TFS Version Control
Part 1
Branching Strategies
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# Table of Contents

Foreword ........................................................................................................................................... 4
Introduction ......................................................................................................................................... 5
What's New .......................................................................................................................................... 6
Concepts............................................................................................................................................ 9
  Vocabulary ....................................................................................................................................... 9
  Branching Concepts .......................................................................................................................... 9
Branch Types .................................................................................................................................... 12
Branching Strategies .......................................................................................................................... 13
  Main Only ...................................................................................................................................... 13
  Development Isolation ..................................................................................................................... 14
  Release Isolation .............................................................................................................................. 14
  Development and Release Isolation .................................................................................................. 15
  Servicing and Release Isolation ....................................................................................................... 15
  Servicing, Hotfix, and Release Isolation ........................................................................................... 17
Code Promotion .................................................................................................................................... 18
Feature Isolation ................................................................................................................................... 18
Alternative Strategies .......................................................................................................................... 20
  Adapt your branching process for inevitable ‘blips’......................................................................... 20
  Feature Toggling ............................................................................................................................... 21
  Continuous Delivery ......................................................................................................................... 23
Walkthroughs ....................................................................................................................................... 25
  From nothing to complexity or not ................................................................................................... 25
  Adapt your branching process for inevitable ‘blips’......................................................................... 28
Real World Scenarios .......................................................................................................................... 30
  Delivering software at intervals ranging from days to months ......................................................... 30
FAQ ...................................................................................................................................................... 33
Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not? ................................................................. 36
  Exercise 1: Environment Setup ......................................................................................................... 36
  Exercise 2: MAIN Only – Simplicity Rules......................................................................................... 42
  Exercise 3: Development Isolation ... welcome branching............................................................... 47
  Exercise 4: Feature Isolation ... a special! .......................................................................................... 54
  Exercise 5: Release Isolation ... audit alarm ..................................................................................... 62
  Exercise 6: Servicing & Release Isolation ......................................................................................... 65
In Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................... 68
Foreword

Since the first writing of the TFS branching guide, a lot has changed in the world of version control. Hosted version control solutions are everywhere, and many of them include integration with build, project tracking, and other services. Distributed Version Control is no longer a niche, and has changed the way that many developers think about what it means to version their code. More developers using version control than ever before – and that is a great thing for the billions of end users of those software development projects.

More developers using version control also means that, now more than ever, the industry needs solid, practical, and easy-to-digest guidance that is industry proven. This guide, and those that came before it, strive to do just that – provide the version control guidance that development teams need to be effective while being approachable and flexible. In this latest edition, we have streamlined the guidance and simplified concepts with the goal of helping teams of all shapes and sizes to develop strategies that enable the flexibility and agility that modern development teams demand.

I also need to mention that this guide would not be in its current form without the readers. Thanks to all of you whom have contributed your feedback and ideas that have helped shape this guide over the years. As is in the past, if you see something in this guide that you would like to see changed or improved, please let us know!

Happy versioning!

Matthew Mitrik – Program Manager, Cloud Dev Services
Introduction

This guide aims to provide insightful and practical guidance around branching strategies with Team Foundation Server. Branching of software is a vast topic and it is imperative to realize that every organization is different, and there is ‘no one size fits all’ branching strategy.

These guidelines serve as a starting point for your planning and you may find that deviating in certain circumstances adds value to your environment. In this guidance, the focus is primarily on practical and real world scenarios of branching that you can apply immediately. We avoid discussing the mechanics of branching but rather focus on best practices and real world examples of patterns that work for many of the business cases we have seen. This guide is one of a set of companion guides as outlined in chapter What’s New, on page 6.

Intended audience

In this guide, we primarily target Garry, the development lead, Doris, the developer, and Dave, the TFS administrator. See ALM Rangers Personas and Customer Profiles¹ for more information on these and other personas.

Visual Studio ALM Rangers

The Visual Studio ALM Rangers provide professional guidance, practical experience and gap-filling solutions to the ALM community. They are a special group with members from the Visual Studio Product group, Microsoft Services, Microsoft Most Valuable Professionals (MVP) and Visual Studio Community Leads. Membership information is available online².

Contributors

Matthew Mitrik, Michael Fourie, Micheal Learned and Willy-Peter Schaub.

A special thank you to the ALM Ranger teams who laid the foundation with v1 and v2: Anil Chandr Lingam, Bijan Javidi, Bill Heys, Bob Jacobs, Brian Minisi, Clementino de Mendonca, Daniel Manson, Jahangeer Mohammed, James Pickell, Jansson Lennart, Jelle Druyts, Jens Suessmeyer, Krithika Sambamoorthy, Lennart Jansson, Mathias Olausson, Matt Velloso, Matthew Mitrik, Michael Fourie, Micheal Learned, Neno Loje, Oliver Hilgers, Sin Min Lee, Stefan Mieth, Taavi Koosaar, Tony Whitter, Willy-Peter Schaub, and the ALM Community.

Using the sample source code, Errata and support

All source code in and revisions of this guide are available for download via the Version Control Guide (formerly the Branching and Merging Guide) site. You can contact the team using the CodePlex discussion forum.

Additional ALM Rangers and other Resources

Understanding the ALM Rangers ⁴
Visual Studio ALM Ranger Solutions ⁵
Branching Taxonomy, by MS Research ⁶
The Effect of Branching Strategies ⁷

¹ http://vsarguidance.codeplex.com/releases/view/88001
² http://aka.ms/vsarindex
³ http://aka.ms/treasure18
⁴ http://aka.ms/vsarunderstand
⁵ http://aka.ms/vsarsolutions
⁶ http://research.microsoft.com/apps/pubs/?id=209683
What’s New

This guide delivers a new crisper, more compact style, which is easier to consume on multiple devices without sacrificing any content. The authors have updated the content, and aligned it with the latest Visual Studio technologies. This latest guidance incorporates key feedback from the readers of the previous guidance.

**NOTE**

Branching is cheap ... Merging is expensive!

This latest guidance promotes the notion of starting with no branching and merging strategy. Instead of selecting the most applicable strategy and evolving your team processes and skills to embrace the strategy, you should adopt and evolve one or more strategies as and when needed.

Strategy Changes

The strategy names simple, basic and advanced used in previous versions of the branching and merging guide have been replaced with more contextual and meaningful names as summarized in the table below. Additionally two new strategies are included in this guide to address new emerging best practices: **feature toggling** and **continuous delivery**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New strategy name (Old name in braces)</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Only</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Main Only Diagram" /></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(No Branch Plan)</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Main Only Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release Isolation</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Release Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Release Branching – Basic (Single Branch))</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Release Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development Isolation</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Development Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(part of Release Branching – Basic (two branch))</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Development Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development and Release Isolation</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Development and Release Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Release Branching – Basic (two branch))</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Development and Release Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servicing and Release Isolation</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Servicing and Release Isolation Diagram" /></td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Release Branching – Standard)</td>
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**Microsoft**

Page 6 of 75
**Branching Strategies – What’s New**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New strategy name (Old name in braces)</th>
<th>Visual</th>
<th>Page</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Servicing, Hotfix and Release Isolation (Release Branching – Advanced)</td>
<td><img src="chart1.png" alt="Visual" /></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature Isolation (Feature Branching)</td>
<td><img src="chart2.png" alt="Visual" /></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1 – Branching strategies at a glance**

**Walkthroughs**

To complement the companion hands-on labs and the branching strategies, new walkthroughs are included to guide you through common scenarios such as:

- Starting with no strategy and adopting one or more strategies as needed.
- Adapting your strategy for ‘blips’ in your standard process, e.g. if you need to temporarily branch from a specific changeset.

The walkthroughs are intended as practical checklists that guide you through the recommended process and outlines the pros/cons.
Companion guides

We have split this guidance into the four topics as summarized below. This will allow you to pick the “world” you are interested in while minimizing the noise and distractions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guide</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Branching Strategies → this guide. Practical guidance on a number of (not all) common Branching Strategies and usage thereof. Core sections:  
  - Branching concepts  
  - Branching strategies  
  - Walkthroughs | |
| Team Foundation Version Control (TFVC) Practical guidance on how to use Team Foundation Version Control (TFVC) features. Core sections:  
  - Workspaces  
  - Merging  
  - New features, i.e. Code Lens  
  - Walkthroughs | |
| Dependency Management with NuGet Practical guidance on dependency management, using NuGet with Visual Studio. Core sections:  
  - Managing shared resources  
  - Dependency management  
  - Walkthroughs | |
| Git for TFVC Users Practical guidance on Git from a TFS perspective. Core sections:  
  - Guidance  
  - Walkthroughs  
  - Terminology/Concepts map | |

Table 2 – Version Control guides
Branching Strategies – Concepts

Concepts

1. **Start** with no branching or the Main Only branching strategy
2. **Branch** only when needed and only after analyzing and understanding the value-add and maintenance costs
3. The strategies in this guide are not the only valid branching strategies. Other strategies may work better for your team and situation.
4. If you are unsure whether you really need a branching strategy, start with step 1.

Vocabulary

“One forgets words as one forgets names. One’s vocabulary needs constant fertilizing or it will die” - Evelyn Waugh

Terminologies may vary in your organization so some translation may be required to the terminology used throughout this guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development Branch</td>
<td>Changes for next version work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forward Integrate (FI)</td>
<td>Merges from parent to child branches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotfix</td>
<td>A change to fix a specific customer-blocking bug or service disruption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Branch</td>
<td>This branch is the junction branch between the development and release branches. This branch should represent a stable snapshot of the product that can be shared with QA or external teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release Branch</td>
<td>A branch to isolate code in preparation for a release. Make ship-stopping fixes before a major product release. After product release this branch may set to read-only based on your process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release Vehicle</td>
<td>How your product gets to your customer (e.g. major release, hotfixes and/or service packs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reverse Integrate (RI)</td>
<td>Merges from child to parent branches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Pack (SP)</td>
<td>A collection of hotfixes and features targeting a previous product release</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 – TFVC branching vocabulary

Branching Concepts

“Your branch distance from main is equal to your level of insanity” – anonymous

Figure 1 – (Heavy) Branching obfuscates simplicity and we recommend the simpler “main only” bamboo strategy 😊

Branching enables parallel development by providing each development activity a self-contained snapshot of needed sources, tools, external dependencies and process automation. Having more branches increases complexity and merge costs. Nevertheless, there are several scenarios where you will need to consider multiple branches to maintain a required development velocity. Whether you branch to temporarily isolate or stabilize a
Branching Strategies – Concepts

breaking change, develop a feature, or jumpstart development on a future version, you should consider the following:

- Branch from a parent with the latest changes (usually MAIN or another DEV branch).
- Branch everything you require to develop in parallel, typically this may mean branching the entire parent.
- Merge from the parent branch (FI) frequently. Always FI before RI. FI as often as it makes sense. Weekly is a good goal.
- Ensure you build and run sufficient Build Verification Tests (BVT) to measure the stability of the branch.
- For stabilization changes, take your changes, forward integrate (FI), build and pass all BVTs before merging (RI) the change and supporting changes to the parent.
- A merge (RI) to MAIN is comparable to a “feature release” to peer development teams. Once the feature branch merges (RI), other teams will use that version of the feature until the next merge (RI).
- When MAIN branches for release (current version), servicing of final ship-stopping bug fixes should be made in the RELEASE branch. The feature branch is just for next version work. In this example when MAIN branches for an upcoming release, all DEV branches can begin next version work.

Avoiding Branching

NOTE The fewer branches you have the better. Instead of selecting and pre-creating a branching strategy, start with nothing and branch as needed. See From nothing to complexity or not, page 25, for a practical walkthrough.

The bar for creating a branch should be set high to avoid the inevitable associated costs. Consider the following before creating a branch for temporary development work.

- Can you use a shelveset? A shelveset allows developers to save and share changes in TFS, but not commit them to the branch.
- Is there another work item you should be working on? Sometimes other work is not visible to the individual engineer.
- Are you able to work in the “next version” branch mentioned above? This may be feasible if the stakeholders approve the change for the next version release.
- Do you “really” need the branch now? Alternatively, can we create it later when we need the branch? At that time, perhaps we can create the new branch by branching from a changeset version.

Always make sure you can adequately describe the value a branch is giving your organization; otherwise perhaps the branch is not needed.

Branching with Labels

Organizations that need a good deal of stability should consider creating branches to capture specific versions of code that went into a release. Utilizing this type of branching strategy makes it relatively easy for a developer to be able to pull down a specific version of code and perform maintenance on that version. Creating a branch from specific versions of source allows the creation of branches for maintenance as needed instead of as a side effect of every release. When branching by version using TFVC, it is important to recognize the value that labels provide.

Labels in TFS are a powerful tool that allow a development team to identify quickly files at specific version levels. Utilizing labeling as part of a branching strategy allows developers to be able to isolate code from subsequent changes that may have happened in the source control system. For example, if a specific version requires maintenance, we can create a branch at any time in the future based on a label. This may lead to a cleaner folder structure in version control as we only create new folders as needed.

When using labels, keep in mind the following caveats:

- Labels are editable and can be deleted (requires permission). These changes are not auditable.
- There can be contention for a given label if more than more person wants to use and modify the label or the files contained in the label.
Branching Strategies – Concepts

- Build labels cannot be relied upon because they might be deleted automatically when build retention policy is applied.

As such, only use labels in cases where we need a snapshot of sources and if it is possible to guarantee, via permissions, that we will not change the contents of the label.

Building Branches

It can be helpful to name builds for branches to easily identify the builds and output associated thereof, e.g.

- DEV_ProductName_versioninfo
- REL_ProductName_versioninfo
- FEA_ProductName_FeatureName_versioninfo

Automate the update of version information by the build procedure. For example, setting assembly information attribute of an assembly to directly link the artefact to a specific build.

This traceability can be helpful if you have multiple branches and build agents. To make it easier to identify binaries, add full build name information into the file version info and/or assembly info. This will help you to identify binaries by knowing to which branch they belong.

Permissions

TFS provides two permissions related to branching and merging. One allows teams to designate certain individuals to be responsible for creating new branches. The other can be responsible for merging code between branches, while most developers will be restricted to working only on certain branches.

- Manage Branch
- Merge

Manage Branch Permissions

The Manage Branch permission enables the following actions:

- Convert folders to branches
- Convert branches back to folders
- Update metadata for a branch, such as owner, description, etc.
- Create new child branches from a given parent branch
- Change the relationships between branches with merge relationships (i.e. re-parenting branches)

The Manage Branch permission only applies to branches (not branched folders or files). Denying the Manage Branch permission does not prevent users from branching ordinary folders for which you have denied this permission. TFS scopes Manage Branch permission to a specific path. Like ordinary folders, we can organize branches into folders. This can be a useful way to organize and apply permissions to groups of branches.

For example, a team could deny Contributors Manage Branch permission for all branches organized under the paths: $/<TeamProject>/Main and $/<TeamProject>/Releases, but allow Contributors the Manage Branch permission for feature branches organized under the path $/<TeamProject>/Development. With these permissions, members of the TFS Contributors group can create child branches for development (from existing feature branches), but cannot create new branches from existing release branches or from the Main branch.

Merge Permission

NOTE: This “Branching Strategies” guide does not cover merging. Refer to MSDN and the companion “Team Foundation Version Control (TFVC)” guide for more information on merging.

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8 http://msdn.microsoft.com
Branching Strategies – Concepts

The **Merge** permission is required in order to pend merge operations on branches, folders, and files under a specified path. Merge permission is required for the **target** path of a merge operation. There is no permission to prevent you from **merging** a particular branch or folder to another path. Merge permission is not limited to branches; you can also apply merge permission to folders and branches under a given path.

### Branch Types

“The tree was evidently aged, from the size of its stem. It was about six feet high, the branches came out from the stem in a regular and symmetrical manner, and it had all the appearance of a tree in miniature” - Robert Fortune

You can organize branches into three categories: MAIN, DEVELOPMENT and RELEASE. Regardless of branch type, consider the following:

- Building regularly (continuously) encourages a regular cadence and immediately identify quality issues.
- The movement of changes between child and parent branches is a concept all team members must consider and understand.

If you are looking for a continuous build and deployment pipeline, we recommend that you peruse the [ALM Rangers](http://aka.ms/treasure54) [DevOps](http://aka.ms/treasure54) guidance and the [Building a Release Pipeline with Team Foundation Server](http://aka.ms/treasure54) guide.

The following table lists additional considerations and attributes for the aforementioned branch types.

#### Main

- **Junction** between DEVELOPMENT and RELEASE, with a natural merge path back to main.
- Branch of “truth”, which must be buildable, meet minimum quality bar and is the trusted source by QA teams.
- Except in a “Main Only” strategy, avoid making changes to MAIN.
- As the number of DEVELOPMENT branches increase, the cost and need to merge (FI) following each successful MAIN build increases.

#### Dev (Development)

- All branches are self-contained (isolated) area that enables each development activity to proceed at its own pace, without taking any dependency on another.
- We must base a DEV branch on a parent branch with a known good state, typically MAIN.
- Merge (FI) frequently to reduce the complexity of “big bang” type merges.
- Optionally you can merge (FI) every time the parent branch builds and passes BVTs, but this comes with potential overhead and disruption.

#### Rel (Release)

- Release branches should **support** your release vehicle.
- Most common release vehicles are major release, hotfix and service pack.
- As with branching in general, less is better!
- The parent/child branch relationship between MAIN→SP→ and HOTFIX branches support merging of changes into future releases (i.e. Hotfixes merge into the SP branch on their way to MAIN) reducing risk of bug regressions in future releases.
Branching Strategies

"Save your creativity for your product... not the branch plan" – Anonymous

The elements of the branching strategies introduced in this section are typically additive, starting with the simple Main Only strategy and adopting other strategies to evolve and mix into a more complex environment when and as needed.

GOAL

The goal of this section is to introduce the basic strategies we have encountered and used effectively in the field. Please post your scenarios not covered to the community discussion forum on our CodePlex team site, so that we can consider and leverage alternatives in future updates to this guide.

Main Only

The Main Only strategy can be folder based or with the main folder promoted to a branch to support version control features that provide extra visibility.

In the illustration below, the branch icon on the left indicates that we have promoted the main folder to a branch, which is an optional step. We recommend this approach only if you intend to evolve into other branching strategies at a later stage.

See Branch Folders and Files and the FAQ for more information on branch folders. Note that examples (V1.0, V1.1, and V2.0) illustrate how we can apply labels.

![Main Only branching strategy](Figure 2)

Usage scenarios

This strategy is the recommended starting point for any development team that has no need for code isolation using branches and no issue with mutable labels used to indicate milestones, in the one and only branch.

NOTE

ALM Ranger projects start their life with this strategy, created by the TFS Branch Tool, and evolve to other branching strategies when and as needed, reducing merge complexity and costs.

Considerations

- Without branching, we need labels to mark development and release milestones. The mutability and lack of history for labels adds risk of change control.
- Peruse Team Foundation Server Permissions and consider protecting the administration of labels.

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11 http://aka.ms/treasure18
13 http://aka.ms/treasure35
Development Isolation

The Development Isolation strategy introduces one or more development branches from main, which enables concurrent development of the next release, experimentation, or bug fixes in isolated development branches.

Figure 3 – Development isolation branching strategy

Usage scenarios

- You need isolation and concurrent development, protecting the stable main branch.
- You need only one major release, supported and shipped to customer using the main branch.
- You need a servicing model for customers to upgrade to the next major release, i.e. v1 → v2.

Considerations

- Each development branch should be a full child branch of the main branch. Avoid creating partial branches.
- We can isolate work in development branches by feature, organization, or temporary collaboration.
- Development branches should build and run Build Verification Tests (BVTs) the same way as main.
- Forward Integrate (FI) frequently from main to development if changes are happening directly on main.
- Forward Integrate (FI) and then Reverse Integrate (RI) from development to main based on some objective team criteria (e.g. internal quality gates, end of sprint, etc.).

Release Isolation

The Release Isolation strategy introduces one or more release branches from MAIN, which enables concurrent release management.

Figure 4 – Release isolation branching strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOTE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
There will be scenarios that are not black and white, which is why we continue to show emergency hotfixes done on release branches which, in theory, should be immutable.

See the Real World Scenarios on page 30, for real-world example using the branching guidance, but deviating (evolving) from the black & white guidelines without affecting delivery or solution quality. Do NOT view this guidance as immutable and cast-in-stone. Instead, evolve continuously to match your environment and requirements.
Usage scenarios

- You need isolation and concurrent releases, protecting the stable Main branch.
- You have multiple, parallel major releases, supported and shipped to customer using the appropriate release branch.
- You need a servicing model for customers to upgrade to the next major release, i.e. v1 → v2.
- You have compliance requirements that require accurate snapshots of sources at release time.

Considerations

- Each release branch should be a full child branch of the main branch.
- Your major product releases from the release branch.
- Lock (read-only) the release branch using access permissions to prevent modifications to a release.
- Changes from the release branch may merge (RI) to main. You should not FI from the Main branch into Release branches.
- Create new release branches for subsequent major releases if you require that level of isolation.
- Any fixes shipped from the release branch can include patches from that branch. Patches can be cumulative or non-cumulative regardless of branch plan.

Development and Release Isolation

The Development and Release Isolation strategy combines the Development Isolation and Release Isolation strategies, embracing both their usage scenarios and considerations.

Servicing and Release Isolation

WARNING: This is an advanced isolation strategy, which introduces complexity, maintenance and cost in terms of tracking, merging and service management. We recommend that you evolve to this strategy as needed and do not start a new project with this strategy or derivations thereof as a blueprint.

The Servicing and Release Isolation strategy introduces servicing branches, which enables concurrent servicing management of bug fixes and service packs. This strategy evolves from the Release Isolation strategy, or more typically from the Development and Release Isolation strategy.
Usage scenarios

- You need isolation and concurrent releases, protecting the stable main branch.
- You have multiple major releases, supported and shipped to customer using the appropriate release branch.
- You need a servicing model for customers to upgrade to the next major release, i.e. v1 → v2.
- You need a servicing model for customers to upgrade to additional service packs per release, i.e. v1 SP1 → v1 SP2, which is the main differentiator of this strategy to the release isolation strategy.
- You have compliance requirements that require accurate snapshots of sources at service and release time.

Considerations

- The service and release branches are branched from main at the same time to create a main → servicing → release parent-child relationship.
- Servicing branch
  - Each servicing branch should be a full child branch of the main branch.
  - Your service pack releases from the servicing branch.
  - Changes from the servicing branch merge (RI) to main. You should not FI from the Main branch into Release branches.
  - Lock (read-only) the servicing branch using access permissions to prevent modifications to a release.
  - Any fixes shipped from the servicing branch can include all previous fixes from that branch. Patches can be cumulative or non-cumulative regardless of branch plan.
- Release branch
  - Each release branch should be a full child branch of the servicing branch.
  - Your major product releases from the release branch.
  - Changes from the release branch merge (RI) to service. You should not FI from the Main branch into Release branches.
  - Lock (read-only) the release branch using access permissions to prevent modifications to a release.
  - Any fixes shipped from the release branch can include all previous fixes from that branch. Patches can be cumulative or non-cumulative regardless of branch plan.
- Create new service and release branches for subsequent major releases if you require that level of isolation.

NOTE: Previous versions of the Branching and Merging guidance referred to this strategy as the Standard Branch Plan.
Servicing, Hotfix, and Release Isolation

We can evolve the servicing and release strategy by introducing additional hotfix branches, which enables support for many release vehicles and servicing scenarios. As we are promoting branching on demand and keeping it simple, we will mention, but not delve into this strategy in detail.

Figure 7 – Servicing, hotfix and release branching strategy

NOTE
Previous versions of the Branching and Merging guidance referred to this strategy as the Advanced Branch Plan.
Code Promotion

The code promotion plan promotes versions of the code base to new levels as they become more stable. Other version control systems have implemented similar techniques with the use of file attributes that indicate what promotion level of a file. As code in main becomes stable, you promote it to the test branch (often referred to the QA branch), where full regression tests take place and additional bug fixes may occur. Once the code is ready for release in the testing branch, it is merged into the production branch, where final quality certification and testing be done. Concurrent development can continue in the main branch, which promotes the concept of no “code freeze”.

NOTE
A Code Promotion strategy feels like a relic from the waterfall development era. We may associate this with long testing cycles and separate development and testing departments. Generally, we no longer recommend this strategy since it is dated.

Usage scenarios

- You have only one major release, supported and shipped to customer using the main branch.
- You have long running testing lifecycles.
- You need to avoid code freezes, and still have isolation for your major release.

Considerations

- Test branch is a full child branch of the main branch.
- Release branch is a full child branch of the test branch.
- Your major product releases from the release branch.
- Changes from the test branch merge (RI) to main. This merge is one way.
- Restrict permissions to release branch to isolate risk.

Feature Isolation

The Feature Isolation strategy introduces one or more feature branches from main, enabling concurrent development of clearly defined features for the next release.
The Feature Isolation strategy is a special derivation of the Development Isolation strategy, essentially with two or more development (feature) branches.

With a Feature Isolation strategy, we can isolate each feature in its own branch giving us a lot of flexibility in terms of when we move a release into production. This strategy also helps to prevent situations where a branch needs to be “cherry-picked” for features that are ready for production while other features in the same branch are not ready. Merge features into main as they become stable enough for release, delete and create new feature branches as necessary.

Usage scenarios
- You need isolation and concurrent development of clearly defined features, protecting the stable main branch.
- You may have separate dedicated teams developing various features that all roll into one product.
- You are developing a large product with many features needing isolation.
- You are developing features in parallel that may not be on the same release cycle.
- You need the ability to easily rollback features from a release. Rolling back features can be costly (and may reset testing) and while possible, should be used with care.

Considerations
- Each feature branch should be a full child branch of the main branch.
- Keep the life of your feature development short, and merge (RI) with main frequently.
- Feature branches should build and run Build Verification Tests (BVTs) the same way as main.
- Merge (FI) frequently from main to feature branches if changes are happening directly on main.
- Merge (RI) from feature to main based on some objective team criteria, e.g. Definition of Done (DoD).
Alternative Strategies

Adapt your branching process for inevitable ‘blips’

*Blip* - (noun) - an unexpected, minor, and typically temporary deviation from a general trend.

Even with the best project planning and intentions, the stakeholders may ask your development teams to change course. Be it a temporary change in priorities, failure to meet a deadline or a change in direction, you need to be able to handle these ‘blips’ as they happen and, importantly, deal with their consequences in the longer term.

Remember, all you need to guarantee you can repeat a build is a changeset because it is immutable. Labels and branches are just conveniences. Use them to your advantage to handle blips in your process and to simplify the support and delivery of your software.

Whether you have a simple main branch strategy or an advanced ‘main, servicing, hotfix, feature’ branching strategy, the process is the same:

1. **Analyze the new requirement and do not panic**

   While the team may be panicking over how to deal with the blip, keep a steady head and remember your strategy. Ensure that the person controlling your branching is involved in this analysis. The person who has control over branches in your source control system will likely have a good understanding of which procedures they follow, the exact state of the system, and the release vehicles. They will be able to provide invaluable ‘matter of fact’ input.

2. **Branch only if necessary**

   Once you understand the requirements, you may find that is unnecessary to create another branch, if however, you do need a new branch, then it is important to understand how branching options. Visual Studio allows you to branch by Changeset, Date, Label, Latest Version or Workspace Version.

   ![Branch](image)

   **Figure 10** – Branch from version using Date

   We generally recommend you get a confident understanding of your requirement and branch by Changeset.

3. **Remove the branch**

   If you needed to create a branch, your ultimate goal will likely be to get the code from the branch back into your normal operating branch or branches to mitigate any long-term consequences. Try to be understanding but firm in working towards this goal. Temporary and numerous branches cause confusion and overhead for the team.
Branching Strategies – Alternative Strategies

See a simple walkthrough on page 28, where we deal with a blip that requires branching to support an ‘out-of-band’ patch and the subsequent collapsing of that branch.

Feature Toggling

Please also refer to the Using Feature Toggles as an Alternative to Development or Feature Branches \(^{15}\) article, by Bill Heys \(^{16}\) for more information on feature toggling.

Feature Toggling is a useful technique for toggling features on and off to determine whether a software feature is available at run time. These may be UI features visible by the end user or simply code itself driving functionality. There are several names and nicknames for this technique that include flags, toggles and switches, and various implementation strategies that include both build and run time. For the purpose of this guidance we will discuss run time feature toggling, which involves the hiding or showing of features during run time. Most of the time the implementation involves a configuration file where the toggles are set. We can combine this with the wrapping of UI elements or classes, and thus control the visibility of the various features. Some implementations leverage a data driven approach where we maintain feature toggle state in a database.

Usage scenarios

- You need to release features \textit{frequently} and \textit{continuously}.
- You need to be able to \textit{enable} and \textit{disable features} on the fly.
- You need to selectively enable/disable features to a specific \textit{audience} or set of \textit{users}

Considerations

- Make use of “\textit{Canaries}” to release and evaluate features with a selected audience.
- Ensure you do not leak features inadvertently to the wrong audience or enable features that are not ready.

Advantages

There are several advantages for implementing feature toggling. One simple advantage is yanking or rolling back a feature becomes easy and done on the fly, and without an entire recompilation and redeployment ceremony. With the advent of continuous delivery, software releases are happening very frequently, and many features complete at different times, and can span multiple sprints. Often this requires complex branching and merging strategies to coordinate the various feature development activities. This can lead to reduced velocity and increased merge conflicts. The further the various branches drift from each other, the worse the merging exercises will become. With feature toggling, in general, we can expect to use less branches since we can have a single codebase contain both features that are done, as well as features still under development. Everyone can safely integrate to Main continuously and in general without worry of destabilizing the code base.

Another advantage to feature toggling is the ability to do so called “A/B”, “canary”, and various other scenarios where you may want to test features on only a certain segment of your audience or customers. Many popular online social networking applications leverage these techniques to roll out new features selectively to their audiences. You can gradually open the feature up to more and more of your user base as you get the success you desire during this type of roll out. Of course, you can also roll back features quickly if things do not go so well.

\(^{15}\) http://aka.ms/vsarfeaturetoggling
Disadvantages

Of course, with any technology choice, there are pros and cons. One disadvantage to feature toggling is you must ensure you do not accidentally forget to wrap the features appropriately, and thus inadvertently make a feature visible before it is ready. Feature toggling also requires upfront planning and some technical overhead on implementation of a strategy.

Inadvertent disclosure is another potential risk. There can be situations where the live code base contains features still under development. Crafty end users may view these feature in plain sight simply by looking at your source. This might give a competitor or a user visibility into what features are coming in your product. This might cause you to implement cryptic naming for your various features if this is an issue for your product. You also need to ensure you are testing scenarios for the feature being both on and off, which of course involves some overhead.

Techniques and Practices

You can leverage some common techniques to ensure you optimize your feature toggling approach. One of the key tenets of feature toggling, as well as a typical best practice in building software in general, is to ensure your developers are writing code as modular as possible. For example, you may have method or function where you implement several features simultaneously via nested if/else clauses. This does not line up well with isolating features. Ensure you are compartmentalizing your features as much as possible.

Adopt naming conventions and consistency to ensure the feature toggling techniques are consistent throughout your codebase. Also, if security is an issue, ensure you are naming your features appropriately for obfuscation of the feature. It is very important to keep in mind scenarios where end users are able to view pre-release features or features that you want to hide in source code. Clever users may derive the meaning of hidden features by following loose naming conventions. If this is important to your scenario, you must weigh the risks and determine a strategy.

You will want to ensure you do appropriate smoke testing both with feature toggles on as well as off for your various features. The essential idea is to understand how your application behaves for each of the feature states. Obviously depending on the exact scenario, there may or may not be nuances for specific features.

In some cases you can eventually deprecate the feature flag from your code base, while in other cases you may want to leave the ability to toggle on and off the feature after is it in production a while. This is a preference decision, but in general a cleanup of features implemented long ago can help keep the codebase tidy.

Tools

There are various open source tools available for implementing feature toggling. Some companies employ their own custom-built implementation. Depending on the type of application you are building, may determine the appropriate technology to leverage. For example in an ASP.NET application, you may wrap UI elements, and drive the toggles via a configuration file.

At Microsoft, the team responsible for implementing Visual Studio Online (also called Team Foundation Service) employs feature toggles. The implementation used in this scenario is a custom-built solution that leverages a data driven approach combined with a REST based service for toggling on and off features. This enables this team to maintain feature toggle state in a database. With this approach, this team achieves the benefits described in this guidance.

NOTE

This guidance is not recommending one technology or tool over another at this point. Here is a starter to look at: Feature Toggle libraries for .NET

---

Continuous Delivery

Continuous delivery relies on automation of build, testing and deployment. Change is continuous, frequent and merge operations more challenging as merge conflicts often require manual intervention. It is recommended to avoid branching and rely on other strategies, such as feature toggling (page 20), when considering continuous integration.

Usage scenarios

- You have only one major release, supported and shipped to customer using the main branch.
- You have short feature development cycles.
- You need to release features frequently and continuously.

Considerations

- Labels, when used as bookmarks, are mutable (can be changed) and there is no history of changes made to labels.
- Peruse Team Foundation Server Permissions 18 and consider protecting the administration of labels.
- Avoid cherry picking which complicates tracking of changes and subsequent merge operations.

NOTE If you are looking for a continuous build and deployment pipeline, we recommend that you peruse the ALM Rangers DevOps 19 guidance and the Building a Release Pipeline with Team Foundation Server 20 guide.

When using feature toggling, we can adopt the main only branching strategy, enabling and disabling features by toggling them on or off as shown. The main branch becomes the trusted source for the automation pipeline.

Figure 11 – Continuous integration: Feature toggling

19 http://aka.ms/treasure54
20 http://aka.ms/treasure53
Release isolation is feasible if you use branches as snapshot archives only and lock the branches down appropriately.

Figure 12 – Continuous integration: Feature toggling with release isolation

If you opt for the use of feature isolation, it is important to keep the scope of each feature small and the duration short. By making the feature branches short-lived, the merge operations and potential impact are as small as possible. Restrict the lifespan of a feature branch to hours, rather than days, and delete the feature branch as soon you merge (RI) it with the main branch.

Figure 13 – Continuous integration: Feature isolation
Walkthroughs

From nothing to complexity or not

**NOTE** The walkthrough relies on the Hands-on Lab (HOL) from “Simple to Complex or not”, page 36. Refer to the HOL for a more detailed and sample solution based walkthrough.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 | Starting with **Main** Only  
- **Done**  
We **recommend** that you start with this strategy, avoiding branch and merge complexities.  
- Consider when you have **no need for isolation** (yet) and are comfortable using labels.  
- Optionally convert the main folder to a main branch to enable branch-specific features, such as visualization and the ability to store properties like owner and comment.  
**Complexity** → **Low 🌴** | **Isolation**: None | **Releases**: 1 |
| 2.1 | **Development Isolation** – Getting Started  
- **Done**  
- Consider the **Development Isolation** strategy if you need **isolation** of **development** such as new features, experimentation or bug fixes.  
- Branch from **main** to **dev** when you have a need for concurrent support of a major release and development.  
- Before you merge new features from dev to main (**Reverse Integration**), perform a merge from main to dev (**Forward Integration**) to pick up changes from the main branch.  
**Complexity** → **Moderate 🎨** | **Isolation**: Development | **Releases**: 1 | **NOTE** Consider creating a second workspace for the dev branch to isolate it from main. |
| 2.2 | **Development Isolation** – Hotfix  
- **Done**  
- Develop hotfixes in the **dev** branch if part of the concurrent development stream.  
- Alteratively (not recommended) develop **emergency** hotfixes in the **main** branch and merge (**FI**) changes to the **dev** branch at the earliest convenience.  
**Complexity** → **Moderate 🎨** | **Isolation**: Development | **Releases**: 1 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3.1  | **Feature Isolation – Getting Started**  
- Consider using the **Feature Isolation** strategy if you have a need to develop **clearly defined features** concurrently.  
- Investigate and decide whether to branch your feature branches off **main** (as above) or the **dev** branch (as below).  
- If you find you are frequently developing emergency hotfixes on main, consider using Feature Isolation for **hotfixes**, branching feature branches off main.  
- Before merging new features from feature to parent (main or dev), perform a merge from parent to the feature branch (FI) to pick up latest changes from the parent branch.  
  **COMPLEXITY** → **Moderate**  
  **Isolation**: Development  
  **Releases**: 1 |
| 3.2  | **Feature Isolation – Cleanup**  
- Optionally **delete** and/or **destroy** feature branches when no longer needed to reduce noise.  
- Be cautioned that **destroy** is a non-reversible action and should be used with caution. |
| 4    | **Release Isolation**  
- The **Release Isolation** strategy is useful when you need to snapshot and support multiple main releases, i.e. v1 and v2  
- Optionally (not recommended) develop **emergency** hotfixes in the **release** branch and merge (FI) changes to the **main** branch at the earliest convenience.  
  **COMPLEXITY** → **Moderate**  
  **Isolation**: Release  
  **Releases**: 2+ |
Branching Strategies – Walkthroughs

### Step 5

**Development & Release Isolation**

- You typically evolve from a Development Isolation strategy to a Development & Release Isolation strategy by adding Release Isolation.

- When you merge changes from a release branch to the main branch, such as due to an emergency hotfix, ensure that you merge (FI) these changes to the development and/or feature branches as soon as possible.

**Complexity** → Moderate ☺ to High ☠ | Isolation: Development & Release | Releases: 2+

### Step 6

**Servicing and Release Isolation**

- If and only if you require a release strategy with concurrent servicing management of bug fixes and service packs, you can evolve to the Servicing and Release Isolation strategy.
- Analyze and define your servicing and release naming convention.
- Rename your release branch to servicing, and branch from servicing to release, as defined by your naming convention.

**Complexity** → [Very] High ☠ | Isolation: [Dev &] Release | Releases: 2+ and Service Packs

### Step 7

**Other options**

- Consider the use of Main Only strategy as your default.
- Before embracing branching strategies, consider other options such as Feature Toggling.
- AVOID complex branching models that are fascinating, but costly to maintain!

---

Table 4 – Walkthrough: From nothing to complexity
Adapt your branching process for inevitable ‘blips’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Starting point</strong>&lt;br&gt;☑ - Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>We start</strong> with a team who are using a <em>servicing and release isolation</em> strategy. There are three teams working on the code base. Some are working on main for the next major release, some are working on servicing to create the next minor release and some are working on the release branch to provide hotfixes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The team providing hotfixes has a release cadence of around 1 hotfix per week, however they provide these hotfixes to the client for additional testing; there will be a delay between providing the fix and its production implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Blip – no branch</strong>&lt;br&gt;☑ - Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The team have provided hotfix 5 to the client and are working on hotfix 6. Hotfix 3 is in production. The client has raised a high priority bug, which needs to go into production as soon as possible. They are not able to take hotfixes 4, 5 or 6. <strong>Remember the steps,</strong>&lt;br&gt;1. <strong>Analyze the new requirement and do not panic</strong>&lt;br&gt;We know the client requires an out-of-band hotfix. After analyzing the bug, we determine that it is in an area of the code that is unchanged in hotfixes 4, 5 and 6. This means we can build the code and provide the fix from the release branch. The important part is that we test this patch, let us call it 3a for simplicity, on an environment that is at hotfix 3 level. <strong>Always</strong> have an environment or snapshot, which is at the same level as production.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Blip – branch</strong>&lt;br&gt;☑ - Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. <strong>Branch only if necessary</strong>&lt;br&gt;Let us use the same scenario as #2. However, this time we analyze the bug and discover that hotfix 4, 5 and 6 have all changed code in the same area. We will need to create a branch to meet these requirements, but that leads to more questions: From what branch should we create the new branch? What version should be this branch?&lt;br&gt;Let us first deal with where. Our dev branch is far progressed from the release and the servicing branch is well on its way to providing the next minor release. The best branch to branch from is the release branch.&lt;br&gt;Determining the version to branch depends on what is in production. As production is at hotfix 3, we need to identify the changeset that concluded hotfix 3 and branch by that. We will call this branch ‘crisis’ rather than 3a for reasons that we will make apparent shortly. We can now create Team Foundation builds for the branch, create the patch, test it and ship it to the client.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. <strong>Remove the branch</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Branching Strategies – Walkthroughs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If we merge the changes back to release, they can be included in hotfix 6 to ensure we do not regress the fix. However, in this situation we find ourselves with a bigger problem. One could argue that we are providing too many hotfixes and the delay between providing the fix and implementing it is unacceptably slow. This may be true, however, this scenario will happen and we need to effectively recover as a priority and then re-evaluate our release cadence to try avoiding the situation happening again. In this scenario, rather than merging back (RI) to release, we need to merge (FI) all the changesets that made up hotfix 4 from release to the crisis branch. We can now use this branch to produce hotfix 4a (this is why we named the branch crisis and not 3a!). We follow the same process to produce hotfix 5a and then we merge (RI) back to release. We delete the branch only after hotfix 6 goes into production. It is potentially a big effort but the process is sound. <strong>Always</strong> be clear and candid on the impact of a fix; the client may be happy to deprecate a series of fixes and take a cumulative fix if the benefits make sense. It took a bit of effort but consider the crisis averted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 – Walkthrough: Adapt your branching process for inevitable ‘blips’
Real World Scenarios

Delivering software at intervals ranging from days to months

We base the following scenarios on real world implementations successfully delivering software into production at various intervals ranging from long term -- 6 to 9 months -- through mid-term -- 1 to 3 months -- to short term ad hoc deliveries -- 1 to 14 days. Team sizes range from 20 to 100+ and typically involve a supporting infrastructure of several hundred servers. The code base is typically in the region of 5 million lines. The point is that these are large systems; however, the scenario as a whole could be applicable to much smaller projects.

NOTE In this scenario, we will bend some of the rules, which we have outlined in this guide. We will be coding directly on the Main and Release branches and illustrating how we use our understanding of the concepts illustrated in this guide to provide a working and successful solution.

Walkthrough

This scenario works through three releases. We will use a three-part numeric sequence with the following makeup r.s.hh, where r = Release, s = Servicing and h = Hotfix. For example, our three releases will be 1.1.0, 1.2.0 and 2.1.0.

The 1.1.0 and 1.2.0 releases will branch off from the Servicing 1.0 branch while 2.1.0 will branch from the Servicing 2.0 branch. When teams are discussing versions / branches, it is clear that a two-part name is a Servicing branch while a three-part name is a release branch. It is also clear from which Servicing branch we took the Release branch.

### Scenario Stages and Detail

**Getting Started** - The team starts with a single main branch. They have a clear set of requirements and a delivery date to meet. At this stage, they do not know what the released version will be, but collectively the team refers to the release as release 1.

The Development, Test and Build team work together to develop the solution.

**Branch to Stabilize** - When the code is stable the team decide that they will branch it from Main into a Servicing branch for final stability changes.

Two teams can now operate independently. On Main some of the team can start work on the next major delivery, while on Servicing 1.0 other team members can wrap up final stability fixes.

We would expect a larger test representation of the team working on Servicing to ensure it meets release quality, while a subset start ramping up on new tests for the work on Main. Depending on your level of automation you may see the opposite.
Scenario Stages and Detail

Branch to Release – When you deem the code to be of sufficient quality, the team take a Release branch from Servicing. At this point, it is worth thinking a little about the exact name you give the Release branch. We do not expect to branch more than one or two release branches from Servicing 1.0 so we have single padded the Servicing digit.

If you expected to release 10 or more then pad the Servicing number with a zero, e.g. 1.00.00. Why? Simply because in Source Control Explorer the releases will be listed in the correct order.

Branch Release 1.0.00 deemed as having sufficient quality, not necessarily production quality. While the release is with the client, create all hotfixes on the Release branch to address any immediate issues. At the same time, a team is working on the Servicing branch to further stabilize the code and reduce the bug count to the point that it reaches production quality. Any hotfixes, e.g., 1.0.01, 1.0.02 are reverse integrated back into the Servicing 1.0 branch and eventually all parent and new child branches.

Branch to Release (again) - In our scenario Release 1.0.00 will never actually hit production. We provide this release to the client so that they can perform integration testing with various other partners.

Release 1.0.00 has been issued with several hotfixes which have all been merged back to Servicing 1.0 and the team looking after that branch have deemed that the code is production ready. Release 1.1.00 is branched from Servicing 1.0.

It all comes down to resource, but try to limit the number of branches you are supporting, especially Release branches as taking a fix there means various merges need to take place. Ideally you should try use Servicing as a buffer. If a bug is not of high enough importance, try to convince the client that it will be better to take the fix in the next release. This way you do not have to create and test a hotfix and the change can be made in Servicing which will get more testing time.

System Live - Release 1.1.00 is now in production. Any hotfixes are coded on the Release branch, tested and progressed into production as fast as possible. This is to avoid situations where a hotfix is coded on Release and in the time it takes to be signed off, another issue is found which is more important and needs to go in first. In this situation it is often easiest to rollback the first change, implement the critical fix and then redo the first fix. Alternatively you could branch by changeset from the Release branch, but this has additional costs like setting up builds and moving a team over to the new branch.

We also use the Servicing branch for longer term fixes on a release. For example, if a fix is going to take two weeks to implement and you expect to issue hotfixes in that time, then a team can work in Servicing and when they are done the fix is merged into release and the hotfix issued. This assumes that Servicing is not being used to stabilise a new set of code to branch off as another release. If this is the case then you need to branch a Feature branch from the Release branch to provide the isolation needed.
Scenario Stages and Detail

**Maturity** - Let’s talk through the following diagram which shows us supporting eight branches. Production is running Release 1.1.00.

**Main** – here we have a team working on release 3 functionality.

**Servicing 1.0** – this is really just a pass through branch at this stage.

**Release 1.0.00** – is actually deleted and shown here to illustrate how we take multiple releases from Servicing.

**Release 1.1.00** – this is where we work on production hotfixes

**Servicing 2.0** – has a team working on stabilising the code that will be branched as 2.1.00 and expected to replace 1.1.00 in production.

**Release 2.0.00** – is there to support the release that the client is using for integration testing with other systems.

**Feature 2.0.03** – is a hotfix we are working on which we know will take a while to implement and we can’t work on Servicing as its stabilizing 2.1.0 code. Once the code is stable we will merge it to 2.0.00, issue the hotfix and probably delete the 2.0.03 branch.

**Feature 4.0** – here work is being done on functionality that is only expected to be ready after the next major release from main. It’s importatan to remember that a Feature branch can also be taken from Main to work on something which may not be signed off for the release; that way Main can easily ship without the feature rather than having to rollback code on Main because the client changed their mind.

**Key Points**

- We code on Main for major releases but may use feature branches to offer protection from having features cancelled or postponed.
- We code on Release branches and do not treat them as immutable. We use additional Feature branches and Servicing branches when we expect a fix to take some time. This way we leave the Release branch available to code any high priority hotfixes.
- All you need to guarantee you can repeat a build is a changeset because it is immutable. Labels and branches are just conveniences. Use them to your advantage to simplify the support and delivery of your software.
- We merge code from Release to Servicing as soon as a hotfix ships. We typically merge that hotfix to main and any other later branches so that we do not regress. We merge from Servicing to Main when we branch to Release.
- We leave the Servicing branch in place even though it may prove to simply be a pass through branch for some time. It provides us with a natural place to code a longer term hotfix and may even be used to create another full release if project circumstances change.
- We use a consistent naming system for our branches.
- We try to limit the number of branches that we need to hotfix as hotfixes can be expensive to deliver.
- We arrange our branches into folders for easy navigation as shown here...
FAQ

Strategies

What are the differences between folders and branches?

Starting with TFS 2010 there is a distinction between branches and folders in version control. A branch enables some branch-specific features such as visualization, as well as the ability to store properties like the owner and a comment to each branch. For more information see:

- Branch Folders and Files 21
- View the Branch Hierarchy of a Team Project 22
- View Where and When Changesets Have Been Merged 23
- Team Foundation Server Permissions 24

Why have we changed the strategy names?

We listened to the way engineering and users were talking about branching in casual and technical discussions. Our decision was to introduce strategy names that are meaningful and which you can visualize in your mind. For example, visualize a basic branch plan. Now repeat the exercise, visualize a development, then a release, and finally a development and release isolation strategy. Which was easier to visualize?

Operations

Are work items a part of the branching/merging model?

No, work items exist at a logical level that is distinct from that of the source control repository. When you perform a branch operation, you will not: duplicate the work items, carry over work item history, or update work item links. For more information see: Copy a Work Item 25.

Can source code be branched across team projects?

Yes, you can but we do not recommend it unless two teams must share source and cannot share a common process.

How should we handle bugs over branches?

As outlined in Are work items a part of the branching/merging model?, page 33, branching of source code has no impact on work items, including bugs. Consider who is responsible for the code and the bugs, whether responsibility and ownership moves (copied) the code or if bugs are resolved as part of the merge process. For more information, see Copy a Work Item 26 and Create or Delete Relationships Between Work Items 27.

Is there a preferred “Branch from version” value when creating a branch?

When creating a branch, there are five options available from which to choose the source.

---

• **Labels** and **workspaces** do not usually refer to a point in time but rather to a collection of files grouped together by the user.

• **Date**, **Latest Version** or **Changeset** usually refer to a point in time and address the needs of larger teams. For example, for bug resolution knowing when the break occurred is a point in time (date) to consider. When moving to another sprint or iteration the Latest Version or Changeset may be the best fit.

**Can you delete branches?**

Yes. You need to understand your branching hierarchy and aware of future implications before deleting a branch. By deleting a branch, you are potentially removing a parent or child relationship, introducing the need for baseless merging.

For example, the diagram on the left allows changes to propagate from A -> B, B -> C and vice versa through the branch hierarchy. If you delete the branch B (see image on the right), you can only get changes from A -> C and C -> A using a baseless merge.

![Diagram showing branch hierarchy](image)

**Figure 14 - A -> B -> C branch hierarchy**


**What is required to consolidate or transition branches?**

Before considering, a consolidation or transitioning of branches ask the following questions:

- What are the predominant reasons for considering this action?
- What are the benefits of this action?
- What are the benefits for remaining with the status quo?
- What are the risks of consolidation?
- What resources will be required to complete a consolidation?
- What is the exit plan?
- What effects will this have on future development?
- How will you incorporate any existing best practices?
- Do we need to keep history and associated work items with the source?

Once you have decided on the answers to these questions, you will determine your next steps based on whether you wish to consolidate your branches or transition into a new environment. Transitioning to a new branch may be the easier of the two options. You can essentially lock off your existing branches and have everyone work in the new environment from the designated start point. This is most appropriate when applications that have been created and maintained by teams that were previously separate and do not have anything in common, other than they are now all products of a combined entity.

---


Branching Strategies – FAQ

For consolidating branches, you will have to review your existing branches and determine what must be included. Once you have made those decisions, you will need to create a new mainline and proceed to migrate each designated branch. Along each step, you should verify that each migrated branch does not break the new mainline. If possible, do this in a sandbox environment prior to attempting in a production environment.

For more information, see Branch Folders and Files 30 and Merge Folders and Files 31.

What is the “Re-parent Branch” function and when should you use it?

Re-parent Branch is a feature that you can use to establish a parent-child relationship between baseless merged branches (i.e. branches with no existing merge relationship) as well as to alter existing branches’ parent-child relationships in a branch hierarchy.

However, to “reverse” an existing parent-child relationship, you need to disconnect the child branch from the parent branch using the "No parent" option, and then re-parent the former parent branch to the former child branch.

Refer to Branch Re-parenting 32 for more information.

When should you use Labels?

We recommend labels in cases where you need a snapshot of source for future reference and or use and where the mutability of labels is not an issue.

Security

Can a branch be truly immutable?

Can you lock your house and guarantee that no one can access? The answer is likely to be “no”.

While we can lock-down a branch with permissions, the “truly immutable” depends on your security architecture and enforcement thereof.

How do I manage permissions across branches for my team?

You should carefully evaluate how you manage access and permissions to source control. Taking the time to evaluate the levels of access that you need across roles and defining a roles and responsibilities matrix can provide you with a consistent and security focused solution. Consider using secure groups, based on Active Directory, since TFS can refresh automatically. Remember to include those people from outside your immediate teams who might also need access, such as IT Ops or Support. You may also need to take into consideration any corporate security or governance policies that apply.

Refer to Securing Team Foundation Server for more information.

Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

Prerequisites
You require the following to complete this lab:

- The sample solution, documented below
- The latest Brian Keller VM or an environment with:
  - Visual Studio 2012 Professional or higher
  - Team Foundation Server 2012 or higher

Our sample solution and context
Our sample solution, which ships together with this HOL on the CodePlex Version Control (formerly the Branching and Merging) site is based on the Managed Extensions Framework (MEF) exploration sample, covered in detail Managed Extensions Framework (MEF) ... simplicity rules.

We start with our favorite calculator solution, which starts with the ability to add and subtract and evolves to include multiplication and division during the course of this lab. The focus is not on MEF, C#, .NET or the exciting world of debugging, but instead on the question “whether to branch or not to branch”.

We hope you will enjoy this journey and encourage you to explore the companion guides for details on branching and Team Foundation Version Control features.

Exercise 1: Environment Setup

GOAL
In this lab, we assume we start with no pre-configured environment, create a team project, download and check-in our sample solution.

Task 1: Log on to your environment

WARNING
Please do not use a production system to complete this or other HOLs, as we do not want to create unwanted team projects or branches in production!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Logon</td>
<td>If you are logging using an instance of BK’s VM, i.e. at TechReady login using the administrator P2ssw0rd credentials. Alternatively, login using your own evaluation environment with credentials that will allow you to create a Team Project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 – Lab 1, Task 1

33 http://aka.ms/almvms
34 http://aka.ms/treasure18
Task 2: Create a Team Project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Start Visual Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Create Team Project (TP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Start Visual Studio

- Create a Team Project called **BranchingScenarios**

![New Team Project on vsalm\FabrikamFiberCollection](image)

**Specify the Team Project Settings**

The New Team Project Wizard uses the team project name you type here when creating various components. After the team project is created, the name is used by team members to locate the team project.

Make sure that the name you pick for the team project is not already in use by Team Foundation Server or any other software used in the deployment (for example, SharePoint Products or SQL Server Reporting Services).

**What is the name of the team project?**

BranchingScenarios

**What is the description of the team project?**

- Select the process template of your choice.
- You do not require a SharePoint portal.
- Select Team Foundation Version Control for your Source Control.

![New Team Project on vsalm\FabrikamFiberCollection](image)

**Confirm Team Project Settings**

- Team Project Settings
  - Name: BranchingScenarios
  - Description:

- Process Template Settings
  - Process Template: Microsoft Visual Studio Scrum 3.0 - Preview
  - Template Description: This template is for teams who follow the Scrum methodology and use Scrum terminology.

- Team Site Settings
  - Address: (none configured)

- Source Control
  - Version Control: A new empty folder $/BranchingScenarios will be created in Team Foundation

Table 7 – Lab 1, Task 2
## Task 3: Create your sandbox

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>If you are using Visual Studio 2012</strong> (see below if using VS 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Configure your workspace mappings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Hint:</strong> In <strong>Source Control Explorer</strong>, select <strong>Workspaces</strong> drop down, <strong>Workspaces</strong>, your workspace and <strong>Edit</strong> in the Configure Workspaces dialog.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Change the workspace path to <code>c:\HOL\BranchingScenarios</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Configure Workspace" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Add Workspace" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Select</strong> <strong>Advanced...</strong> and name your workspace <strong>HOL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use the process as above, or the new process for Visual Studio 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Connect to the new team project called <strong>BranchingScenarios</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Select <strong>configure your workspace</strong> mappings to get started</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Map &amp; Get" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Go to Source Control Explorer" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Map local path</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Go to Source Control Explorer</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ - Done</td>
<td>• Change your workspace to <strong>HOL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ - Done</td>
<td>• Create a folder <strong>main</strong> in <code>c:\HOL\BranchingScenarios</code> through the Source Control Explorer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 8 – Lab 1, Task 3

### Task 4: Download and check in sample solution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ - Done</td>
<td>• Download the sample code from <a href="http://aka.ms/hol-bs1">http://aka.ms/hol-bs1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ - Done</td>
<td>• Unzip the sample project to the <code>c:\hol\BranchingScenarios\main</code></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ - Done</td>
<td>• Open the solution <code>6_MEF</code> in <code>c:\hol\BranchingScenarios\main</code>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ - Done</td>
<td>• Select OK when you get the following Visual Studio 6.0 projects warning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explore the sample solution.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step 4 Instructions

- It is a console based sample solution
- We will use the Debug Command parameter to define test data, i.e. 1 1 + to add 1 and 1.
- Ensure it builds and runs without any errors
- Verify you have the following environment in your Source Control Explorer

4. Add source to Source Control
   □ - Done

- Right click on the solution in the Solution Explorer, and select Add Solution to Source Control...
We have setup our sample environment and are ready to explore the “to branch or not to branch” dilemma.
Exercise 2: MAIN Only – Simplicity Rules

**GOAL**
Explore the Main Only branching strategy. We recommend the strategy and the avoidance of branch and associated merge strategy, and are using this strategy for all new ALM Ranger projects.

**Context**
Your team needs to implement the DIVIDE feature, has no need for isolation (yet) and is comfortable with using labels to indicate milestones. By using the Main Only strategy you avoid the need for branching and subsequent need for merging, which minimizes maintenance complexity and associated cost.

![Main Only Strategy](image)

**Task 1: Developing on Main**

In the real world, you need to implement BVT (Build-Verify-Test) strategies, such as a gated build and unit tests, to protect the quality of the main and other branches. Refer to Visual Studio Test Tooling Guide[^36], Team Foundation Build Guidance[^37] and Unit Test Generator[^38] for more information on these topics, which are not covered in this walk-through to keep the focus on branching strategies and avoid distractions and delays caused by build and test runs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Label</td>
<td>• To start we label our latest code, we just checked in, as v1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[^36]: http://aka.ms/treasure27
[^37]: http://aka.ms/treasure23
[^38]: http://aka.ms/treasure50
Step | Instructions
--- | ---
2 | **Run to validate**

- Right-click on the main folder in the Source Control Explorer, select **Advanced** and **Apply Label**
- Define a name, comment and select the Latest Version

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>![Image of Source Control Explorer]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- Right click on the 6_MEF project in the Solution Explorer and select **Properties**
- Select **Debug** tab and define the following command line arguments **4 2 /**
- Build and run the program (F5) and verify that the calculator fails as it lacks this feature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>![Image of Debug tab]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

3 | **Extend the feature**

- Add class `CalculationExtension_Div` to the project and the division logic by writing out the class or copy-paste and edit from the `_Add class`
### Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Done</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- You must define the ExportMetadata symbol, the class name and the division</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|      | ![Code Snippet](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Test new feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Done** | - Build and run (F5) the solution  
- Verify your vision calculation now passes  
![Screenshot](image)
- Feature implemented and tested successfully by developer  
- We can now check in the changes without compromising the main folder quality |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th>Check in and label</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Done** | - Check in the code changes by right-clicking on the main folder in the Source Control Explorer and selecting **Check In Pending Changes**  
![Screenshot](image)  
Right-click on the main folder in the Source Control Explorer, select **View History** and take note of the changsets. You should have one for the initial import and one for the division feature checkin |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>History Location:</th>
<th>Source Control Explorer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BranchingScenarios</td>
<td>HOL Starting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source Location:</td>
<td>\HOL\BranchingScenarios\main</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Changesets</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 8:10:08 AM</td>
<td>Implement the division feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 8:08:26 AM</td>
<td>Initial import</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Step Instructions

- **Right-click on the main folder in the Source Control Explorer, select** Advanced and Apply Label

- **You can select Latest Changeset as before or define the Changeset number for the check in that included the division feature.**

- **Right-click on the main folder in the Source Control Explorer, select** View History and then select the Labels tab

- **You now have two labels specifying milestones on our main branch, which you can use for reference, comparisons or checkouts, or the associated changesets as shown.**
Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

Table 10 – Lab 2, Task 1

Task 2: Optionally convert main folder to main branch

Converting the main folder to a branch is an optional step. The branch process automatically performs this when you create branches off main. ALM Rangers frequently use the TFS Branch Tool utility to implement their version control environment, which automatically performs this step as part of the configuration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spoting the potential Label issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Right-click on any of the labels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Note the edit and delete options for labels, which makes them mutable and therefore not reliable for auditing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="http://aka.ms/treasure35" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Table 10 – Lab 2, Task 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="http://aka.ms/treasure35" alt="Table" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Task 2: Optionally convert main folder to main branch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Converting the main folder to a branch is an optional step. The branch process automatically performs this when you create branches off main. ALM Rangers frequently use the TFS Branch Tool utility to implement their version control environment, which automatically performs this step as part of the configuration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="http://aka.ms/treasure35" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Check features</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⊗ - Done before conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Right-click on the main folder and select <strong>Branching and Merging</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="http://aka.ms/treasure35" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Note that we can Branch, Merge and Convert to Branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Convert folder to Branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⊗ - Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Right-click on the main folder and select <strong>Branching and Merging, Convert to Branch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="http://aka.ms/treasure35" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Optionally add a description and then select Convert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Check features after conversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>⊗ - Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Notice that the folder icon has changed into a branch icon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="http://aka.ms/treasure35" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

39 http://aka.ms/treasure35
Step Instructions

- Right-click on the main branch and select Branching and Merging
  - Branch...
  - Merge...
  - View Hierarchy
  - Convert to Folder
  - Reparent...

Note that Convert To Branch has vanished, but View Hierarchy and Reparent appeared
- Select View Hierarchy to view the single (main only) node

Table 11 – Lab 2, Task 1

We explored the Main Only branching strategy and the implications of promoting the main folder to a branch. We worked in only one place, the main folder | branch and used labels to bookmark versioning of the code base.

In this exercise we performed:

- 0 branches
- 0 merges
- 2 labels

Exercise 3: Development Isolation ... welcome branching

Explore the Development Isolation strategy, which introduces one or more development branches from main, enabling concurrent development of the next release, experimentation or bug fixes in isolated development branches.

Context

Your team needs to maintain a stable main branch for the major release supported in production and invest in concurrent development to add a multiplication feature to the calculator solution.

Figure 16 - Development Isolation Strategy
## Task 1: Create the Development Branch to isolate new development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Create dev branch - Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Right-click on **main** in the Source Control Explorer, select **Branching and Merging, Branch**

- Define the **Target Branch Name** as $/BranchingScenarios/dev, as shown, and click **Branch**

- You could use any name for the **dev** branch, i.e. dev, research or development, but strive for consistency to avoid the potential for confusion and error

- Right-click on **BranchingScenarios** folder in the Source Control Explorer and select **Get Latest Version**

**NOTE**

In the real world, you may consider creating a second workspace for the dev branch to isolate it from main.
Step    Instructions

1
Right-click on dev branch in Source Control Explorer, select Branching and Merging and View Hierarchy to view a visualization of the main and dev branches

2
Time permitting, view some of the other diagrams

3
Open the 6_MEF.sln solution in the dev branch

Extend the feature

- Add class CalculationExtension_Mul and the division logic by writing out the class or copy-paste and edit from the _Add class

- You must define the ExportMetadata symbol, the class name and the multiplication

```csharp
[Export(typeof(ICalculation))]
[ExportMetadata("Symbol", "+")]
public class CalculationExtension_Mul : ICalculation
{
    public long Calculation(long valueOne, long valueTwo)
    {
        return valueOne * valueTwo;
    }
}
```

Test new feature

- Right click on the 6_MEF project in the Solution Explorer and select Properties
- Select Debug tab and define the following command line arguments: 4 2 *
- Build and Run (F5) the solution.
### Task 2: Fix a bug in Main as a hotfix

Before we can merge and release the new features, however, we have to investigate and fix a production bug, which has a higher priority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Investigate the bug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- The users have reported that the subtraction feature in our v1.1 release is broken
- Switch context to the **main** branch, which contains the production release
- Open the 6_MEF.sln solution in the **dev** branch
- Right click on the 6_MEF project in the Solution Explorer and select **Properties**.
- Select **Debug** tab and define the following command line arguments: `4 2 -`  
  - Build and Run (F5) the solution
  - Notice that the user is correct, the subtraction seems to be adding the values
### Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Fix the bug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Edit the ...\main\CalculationExtension_Sub.cs file and notice the gremlin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public class CalculationExtension_Sub : ICalculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>{</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public long Calculation(long valueOne, long valueTwo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>{</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>// Intentional bug for HOL should be -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>return valueOne + valueTwo;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Change the + to a - to correct the bug and optionally remove the comment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public class CalculationExtension_Sub : ICalculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>{</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public long Calculation(long valueOne, long valueTwo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>{</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>return valueOne - valueTwo;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Validate and test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Build and Run (F5) the solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verify that your subtraction feature works as shown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Subtraction Example" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Check-in, label and ship v1.1 Hotfix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Check-in the changes in the main branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Label the latest changes in the main branch as v1.1 hotfix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Table 13 – Lab 3, Task 2

**Context – Intermission**

As shown below we have a stable v1.1 Hotfix release in main and a stable v2.DEV release in the dev branch at this point ...

![Branching Diagram](image)
What we need to do is share the hotfix with the dev team and then merge all the changes back to our main branch so that we can offer the latest and greatest release, which include + - * / features with our customers.

Task 3: Merge all changes and ship a new major release

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Merge hotfix to dev branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Right-click on the `main` branch in Source Control Explorer, select **Branching and Merging, Merge**

- Verify that source is `$/BranchingScenarios/main` and target is `$/BranchingScenarios/dev`

Source Control Merge Wizard (Workspace: HOL)

Select the source and target branches for the merge operation

Select the branch that contains the changes you would like to merge.

Source branch:
```
$/BranchingScenarios/main
```

Select the source branch changes you would like to merge:
- All changes up to a specific version
- Selected change sets

Select the target branch for the merge operation. The drop-down list contains all target branches applicable to the selected source branch.

Target branch:
```
$/BranchingScenarios/dev
```

Select **Next**, set Version type to **Latest Version** and select **Next**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td><strong>Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 2.   | - Merge dev branch to main branch  
|      | ☑ - Done |
| 3.   | - Validate and test  
|      | ☑ - Done |
| 4.   | - Label and ship v2.0  
|      | ☑ - Done |
|      | **Table 14 – Lab 3, Task 3** |

### Step Instructions

- **Step 1:**
  - Read the merge operation summary and select **Finish** to perform a forward integration (FI) merge as shown below:
  - You should experience no merge conflicts as we have not made any conflicting changes
  - Check in your changes to the dev branch, comprised of CalculationExtension_Sub
  - For safety, re-test the division feature and the subtraction feature

  ![Diagram 1](image1.png)

- **Step 2:**
  - Right-click on the dev branch in Source Control Explorer, select **Branching and Merging**, and **Merge**.
  - Verify that source is `/BranchingScenarios/dev` and target is `/BranchingScenario/main`
  - Select **Next**, set Version type to **Latest Version** and select **Next**
  - Read the merge operation summary and select **Finish** to perform a reverse integration (RI) merge as shown below

  ![Diagram 2](image2.png)

- **Step 3:**
  - Right-click on the main branch in Source Control Explorer and select **Check In Pending Changes**, which includes 6_MEF.csproj project file (merge, edit) and CalculationExtension_Mul.cs (merge, branch)

- **Step 4:**
  - Open the solution in the main branch and by setting the command line arguments as before, verify the following calculations:
    - Test 4 2 +
    - Test 4 2 –
    - Test 4 2 *
    - Test 4 2 /

- **Label and ship v2.0**
  - Label the latest changes in the main branch as V2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Changeset</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1.0</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:40:34 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Feature complete calculator with +, –, * /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1.1</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:22:23 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Move subtraction hotfix to production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1.1 Hotfix</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:14:43 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Production release with division feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v1.0</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:18:58 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>First production release</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We explored the development isolation strategy. We demonstrated how to implement this strategy. Finally, we explained why you should use this strategy. We explored how to work on a hotfix and development feature concurrently, merging the innovations back into the stable main branch at the end of the exercise.

In this exercise we performed:
- 1 branch
- 2 merges, one FI and one RI
- 3 labels

**Exercise 4: Feature Isolation … a special!**

**GOAL**
Explore the Feature Isolation strategy, which introduces one or more feature branches from main, enabling concurrent development on clearly defined features, which you can merge and release as needed.

**Context**
As before, you need isolation, but you have a need to develop clearly defined features Mod and Power, with flexibility in terms of which when you release these features into production. Whether you implement another development branch or named feature branches is your choice, whereby we will implement the following hybrid-model for this exercise as shown below:

**Figure 18 - Hybrid Development and Feature Isolation Strategy Example 1**
A different strategy could be to branch off the dev branch tying the features and their implementation to the dev branch instead. This strategy would use the development branch as an integration branch, merging all features to the parent.

![Diagram of branching strategies](image)

**Figure 19 - Hybrid Development and Feature Isolation Strategy Example 2**

### Task 1: Create Feature Branches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Create POWER feature branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Right-click on main branch in Source Control Explorer, select <strong>Branching and Merging, Branch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Define target as $/BranchingScenarios/featurePOWER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Branch from main" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source Branch Name: $/BranchingScenarios/main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Branch from Version:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By: Latest Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target Branch Name: $/BranchingScenarios/featurePOWER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Description: Branched from $/BranchingScenarios/main</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="NOTE" /> Consider concept of folders for organizing branches when working with feature branches, for example $/BranchingScenarios/features/featurePOWER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Select <strong>Branch</strong> and confirm “Continue to branch?” dialog with <strong>Yes</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Create MOD feature branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Right-click on main branch in Source Control Explorer, select <strong>Branching and Merging, Branch</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Define target as $/BranchingScenarios/featureMOD or $/BranchingScenarios/features/featureMOD if you wish to organize your feature branches further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Select <strong>Branch</strong> and confirm “Continue to branch?” dialog with <strong>Yes</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Get latest and view hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Right-click on BranchingScenarios folder in Source Control Explorer, select <strong>Get Latest Version</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Implement feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Test feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Check-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Done</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 15 – Lab 4, Task 1**

**Task 2: Create MOD Feature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Open the 6_MEF.sln solution in the featureMOD branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Add class CalculationExtension_Mod and the Mod logic by writing out the class or copy-paste and edit from the Add class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- You must define the ExportMetadata symbol, the class name and the Mod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- public class CalculationExtension_Mod : ICalculation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- public long calculation(long valueOne, long valueTwo)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- return valueOne % valueTwo;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 16 – Lab 4, Task 2**
Task 3: Create POWER Feature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1      | Implement feature  
- Open the 6.MEF.sln solution in the **featurePOWER** branch  
- Add class CalculationExtension_Pow and the Power logic by writing out the class or copy-paste and edit from the _Add class  
- You must define the ExportMetadata **symbol**, the class **name** and the **Power** feature  
```csharp
[Export(typeof(ICalculation))]
[ExportMetadata("Symbol", '^')]

public class CalculationExtension_Pow : ICalculation
{
    // <summary> ... 

    public long calculation(long valueOne, long valueTwo)
    {
        long valueResult = 0;
        if (0 != valueTwo)
        {
            valueResult = valueOne;
            for (long i = --valueTwo; 0 != valueTwo; valueTwo-- )
            {
                valueResult *= valueResult;
            }
        }
        return valueResult;
    }
}
```
- The code above is not the most optimal and you are welcome to improve the sample 😊  
| 2      | Test feature  
- Right click on the 6.MEF project in the Solution Explorer and select **Properties**  
- Select **Debug** tab and define the following command line arguments: **4 2 ^**  
- Build and Run (F5) the solution.  
- Verify that your power feature works as shown  
| 3      | Check-in  
- Check in your changes to the **featurePOWER** branch  

*Table 17 – Lab 4, Task 3*
Context – Intermission

As shown below, we have a stable **main**, a **development** branch with unknown activity and the two new features all ready to go, but isolated.

![Diagram of branching strategies](image)

**Figure 20 - Feature Isolation Strategy Exercise Review**

What we need to do is ensure the feature branches are up to date with any activity that may have occurred during their development phase and then merge the changes back to main, validate and ship v3.

**Task 4: Merge all changes and ship a new major release**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Merge featureMOD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Done

- **Forward-Integration (FI) merge**
  - Right-click on the **main** branch in Source Control Explorer, select **Branching and Merging**, and **Merge**.
  - Verify that source is `/BranchingScenarios/main` and target is `/BranchingScenario/featureMOD`.
  - Select Next, set Version type to **All changes up to a specific** and select Next.
  - Select Label, find the V2 label as shown and select Next.

- **Reverse-Integration (RI) merge**
  - Right-click on the **featureMOD** branch in Source Control Explorer, select **Branching and Merging**, and **Merge**.
  - Verify that source is `/BranchingScenarios/featureMOD` and target is `/BranchingScenario/main`.

[microsoft visual studio dialog]

- There were no changes to merge.

- OK

- Help
### Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Merge featurePOWER</strong> ✔ - Done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Same as previous, but focused on other feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Forward-Integration (FI) merge to get the latest changes from main, resolve possible conflicts in the feature branch, and stabilize before merging back into main.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Right-click on the <strong>main</strong> branch in Source Control Explorer, select <strong>Branching and Merging</strong>, and <strong>Merge</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verify that source is $/BranchingScenarios/main and target is $/BranchingScenario/featurePOWER.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select <strong>Next</strong>, set Version type to <strong>All changes up to a specific</strong> and select <strong>Next</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select <strong>Label</strong>, find the <strong>V2</strong> label as shown and select <strong>Next</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read the merge operation summary and select <strong>Finish</strong> to perform a reverse integration (RI) merge as shown below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• As there have been no changes in main, you will see the &quot;no changes to merge&quot; dialog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reverse-Integration (RI) merge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Right-click on the <strong>featurePOWER</strong> branch in Source Control Explorer, select <strong>Branching and Merging</strong>, and <strong>Merge</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verify that source is $/BranchingScenarios/featurePOWER and target is $/BranchingScenario/main.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select <strong>Next</strong>, set Version type to <strong>Latest Version</strong> and select <strong>Next</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Read the merge operation summary and select <strong>Finish</strong> to perform a reverse integration (RI) merge as shown below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Step | Instructions
--- | ---
| • We performed the following

![Diagram of branching strategies]

- featurePOWER
- featureMOD
- dev
- main

3 Verify and release
☐ - Done

• Open the solution in the main branch and by setting the command line arguments as before, verify the following calculations:
  - Test 4 2 +
  - Test 4 2 -
  - Test 4 2 *
  - Test 4 2 /
  - Test 5 2 %
  - Test 4 2 ^

• Label the latest changes in the main branch as V3

![Image of Source Control Explorer]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>User</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Changeset</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V3</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 7:50:54 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Production release with + - * % ^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:50:54 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Feature complete calculator with + - * /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1.l</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:50:54 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>MOVE subtraction feature to production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V1.h</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:50:54 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Production release with division feature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V10</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>7/9/2013 6:50:54 AM</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>First production release</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18 – Lab 4, Task 4

Task 5: Optionally (not recommended) delete the Feature Branches

**WARNING**

None of us is crazy about this optional task, as most teams want the audit trail and traceability. Deleting or worse, destroying everything rather defeats the purpose of Version Control.

We delete the feature branch, folder and associated artifacts, keeping history in version control for auditing and safety reasons. If you are happy to delete permanently the artifacts, you can use the `tf` command line utility to **destroy** permanently. Caution, the destroy operation cannot be reversed.

**tf destroy** ➔ Destroys, or permanently deletes version-controlled files from Team Foundation version control.
Step | Instructions
--- | ---
1 | Delete featureMOD
   - Done
   - Right click on featureMOD branch in Source Control Explorer and select Delete
   - Right click on BranchingScenarios folder and select Check in Pending Changes
   - Select Check In, which will delete the featureMOD branch.

2 | Delete featurePOWER
   - Done
   - Right click on featurePOWER branch in Source Control Explorer and select Delete
   - Right click on BranchingScenarios folder and select Check in Pending Changes
   - Select Check In, which will delete the featurePOWER branch.

Table 19 – Lab 4, Task 5

We explored the feature isolation strategy. We demonstrated how to implement this strategy, and why to use this strategy. We implemented two clearly defined and isolated features and have shipped v3

In this exercise we performed:
- 2 branches
- 4 merges, i.e. two FI’s and two RI’s
- 1 label
Exercise 5: Release Isolation ... audit alarm

**GOAL**
Explore the Release Isolation Strategy, which introduces one or more release branches from MAIN, which enables concurrent release management. Technically speaking we are introducing the Development & Release isolation strategy in this walkthrough, but will discuss on the release side only in this exercise.

**Context**
Management has notified your team that the organization needs to support release v2, v3 and future releases concurrently and that the compliance team has requested that each release has an accurate snapshot of the sources used at release time.

![Figure 21 – Release Isolation](image)
### Task 1: Create Release Branches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Release v2</strong>&lt;br&gt;☑ - Done&lt;br&gt;• Right-click on <strong>main</strong> in the Source Control Explorer, select <strong>Branching and Merging</strong>, <strong>Branch</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Define the <strong>Target Branch Name</strong> as <em>/BranchingScenarios/rel/v2</em>, branch by label <strong>V2@*/BranchingScenarios</strong>, as shown, and click <strong>Branch</strong>&lt;br&gt;• Right-click on <strong>BranchingScenarios</strong> folder in the Source Control Explorer and select <strong>Get Latest Version</strong>&lt;br&gt;2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Let's recap | • Remember that we created v2 from the label and then we created v3 from latest.  
• We hope this helps to clarify how these branches differ and solidifies why the labeling is important. |
| View hierarchy | • Right-click on main branch in Source Control Explorer, select Branching and Merging and View Hierarchy to view a visualization all the branches |

Table 20 – Lab 5, Task 1

What about the lock symbol?

Now that we have isolated branches representing the releases we can optionally lock them down by applying read-only access. The lock symbol shown on some of the guidance diagrams indicate such locked branches. TFS does not yet visualize locked-down status in branching hierarchy models.

Figure 22 – Release Isolation: Locking down

REVIEW

We explored the release isolation strategy. We demonstrated how to implement this strategy. Finally, we explained and why to use release isolation.

We have not promoted the notion of the release branch being secure or having to be immutable. See guidance for discussions around this hot topic ☺
Exercise 6: Servicing & Release Isolation

**GOAL**
Explore the Servicing and Release Isolation strategy introduces servicing branches, which enables concurrent servicing management of bug fixes and service packs. This strategy evolves from the Release Isolation strategy, or more typically from the Development and Release Isolation strategy.

**Context**
We will finish this walk-through with an easy and quick exercise. We will focus on demonstrating the concepts, allowing you to expand the concepts to your required level of granularity and complexity as and when needed.

Your team learns that a servicing model enabling customers to upgrade to the next major release, i.e. v1 → v2 and, in addition, the servicing model supports additional service packs per release, starting with v3.

**Figure 23 – Servicing & Release Isolation**

**NOTE**
We are going to use an arbitrary naming convention for the branches in this exercise, as we have done before. You need to invest time in defining a consistent naming convention that suits your organization and environment before you perform a branch action. Renaming branches is atypical and as an alternative, you could proactively plan and introduce the servicing branch with v4 instead of injecting it into the v3 hierarchy.

**WARNING**
Renaming branches is a technically feasible operation, but can introduce traceability and migration challenges in the future if not done consistently. This short and simple exercise demonstrates how easy it is to introduce more branches quickly, which dramatically increase your merge maintenance and cost.
Task 1: Introduce the Servicing Branch

Step | Instructions
--- | ---
1 | **Rename release to servicing**
   - Rename the v3 branch in Solution Control Explorer ...
   - Right-click on servicing branch, select **Check In Pending Changes** and check in.

2 | **Add release branch**
   - Right-click on servicing branch, select **Branching and Merging** and Branch
   - Done
**Branching Strategies – Hands-on Lab (HOL) – From Simple to Complex or not?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Instructions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Define the Target Branch Name as $/BranchingScenarios/rel/v3 rel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Select Branch and Yes when promoted to continue to branch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Right-click on BranchingScenarios folder and perform a Get Latest Version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Right-click on main branch in Solution Control Explorer, select Branching and Merging, and View Hierarchy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 21 – Lab 6, Task 1**

- We explored the servicing and release isolation strategy, how to implement, intentionally using a very simple branching scenario. Remember that we discourage the use of branches to isolate servicing, but your requirements may force you to deploy this branching strategy and release a service pack.
In Conclusion

This concludes our adventure into Branching Strategies. We have touched on basic theory and introduced you to the common strategies and alternatives to branching. We have covered various exercises in the walk-throughs and have complemented this guide with a Hands-on Lab and companion guides.

In the final pages of this guide, you will find our Quick Reference cheat sheets and posters. These are available separately as part of the guidance and you might find it useful to print these and hang them up in the team area.

We hope that you have found this guide useful.

Sincerely

The Microsoft Visual Studio ALM Rangers
Branching Strategies

There are no magic potions or silver bullets with branching and merging. You should map the numerous options against your requirements to help you find the best fit or a foundation to build upon. This cheat sheet introduces you to some of the branching plans and strategies covered by the guidance and a matrix that allows you to focus on the most relevant plan. This cheat sheet is a starting point—not an exhaustive guide—for your decision-making on a branch plan.

Why Branch?
- Manage concurrent / parallel work
- Isolate risks from concurrent changes
- Take snapshots for separate support
- Share resources

### Requirement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Main Only</th>
<th>Development and Release Isolation</th>
<th>Servicing and Release Isolation</th>
<th>Feature Toggling</th>
<th>Code Promotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep it simple &amp; minimize maintenance costs</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feature isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Release isolation</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long running testing lifecycles</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic feature enablement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single release service model</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple release service model</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple release and service pack service model</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple release, hotfix and service pack service model</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance requirement for snapshot of releases</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Development and Release Isolation Branching

The Development Isolation strategy introduces one or more development branches from main, which enables concurrent development of the next release, experimentation or bug fixes in isolated development branches.

The Release Isolation strategy introduces one or more release branches from MAIN, which enables concurrent release management.

The Development and Release Isolation strategy combines the Development Isolation and Release Isolation strategies, embracing both their usage scenarios and considerations.

Key: (B) Branch (FI) Forward Integrate (RI) Reverse Integrate ⬇️ read-only

When to consider
- Isolation and concurrent development
- Multiple major releases
- Compliance requirements
Service and Release Isolation Branching

The Servicing and Release Isolation strategy introduces servicing branches, which enables concurrent servicing management of bug fixes and service packs. This strategy evolves from the Release Isolation strategy, or more typically from the Development and Release Isolation strategy.

When to consider

- Isolation and concurrent releases
- Multiple major releases and service packs
- Compliance requirements

Key: (B) Branch (FI) Forward Integrate (RI) Reverse Integrate ☑️ read-only
Feature Isolation Branching

On many software projects, you may have clearly defined features you wish to implement in your product. There may be separate dedicated teams that are simultaneously developing various features that all roll into a product. When you have this clear isolation in your process, you may consider Feature Isolation branching. Branching by feature can also be a reasonable branch plan for large products that inherently have many features and various teams working on the product.

When to consider

• Concurrent feature development
• Clearly isolated features in codebase
• Large product with many features
• Features not in same release cycle
• Ability to abandon features

Key: (B) Branch (FI) Forward Integrate (RI) Reverse Integrate × Delete
Code Promotion Branching

**Code Promotion** is a plan that promotes versions of the code base to new levels as they become more stable. Other version control systems have implemented similar techniques with the use of file attributes to indicate a file's promotion level. As the code in main becomes stable, we promote the code base to the testing branch.

**When to consider**

- Single major release in production
- Long running testing lifecycles
- Need to avoid code freezes, still having release isolation

![Diagram showing version control branching](image)

**Key:** (B) Branch (RI) Reverse Integrate
This cheat sheet is available separately in JPG and PDF format as part of the guidance.
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