symptoms include defensive retrospectives, risk concealment, and loss of initiative.

3SF counters this through **R7 (Risk Shared is Risk Reduced)** and **R12 (Learning is the Only Sustainable Advantage)** — turning failure into data, not division.

Summary

- **Relationship maturity is system maturity.** It grows through the same feedback loops that improve delivery and product quality.
- The **six capability gaps** (strategy, user, outcomes, feedback, sustainment, governance) act as maturity levers across all SDLC stages.
- **Progression goals** move relationships from transactional to strategic through trust, co-creation, and shared accountability.
- Integrated within the 3SF layers, maturity becomes not a byproduct – but the *primary output* of effective delivery systems.

When teams master 3SF, they don't just deliver software;
they evolve the **partnerships, systems, and organizations** that make continuous value creation possible.

3SF Practice Architecture

"Theory guides understanding. Practice enables transformation."

Purpose

The **3SF Practice Architecture** explains how to **apply the 3-in-3 SDLC Framework (3SF)** in real projects – for both **Client** and **Vendor** organizations.

While the **theory** defines *why* 3SF exists and *what* it represents, the **practice** defines *how* to use it – *when, by whom, and for what purpose*.

3SF practices are designed to:

- Help **clients** mature as commissioning and ownership partners.
- Help **vendors** mature as delivery and advisory partners.
- Create a **shared language** between both sides across the full SDLC lifecycle.

Objectives

- Provide a **map of 3SF usage** across delivery stages and relationship lines.
- Distinguish **client-side** and **vendor-side** applications of each tool.
- Define **modes of application** (Design, Diagnose, Assess, Reflect, Audit, Measure).
- Act as a **navigator** for all practice tools and related training modules.

Structure of the Practice Part

Each practice is a standalone tool (one file per tool) using a unified template.

Tools are grouped by **application mode** and mapped to **client / vendor contexts**.

| Mode | Primary Focus | Typical User | Example |
|------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Design | Establish delivery & engagement model | Vendor Delivery Facilitator / Client Product Leader | Initial Delivery System Design |
| Diagnose | Reveal constraints and gaps | Vendor Solution Architect / Client Product Leader | Delivery System Diagnostic |
| Assess | Measure project & relationship maturity | Delivery Facilitator / Account Lead / Executive Sponsor | Quarterly Delivery and Relationship Assessment |
| Reflect | Enable self-awareness and growth | Delivery Facilitator , Technical Integrator , Solution Architect , Product Leader | Self-Diagnostic and Reflection Tool |
| Audit & Aggregate | Compare and improve across portfolio | Engineering Director / Governance Officer | Relationship Audit and Portfolio Maturity Review |
| Measure | Consolidate maturity metrics and visualize systemic health | Governance Officer , Account Lead , Engineering Director | Maturity Dashboard and Metrics Consolidation |

Dual-Perspective Application

Each 3SF tool distinguishes **Client View** and **Vendor View**:

| Perspective | Purpose | Typical Roles | Example Application |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Client | Ensure vendor alignment, internal dependencies, and ownership clarity. | Product Leader, Executive Sponsor, Vendor Manager | Use 3SF tools to verify engagement readiness and integration. |
| Vendor | Design, execute, and evolve delivery systems that build partnership trust. | Delivery Facilitator, Solution Architect, Product Leader | Use 3SF tools to structure engagements and measure maturity. |
| Shared (Client + Vendor) | Strengthen collaboration, feedback, and transparency. | Combined teams across both sides | Apply tools jointly to synchronize relationship evolution. |

Each practice file includes sections:

Client-Side Application and Vendor-Side Application, highlighting respective actions and insights.

Application Modes

| Mode | Typical When | Used by (Client / Vendor) | 3SF Layers Focused | Outcomes |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------|---|
| Design | RFP → Kick-off | Delivery Facilitator / Product Leader | CDL + SRL | Intent and collaboration system established |
| Diagnose | Discovery / Early Delivery | Solution Architect / Product Leader | CDL + SRL | Constraints and dependencies identified |
| Assess | Quarterly / Milestone | Delivery Facilitator / Account Lead / Executive Sponsor | SRL + RAC | Delivery and relationship health tracked |
| Reflect | Anytime | Delivery Facilitator, Technical Integrator, Product Leader | RAC | Individual or team awareness improved |
| Audit | Periodic / Portfolio | Engineering Director / Governance Officer | CDL + SRL + RAC | Portfolio-level maturity comparison |
| Measure | Continuous / Portfolio Governance | Governance Officer / Account Lead / Engineering Director | SRL + RAC | Relationship and maturity data visualized for decision-making |

Lifecycle Navigation

| When | Mode | Tool | Client Role(s) | Vendor Role(s) | Outcome |
|------------------------------|----------|--|---|--|---|
| RFP / Pre-Engagement | Design | Initial Delivery System Design | Executive Sponsor, Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator, Account Lead | Shared engagement model & maturity baseline |
| Small Team Discovery | Diagnose | Delivery System Diagnostic | Product Leader, Requirements Analyst | Solution Architect, Delivery Facilitator | Validated context and delivery readiness |
| Kick-off | Design | Initial Delivery System Design | Product Leader, Executive Sponsor | Delivery Facilitator, Solution Architect | Clear interfaces and governance rules |
| Ongoing Delivery (MVP → v1) | Assess | Quarterly Delivery and Relationship Assessment | Product Leader, Executive Sponsor | Delivery Facilitator, Account Lead | Relationship and flow monitored |
| Anytime | Reflect | Self-Diagnostic and Reflection Tool | Client Product Leader, Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator, Technical Integrator | Personal or team growth insight |
| Post-v1 / Portfolio | Audit | Relationship Audit and Portfolio Maturity Review | Executive Sponsor, Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator, Engineering Director | Lessons learned & next-stage maturity targets |
| Ongoing Portfolio Governance | Measure | Maturity Dashboard and Metrics Consolidation | Executive Sponsor, Governance Officer | Account Lead, Engineering Director | Visibility into maturity trends and data-driven portfolio decisions |

3SF Layer Mapping

| 3SF Layer | Purpose | Client-Side Focus | Vendor-Side Focus | Example Tool |
|--------------------------------|---|--|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) | Clarify environment, goals, and constraints | Business objectives & internal readiness | Engagement framing & feasibility | Initial Delivery Design |
| Stable Rules Layer (SRL) | Define repeatable collaboration patterns | Governance & dependencies | Team operations & flow | Delivery System Diagnostic |
| Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) | Reflect and verify maturity | Value realization & partnership signals | Relationship metrics & feedback | Self-Diagnostic / Relationship Audit |

Expanding SDLC Practices – Alignment over Execution

3SF prioritizes **alignment before performance**.

To ensure that alignment is not aspirational but measurable, the following tools extend the six core SDLC practices and convert 3SF **Principles** into **mandatory, inspectable artifacts**.

They enforce joint ownership across the Client ↔ Vendor boundary and make theoretical concepts operational.

Tools to Expand the Six Core SDLC Practices

| Core SDLC Practice | Tool/Artifact (Mode) | Purpose in 3SF System |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Product Thinking | Outcome-to- Accountability Map (Design) | Enforces the " Outcome before Output " principle. Maps specific business metrics (outcomes) to the accountable Client Product Owner and the responsible Vendor Product Manager for each SDLC stage. Prevents the client from handing off a requirement without co-owning the result. |
| Architecture & Design | Architectural Trade-Off Contract (Design/ Diagnose) | Formalizes joint decisions. Documents critical non-functional requirement (NFR) trade-offs (e.g., speed vs. cost, security vs. complexity) and requires explicit sign-off from both Client Solution Architect and Vendor Solution Architect . Directly supports Shared Accountability . |
| Engineering & Quality | Shared Definition of Done (DoD) Matrix (Design) | Moves the Validate stage beyond simple client sign-off. Defines quality criteria across three dimensions: <i>Code Quality</i> (Vendor responsibility), <i>Operational Readiness</i> (Client Technical Integrator responsibility), and <i>User Acceptance</i> (Client Product Owner responsibility). |
| DevOps & Delivery | Flow Constraint Identification (Diagnose) | Used by the Vendor Delivery Lead and Client Project Manager to collaboratively map the flow (Value Stream Mapping) and identify the top 3 systemic constraints (e.g., Client security review time, Vendor environment provisioning). Directly supports " Flow before Speed ". |
| Governance & Risk | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter (Design) | Essential for " Trust before Control ." Defines explicit decision rights based on the current Maturity Level . E.g., at <i>Transactional Trust</i> , the Vendor needs approval for changes >1 day effort; at <i>Strategic Partnership</i> , the Vendor reports changes >5 days effort. This makes the boundary measurable. |
| Feedback & Learning | "Learning Before Blame" Protocol (Reflect) | A structured retrospective guide for the Evolve stage. Forces teams to analyze system friction by asking: (1) What was the <i>systemic cause</i> ? (2) What <i>principle</i> was violated? (3) What Stable Rule should we audit? Prevents the system from defaulting to The Scapegoat Culture . |

Tool for the Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)

| Framework Layer | Tool/Artifact (Mode) | Purpose in 3SF System |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Contextual Drivers Layer | Engagement Context Canvas (Design/Audit) | A structured canvas used at the outset of the Discover stage. It requires both sides to explicitly define the six Contextual Drivers (Commercial, Regulatory, Architectural, etc.) and agree on the corresponding Stable Rule Adjustments . This prevents the core issue of a Client Vendor Manager imposing a rigid process when the context (e.g., highly experimental scope) demands flexibility. |

Cross-Organizational Application Layer – Contractual Artifacts

While the *Alignment-over-Execution* tools operationalize 3SF Principles within delivery teams, the **Contractual Artifacts** define how those Principles are enforced **across organizational boundaries**.

These artifacts form the **interface layer** between Client and Vendor organizations – transforming principles such as *Trust before Control*, *Outcome before Output*, and *Shared Accountability* into measurable, co-signed commitments.

They are used as annexes or attachments to the **Delivery Charter** and act as the daily governance instruments of the 3SF operating system.

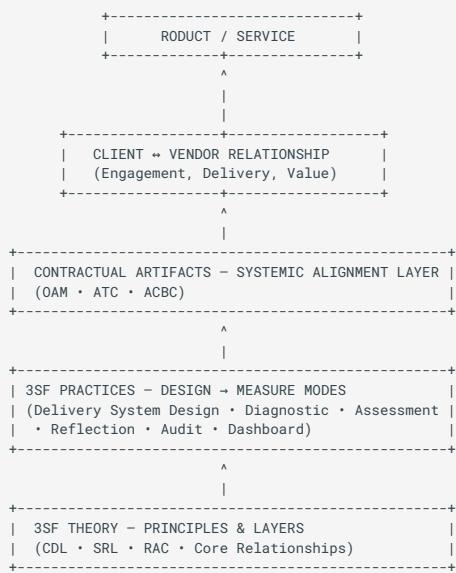
| 3SF Principle | Contractual Artifact | Core SDLC Practice | Primary Purpose |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Trust before Control | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter | Governance & Risk | Defines decision-making rights and escalation boundaries based on relationship maturity level. |
| Outcome before Output | Outcome-to- Accountability Map | Product Thinking | Connects each delivery goal to a measurable business outcome jointly owned by Client and Vendor. |
| Shared Accountability | Architectural Trade-Off Contract | Architecture & Design | Formalizes key technical and non-functional trade-offs with explicit sign-off from both Solution Architects. |

Each artifact is:

- **Bilateral** – co-created and co-signed by corresponding functional pairs.
- **Inspectable** – verified during maturity assessments and relationship audits.
- **Evolving** – updated as trust and autonomy mature over time.

Together, these artifacts make 3SF the **Meta-Framework of Co-Governance**, bridging strategic intent and operational practice between Client and Vendor organizations.

Systemic View of 3SF Contractual Artifacts



Interpretation:

The Contractual Artifacts act as the **governance bridge** between 3SF Theory and 3SF Practices.

They enforce alignment across the Client ↔ Vendor ↔ Product triangle by turning abstract principles into concrete agreements.

Without them, collaboration relies on interpretation; with them, collaboration becomes measurable.

3SF Functional Role Model

Purpose

The Functional Role Model defines how both Client and Vendor teams participate in the SDLC system described by 3SF.

It establishes a shared functional language across all practices, enabling consistent use of roles in the Practice documents.

Roles are defined by their **system function**, not organizational title, and may exist on either side depending on engagement setup.

Co-Dependent SDLC System Functions

These are the core **joint execution functions** that drive the SDLC. They are necessary for managing the **Client ↔ Vendor ↔ Product** relationships.

| Functional Core | Purpose (Joint SDLC Management) | Composite Name Examples |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Product Leader | Owns <i>What</i> (Value) and <i>How</i> (Solution Strategy). | Client Product Owner / Vendor Product Manager |
| Delivery Facilitator | Owns <i>Flow</i> , removes impediments, and manages <i>systemic friction</i> . | Client Project Manager / Vendor Delivery Lead |
| Solution Architect | Owns <i>Coherence</i> , structural integrity, and architectural <i>trade-offs</i> . | Client Solution Architect / Vendor Solution Architect |
| Technical Integrator | Owns <i>Technical Execution</i> , operational readiness, and integration <i>quality</i> . | Client Technical Integrator / Vendor Technical Integrator |
| Requirements Analyst | Owns <i>Clarity</i> , domain expertise, and the <i>translation</i> of business needs. | Client Requirements Analyst / Vendor Requirements Analyst |
| Experience Designer | Owns <i>Usability</i> , user needs, and the design that enables Outcome before Output . | Client Experience Lead / Vendor Experience Lead |

Client-Specific Fixed Cores

These roles provide the **governance, funding, and boundaries** for the engagement.

| Functional Core (Client-Only) | Purpose |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Owns funding, strategic intent, and the highest-level Trust before Control decisions. |
| Vendor Manager | Owns commercial agreements, contracting, and performance against the Maturity Model . |
| Governance Officer | Owns adherence to regulatory, security, and internal audit standards. |

Vendor-Specific Fixed Cores

These roles provide the **organizational capacity, quality assurance, and commercial stewardship** needed to sustain the partnership.

| Functional Core (Vendor-Only) | Purpose |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Account Lead | Owns the overall commercial health and portfolio alignment for the client relationship. |
| Engineering Director | Manages resource capacity, staff health, and supports the delivery unit's systemic maturity . |
| Practice Lead | Defines and upholds quality standards for specific disciplines (e.g., Architecture, DevEx, QA, DevOps). |
| Engineering Specialist | The core capacity responsible for hands-on technical implementation and verification. |

Summary of Dimensions

1. **Co-Dependent System Roles** – the joint actors of the SDLC.
2. **Client Governance & Sponsorship Roles** – the structural boundary setters.
3. **Vendor Capacity & Stewardship Roles** – the structural sustainers.

Practice Template

Each individual practice file follows this shared structure:

| Section | Description |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Purpose | Why the tool exists and what maturity gap it closes |
| Applies To | SDLC stage, relationship line, and maturity level |
| Actors / Roles | Client + Vendor roles involved (see Functional Role Model) |
| Steps / Routines | How to apply it collaboratively |
| Inputs / Outputs | Artifacts or agreements produced |
| Metrics / Signals | Quantitative and qualitative indicators |
| Common Pitfalls | Typical misuses or blind spots |
| Scaling Notes | How to evolve use with maturity |
| Client-Side Application | Specific guidance for client users |
| Vendor-Side Application | Specific guidance for vendor users |

Using Practice Architecture in Training

This file serves as the **starting point** in all training paths:

1. Identify your **side** (Client or Vendor).
2. Determine your **current stage** (RFP, Discovery, Delivery, Post-v1).
3. Choose the **application mode** (Design, Diagnose, Assess, Reflect, Audit).
4. Open the corresponding tool file.
5. Apply it collaboratively using shared terminology and maturity targets.

Training programs and certifications use these mappings to define **3SF Practitioner Paths** – separate for Client and Vendor, but sharing the same conceptual backbone.

Summary

3SF Practice Architecture bridges the *3SF Theory* and the *Practical Toolset*, creating a shared map for both **Client** and **Vendor** teams to:

- Understand *when* and *why* to use each tool,
- Distinguish respective responsibilities and contributions,
- Build maturity in a synchronized and measurable way.

Initial Delivery System Design

"Every successful engagement starts with a consciously designed system, not an improvised process."

Purpose

The **Initial Delivery System Design** tool establishes the **first working model** of collaboration between **Client** and **Vendor** before or during project kick-off.

It translates business intent into an executable delivery system by aligning:

- **Engagement expectations** between Client and Vendor,
- **Flow of work** and information across both organizations,
- **Stable rules** for decision-making, communication, and governance.

This tool closes the maturity gap between *contractual setup* and *operational collaboration* – helping both sides enter delivery with clarity instead of assumptions.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | RFP → Discovery → Kick-off |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Define intent, funding logic, and partnership boundaries. |
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Translate business goals into flow and governance patterns. |
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Align architectural feasibility and constraints. |
| Requirements Analyst | Requirements Analyst | Clarify problem statements and validation criteria. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Ensure compliance, security, and resourcing stability. |

Steps / Routines

1. **Frame the Intent**
2. Clarify *Why this product or service exists* and *What success looks like* for both sides.
3. Record shared vision, constraints, and strategic assumptions in a **Delivery Charter**.
4. **Map the Engagement System**
5. Identify *interfaces* between Client ↔ Vendor ↔ Product.
6. Define how information, priorities, and dependencies will flow.
7. Visualize using a **3-in-3 Engagement Canvas** (triangle form).

8. Define Stable Rules

9. Agree on key collaboration practices (e.g., cadence, decision loops, escalation path).
10. Select initial 3SF practices relevant to context (e.g., RACI, backlog management, risk log).

11. Assess Starting Maturity

12. Use a simplified 3SF Maturity Checklist to rate Engagement, Delivery, and Value relationships.
13. Capture baseline scores to enable progress tracking after first quarter.

14. Validate System Coherence

15. Review with both technical and business representatives.
16. Ensure the setup supports value realization, not only contract execution.

17. Publish and Commit

18. Share the agreed system (charter + canvas + checklist) across both organizations.
19. Schedule a 6-week review to confirm the system works as intended.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|--|
| RFP / SoW draft, strategic objectives, architectural outline | Delivery Charter, Engagement Canvas, Maturity Baseline, initial Governance Matrix |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Alignment Quality | Shared definition of “done” and measurable success criteria exist. |
| Engagement Clarity | Decision flow, communication cadence, and ownership map defined. |
| Readiness Confidence | Both sides confirm ability to start delivery without new dependencies. |
| Maturity Signal | Baseline shows at least <i>Collaborative</i> level on Engagement and Delivery lines. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating the exercise as documentation instead of *system design*.
- Letting either side dominate – missing true co-ownership.
- Starting delivery without defining communication rhythm or decision rules.
- Ignoring cross-organizational dependencies (security, access, procurement).
- Focusing on individual roles instead of *relationships between functions*.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Transactional → Collaborative | Move from single-point contacts to functional interfaces (Product ↔ Delivery ↔ Architecture). |
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Integrate metrics and shared backlog ownership. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Embed 3SF practices into organizational governance and portfolio planning. |

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure the vendor team integrates smoothly into internal structures and delivers business outcomes, not just outputs.

Client actions

1. Use this tool during RFP finalization or early discovery.
2. Assign internal ownership for each engagement interface (business, technical, governance).
3. Approve the joint Delivery Charter and participate in the maturity baseline review.
4. Record internal dependencies (e.g., data access, release approvals) in the Governance Matrix.
5. Communicate strategic priorities transparently to enable vendor autonomy.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Establish a predictable, value-aligned delivery system and demonstrate partnership maturity from day zero.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate creation of the Engagement Canvas with Client roles.
2. Translate business goals into technical and operational flow diagrams.
3. Identify missing context or misaligned assumptions early and document them.
4. Propose the initial Stable Rules set and verify Client acceptance.
5. Use baseline metrics to plan first 3SF Quarterly Assessment.

Summary

Initial Delivery System Design is the *gateway practice* of 3SF.

It connects intent to execution by co-creating the first stable delivery system between **Client** and **Vendor**.

The result is a shared **Delivery Charter**, **Engagement Canvas**, and **Maturity Baseline** – forming the foundation for all subsequent 3SF tools and assessments.

Delivery System Diagnostic

"A healthy system adapts before it breaks."

Purpose

The **Delivery System Diagnostic** is applied early in the project (typically after 4–6 weeks of active work) to verify whether the **designed delivery system** performs as expected.

Its goal is to:

- Detect **systemic friction** or **relationship gaps** between Client and Vendor,
- Evaluate alignment between **intent, flow, and value**,
- Identify which **3SF layers** need adjustment before scaling or acceleration.

This tool bridges the transition from *planned system* (design intent) to *observed system* (actual operation).

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Early Delivery |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Ensure delivery aligns with business value and maintains flow. |
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Validate architectural and technical integrity. |
| Requirements Analyst | Requirements Analyst | Verify clarity, scope flow, and requirement traceability. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Check compliance, access, and operational readiness. |
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Evaluate relationship maturity and system health. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Collect Observations**
- Review how work actually flows through the system.
- Compare to the designed model from the **Initial Delivery System Design**.
- Capture evidence: velocity trends, dependency logs, unresolved impediments.
- 5. Assess Relationship Lines**
- 6. Engagement Line:** Are expectations and communication loops effective?
- 7. Delivery Line:** Are teams collaborating fluidly, or bottlenecks emerging?

8. **Value Line:** Is delivered output translating into business outcomes?

9. Identify Maturity Gaps

10. Apply the **3SF Maturity Diagnostic Grid** (simplified per relationship line).

11. Rate each on a 1–5 maturity scale (Reactive → Strategic).

12. Record differences between *planned* and *actual* maturity.

13. Map Systemic Constraints

14. Analyze internal dependencies (e.g., security approvals, environment setup).

15. Document external ones (e.g., vendor staffing, client change management).

16. Tag each as *short-term fix* or *systemic risk*.

17. Facilitate Review Session

18. Conduct a 90-minute joint workshop led by the Delivery Facilitator and Product Leader.

19. Discuss each constraint and decide what should be improved, delegated, or postponed.

20. Prioritize no more than three systemic improvement actions.

21. Publish Diagnostic Report

22. Summarize observations, ratings, and actions in a **Delivery Diagnostic Sheet**.

23. Share with both organizations' leadership (Account Lead + Executive Sponsor).

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|--|
| Delivery Charter, Engagement Canvas, Maturity Baseline | Delivery Diagnostic Sheet, Maturity Delta Report, updated Improvement Backlog |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------------|---|
| Flow Efficiency | <10% work blocked or delayed >3 days. |
| Dependency Visibility | All cross-org dependencies tracked and owned. |
| Decision Latency | Average turnaround time < 48 hours for delivery-critical decisions. |
| Maturity Delta | Gap between designed and actual maturity ≤ 1 level per relationship line. |
| Engagement Pulse | Positive sentiment trend in post-review survey ($\geq 4/5$). |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating observed delivery issues as *team performance* instead of *systemic friction*.
- Focusing only on process metrics (velocity, defects) instead of relationship quality.
- Overloading the session with too many improvement goals.
- Conducting the review without both client and vendor decision-makers present.
- Ignoring early warning signs in engagement tone or feedback cadence.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|--|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Joint backlog ownership, transparent metrics dashboards. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Shared outcome KPIs replacing output metrics. |

As maturity increases, the diagnostic evolves from *problem detection* to *continuous improvement ritual*.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Confirm that the vendor delivery system effectively contributes to intended business outcomes.

Client actions

1. Review progress against expectations defined in the Delivery Charter.
2. Provide transparent feedback on value realization, not just output volume.
3. Identify internal blockers that affect vendor performance (e.g., approvals, access).
4. Participate in the joint diagnostic workshop; focus on shared system ownership.
5. Approve improvement actions that require internal resource or policy change.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Detect early misalignments and demonstrate delivery accountability through data and transparency.

Vendor actions

1. Collect delivery flow metrics and prepare the Maturity Delta Report.
2. Facilitate the diagnostic workshop using 3SF templates.
3. Document agreed actions with clear ownership (Client or Vendor).
4. Present findings constructively – emphasizing collaboration, not blame.
5. Integrate improvement items into the next quarterly plan or sprint retrospectives.

Summary

The **Delivery System Diagnostic** ensures that the joint delivery system is *functional, adaptive, and value-aligned*. It transforms early-stage ambiguity into structured learning and continuous improvement.

Used effectively, it becomes a **trust accelerator** – validating that both Client and Vendor are learning *with each other, not about each other*.

Quarterly Delivery and Relationship Assessment

"Partnership maturity grows through reflection, not reports."

Purpose

The **Quarterly Delivery and Relationship Assessment** provides a structured checkpoint to evaluate the **health, maturity, and trajectory** of the ongoing client–vendor engagement.

It measures both **delivery performance** and **relationship maturity** to:

- Identify what has evolved since the last Diagnostic or Assessment,
- Re-align expectations and metrics between Client and Vendor,
- Strengthen systemic trust and prevent silent degradation of engagement quality.

This tool turns continuous improvement into a shared quarterly ritual rather than a reactive exercise.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Ongoing Delivery → MVP / v1 → Post-v1 Evolution |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From Co-Creative Trust → toward Strategic Partnership |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--|--|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Ensure business and partnership alignment across portfolio. |
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Review delivery flow, backlog health, and outcome alignment. |
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Evaluate technical evolution and design integrity. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Verify compliance, continuity, and risk management. |
| Requirements Analyst, Experience Designer | Technical Integrator, Practice Lead | Review quality, usability, and system coherence. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Prepare Evidence and Signals**
2. Collect performance metrics (velocity, incidents, releases, satisfaction).
3. Summarize progress against previous Diagnostic and Improvement Backlog.
4. Compile survey or pulse feedback from both teams.
- 5. Evaluate Relationship Maturity**

6. Apply the **3SF Maturity Grid** across all three relationship lines.
7. Rate current state and discuss deltas since last quarter.
8. Use narrative reasoning: "What changed, why, and what did we learn?"

9. Assess Delivery Health

10. Review flow efficiency, predictability, and outcome correlation.
11. Identify systemic blockers or cross-team dependencies.
12. Validate that stable rules (SRL) are still effective.

13. Identify Next Maturity Levers

14. Select one Engagement lever (e.g., trust rituals),
one Delivery lever (e.g., joint planning),
and one Value lever (e.g., outcome-based metrics).

15. Define targeted improvements for the next 3 months.

16. Facilitate the Quarterly Review Session

17. Conduct a 2-hour structured conversation led jointly by the Delivery Facilitator and Product Leader.
18. Include both Executive Sponsor and Account Lead for alignment on strategic direction.
19. Conclude with a signed **Quarterly Alignment Record (QAR)** summarizing decisions.

20. Publish and Track

21. Update the **Maturity Dashboard** and **Improvement Backlog**.
22. Plan follow-up in next retrospectives or governance meetings.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Previous Diagnostic or Assessment reports, metrics dashboards, Improvement Backlog | Quarterly Alignment Record (QAR) , updated Maturity Dashboard , new Improvement Plan |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|---------------------------|---|
| Maturity Delta | +1 level on at least one relationship line per two quarters. |
| Engagement Quality | ≥ 80% survey score on trust, clarity, and communication. |
| Delivery Health | <15% churn in backlog due to unclear priorities. |
| Value Realization | ≥ 70% of delivered items linked to measurable outcomes. |
| System Stability | No recurring systemic issues across two consecutive quarters. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating the assessment as a KPI review instead of a **relationship reflection**.
- Focusing only on delivery metrics and ignoring value signals.
- Lack of senior involvement (Sponsor / Account Lead).
- Overcomplicating the scoring instead of discussing narratives.
- Not translating insights into actionable next steps.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Establish shared portfolio governance and joint success metrics. |
| Strategic Partner → Integrated Partner | Formalize 3SF assessments as part of enterprise governance cadence. |

At higher maturity, assessments evolve into **joint portfolio reviews** connecting multiple projects under one relationship umbrella.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Maintain visibility into how the vendor partnership contributes to both product outcomes and organizational learning.

Client actions

1. Gather stakeholder feedback (Product, IT, Compliance).
2. Validate vendor delivery outcomes against business KPIs.
3. Participate in rating and narrative discussion openly.
4. Identify internal policy or dependency changes required to sustain maturity growth.
5. Endorse the next-quarter improvement levers and allocate needed support.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate delivery maturity, anticipate systemic risks, and nurture trust through transparency.

Vendor actions

1. Prepare delivery and relationship metrics with context and narrative.
2. Facilitate the assessment workshop jointly with the client.
3. Summarize improvement recommendations in QAR format.
4. Highlight proactive actions taken since last quarter.
5. Support governance follow-up and accountability tracking.

Summary

The **Quarterly Delivery and Relationship Assessment** transforms performance review into **relationship evolution**.

It anchors the 3SF maturity journey in real, measurable progress — ensuring that trust, value, and flow advance together.

This tool closes the feedback loop between **system observation** and **system evolution**, forming the foundation for strategic partnership readiness.

Self-Diagnostic and Reflection Tool

"Systems evolve only when their people reflect."

Purpose

The **3SF Self-Diagnostic** enables **individuals and small teams** to reflect on their contribution to the joint delivery system and relationship maturity.

It transforms *personal perception* into *systemic awareness* — revealing how each role, action, or decision affects **Engagement, Delivery, and Value** lines across the 3SF model.

This tool helps:

- Recognize blind spots before they escalate into team or client tension,
- Reinforce alignment between individual purpose and system goals,
- Build a culture of self-correction and trust across organizations.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Any ongoing project stage |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> (individual level) |

Actors / Roles

Applicable to all **functional cores** defined in the 3SF Functional Role Model, e.g.:

| Role | Reflective Focus |
|---|---|
| Product Leader | Balancing value definition with delivery realism. |
| Delivery Facilitator | Maintaining flow and psychological safety. |
| Solution Architect | Ensuring technical coherence serves outcomes. |
| Technical Integrator | Safeguarding quality and reducing friction. |
| Requirements Analyst | Clarifying what matters most and why. |
| Experience Designer | Keeping user value central across trade-offs. |
| Executive Sponsor / Account Lead | Enabling trust and transparency from leadership. |

Steps / Routines

1. Set the **Reflection Context**
2. Choose a time window (last sprint, quarter, or milestone).
3. Reflect individually or as a small peer group (2–5 participants).
4. Prepare the last **Quarterly Assessment** or **Diagnostic** as context.

5. Answer Reflection Questions

6. Use the **3x3 Reflection Grid** (below).
7. Rate yourself 1–5 (1 = rarely true, 5 = consistently true).
8. Write short examples for scores ≤3.

| Relationship Line | Typical Reflection Questions |
|-------------------|--|
| Engagement | Do I maintain clarity in cross-team communication? Do I address misalignment early? Do I contribute to mutual trust? |
| Delivery | Do I help simplify complexity? Do I keep commitments realistic? Do I help others succeed across boundaries? |
| Value | Do I understand why my work matters to the end user or client? Do I connect outputs to outcomes? Do I seek feedback on impact? |

1. Identify Learning Signals

2. Review your lowest 2–3 ratings – they represent current learning edges.
3. Link each to a 3SF layer or maturity gap (e.g., unclear Stable Rule, missing feedback loop).

4. Create an Action Pledge

5. Choose one improvement commitment for the next iteration.
6. Frame it as a behavior: "I will start / stop / continue..."
7. Share it with your Delivery Facilitator or Product Leader.

8. Revisit After One Cycle

9. At next sprint or quarterly review, reflect on what changed.
10. Integrate learning into the team's improvement backlog.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Last Diagnostic / Assessment results, project retrospectives, personal notes | Reflection Grid, Action Pledge , optionally shared Reflection Summary |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Awareness Growth | Increase in individual reflection depth over 2 cycles. |
| Behavioral Change | Observable alignment between reflection actions and delivery outcomes. |
| Psychological Safety | 80% of team members report feeling safe to speak about issues openly. |
| Learning Culture | Reflections discussed in retrospectives at least once per iteration. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating reflection as evaluation instead of learning.
- Focusing only on personal comfort, not on system contribution.

- Lack of follow-up – reflection without visible change.
- Using scores as performance metrics instead of awareness indicators.
- Conducting reflection in isolation from client or cross-functional peers.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Peer reflections become team rituals; feedback becomes normalized. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Reflections feed into leadership training and organizational maturity programs. |

Client-Side Application

Objective: Build reflective leadership habits that improve vendor collaboration and value realization.

Client actions

1. Encourage Product Leaders and Governance Officers to run reflections after each milestone.
2. Connect reflection insights to improvement areas identified in Quarterly Assessments.
3. Use outcomes to adjust internal dependencies (e.g., approval flow, release cadence).
4. Demonstrate accountability by sharing top insights with the vendor team.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Reinforce ownership, humility, and transparency inside delivery teams.

Vendor actions

1. Integrate reflections into retrospectives or end-of-phase reviews.
2. Use reflection outcomes to identify internal capability gaps (skills, communication, tools).
3. Share aggregated themes with the client to illustrate learning progress.
4. Include top insights in Delivery Facilitator and Practice Lead coaching plans.

Summary

The **3SF Self-Diagnostic** empowers every participant – from engineer to executive – to become a conscious contributor to system maturity. It turns reflection into a **core maintenance function** of the client-vendor relationship, ensuring that personal learning continuously fuels organizational evolution.

Use this tool regularly, even when everything seems fine – because systems thrive on awareness, not assumptions.

Relationship Audit and Portfolio Maturity Review

"Partnership health is the leading indicator of delivery success."

Purpose

The **Relationship Audit and Portfolio Maturity Review** validates how well the client–vendor ecosystem performs as a **system of relationships**, not just a collection of projects.

It enables leadership teams on both sides to:

- Audit **Engagement, Delivery, and Value** relationships across projects,
- Identify systemic risks and recurring maturity gaps,
- Translate learning from individual assessments into **portfolio-level improvement actions**.

This tool closes the 3SF feedback loop – from individual reflection to organizational learning.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Post-MVP / Ongoing portfolio operations |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Strategic Partnership</i> → toward <i>Integrated Partnership</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Align portfolio strategy and investment with delivery health. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Ensure compliance, continuity, and risk mitigation. |
| Product Leader(s) | Delivery Facilitator(s) | Share learning from active projects and surface systemic blockers. |
| Vendor Manager | Practice Lead | Review contract and performance alignment with maturity targets. |
| Solution Architect(s) | Technical Integrator(s) | Capture architectural and operational improvement patterns. |

Steps / Routines

1. **Collect Inputs Across Projects**
2. Gather the latest **Quarterly Assessments, Diagnostics, and Self-Diagnostics**.
3. Extract recurring patterns in Engagement, Delivery, and Value relationship lines.
4. **Aggregate Maturity Data**
5. Plot each project's maturity level on the **3SF Portfolio Maturity Map**.
6. Highlight anomalies – e.g., strong delivery but weak engagement, or value lagging behind output.
7. **Analyze Systemic Causes**

8. Group issues by origin: *structural, behavioral, contextual*.
9. Determine which constraints are internal to the client, vendor, or shared.
10. Identify missing or outdated Stable Rules (SRL) at portfolio level.

11. Facilitate the Portfolio Audit Session

12. Conduct a half-day workshop co-led by the **Account Lead** and **Governance Officer**.
13. Include Executive Sponsor(s) for cross-project alignment and funding decisions.
14. Discuss trends, systemic risks, and improvement priorities.

15. Define Portfolio Improvement Themes

16. Select 2–3 strategic maturity themes for the next quarter (e.g., “decision latency reduction,” “shared risk management,” “value metrics adoption”).
17. Assign cross-project owners for each theme.

18. Publish the Relationship Audit Report

19. Summarize findings, visualizations, and improvement commitments.
20. Store in a shared governance repository accessible to both organizations.
21. Schedule next audit in 3–6 months.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|--|
| Diagnostics, Quarterly Assessments, Self-Diagnostics, Delivery Charters | Relationship Audit Report, Portfolio Maturity Map, Strategic Improvement Plan |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Portfolio Maturity Index | Average maturity across projects improving +0.5 per audit cycle. |
| Relationship Stability | ≥ 80% of engagements remain active or renewed after 12 months. |
| Value Consistency | ≥ 70% of projects demonstrate measurable business outcomes. |
| Governance Efficiency | Decision latency reduced by ≥ 25% portfolio-wide. |
| Learning Diffusion | Best practices from one project adopted by ≥ 50% of others. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating the audit as compliance instead of **strategic learning**.
- Aggregating only delivery metrics without relationship indicators.
- Skipping qualitative narratives behind maturity scores.
- Failing to involve both client and vendor leadership at equal weight.
- Not converting audit results into actionable improvement themes.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|--|
| Strategic → Integrated Partnership | Establish joint governance boards using 3SF as a shared maturity language. |
| Integrated → Institutionalized Partnership | Embed 3SF metrics into enterprise OKRs and vendor management frameworks. |

At high maturity, Relationship Audits replace periodic vendor scorecards – becoming a **shared governance standard** between organizations.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure that vendor collaboration scales sustainably and contributes to strategic portfolio outcomes.

Client actions

1. Initiate the audit through Governance Officer or Executive Sponsor.
2. Collect cross-project evidence and invite vendor leadership to co-analyze results.
3. Use audit insights to adjust sourcing strategy, internal processes, and funding models.
4. Champion systemic improvement themes across departments.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate maturity leadership and partnership stewardship across the client portfolio.

Vendor actions

1. Consolidate maturity data from all projects with the same client.
2. Identify recurring patterns in engagement, delivery, and value translation.
3. Propose systemic improvements backed by evidence.
4. Collaborate with client governance in defining and tracking strategic themes.
5. Use outcomes to evolve internal playbooks and training curricula.

Summary

The **Relationship Audit and Portfolio Maturity Review** elevates 3SF from a project framework to an **organizational governance model**.

It helps leadership teams on both sides move beyond performance management toward **shared strategic learning** – turning every project into a data point in a continuously improving partnership system.

When applied regularly, this tool ensures that trust, capability, and value creation grow together across the entire client–vendor ecosystem.

Maturity Dashboard and Metrics Consolidation

"You can't manage trust, but you can observe its signals."

Purpose

The **3SF Maturity Dashboard** aggregates data and insights from all 3SF practices into a single view of **delivery health**, **relationship quality**, and **value realization** across projects or portfolios.

It enables both **Client** and **Vendor** organizations to:

- Track the evolution of maturity across **Engagement**, **Delivery**, and **Value** lines,
- Identify systemic patterns, strengths, and weaknesses,
- Support decision-making with evidence rather than perception.

This tool transforms qualitative insights from Diagnostics, Assessments, and Audits into **measurable governance intelligence**.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Active delivery and portfolio governance |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | Continuous visibility across all maturity stages |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|---|--|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Use dashboard to align strategy and investment with maturity progress. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Manage compliance, performance, and improvement initiatives. |
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Use dashboard insights for quarterly planning and team health reviews. |
| Solution Architect, Technical Integrator | Solution Architect, Practice Lead | Analyze technical and process health trends across engagements. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Collect Maturity Data**
- Gather scores and narratives from all **Diagnostics**, **Quarterly Assessments**, **Self-Diagnostics**, and **Audits**.
- For each relationship line (Engagement, Delivery, Value), capture:
 - Current maturity level (1–5 scale)
 - Trend (improving, stable, declining)
 - Confidence (high, medium, low)
- 4. Aggregate and Visualize**

5. Create a visual matrix (projects on X-axis, relationship lines on Y-axis).
6. Use color or symbol codes for maturity levels and trends.
7. Optional: combine multiple clients or vendors for benchmarking.

8. Analyze Patterns

9. Identify correlations (e.g., strong Delivery maturity often predicts Value growth).
10. Detect portfolio hotspots where engagement maturity lags behind delivery performance.
11. Cross-reference with improvement backlogs for progress validation.

12. Publish Insights

13. Generate **Maturity Dashboard Summary** with key observations and recommendations.
14. Include:

- Top strengths to preserve,
- Systemic gaps to address,
- Maturity evolution graph by quarter.

15. Share dashboard in portfolio review or governance sessions.

16. Integrate into Decision Loops

17. Use maturity trends to prioritize leadership coaching, governance improvements, or funding adjustments.
18. Embed dashboard checkpoints into regular 3SF review cycles.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Maturity data from all 3SF tools (210–250), Improvement Backlogs, Relationship Audit reports | Maturity Dashboard (visual + tabular), Trend Analysis Summary, Portfolio Health Overview |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|---|--|
| Engagement Maturity Index (EMI) | Average score across all active projects for Engagement line. |
| Delivery Maturity Index (DMI) | Average Delivery line score adjusted by predictability and flow metrics. |
| Value Maturity Index (VMI) | Proportion of delivered outputs linked to measurable outcomes. |
| Partnership Confidence Index (PCI) | Combined sentiment from client and vendor quarterly surveys. |
| Maturity Velocity (MV) | Rate of improvement (+/- maturity points per quarter). |
| Systemic Risk Ratio (SRR) | Percentage of projects with declining maturity for 2+ quarters. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating the dashboard as a performance scorecard instead of a **learning compass**.
- Aggregating numeric scores without including qualitative narratives.
- Lack of shared ownership between client and vendor in maintaining data accuracy.
- Inconsistent maturity definitions across teams.
- Focusing on individual project issues instead of systemic patterns.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|---|---|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Track maturity across multiple teams or products. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Integrate dashboard into quarterly executive reviews. |
| Strategic → Integrated Partnership | Automate dashboard updates and use them for strategic planning. |

At high maturity, the dashboard becomes part of enterprise reporting – linking relationship quality directly to business outcomes.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Use the dashboard to align business value realization and governance oversight with real relationship maturity data.

Client actions 1. Assign a **Governance Officer** to own dashboard updates and review cadence. 2. Correlate maturity trends with business metrics (ROI, adoption, satisfaction). 3. Share insights with executive sponsors to guide sourcing and portfolio investment. 4. Use findings to improve vendor enablement and internal dependency management.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Use the dashboard as evidence of maturity growth, delivery reliability, and partnership accountability.

Vendor actions

1. Aggregate project-level maturity data quarterly under the **Account Lead**.
2. Use insights for portfolio retrospectives and client presentations.
3. Correlate maturity signals with delivery performance (e.g., predictability, defect rate).
4. Share dashboard visuals during Relationship Audits and executive check-ins.
5. Translate trends into training, hiring, and playbook improvements.

Summary

The **3SF Maturity Dashboard** is the measurement layer connecting all 3SF tools into a living system of governance intelligence.

It replaces anecdotal reporting with a **shared, evidence-based understanding** of partnership maturity – bridging data, dialogue, and decision-making.

When used consistently, it turns 3SF from a set of practices into a **maturity management ecosystem** – allowing both Client and Vendor organizations to see, learn, and evolve together.

Outcome-to-Accountability Map

"Every output without a shared outcome erodes trust."

Purpose

The **Outcome-to-Accountability Map (OAM)** enforces the 3SF principle "**Outcome before Output**." It ensures that every deliverable is linked to a clearly defined **business outcome** that both Client and Vendor jointly own.

This tool converts intent into accountability by:

- Connecting **business metrics** (outcomes) with **delivery metrics** (outputs),
- Assigning **accountability** to the Client Product Owner (value realization) and **responsibility** to the Vendor Product Manager (delivery results),
- Making both sides jointly accountable for success beyond completion.

OAM closes the gap between *client expectations* and *vendor execution*, establishing measurable value ownership before delivery starts.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Design → Delivery |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Value ↔ Engagement ↔ Delivery |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--|--|--|
| Product Leader (Client Product Owner) | Product Leader (Vendor Product Manager) | Define and co-own success metrics. |
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve business alignment and outcome definitions. |
| Requirements Analyst | Solution Architect | Ensure traceability between outcome, requirement, and implementation. |
| Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Validate that outcome accountability is reflected in reporting and dashboards. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Define Core Outcomes**
- Identify 3–5 primary outcomes representing *business impact*, not *features delivered*.
- Example outcomes: *increase conversion by 5%*, *reduce support time by 30%*, *enable compliance with X standard*.
- 4. Map Outcome-to-Output Chain**
- For each outcome, list supporting epics or deliverables.

6. Link each epic to outcome metric(s) and designate:

- **Accountable (Client)** – ensures outcome adoption.
- **Responsible (Vendor)** – ensures delivery of the enabling feature.

7. Assign Verification Method

8. Define how each outcome will be measured (data source, time window, owner).

9. Document agreed-upon baseline and target values.

10. Validate Accountability Balance

11. Review across roles — ensure no outcome is owned by only one side.

12. The Delivery Facilitator confirms workload balance and alignment.

13. Approve and Publish

14. Present the OAM in the **Initial Delivery System Design** workshop or early discovery.

15. Both Executive Sponsor and Account Lead sign off.

16. Store in the shared Delivery Charter repository.

17. Revisit During Quarterly Assessment

18. Track outcome progress alongside delivery metrics.

19. Adjust accountability mapping if team composition or ownership changes.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|--|
| Business objectives, backlog epics, KPIs | Outcome-to-Accountability Map , baseline and target metrics, accountability matrix integrated into Delivery Charter |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Outcome Traceability | 100% of major epics linked to at least one measurable outcome. |
| Ownership Clarity | Each outcome has both a Client and Vendor owner. |
| Value Adoption Rate | ≥ 70% of delivered outcomes meet or exceed baseline targets within 3 months. |
| Engagement Maturity Signal | Increased alignment between product metrics and delivery cadence. |

Common Pitfalls

- Confusing *outputs* (features) with *outcomes* (impact).
- Allowing one-sided ownership — e.g., only vendor responsible for outcomes.
- Using vanity KPIs (story points, release counts) instead of real value metrics.
- Neglecting to update accountability when team composition or priorities change.
- Omitting baselines — making success impossible to measure.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Transactional → Collaborative | Introduce shared success metrics in statements of work. |
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Integrate outcome metrics into backlog prioritization. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Shift governance reviews from output completion to outcome realization. |

Client-Side Application

Objective: Maintain value ownership and prevent delegation of accountability to the vendor.

Client actions

1. Lead outcome definition with input from stakeholders.
2. Assign clear accountability for each outcome to internal business or product owners.
3. Validate that vendor outputs map to business goals.
4. Review outcome progress during Quarterly Assessments.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Align delivery execution to business value and demonstrate accountability maturity.

Vendor actions

1. Support outcome framing and confirm technical feasibility.
2. Map features and epics to defined outcomes using the OAM template.
3. Report progress based on impact, not just delivery completion.
4. Use OAM data to inform retrospective discussions and maturity assessments.

Summary

The **Outcome-to-Accountability Map** is the keystone artifact enforcing **Outcome before Output**.

It transforms expectations into shared accountability – ensuring that every output contributes to measurable, co-owned business results.

Applied consistently, OAM strengthens alignment, accelerates trust, and prevents the “handover mentality” at the root of failed client–vendor partnerships.

Architectural Trade-Off Contract

"Every architecture decision is a trust transaction."

Purpose

The **Architectural Trade-Off Contract (ATC)** formalizes critical design decisions that affect the long-term sustainability and risk profile of the product or service.

It enforces **Shared Accountability** between **Client** and **Vendor** Solution Architects by documenting, validating, and co-signing key architectural trade-offs.

This tool transforms subjective design debates into transparent agreements, ensuring that:

- Each major trade-off (e.g., cost vs. resilience, speed vs. maintainability) is consciously accepted,
- Responsibility and ownership are shared, not delegated,
- The rationale and consequences are traceable throughout the SDLC lifecycle.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Design → Early Delivery |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Jointly assess, document, and own architectural trade-offs. |
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Validate that architectural choices serve business and delivery objectives. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Ensure decisions comply with security, performance, and quality standards. |
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve exceptions and confirm business alignment with risk tolerance. |

Steps / Routines

1. Identify Decision Candidates

2. During discovery or design reviews, list major design decisions with potential long-term implications.

3. Typical examples:

- Cloud-native vs. hybrid deployment,
- Data model structure (monolith vs. modular),
- Tooling and framework standardization,
- Security controls vs. developer autonomy.

4. Define Trade-Off Criteria

5. For each decision, specify **drivers** (e.g., performance, cost, compliance) and **risks**.
6. Align criteria with **Contextual Drivers Layer** (e.g., regulatory, commercial, architectural context).

7. Evaluate Options and Impact

8. Analyze impact of each option across five lenses:

- *Business Value*
- *Technical Complexity*
- *Security/Compliance*
- *Scalability & Maintainability*
- *Delivery Cost & Timeline*

9. Use a 1–5 impact scoring and comment rationale.

10. Negotiate and Record Decision

11. Summarize chosen option, rationale, and trade-off accepted.
12. Define mitigation actions for deferred risks (e.g., backlog items, monitoring).
13. Both Solution Architects co-sign the agreement.

14. Publish the Contract

15. Include ATC in architecture repository or Delivery Charter.
16. Communicate highlights to delivery and governance teams.

17. Reassess Periodically

18. Review key trade-offs during **Quarterly Assessment** or when a major change occurs.
19. Log outcomes of reassessments and lessons learned.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|---|
| Architecture design documents, discovery results, risk register | Architectural Trade-Off Contract , impact analysis matrix, sign-off record |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------------|--|
| Decision Traceability | 100% of major design decisions have signed ATCs. |
| Risk Awareness | Risks explicitly linked to trade-offs with defined mitigation. |
| Review Cadence | ATCs revisited at least once per quarter. |
| Alignment Signal | Reduced conflict between technical and business goals over time. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating architectural decisions as purely technical rather than systemic.
- Recording trade-offs retrospectively ("we already built it").
- Lack of client-side involvement in architectural sign-off.
- Not updating contracts when context or priorities shift.
- Ignoring deferred risks after sign-off.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Standardize ATC templates across multiple projects. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Integrate ATC decisions into portfolio-level Relationship Audits. |

As maturity increases, the ATC becomes a living reference shaping organizational architecture patterns and investment priorities.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Retain architectural accountability and ensure vendor designs align with business, risk, and compliance goals.

Client actions

1. Actively participate in defining and signing off trade-offs.
2. Validate that architecture serves strategic and operational objectives.
3. Store approved ATCs in governance repositories for audits.
4. Review ATCs during major business or platform changes.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate architectural discipline and transparency, strengthening technical trust.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate trade-off sessions with the client's technical leads.
2. Document trade-offs clearly – avoid jargon, emphasize rationale and business impact.
3. Maintain ATC register in architecture documentation.
4. Present updated ATCs during assessments or portfolio audits.

Summary

The **Architectural Trade-Off Contract** transforms design reasoning into a formalized trust instrument between **Client** and **Vendor**.

It replaces informal “architectural understanding” with explicit, auditable commitments – ensuring that both sides consciously share accountability for decisions that shape long-term value, cost, and resilience.

Shared Definition of Done (DoD) Matrix

"Done isn't done until it delivers value, operates safely, and is understood by all."

Purpose

The **Shared Definition of Done (DoD) Matrix** ensures that "done" means the same thing to everyone – Client, Vendor, and end users. It extends beyond completion of features to include operational readiness, usability, and value validation.

This tool turns the 3SF principles **"Outcome before Output"** and **"Trust before Control"** into explicit, inspectable agreements. It creates a single measurable artifact defining:

- What *quality* means across both sides,
- Who is responsible and accountable for verifying each aspect of "done,"
- How and when verification occurs in the SDLC flow.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Design → Delivery → Validation |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--|-------------------------------|---|
| Technical Integrator | Engineering Specialist | Ensure build quality and deployment readiness. |
| Product Leader (Client Product Owner) | Delivery Facilitator | Define and validate acceptance criteria and usability. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Enforce regulatory, security, and operational standards. |
| Experience Designer | Requirements Analyst | Validate user experience and alignment with requirements. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Define Quality Dimensions**
2. Identify 3 core dimensions of "done":
 - Code Quality** – internal engineering standards, test coverage, peer review.
 - Operational Readiness** – deployment, observability, monitoring, rollback capability.
 - User Acceptance & Value Verification** – alignment with business outcomes and user expectations.
3. **Build the DoD Matrix**

4. Create a table where each quality dimension is a row and each column represents ownership and verification points:

| Quality Dimension | Vendor Responsible | Client Accountable | Verification Timing | Evidence / Artifact |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--|
| Code Quality | Engineering Specialist | – | Before merge | CI/CD test report, code review record |
| Operational Readiness | Technical Integrator | Governance Officer | Before deployment | Deployment checklist, monitoring setup proof |
| User Acceptance & Value Verification | Delivery Facilitator | Product Leader | After release | Outcome tracking, user feedback, KPI dashboard |

5. Integrate into Workflow

6. Add DoD checkpoints into definition-of-ready and release readiness reviews.

7. Enforce that a work item cannot close until all relevant DoD dimensions are verified.

8. Review and Update

9. Validate the DoD Matrix quarterly or whenever a new context (team, technology, or product) is introduced.

10. Record updates as part of the **Stable Rules Layer (SRL)**.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Quality standards, CI/CD data, release checklist, product KPIs | Shared Definition of Done Matrix , signed by Client and Vendor representatives |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------|--|
| Alignment Signal | No major disagreements about “done” definitions during retrospectives. |
| Quality Consistency | <5% of items re-opened post-release due to incomplete readiness. |
| Accountability Clarity | 100% of features include DoD traceability in backlog. |
| Maturity Indicator | Shared sign-off process applied across ≥ 2 cross-functional teams. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating DoD as a static document rather than a living agreement.
- Focusing only on development quality while ignoring operational or value readiness.
- Client expecting vendor to own all validation steps unilaterally.
- Vendor marking tasks as “done” without verification evidence.
- Updating DoD inconsistently across projects or releases.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Embed DoD verification into automation pipelines and dashboards. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Integrate outcome validation into SLA / contract governance. |

As maturity rises, “done” becomes a joint performance metric, not a delivery milestone.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Maintain control over business value realization and operational readiness.

Client actions

1. Approve DoD dimensions and assign accountable roles.
2. Validate operational readiness before approving production releases.
3. Track post-release outcomes to verify “done” equals value delivered.
4. Include DoD compliance in governance or audit checklists.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate engineering excellence and maturity through transparency.

Vendor actions

1. Define measurable quality gates and include them in the DoD Matrix.
2. Provide objective verification artifacts before requesting acceptance.
3. Collaborate with client on readiness and outcome validation steps.
4. Continuously refine automation and testing to meet DoD expectations.

Summary

The **Shared Definition of Done Matrix** transforms “completion” into a **joint commitment**.

It replaces unilateral sign-offs with measurable, shared quality standards – ensuring that **trust is built through clarity, not control**.

When integrated into delivery systems, it becomes one of the most reliable indicators of relationship and delivery maturity.

Flow Constraint Identification

"Before improving speed, improve flow."

Purpose

The **Flow Constraint Identification (FCI)** tool helps Client and Vendor teams jointly diagnose **systemic delivery constraints** that limit throughput, quality, or predictability.

It operationalizes the 3SF principle "**Flow before Speed**" by:

- Shifting attention from team velocity to **system flow**,
- Revealing **cross-boundary bottlenecks** caused by process friction, dependencies, or governance rules,
- Creating a shared improvement plan owned by both Client and Vendor.

This tool turns local optimization conversations into a **joint systems-thinking exercise**, ensuring both sides take accountability for improving delivery flow.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Early Delivery → Continuous Delivery |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--|--|---|
| Delivery Facilitator (Client Project Manager) | Delivery Facilitator (Vendor Delivery Lead) | Co-own system flow and constraints visibility. |
| Technical Integrator | Engineering Specialist | Identify environment or release bottlenecks. |
| Product Leader | Requirements Analyst | Validate alignment between backlog flow and business readiness. |
| Governance Officer | Account Lead | Approve systemic improvement actions and adjust control rules. |

Steps / Routines

1. **Visualize End-to-End Flow**
2. Create a **Value Stream Map (VSM)** from idea to production.
3. Include all steps – discovery, prioritization, development, testing, approvals, deployment, and validation.
4. Capture ownership, handoffs, and typical cycle time per step.
5. **Identify Systemic Constraints**
6. Mark stages where work consistently queues or reworks occur.

7. Distinguish between:

- **Internal constraints** – team capacity, skills, tooling gaps.
- **External constraints** – approvals, governance, third-party dependencies.

8. List the top 3 recurring constraints.

9. Quantify Impact

10. For each constraint, define its measurable impact (e.g., delay days, quality degradation, rework).

11. Use data from ticket systems, release logs, or velocity trends.

12. Analyze Causes and Ownership

13. Discuss each constraint's root cause and ownership domain (Client, Vendor, Shared).

14. Identify which **Stable Rules** (SRL) are ineffective or missing.

15. Define Improvement Actions

16. Co-create a 60-day action plan to relieve or mitigate the top 3 constraints.

17. Assign measurable targets (e.g., reduce deployment wait time from 3 days to 1 day).

18. Document agreed responsibilities in the **Delivery System Diagnostic** or **Quarterly Assessment** follow-up.

19. Review Progress Regularly

20. Track progress on each constraint during retrospectives and quarterly reviews.

21. Escalate systemic issues to portfolio level if not resolvable within the project.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|--|
| Delivery metrics (lead time, WIP, cycle time), release logs, backlog board data | Flow Constraint Map, Top 3 Systemic Constraints Report, Improvement Action Plan |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Flow Efficiency | Percentage of active vs. waiting time improves by $\geq 15\%$. |
| Dependency Visibility | 100% of known dependencies tracked with owners and due dates. |
| Constraint Resolution Rate | ≥ 2 systemic constraints resolved per quarter. |
| Engagement Maturity Signal | Improved collaboration across organizational boundaries. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating flow mapping as a one-time activity.
- Blaming teams instead of addressing systemic constraints.
- Ignoring client-side process bottlenecks (approvals, security reviews).
- Optimizing for throughput without verifying downstream impact.
- Not revalidating constraints after process or team changes.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Automate flow metrics (cycle time, WIP) via dashboards. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Integrate constraint data into organizational governance and KPI systems. |

At higher maturity, constraint analysis becomes part of quarterly relationship audits and portfolio optimization.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Reveal and address client-originated constraints to enable smoother vendor delivery.

Client actions

1. Participate in value stream mapping sessions.
2. Identify and commit to resolving internal blockers (access, approvals, decision latency).
3. Authorize necessary process or policy adjustments.
4. Support transparent reporting of systemic issues without assigning blame.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate delivery system leadership and transparency.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate the mapping workshop and gather supporting data.
2. Quantify constraint impact using available delivery metrics.
3. Co-develop and maintain the improvement action plan.
4. Report systemic risks early to prevent reoccurrence across engagements.

Summary

The **Flow Constraint Identification** tool transforms efficiency discussions into system alignment.

It turns the 3SF principle "**Flow before Speed**" into a measurable improvement practice, ensuring that delivery optimization is driven by shared ownership rather than isolated performance targets.

Used consistently, FCI builds trust by proving that **transparency and flow** outperform speed and control.

Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter

"The higher the trust, the lighter the control – and the stronger the outcomes."

Purpose

The **Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter (ACBC)** defines **decision-making rights** between the Client and Vendor based on current **relationship maturity**.

It replaces implicit power dynamics with explicit, measurable governance rules.

This tool operationalizes the 3SF principle "**Trust before Control**" by:

- Establishing transparent **autonomy levels** for each functional area (e.g., design, delivery, environment, finance),
- Making control mechanisms **adaptive to maturity**, not static to contract,
- Building mutual confidence in distributed accountability.

When used correctly, the ACBC becomes both a **trust contract** and a **risk management instrument** – reducing micromanagement and dependency escalation.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Design → Delivery → Governance |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Strategic Partnership</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve and maintain autonomy boundaries. |
| Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Define, monitor, and adapt decision rights. |
| Product Leader | Solution Architect | Operate within defined autonomy levels and escalate only by exception. |
| Vendor Manager | Engineering Director | Ensure commercial and quality assurance alignment. |

Steps / Routines

1. Define Governance Domains

2. Identify key decision areas to structure the charter, e.g.:

- Scope & Requirements
- Architecture & Technology
- Delivery Process & Planning
- Quality & Acceptance
- Environment & Access
- Budget & Change Control

3. Set Autonomy Levels by Maturity Stage

4. For each domain, define who has autonomy at each maturity level:

| Maturity Stage | Autonomy Description |
|----------------|---|
| Transactional | Vendor executes predefined tasks; Client approval required for all changes >1 day or >€1k. |
| Collaborative | Vendor can adjust plans within sprint or iteration scope; approval for budget-affecting changes only. |
| Co-Creative | Vendor adjusts backlog priorities autonomously within agreed outcomes; joint review monthly. |
| Strategic | Vendor and Client co-manage portfolio and share improvement budgets; approval by exception only. |

5. Document Control Rules

6. Specify which controls remain mandatory (e.g., security, compliance).

7. Define escalation criteria and response expectations for exceptions.

8. Formalize the Charter

9. Summarize decisions in a single-page **Autonomy & Control Matrix**.

10. Have both the **Executive Sponsor** and **Account Lead** approve and sign.

11. Store the charter in the shared Delivery Charter repository.

12. Monitor and Adapt

13. Review the charter quarterly during **Relationship Assessments**.

14. Adjust autonomy levels when maturity or trust indicators evolve.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Engagement model, risk register, delivery governance framework | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter , updated Governance Matrix , approval record |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|----------------------|--|
| Decision Latency | Average approval cycle reduced by $\geq 30\%$ over 2 quarters. |
| Escalation Frequency | <10% of decisions require escalation beyond defined boundaries. |
| Trust Signal | Both sides report improved confidence in governance transparency ($\geq 4/5$ in surveys). |
| Control Compliance | 100% of mandatory compliance controls still maintained. |

Common Pitfalls

- Designing boundaries based on organizational hierarchy instead of maturity.

- Keeping autonomy static despite demonstrated trust growth.
- Over-controlling vendor delivery to “avoid risk,” creating bottlenecks.
- Neglecting to include compliance teams early in discussions.
- Not reviewing boundaries periodically as projects evolve.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|--|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Introduce adaptive controls based on performance indicators. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Integrate autonomy levels into vendor scorecards and portfolio governance. |

At higher maturity, autonomy is not “granted” but **earned and measured**, becoming a primary trust KPI.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Build confidence in vendor self-management while maintaining necessary safeguards.

Client actions

1. Lead the definition of control domains aligned to internal governance.
2. Approve the charter jointly with vendor leadership.
3. Regularly review metrics of autonomy success and control compliance.
4. Use autonomy growth as an indicator of partnership maturity.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Earn autonomy through transparency and proactive governance participation.

Vendor actions

1. Collaborate on defining boundaries and acceptable levels of autonomy.
2. Demonstrate responsible independence by maintaining visibility and reporting.
3. Escalate issues only when charter criteria apply.
4. Use autonomy metrics as evidence of relationship maturity in audits.

Summary

The **Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter** transforms trust into a **structured governance artifact**.

It provides measurable decision boundaries that evolve with maturity – ensuring **control exists to enable autonomy, not to restrict it**.

By co-owning this charter, Client and Vendor shift from supervision to partnership, reinforcing the 3SF foundation of **Trust before Control**.

Learning Before Blame Protocol

"When things go wrong, the system failed – not the people."

Purpose

The **Learning Before Blame Protocol (LBP)** institutionalizes the 3SF principle "**Learning before Blame.**"

It provides a structured, repeatable process for analyzing incidents, delivery issues, or failed outcomes in a way that produces **systemic improvement**, not personal defense.

This tool helps Client and Vendor teams:

- Identify the *systemic causes* of breakdowns rather than individual mistakes,
- Trace problems back to violated **3SF Principles** or missing **Stable Rules**,
- Record actionable learnings for inclusion in the next **Quarterly Assessment** or **Relationship Audit**.

LBP shifts post-mortem discussions from *accountability theater* to *continuous learning* – strengthening trust and resilience.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Evolve → Operate → Improve |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Delivery ↔ Value ↔ Engagement |
| 3SF Layers | Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Jointly lead reflection and improvement actions. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Capture compliance, risk, and systemic learnings. |
| Solution Architect | Technical Integrator | Identify and document technical or process root causes. |
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve and track cross-project improvement themes. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Trigger the Protocol**
- Initiate LBP when a significant delivery issue, incident, or client concern occurs.
- The Delivery Facilitator ensures the conversation happens *within 48 hours* of detection.
- 4. Set the Stage for Psychological Safety**
- Remind all participants: *The purpose is learning, not assigning blame.*
- Use a neutral facilitator (Delivery Facilitator or Product Leader).
- Prohibit discussion of individual performance or disciplinary matters.
- 8. Collect System Facts**

9. Gather objective data: timeline, metrics, dependencies, decisions.
 10. Document the sequence of events without interpretation or emotion.

11. Analyze Through the 3SF Lens

12. Ask the three guiding questions:

- a. *What was the systemic cause?*
- b. *Which 3SF Principle was violated or missing?*
- c. *Which Stable Rule (SRL) should we review or strengthen?*

13. Tag findings by **Relationship Line** (Engagement, Delivery, Value).

14. Define Learning Outcomes

15. Identify 2–3 specific learning insights per event.
 16. Translate insights into preventive actions or SRL updates.

17. Publish and Integrate

18. Record the session output as a **Learning Summary** with lessons learned, actions, and owners.
 19. Feed learnings into the next **Quarterly Assessment** or **Relationship Audit**.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|---|
| Incident reports, delivery metrics, retrospective notes | Learning Summary, Stable Rule Adjustment Record, updated Improvement Backlog |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Response Speed | 100% of critical incidents trigger LBP within 48 hours. |
| Systemic Action Ratio | ≥ 80% of actions focus on system/process, not individuals. |
| Learning Retention | Learnings tracked and reused in ≥ 2 subsequent retrospectives. |
| Psychological Safety Signal | Team survey rating ≥ 4/5 for safety during LBP sessions. |

Common Pitfalls

- Conducting sessions reactively instead of routinely.
- Allowing implicit blame through tone or question framing.
- Producing long “root cause” documents without actionable learning.
- Failing to connect learnings to 3SF layers (Principles → Rules → Practice).
- Not following up on agreed improvement actions.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|---|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Make LBP a recurring part of retrospectives. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Aggregate learning patterns in portfolio-level Relationship Audits. |

At higher maturity, LBP evolves into a **learning culture protocol** embedded across all client-vendor engagements.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Promote systemic learning inside the client organization and demonstrate fairness in accountability.

Client actions

1. Participate in LBP sessions as an equal partner, not a judge.
2. Identify internal system gaps contributing to delivery friction.
3. Integrate lessons learned into internal process improvement cycles.
4. Encourage vendor transparency by rewarding openness over defense.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Reinforce accountability through openness and solution-oriented communication.

Vendor actions

1. Trigger LBP proactively when issues arise.
2. Provide factual evidence and context without defensiveness.
3. Co-author the Learning Summary and improvement backlog entries.
4. Share learnings across teams to avoid repeated systemic issues.

Summary

The **Learning Before Blame Protocol** institutionalizes a culture of transparency, fairness, and systemic thinking. It ensures that every failure strengthens the partnership – transforming incidents into structured learning opportunities. When both Client and Vendor adopt this mindset, **trust becomes renewable**, and **maturity becomes measurable**.

Engagement Context Canvas

"Every engagement inherits its context. Maturity begins by naming it."

Purpose

The **Engagement Context Canvas (ECC)** turns the abstract **Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL)** of 3SF into a practical diagnostic and planning tool. It enables both **Client** and **Vendor** to explicitly define and agree on the *environmental, organizational, and strategic context* shaping their delivery system.

The canvas ensures:

- Alignment between contextual reality and the chosen **Stable Rules**,
- Prevention of misapplied governance or methodology ("process mismatch"),
- Early visibility of constraints and opportunities that determine engagement success.

It is best used at **the start of an engagement** and revisited during **Relationship Audits**.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discover → Design → Audit |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Establish shared understanding of business and strategic context. |
| Product Leader | Delivery Facilitator | Identify contextual constraints and translate them into operational adjustments. |
| Governance Officer | Engineering Director | Align compliance and organizational structures to engagement setup. |
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Translate technical context (legacy, infrastructure, scalability) into delivery expectations. |

Steps / Routines

- 1. Gather Context Data**
- Conduct a 60–90 minute joint discovery session using the six contextual drivers below.
- Collect factual data, assumptions, and risks from both sides.

4. Map the Six Contextual Drivers

The ECC is divided into six zones, each describing a driver that shapes the delivery system:

| Contextual Driver | Typical Questions to Explore | Example Output |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Commercial | What is the funding model and cost tolerance? | Fixed budget with optional scalability buffer. |
| Regulatory | What compliance or security obligations exist? | Must align with ISO27001; data residency in EU. |
| Organizational | How are decisions made internally? | Dual approval for deployments; weekly steering committee. |
| Architectural | What technical ecosystem and constraints exist? | Hybrid cloud; legacy DB; need to align with enterprise patterns. |
| Delivery | What delivery cadence and collaboration model fit this environment? | Two-week sprints; hybrid client/vendor teams. |
| Cultural | What behaviors and communication norms affect delivery? | Preference for async updates; low risk appetite. |

1. Assess Contextual Fit

2. For each driver, rate fit between **context** and **Stable Rules** (1–5 scale).
3. Identify where the default 3SF rules or practices must adapt.
4. Example: In a *Regulatory-heavy* context, the SRL may enforce longer approval loops.

5. Define Contextual Adjustments

6. List required adaptations to processes, tools, or roles.
7. Assign responsibility and timeframe for each adjustment.
8. Example: "Shift release frequency from 2 weeks → monthly to align with compliance audits."
9. **Approve and Record**
10. Consolidate results in the **Engagement Context Canvas** artifact.
11. Both the **Executive Sponsor** and **Account Lead** approve and store it with the Delivery Charter.
12. **Revisit Periodically**
13. Reassess contextual drivers during each **Relationship Audit** or major scope change.
14. Track changes in organizational, commercial, or cultural context that may affect stable rules.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|--|
| RFP, organizational charts, compliance standards, architectural overview | Engagement Context Canvas, Contextual Fit Ratings, Stable Rule Adjustment Log |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|----------------------------------|--|
| Context Awareness | 100% of new engagements have a completed ECC within 2 weeks of initiation. |
| Fit Quality | ≥ 80% of stable rules rated "fit" (4–5) to the current context. |
| Adjustment Implementation | All defined contextual adaptations completed within planned timeframe. |
| Maturity Signal | Reduction in process conflicts or escalation due to misaligned governance. |

Common Pitfalls

- Skipping context assessment due to time pressure.
- Treating the canvas as documentation instead of a decision-making tool.
- Assuming context is static – not revisiting after organizational or regulatory change.
- Allowing only one side (Client or Vendor) to fill it out independently.
- Ignoring cultural and behavioral context in favor of technical aspects.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--|--|
| Transactional → Collaborative | Introduce ECC as part of discovery and proposal process. |
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Use ECC insights to customize 3SF stable rules per engagement. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic Partner | Leverage aggregated ECC data across portfolio for contextual intelligence. |

At higher maturity, ECCs are maintained as **living documents** integrated into governance dashboards and 3SF Maturity Dashboards.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure that vendor teams operate with full awareness of the real business and organizational environment.

Client actions

1. Lead the identification of all six contextual drivers.
2. Provide accurate, timely information on regulatory and internal constraints.
3. Participate in defining fit ratings and approving contextual adaptations.
4. Revisit the canvas during quarterly or audit reviews to update changing context.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Adapt delivery practices to the client's unique context instead of applying generic process templates.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate ECC workshops with client stakeholders.
2. Identify mismatches between client environment and vendor delivery model.
3. Propose SRL adjustments to align with real-world constraints.
4. Use the ECC artifact to brief new team members or external contributors.

Summary

The **Engagement Context Canvas** grounds the 3SF framework in reality.

It ensures that every engagement begins with contextual awareness, not assumptions – aligning governance, architecture, and culture before delivery starts.

When updated regularly, ECC becomes the *compass* that keeps Client and Vendor teams moving together through changing conditions and maturity stages.

3SF Contracts Architecture

"Principles define the intent. Contracts define the commitment."

Purpose

The **3SF Contracts Architecture** defines how the **3-in-3 SDLC Framework (3SF)** principles and practices are **institutionalized through agreements** that govern collaboration between **Client** and **Vendor** organizations.

While **Theory** defines *why* the system exists and **Practice** defines *how* it operates, the **Contracts** define *how both sides commit to those rules in real engagements*.

3SF Contracts turn **alignment and maturity** into **co-signed, inspectable commitments** – making the framework operationally enforceable across organizational boundaries.

Objectives

- Provide a **map of 3SF contractual instruments** that formalize shared accountability and autonomy.
- Clarify the **relationship between Principles, Practices, and Contracts**.
- Define **how maturity evolves** through progressive contractual agreements.
- Serve as a **reference** for integrating 3SF governance into Statements of Work (SoW), Delivery Charters, or Partnership Agreements.

Structure of the Contracts Part

Each contract represents a **governance artifact** derived from a 3SF Principle or Practice.

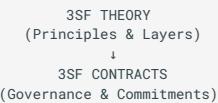
Contracts are grouped by **system purpose** and **relationship maturity stage**.

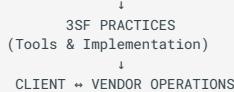
| Category | Primary Purpose | Example |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Engagement Contracts | Define the foundational rules of collaboration, shared terminology, and relationship entry conditions. | Engagement Contract |
| Governance Contracts | Define decision-making rights, escalation rules, and shared accountability. | Governance Contract |
| Maturity Contracts | Define trust evolution and autonomy growth milestones. | Maturity Growth Contract |
| Evolution Contracts | Define review, renewal, and transformation rules across project or portfolio lifecycle. | Relationship Evolution Contract |
| Template Attachments | Provide operational templates for high-impact artifacts (OAM, ATC, ACBC). | Template: Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |

Each contract type may attach to a **Delivery Charter**, **SoW**, or **Portfolio Governance Framework**, depending on organizational maturity.

Relationship to Theory and Practice

The **Contracts layer** is the boundary between intent and behavior – it ensures the same maturity language is applied in **legal, governance, and delivery** conversations.



**Interpretation:**

- Theory defines intent (Principles, Layers, Maturity).
- Contracts define boundaries (Agreements, Rights, Commitments).
- Practices define behavior (Tools, Routines, Artifacts).

Progressive Contractual Maturity

3SF contracts evolve as **trust and autonomy** increase between organizations.
Each maturity stage changes what must be *approved, co-signed, or self-governed*.

| Maturity Level | Contractual Pattern | Decision Autonomy | Typical Artifacts |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|---|---|
| Transactional | Command & Control | Client approves all scope and budget changes. | Baseline SoW, initial Engagement Contract |
| Collaborative | Shared Governance | Vendor adjusts execution within agreed iteration boundaries. | Governance Contract |
| Co-Creative | Distributed Accountability | Vendor self-governs backlog and release within outcome targets. | Maturity Growth Contract, Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |
| Strategic Partnership | Joint Steering | Both sides co-manage portfolio roadmap and investment strategy. | Relationship Evolution Contract |

Mapping Principles to Contract Types

| 3SF Principle | Primary Contract | Related Practice Artifacts | Purpose |
|------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---|
| Trust before Control | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter | Governance & Risk | Defines how decision-making rights evolve with maturity. |
| Outcome before Output | Outcome-to-Accountability Map | Product Thinking | Establishes measurable value metrics co-owned by Client and Vendor. |
| Shared Accountability | Architectural Trade-Off Contract | Architecture & Design | Makes technical risk and quality trade-offs transparent and co-signed. |
| Flow before Speed | Governance Contract | DevOps & Delivery | Ensures system flow is prioritized over short-term performance. |
| Learning before Blame | Maturity Growth Contract | Feedback & Learning | Turns retrospectives into learning commitments instead of fault audits. |

Integration with Practice Layer

Contracts serve as **boundary artifacts** that reference or embed 3SF Practice tools.

| Contract | Embedded Practice Artifacts | Used By | Cadence |
|--|---|--|----------------|
| Engagement Contract | Engagement Context Canvas (ECC), Initial Delivery Design | Client Executive Sponsor / Vendor Account Lead | RFP / Kick-off |
| Governance Contract | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter (ACBC), Flow Constraint Map | Client Governance Officer / Vendor Delivery Lead | Ongoing |
| Maturity Growth Contract | Maturity Dashboard, Quarterly Assessment | Account Lead / Executive Sponsor | Quarterly |
| Relationship Evolution Contract | Relationship Audit, Portfolio Review | Practice Lead / Engineering Director | Annual |

This ensures 3SF artifacts are **living governance components**, not separate documents.

Using Contracts in Delivery and Training

The Contracts section is essential for:

- **Procurement teams**, to include maturity and accountability in sourcing models.
- **Client executives**, to structure engagement agreements beyond SLAs.
- **Vendor delivery leaders**, to define the boundaries of autonomy and responsibility.
- **Coaches and trainers**, to teach 3SF as a governance language, not just a delivery model.

In training and onboarding, this file acts as the **starting point** for introducing governance through maturity.

Summary

The **3SF Contracts Architecture** defines the **governance backbone** of the 3SF Operating System:

- **Theory** establishes intent and principles.
- **Practice** defines methods and tools.
- **Contracts** turn principles and tools into binding commitments.

Together, they enable organizations to **move from transactional projects to strategic partnerships** – not by process enforcement, but through measurable, evolving agreements grounded in shared accountability and trust.

Engagement Contract

"Clarity at the beginning prevents conflict at the end."

Purpose

The **Engagement Contract (EC)** establishes the **initial working agreement** between Client and Vendor organizations entering a 3SF-based engagement.

It defines the **rules of collaboration**, shared vocabulary, contextual drivers, and maturity baseline before delivery begins.

This contract acts as a **governance bridge** between the **commercial SoW** and the **Delivery Charter**, ensuring that both parties understand:

- Why they are collaborating (purpose & outcomes),
- How they will collaborate (process & governance), and
- What principles and maturity assumptions apply (3SF alignment).

The EC does **not replace legal contracts** — it supplements them by creating **operational coherence** that supports trust-building from day one.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Design |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--|--|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve engagement setup and sign off on rules of collaboration. |
| Product Leader (Client Product Owner) | Product Leader (Vendor Product Manager) | Align outcomes and delivery scope. |
| Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Define control, reporting, and escalation procedures. |
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Align architecture and delivery model constraints. |

Key Components of the Engagement Contract

| Component | Description | Referenced 3SF Artifacts |
|---|---|---|
| Purpose & Value Statement | Defines why the engagement exists and what outcomes matter to the business. | Outcome-to-Accountability Map |
| Engagement Context Definition | Documents the commercial, organizational, regulatory, and cultural context. | Engagement Context Canvas (ECC) |
| Governance Model | Defines meeting cadence, decision flow, and escalation routes. | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |
| Delivery System Design | Describes collaboration structure, team topology, and delivery approach. | Initial Delivery Design |
| Shared Principles Acknowledgment | Lists 3SF Principles recognized by both organizations. | 3SF Theory |
| Baseline Maturity Assessment | Defines initial trust and autonomy level. | Maturity Dashboard |

Agreement Format

The Engagement Contract may be structured as a **jointly signed operational memorandum** (not a legal SoW).

It typically includes:

1. **Statement of Intent** – shared purpose, objectives, and 3SF adoption commitment.
2. **Roles and Responsibilities Matrix** – aligned with 3SF Functional Role Model.
3. **Engagement Context Summary** – based on the ECC output.
4. **Governance Cadence Table** – meetings, reports, decision frequency.
5. **Maturity Baseline & Targets** – expected relationship evolution goals.
6. **Sign-off Section** – co-signature by both Executive Sponsors.

Example (extract):

| Section | Client | Vendor | Maturity Reference |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Product Ownership | Accountable: Product Owner | Responsible: Product Manager | Outcome before Output |
| Architecture Decisions | Co-sign: Solution Architect | Co-sign: Solution Architect | Shared Accountability |
| Governance & Reporting | Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Trust before Control |

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|--|
| RFP, SoW draft, Discovery documentation | Signed Engagement Contract , contextual baseline, governance alignment matrix |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|-----------------------|---|
| Clarity Signal | 100% of roles and escalation paths documented before delivery start. |
| Context Completeness | All six contextual drivers defined in the Engagement Context Canvas. |
| Maturity Alignment | Both sides rate baseline maturity consistently (± 1 level variance max). |
| Governance Activation | First joint governance meeting scheduled before project kickoff. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating the EC as a legal document instead of a governance alignment tool.
- Starting delivery without defining contextual or maturity baselines.
- Over-engineering governance models before trust maturity is known.
- Omitting sign-off by key stakeholders (especially Product and Executive roles).
- Copy-pasting EC templates without adaptation to specific engagement context.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Transactional → Collaborative | Use EC as part of RFP and vendor selection to define expectations. |
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Embed EC into Delivery Charter and track alignment metrics quarterly. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic | Integrate EC outcomes into portfolio-level Relationship Audits. |

At higher maturity, EC evolves into a **Portfolio Engagement Framework** governing multiple product or service streams.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure the engagement begins with clarity, context, and measurable trust expectations.

Client actions

1. Lead definition of business purpose and value metrics.
2. Approve governance model and cadence jointly with Vendor.
3. Confirm context accuracy in ECC.
4. Track contract adherence through Maturity Dashboard reviews.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Ensure delivery system is designed to meet contextual and governance expectations from day one.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate ECC and Delivery Design workshops.
2. Document accountability and sign-off structures clearly.
3. Align internal delivery practices with agreed governance cadence.
4. Use EC as a training and onboarding document for new team members.

Summary

The **Engagement Contract** anchors collaboration in shared purpose, context, and maturity.

It ensures that both Client and Vendor **enter the relationship consciously**, with clearly defined principles and expectations.

By co-signing the EC, organizations establish the **foundational trust loop** of the 3SF Operating System – clarity, transparency, and measurable alignment.

Maturity Growth Contract

"Maturity is not declared – it is earned, measured, and renewed."

Purpose

The **Maturity Growth Contract (MGC)** defines the **joint roadmap for evolving relationship maturity** between Client and Vendor organizations. It translates the 3SF Maturity Model from a diagnostic framework into a **living governance plan** that measures and manages how both sides build trust, autonomy, and systemic collaboration.

This contract sets the **baseline**, the **target maturity level**, and the **growth plan** – creating a shared understanding of what “maturity progression” looks like in measurable terms.

The MGC complements legal agreements (SoW, MSA) by governing *how the partnership itself evolves* across projects and quarters.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Delivery → Evolve → Audit |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Strategic Partnership</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve maturity targets and governance cadence. |
| Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Measure and report maturity progress quarterly. |
| Product Leader | Product Leader | Align outcome delivery with relationship growth. |
| Solution Architect | Technical Integrator | Ensure technical maturity aligns with organizational maturity. |

Key Components of the Maturity Growth Contract

| Component | Description | Linked 3SF Artifacts |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|
| Baseline Maturity Assessment | Establishes current level (Transactional, Collaborative, Co-Creative, Strategic). | Maturity Dashboard |
| Target Maturity Level | Defines desired maturity level and timeframe (e.g., Strategic in 18 months). | Quarterly Assessment |
| Growth Roadmap | Specifies initiatives, responsible roles, and checkpoints for improvement. | Delivery Diagnostic |
| Measurement Cadence | Defines frequency and data sources for maturity reviews. | Relationship Audit |
| Governance Evolution Rules | Defines how autonomy, reporting, and control evolve. | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |
| Learning Integration | Incorporates reflection results to adjust maturity plan. | Learning Before Blame Protocol |

Agreement Format

The MGC is a **co-created governance annex** to the Delivery Charter or portfolio agreement. It is reviewed and updated quarterly, co-signed by both Executive Sponsors.

The document typically contains:

1. **Maturity Baseline Summary**
2. Relationship maturity level across Engagement, Delivery, and Value lines.
3. Strengths, constraints, and systemic gaps.
4. **Growth Objectives**
5. Desired maturity target, timeframe, and criteria for achieving it.
6. Example: Move from *Collaborative* to *Co-Creative* by enabling vendor autonomy for iteration planning.
7. **Improvement Initiatives**
8. Actions or experiments contributing to maturity advancement (e.g., governance simplification, trust score tracking).
9. **Measurement Dashboard**
10. Visual metrics of progress across quarters.
11. Uses indicators from the [Maturity Dashboard](#).
12. **Review and Renewal Schedule**
13. Quarterly assessment cadence and sign-off checklist.
14. Commitment to transparency in reporting and joint reflection.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|---|
| Quarterly assessment data, relationship audit reports, delivery metrics | Maturity Growth Plan , updated Dashboard Entries , Quarterly Review Record |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|--------------------------|--|
| Maturity Delta | At least one relationship dimension improves per quarter (e.g., Engagement → from 2.5 to 3.0). |
| Autonomy Growth | Vendor approval dependencies decrease by ≥25% within 2 quarters. |
| Learning Adoption | ≥80% of LBP actions implemented before next review. |
| Trust Stability | Maturity score variance between Client and Vendor ≤ 1 point. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating the MGC as a static compliance checklist.
- Overpromising maturity targets without enabling structural change.
- Confusing delivery performance improvement with maturity growth.
- Lack of quarterly follow-up or dashboard updates.
- Using maturity scores to assign blame instead of learning.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Introduce quarterly maturity reviews tied to specific trust indicators. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic | Integrate maturity tracking into portfolio governance and investment decisions. |

At advanced maturity, the MGC becomes a **Strategic Partnership Growth Framework**, tracking not just delivery quality, but *organizational alignment and innovation capacity*.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure the Client organization actively participates in the relationship's evolution – not just in performance reviews.

Client actions

1. Define clear, measurable growth goals per maturity dimension.
2. Commit to removing internal constraints blocking vendor autonomy.
3. Approve quarterly review cadence and maintain transparency.
4. Integrate MGC metrics into leadership dashboards.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate measurable growth in maturity through transparency, reliability, and governance participation.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate maturity data collection and quarterly reviews.
2. Propose experiments and improvements for maturity progression.
3. Track and report impact of autonomy and trust initiatives.
4. Use MGC results as evidence in portfolio audits and new proposals.

Summary

The **Maturity Growth Contract** transforms 3SF maturity from theory into a **continuous governance process**.

It ensures both Client and Vendor remain accountable for relationship evolution — turning “partnership” into a measurable, managed asset.

By signing the MGC, both sides commit not only to *deliver value*, but to *grow in how they deliver it* — embodying the 3SF vision of **maturity through shared accountability**.

Governance Contract

"Governance exists to enable autonomy, not to constrain it."

Purpose

The **Governance Contract (GC)** establishes the **decision-making structure and escalation rules** that regulate day-to-day collaboration between Client and Vendor under the 3SF framework.

It defines *how decisions are made, who holds which authority, and how exceptions are handled* – ensuring that governance evolves with trust and maturity.

This contract translates the 3SF principle "**Trust before Control**" into an operational framework.

It aligns all governance mechanisms with the current **relationship maturity level**, preventing both micromanagement and unmanaged autonomy.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Design → Delivery → Governance |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Strategic Partnership</i> |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--|--|---|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Approve governance model and review quarterly. |
| Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Maintain operational governance cadence. |
| Product Leader (Client Product Owner) | Product Leader (Vendor Product Manager) | Ensure product-level decisions align with autonomy level. |
| Solution Architect | Solution Architect | Manage architecture decisions and technical risk sign-offs. |

Key Components of the Governance Contract

| Component | Description | Linked 3SF Artifacts |
|---|--|--|
| Governance Structure Overview | Defines key governance layers: executive, operational, and delivery. | Autonomy & Control Boundary Charter |
| Decision Rights Matrix (RACI/DACI) | Assigns authority and consultation rules across functions. | 3SF Functional Role Model |
| Escalation Model | Defines when and how to escalate issues across governance layers. | Flow Constraint Identification |
| Governance Cadence | Lists meeting frequency and objectives for steering committees and working groups. | Engagement Contract |
| Governance Health Indicators | Defines how trust, transparency, and accountability are measured. | Maturity Growth Contract, Maturity Dashboard |

Agreement Format

The Governance Contract is typically structured as a **governance annex** to the Delivery Charter or portfolio agreement. It includes explicit mapping of decision domains, authority boundaries, and escalation paths.

Example extract (decision authority matrix):

| Governance Domain | Client Authority | Vendor Authority | Decision Rule |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Product Scope | Approve major scope changes >5 days | Adjust within iteration | Escalate if >10% effort variance |
| Architecture | Co-sign all critical NFR trade-offs | Co-sign all critical NFR trade-offs | Governed by Architectural Trade-Off Contract |
| Delivery Planning | Approve release milestones | Self-manage sprint planning | Report weekly |
| Quality Standards | Define acceptance thresholds | Validate through DoD Matrix | Shared accountability |
| Incident Resolution | Approve workaround exceeding SLA | Lead resolution and report cause | Follow Learning Before Blame Protocol |

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|---|--|
| Engagement Contract, Delivery Charter, organizational governance policies | Governance Structure Map, Decision Rights Matrix, Escalation Flow, Governance Review Record |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------------|--|
| Decision Latency | Average decision turnaround \leq 48h for operational, \leq 5 days for executive. |
| Escalation Efficiency | \geq 80% of issues resolved within the defined governance tier. |
| Transparency Signal | Governance dashboards visible to both Client and Vendor. |
| Trust Alignment | Governance satisfaction \geq 4/5 in quarterly reviews. |

Common Pitfalls

- Creating governance models that reflect *organizational hierarchy*, not *relationship maturity*.
- Over-escalating small issues, leading to decision bottlenecks.
- Ignoring flow metrics (cycle time, WIP) when assessing governance performance.
- Keeping static authority models despite trust improvement.
- Failing to document exceptions and learning outcomes.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Transactional → Collaborative | Replace one-sided approvals with shared steering. |
| Collaborative → Co-Creative | Simplify escalation paths and introduce delegated autonomy. |
| Co-Creative → Strategic | Integrate governance dashboards into enterprise portfolio management. |

At higher maturity, governance evolves into **co-leadership** – both organizations co-owning decision rights and accountability boundaries.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure governance provides oversight and alignment without stifling flow.

Client actions

1. Approve governance structure and cadence jointly with vendor.
2. Ensure governance decisions are based on data, not opinion.
3. Revisit autonomy levels quarterly as trust increases.
4. Participate in governance health assessments and dashboard reviews.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Use governance to enhance delivery reliability and transparency.

Vendor actions

1. Maintain governance logs, meeting notes, and dashboards.
2. Propose improvements to reduce decision latency.
3. Ensure transparency of risks and dependencies before escalation.
4. Educate teams on governance maturity principles.

Summary

The **Governance Contract** defines how two organizations **co-lead** a delivery system under 3SF principles.

It ensures that every decision, escalation, and control mechanism is aligned with maturity – enabling a shift from *management-by-approval* to *governance-by-trust*.

When executed properly, this contract becomes the **operating kernel** of the 3SF ecosystem – maintaining balance between autonomy, flow, and accountability across all layers of collaboration.

Relationship Evolution Contract

"Partnership maturity is measured not by control, but by continuity and renewal."

Purpose

The **Relationship Evolution Contract (REC)** governs how a Client–Vendor partnership **transitions across maturity stages** and how it is **renewed, scaled, or concluded** based on measurable trust and value outcomes.

It is a **strategic governance instrument** that complements the operational contracts (Engagement, Governance, and Maturity Growth). Where the other contracts define *how to start* and *how to work*, the REC defines *how to grow or transform* the partnership itself.

This contract ensures that both parties treat relationship evolution as a **managed lifecycle**, not a byproduct of delivery success or leadership turnover.

Applies To

| Dimension | Scope |
|------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Audit → Evolve → Renew |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) + Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) |
| Maturity Target | From Co-Creative Trust → toward Strategic Partnership |

Actors / Roles

| Client Side | Vendor Side | Shared Purpose |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Executive Sponsor | Account Lead | Evaluate partnership maturity and define next-phase scope. |
| Governance Officer | Delivery Facilitator | Provide data and insights for decision-making. |
| Product Leader | Product Leader | Identify continued product or service value realization. |
| Engineering Director / Practice Lead | Engineering Director / Practice Lead | Align portfolio and organizational evolution. |

Key Components of the Relationship Evolution Contract

| Component | Description | Linked 3SF Artifacts |
|---|---|---|
| Maturity Review Summary | Captures progress across all relationship lines and principles. | Maturity Dashboard |
| Value Realization Report | Summarizes measurable business and delivery outcomes achieved. | Outcome-to-Accountability Map |
| Trust and Governance Review | Evaluates alignment, autonomy, and risk management performance. | Governance Contract |
| Renewal or Transformation Decision | Defines whether the partnership continues, expands, or transitions. | Maturity Growth Contract |
| Portfolio Integration Plan | Describes how matured engagements integrate into broader portfolio or strategic programs. | Relationship Audit |

Agreement Format

The REC is typically established **annually or per major engagement cycle** as a joint executive agreement. It builds on prior maturity data and explicitly defines next steps for the partnership.

Typical Structure:

1. **Executive Summary** – current state of maturity, trust, and value outcomes.
2. **Key Findings from Audits** – top systemic strengths and constraints.
3. **Renewal Decision Framework** – criteria for continuation, expansion, or rotation.
4. **Evolution Plan** – actions to reach next strategic level (e.g., co-investment, innovation stream, shared governance office).
5. **Sign-off** – mutual commitment to continued improvement or responsible disengagement.

Example extract (renewal decision grid):

| Decision Type | Description | Maturity Criteria | Next Action |
|------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| Renew | Continue engagement under improved governance. | Average maturity ≥ 3.5 | Update Maturity Growth Contract |
| Scale | Expand into new domain or service line. | Proven outcomes + cross-functional maturity | Create new Engagement Contract |
| Transform | Redefine partnership structure or delivery model. | Misalignment on autonomy or flow | Conduct new Context Assessment |
| Conclude | End collaboration with closure plan. | Maturity regression or no value alignment | Execute Knowledge Transition Plan |

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Relationship audits, maturity reports, portfolio metrics | Relationship Evolution Report , updated Maturity Growth Plan , Renewal/Transition Record |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------------|---|
| Retention Signal | Partnership renewed or expanded based on maturity data (not price alone). |
| Continuity Signal | Leadership transitions handled without maturity regression. |
| Value Alignment | Business outcomes tracked consistently across renewal cycles. |
| Strategic Integration | Partnership included in portfolio governance reviews. |

Common Pitfalls

- Treating renewal as a procurement event instead of a maturity checkpoint.
- Making continuation decisions based on delivery performance only.
- Ignoring trust and autonomy metrics when evaluating partnership success.
- Allowing leadership changes to reset relationship progress.
- Skipping transition planning during disengagement.

Scaling Notes

| Maturity Stage | Evolution Focus |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Co-Creative → Strategic | Introduce joint governance offices and co-funded innovation streams. |
| Strategic → Ecosystem | Transition from one-to-one partnership to multi-party collaboration network using 3SF principles. |

At higher maturity, the REC becomes the foundation of **strategic co-governance** — where value and learning are managed across an ecosystem of trusted vendors and clients.

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure partnership continuation and renewal decisions are based on evidence and systemic maturity, not personal or financial bias.

Client actions

1. Lead annual maturity and value review sessions.
2. Assess evolution opportunities based on business impact, not cost alone.
3. Approve renewal or transformation plans jointly with vendor.
4. Integrate REC insights into strategic sourcing or vendor portfolio management.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate maturity growth and partnership reliability as key differentiators.

Vendor actions

1. Prepare maturity and value data with transparency.
2. Propose evolution options grounded in relationship metrics.
3. Use REC discussions to plan cross-account or innovation initiatives.
4. Record renewal decisions and governance changes in portfolio repository.

Summary

The **Relationship Evolution Contract** ensures that partnership continuity and renewal are **intentional, data-driven, and principle-aligned**. It makes the relationship itself a **managed system**, where maturity, trust, and value are continuously evaluated and evolved.

When executed effectively, the REC transforms the partnership from a series of projects into a **living ecosystem** — one that adapts, learns, and thrives through the shared language of 3SF.

Template – Outcome-to-Accountability Agreement

"Every output must trace to a shared outcome, or it serves no one."

Purpose

The **Outcome-to-Accountability Agreement (OAA)** is a **contractual template** derived from the 3SF **Outcome-to-Accountability Map**. It formalizes the shared ownership of product or service outcomes between Client and Vendor organizations.

This agreement enforces the 3SF principle "**Outcome before Output**" by making every deliverable accountable to a measurable business result, ensuring that both sides co-own the *impact*, not just the *work*.

The OAA can be attached to Statements of Work, Delivery Charters, or Engagement Contracts as an outcome-governance annex.

Scope and Application

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Design → Delivery |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Value ↔ Delivery |
| 3SF Layers | Contextual Drivers Layer (CDL) + Stable Rules Layer (SRL) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> |

Contract Parties and Roles

| Role | Representative | Responsibility |
|-----------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Client Product Leader | [Name, Title] | Defines expected business outcomes and success metrics. |
| Vendor Product Leader | [Name, Title] | Aligns delivery scope to business metrics and verifies impact realization. |
| Executive Sponsor (Client) | [Name, Title] | Approves overall business alignment and measurable targets. |
| Account Lead (Vendor) | [Name, Title] | Ensures contractual commitments support agreed outcomes. |

Agreement Structure

Each OAA is structured as a set of **Outcome → Output → Accountability** links, where both organizations co-sign their roles and expectations.

| Business Outcome | Supporting Deliverables | Client Accountability | Vendor Responsibility | Verification Method / KPI | Review Frequency |
|---|---|--|---|--|------------------|
| Example: Increase online conversion by 5% within 3 months. | Front-end redesign, A/B testing framework. | Defines success metrics and validates business data. | Delivers solution and tracks analytics. | KPI dashboard (conversion %, bounce rate). | Monthly |
| Example: Reduce support ticket volume by 30%. | Improve in-app guidance, chatbot integration. | Provides baseline and post-release data. | Delivers self-service features and monitors adoption. | Ticket analytics, CSAT score. | Quarterly |

Each row represents a **jointly owned success path** – both accountable (Client) and responsible (Vendor).

Agreement Clauses

Clause 1 – Shared Ownership of Outcomes

Both parties agree that measurable business outcomes define success.

Outputs or deliverables are only considered complete when their agreed outcomes have been verified through objective evidence.

Clause 2 – Definition of Verification Metrics

Metrics are defined jointly before development begins.

Client provides data sources; Vendor ensures measurement mechanisms exist in the solution.

All metrics must have:

- A **baseline**,
- A **target**, and
- A **timeframe** for verification.

Clause 3 – Review and Renewal

The OAA is reviewed during **Quarterly Assessments**.

If outcomes are not met, corrective actions are defined jointly without assigning blame – guided by the [Learning Before Blame Protocol](#).

Clause 4 – Adjustment Procedure

When business priorities change, outcomes may be updated with approval from both Product Leaders and Account Leads. Changes must maintain traceability between new outcomes and delivery plans.

Clause 5 – Transparency and Reporting

Both sides agree to share progress transparently through the **Maturity Dashboard** and **Governance Contract** cadence. Outcome reports are integrated into portfolio or program-level reviews.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|---|
| Business objectives, backlog, SoW deliverables | Outcome-to-Accountability Agreement , baseline metrics, quarterly review reports |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Outcome Clarity | ≥90% of deliverables linked to measurable outcomes. |
| Ownership Balance | Each outcome has both Client and Vendor sign-off. |
| Outcome Achievement Rate | ≥70% of outcomes meet or exceed targets within timeframe. |
| Transparency Signal | Outcome data visible in shared governance dashboards. |

Common Pitfalls

- Defining outputs instead of outcomes (e.g., "launch feature" vs. "improve conversion").
- Assigning accountability to only one side.

- Lacking baselines or measurable verification.
- Using vanity KPIs disconnected from value realization.
- Allowing changes without proper traceability and sign-off.

Contract Lifecycle

| Stage | Action | Responsible Roles |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Creation | Drafted during Discovery and attached to Engagement Contract. | Product Leaders, Account Leads |
| Activation | Validated before the first delivery milestone. | Executive Sponsor, Delivery Facilitator |
| Review | Revisited quarterly during Maturity or Governance reviews. | Product Leaders, Governance Officers |
| Renewal | Updated upon scope change, product release, or new maturity stage. | Account Leads |

Client-Side Application

Objective: Guarantee that every funded effort is tied to business outcomes and value realization.

Client actions

1. Define clear, quantifiable outcomes and baselines.
2. Validate alignment between outcome and delivery capability.
3. Participate in quarterly outcome verification sessions.
4. Use outcome data for strategic prioritization and renewal decisions.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Demonstrate business impact, not just delivery completion.

Vendor actions

1. Align backlog and technical scope to outcome metrics.
2. Provide measurement mechanisms and data dashboards.
3. Report progress in governance cadence transparently.
4. Document learning when outcomes diverge from expectations.

Summary

The **Outcome-to-Accountability Agreement** transforms project objectives into **shared, measurable commitments**.

It closes the gap between *client expectations* and *vendor execution*, ensuring every feature or deliverable serves a validated business purpose.

By signing this agreement, both organizations commit to **Outcome before Output** – the foundation of 3SF's value-driven collaboration.

Template – Architectural Trade-Off Agreement

"Every architecture decision is a trust transaction."

Purpose

The **Architectural Trade-Off Agreement (ATA)** formalizes critical architectural and non-functional decisions made jointly by Client and Vendor organizations.

It enforces the 3SF principle "**Shared Accountability**" by documenting, validating, and co-signing the trade-offs that shape long-term product sustainability, cost, and risk.

This agreement ensures that architecture decisions are transparent, reasoned, and aligned with contextual constraints defined in the **Engagement Context Canvas**. It becomes an auditable artifact for future governance reviews and maturity assessments.

Scope and Application

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|--|
| SDLC Stages | Discovery → Design → Early Delivery |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery ↔ Value |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Collaborative Confidence</i> → toward <i>Co-Creative Trust</i> |

Contract Parties and Roles

| Role | Representative | Responsibility |
|------------------------------------|----------------|---|
| Client Solution Architect | [Name, Title] | Defines architectural constraints and business risk boundaries. |
| Vendor Solution Architect | [Name, Title] | Proposes solution options and validates trade-offs. |
| Client Product Leader | [Name, Title] | Confirms business impact of architectural choices. |
| Vendor Delivery Facilitator | [Name, Title] | Ensures chosen architecture supports delivery flow and quality targets. |

Agreement Structure

Each ATA records one or more **architectural decision packages**, following a consistent structure:

| Decision ID | Description | Trade-Off Options Considered | Selected Option | Rationale & Expected Benefit | Accepted Risks | Sign-Off |
|-------------|------------------------|---|-----------------|---|--------------------------------|----------|
| ATC-01 | API Gateway Technology | (1) Cloud native, (2) Hybrid on-prem, (3) Managed service | Managed service | Simplifies maintenance, accelerates go-live | Vendor dependency, higher cost | CL-SA |
| ATC-02 | Data Storage Pattern | (1) Single DB, (2) Sharded DB, (3) Data lake | Sharded DB | Improves scalability for expected traffic | Higher operational complexity | CL-SA |

Each trade-off entry must specify **benefits, risks, and mitigations**, and be co-signed by both Solution Architects.

Agreement Clauses

Clause 1 – Transparency of Trade-Offs

All major design decisions with long-term cost or quality implications must be recorded in this agreement before implementation.
No change may be executed without mutual awareness of trade-offs.

Clause 2 – Shared Accountability for Risk

Both parties share accountability for approved architectural risks.
If a decision causes downstream cost or performance degradation, mitigation responsibilities are executed jointly.

Clause 3 – Alignment with Context

All trade-offs must reference the **Engagement Context Canvas (ECC)** and its six contextual drivers.
Deviations require justification and Executive Sponsor approval.

Clause 4 – Change Management

New or modified architectural decisions must be reviewed in governance cadence and appended to the ATA log with version control.

Clause 5 – Review and Renewal

ATAs are reviewed during **Quarterly Assessments** or after major releases.
Findings feed into the **Maturity Growth Contract** and **Relationship Evolution Contract**.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|--|
| Solution design documents, NFR list, risk register | Architectural Trade-Off Agreement , signed decision log, versioned history of changes |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|------------------------------|---|
| Decision Traceability | 100% of major design decisions logged and co-signed. |
| Risk Awareness | ≥90% of known architectural risks linked to mitigation actions. |
| Reassessment Cadence | All ATAs reviewed at least once per quarter. |
| Maturity Signal | Decline in technical conflicts and re-work due to unaligned design decisions. |

Common Pitfalls

- Recording trade-offs retrospectively ("documenting what was already done").
- Client and vendor architects failing to sign decisions jointly.
- Ignoring non-functional aspects (security, maintainability, scalability).
- Treating ATAs as compliance paperwork rather than learning artifacts.
- Neglecting to review ATAs after contextual changes or new releases.

Contract Lifecycle

| Stage | Action | Responsible Roles |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Creation | Draft during design workshops and approve before major implementation. | Solution Architects |
| Activation | Integrate into Delivery Charter and share with engineering teams. | Delivery Facilitator |
| Review | Validate quarterly or post-release. | Governance Officer / Engineering Director |
| Renewal | Update when architecture evolves or risk profile changes. | Solution Architects / Account Lead |

Client-Side Application

Objective: Ensure architectural governance reflects informed business risk and supports long-term sustainability.

Client actions

1. Require ATAs for all major technical or NFR decisions.
2. Validate that trade-offs align with business priorities.
3. Co-sign every approved decision and store it in governance repository.
4. Participate in quarterly architecture reviews.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Maintain transparency and shared ownership for design quality and sustainability.

Vendor actions

1. Facilitate trade-off workshops and maintain the ATA register.
2. Communicate rationale and impact clearly to client stakeholders.
3. Track deferred risks and mitigation progress.
4. Present ATAs during governance and audit sessions.

Summary

The **Architectural Trade-Off Agreement** is the foundation of **technical trust** in 3SF.

It replaces implicit understanding with **explicit, co-signed accountability**, ensuring that every architectural choice is transparent, reasoned, and traceable.

When used consistently, this agreement aligns architecture with business value and maturity – turning design discussions into a shared governance discipline rather than a technical debate.

Template – Autonomy & Control Boundary Agreement

"The measure of trust is the freedom you grant – and the transparency you maintain."

Purpose

The **Autonomy & Control Boundary Agreement (ACBA)** defines **decision-making rights, control mechanisms, and escalation paths** between Client and Vendor organizations.

It formalizes the 3SF principle "**Trust before Control**" by turning abstract trust levels into explicit, measurable governance rules.

This agreement serves as a **governance annex** to the Engagement or Governance Contract.

It evolves alongside relationship maturity – reducing control as trust grows and autonomy proves reliable.

Scope and Application

| Dimension | Scope |
|-------------------------------|---|
| SDLC Stages | Design → Delivery → Governance |
| 3SF Relationship Lines | Engagement ↔ Delivery |
| 3SF Layers | Stable Rules Layer (SRL) + Rule Audit Checklist (RAC) |
| Maturity Target | From <i>Transactional Trust</i> → toward <i>Strategic Partnership</i> |

Contract Parties and Roles

| Role | Representative | Responsibility |
|------------------------------------|----------------|--|
| Client Executive Sponsor | [Name, Title] | Approves decision boundaries and control model. |
| Client Governance Officer | [Name, Title] | Oversees control compliance and escalation management. |
| Vendor Account Lead | [Name, Title] | Ensures vendor decisions respect agreed boundaries. |
| Vendor Delivery Facilitator | [Name, Title] | Implements governance cadence and reports control metrics. |

Agreement Structure

Each ACBA contains a **Decision Autonomy Matrix**, describing who decides, who is informed, and under what conditions autonomy applies.

| Domain | Transactional Stage | Collaborative Stage | Co-Creative Stage | Strategic Stage |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Scope & Requirements | Vendor executes approved backlog; Client approves all scope changes >1 day effort. | Vendor may adjust priorities within sprint; Client approves >5-day changes. | Vendor self-governs iteration scope within agreed outcomes. | Joint planning; Client informed of changes only if they affect outcomes. |
| Architecture Decisions | Client SA approves all design choices. | Co-sign on critical trade-offs; Vendor proposes alternatives. | Vendor proposes; Client validates risk tolerance. | Joint strategic architecture planning. |
| Delivery & Planning | Client PM sets schedule; Vendor reports progress. | Shared sprint planning and progress tracking. | Vendor plans iterations; Client reviews milestones. | Portfolio-level roadmap alignment only. |
| Quality & Acceptance | Client QA defines and verifies all acceptance criteria. | Shared DoD matrix applied. | Vendor owns verification; Client performs outcome validation. | Continuous improvement metrics shared via dashboards. |
| Incident & Change Management | Client approves all changes. | Vendor executes urgent fixes within SLA; reports within 24h. | Vendor self-resolves; Client informed. | Shared accountability for root-cause learning. |

Agreement Clauses

Clause 1 – Adaptive Autonomy

Decision boundaries must reflect current relationship maturity and may evolve as trust metrics improve.
Changes require review and co-signature during **Quarterly Maturity Assessments**.

Clause 2 – Escalation Framework

All escalation paths must follow the governance model defined in the **Governance Contract**.
Escalations are evaluated not by severity alone, but by **trust impact** and **systemic learning potential**.

Clause 3 – Transparency Requirements

All autonomous decisions must be **visible** through shared governance dashboards and logs.
Transparency replaces pre-approval as the control mechanism at higher maturity levels.

Clause 4 – Exceptions and Breaches

Violations of agreed autonomy boundaries trigger a **temporary rollback** to a lower maturity stage, followed by corrective learning using the **Learning Before Blame Protocol**.

Clause 5 – Evolution of Autonomy

Each quarter, maturity is reassessed through the **Maturity Growth Contract**.
Improvement in trust and governance indicators increases vendor decision latitude.

Inputs / Outputs

| Inputs | Outputs |
|--|--|
| Governance model, maturity dashboard data, prior autonomy agreements | Autonomy & Control Boundary Agreement , updated decision matrix, quarterly governance log |

Metrics / Signals

| Category | Example Indicators |
|----------------------------|---|
| Decision Latency | Average approval cycle reduced by $\geq 30\%$ after two quarters. |
| Autonomy Compliance | $\leq 5\%$ of vendor actions exceed current decision authority. |
| Transparency Signal | All autonomous actions logged within agreed timeframe. |
| Trust Maturity | Both sides report $\geq 4/5$ confidence in governance transparency. |

Common Pitfalls

- Fixing autonomy boundaries permanently instead of adapting with maturity.
- Granting autonomy without visibility or reporting.
- Using exceptions as grounds for punishment instead of learning.
- Allowing only one side (client or vendor) to adjust control terms.
- Failing to review boundaries regularly as the relationship evolves.

Contract Lifecycle

| Stage | Action | Responsible Roles |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Creation | Draft and sign during engagement setup. | Executive Sponsor / Account Lead |
| Activation | Integrate into Governance Contract cadence. | Governance Officer / Delivery Facilitator |
| Review | Assess quarterly during Maturity Growth reviews. | Executive Sponsor / Governance Officer |
| Renewal | Update autonomy levels based on trust and performance metrics. | Account Lead / Delivery Facilitator |

Client-Side Application

Objective: Enable controlled delegation while maintaining governance transparency.

Client actions

1. Approve autonomy levels aligned with current trust maturity.
2. Track governance signals and transparency indicators.
3. Adjust boundaries only through joint reviews, not unilaterally.
4. Reward trust improvement through reduced approvals.

Vendor-Side Application

Objective: Earn and sustain autonomy through consistent transparency and reliability.

Vendor actions

1. Operate strictly within agreed boundaries and report all autonomous actions.
2. Propose autonomy expansion based on maturity metrics.
3. Maintain traceability between autonomy decisions and outcomes.
4. Use autonomy responsibly to improve delivery flow, not bypass control.

Summary

The **Autonomy & Control Boundary Agreement** is the cornerstone of **governance evolution** in 3SF.

It replaces static control hierarchies with measurable, adaptive trust – ensuring that autonomy is **earned, visible, and scalable**.

By signing this agreement, both Client and Vendor commit to **Trust before Control** – creating a transparent foundation for sustainable, self-governing delivery partnerships.